

WORKERS' UNITY TO END THE HORROR OF WAR



Fight for a socialist alternative to the brutality of capitalism



The horror of war, of families fleeing for their lives as bombs fall on their cities and towns, is dominating the news. Putin's brutal invasion of Ukraine is being watched with fear and revulsion.

His farcical propaganda claims this is a 'special military operation', designed to fight 'Ukrainian fascism'. But Ukraine is being trampled over in order to try to assert the power of Russian capitalism, and to warn US imperialism and western powers not to move any further east.

War is the inevitable consequence of an international capitalist system based on profit, exploitation and oppression, where the national rights of smaller or weaker nations can

be trampled into the dirt for the short-term interests of the 'great powers'.

Putin's criminal actions have been attacked as 'mad'. They will prove to be an enormous miscalculation, but they flow from the logic of capitalism. They are 'mad' in the same way that US President George Bush was mad in 2003 when, backed to the hilt by New Labour prime minister Tony Blair, the US invaded Iraq.

This was justified with the lie that the regime had 'Weapons of Mass Destruction', believing that it would demonstrate the power of US imperialism and provide it with cheap oil. That occupation created a nightmare for the peoples of the Middle East. Its hubris also enormously undermined US imperialism, as this will for Putin and his regime.

The Russian working class is not being allowed to see the horror of Ukraine on their television screens, just as the capitalist media here in Britain did not show the working class here the horror created by thirty days of 'shock and awe' bombing of Baghdad prior to the

invasion. Despite this, however, in cities and towns across Russia substantial numbers have risked arrest to participate in anti-war demonstrations (see page 13).

That anti-war mood will grow. Given the enormous number of links between Russians and Ukrainians, plus the experiences of Russian soldiers, many of whom are young conscripts who had been told nothing of what they would be facing, no amount of censorship will indefinitely prevent the real situation becoming known. A mass movement to overthrow Putin and his rotten, authoritarian gangster-capitalist rule is posed in the next period.

Boris Johnson and the Tories are cynically trying to use the war in Ukraine to bolster their own positions. But working-class people can have no trust in capitalist governments in any country to defend their interests. Johnson is now posturing as a man who stands up to oligarchs, but just two years ago he overruled security service concerns to get Russian billionaire Evgeny Lebedev the title of 'Lord

Lebedev of Hampton and Siberia'!

Lebedev is one of nine Russian oligarchs who have known to have given money to the Tory Party, along with billionaires linked to many other countries including Saudi Arabia, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine.

Workers worldwide have nothing in common with these capitalist looters. We need to build workers' unity and international solidarity in a struggle to kick out all the warmongers and the profiteers, and for a democratic, socialist society.

▶▶▶ CONTINUED ON PAGES 2-3

- Stop the war. Withdraw Russian troops and end the bombing
- For workers' unity, for self-determination and full democratic rights for all minorities
- No trust in Nato or the capitalist politicians. For an independent workers' movement
- Fight for a socialist alternative to capitalism and war

Ukraine crisis

War - the brutal logic of capitalism



WHAT WE THINK

▶▶ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

It was not accidental that, as part of trying to justify this barbarous invasion, Putin felt the need to attack the legacy of Lenin, one of the key leaders of the Russian revolution in 1917, where capitalism was successfully overthrown for the first time.

The steps to building a democratic workers' state that followed the revolution, was the only time - so far - that the possibility of genuine national liberation for all the peoples of Ukraine was on the agenda, instead of the centuries of war and repression they have faced before and since.

In 1919 Lenin emphasised that the Russian workers' state held "to the view that the independence of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic be recognised" and that: "In view of the fact that Ukrainian culture (language, school, etc.) has been suppressed for centuries by Russian tsarism and the exploiting classes" they had to "use every means to help remove all barriers in the way of the free development of the Ukrainian language and culture."

This was the consistent position of Lenin and Trotsky, the key leaders of the Russian revolution.

However, the degeneration of the Soviet Union, as a result of its isolation and poverty, and the consolidation of power by a brutal Stalinist dictatorship, came with a new wave of Greater Russian nationalism, and once again brutal repression against other nationalities.

Gangster capitalism

When Stalinism finally collapsed in the early 1990s, the restoration of capitalism did not bring peace and prosperity to the peoples of the region but 'gangster capitalism', meaning a massive fall in living standards for the majority and the robbing of state resources by a few who became the oligarchs.

Whether they look towards western or to Russian capitalism, these looters are driven only by maximising their own profits.

But it is not only the oligarchy

which is incapable of taking society forward. On a global basis capitalism is a system in crisis, increasingly presiding over a relentless diet of falling living standards, growing conflict and environmental crisis.

US imperialism, while still the strongest imperialist power, is no longer able to dominate the globe. Instead there is more and more conflict between the major powers, as they jostle for a greater share of the spoils.

Putin's reasons for war

Today, economically Russia is a small power on a world scale - about the size of the Netherlands and Belgium combined - and overwhelmingly reliant on exporting energy and raw materials. Nonetheless, it is the dominant country in the region, and a military superpower.

Partly by relying on China for economic assistance, Putin obviously imagined that he could further strengthen his regime via this invasion. Possibly, he even ludicrously imagined that Ukrainians would welcome Russian troops, drawing a comparison with Crimea.

It is true that when Putin annexed Crimea in 2014, had there been a genuine free referendum on the issue, a majority there would have probably voted to be part of Russia. However, Crimea, which only became part of Ukraine in 1954, is not typical.

On the contrary, it is clear that the large majority of Ukrainians, including many ethnic Russians, are horrified by the invasion, with many prepared to fight. The Russian army, therefore, seems to be facing greater obstacles than they expected and has stepped up barbaric bombings of cities in an attempt to win.

Many fear that this shows Putin 'will stop at nothing' and in the worst-case scenario could even use nuclear weapons in the conflict. However, while there is a clear 'logic' to Putin's threats to use nuclear weapons, as a means to prevent Western powers becoming directly involved in the war, using them in a war just over the Russian border would serve no possible purpose, and would mean annihilation for Putin and Russian capitalism.

'Mutually Assured Destruction', which stayed the hands of the West and Russia during the 'cold war', still applies to the different competing capitalist blocs today. Reports of 'back channels' being set up, to try



The only way to prevent war is for the working class to take power out of the hands of the capitalist elite, and begin to build a new socialist society

to ensure that accidents like Russian planes entering Polish airspace don't lead to escalation, are an indication that all sides are aware of this.

World war is not on the agenda, but this conflict is still appalling. While Russia's military strength is much greater, that does not mean there is any road to any real 'victory' for Putin. Any attempt to occupy parts of Ukraine, or to install a puppet government, would inevitably be faced with sustained guerrilla-type opposition from large parts of the population. Such a horrendously expensive undertaking - economically and in terms of human life - would create mass opposition in Russia, in all likelihood signing the political death knell of Putin.

Even now there are reports that elements of Russia's ruling elite are extremely disquieted about the invasion and its consequences for their interests. This doesn't mean, however, that they are most likely to move against Putin in the short term. Once a capitalist state goes to war the prestige of the whole capitalist class is on the line, making retreat extremely difficult and costly.

In the end, the only way to prevent wars is for the working class to take power out of the hands of the capitalist elite, and begin to build a new socialist society. Nonetheless, the development of mass movements of the Russian working class demanding an end to the war are the most effective means to defeat Putin.

Independent class appeal

It is no surprise that at the moment many Ukrainians are currently rallying behind Ukrainian President Zelensky as they face a foreign invader.

At the end of last year his poll ratings had slipped to about 25%, but now he appears very popular, his reliance on the oligarchs and failure to deal with corruption temporarily put aside by the war.

However, an independent class appeal by Ukrainian workers' organisations to Russian workers and soldiers could have a far greater effect than those of Zelensky who, as president, failed to deliver on his popular 2019 election pledges to end corruption and start serious talks to end conflict in the Donbas that has caused 14,000 deaths.

Instead, his government has continued the shelling of Donetsk and Luhansk - claimed by Putin as the justification for the war.

Self-determination

The peoples of these impoverished statelets have a right to determine their own future, although this will not be achieved under the shadow of Russian invasion. Zelensky has also presided over the banning of Russian from Ukrainian schools.

It is clear that there have already been instances of Ukrainian workers discussing with Russian troops, demanding they go home. An appeal from Ukrainian workers saying 'go home and throw out Putin who has sent you here under false pretences, and leave us to build a movement against our own oligarchs, and together fight for governments in our interests' would be very powerful.

The workers' movement internationally can also assist. The impressive instances we have seen of 'workers' sanctions', like the refusal of dockers to unload Russian oil, are examples of the potential power of



'Workers' sanctions', like the refusal of dockers to unload Russian oil, are examples of the potential power of the working class

the working class.

These are very different to the sanctions introduced by capitalist governments, which will hit working-class Russians hardest and can potentially temporarily give Putin a means to rally support behind his regime. Workers' sanctions, targeted at what will hit the Putin regime hardest, and combined with class appeals to the Russian working class, can have a different effect (see page 4).

No trust in capitalist elites!

In the current situation, faced with this horrific invasion, it is inevitable that many workers in Ukraine and nearby states are looking towards US imperialism and the west for some protection.

However, as the working class and poor of Syria, Afghanistan, Palestine and many other countries can attest, none of the major capitalist powers offer any real way forward, and all are prepared to trample over national democratic rights whenever it suits their interests to do so.

The western media are now emphasising the desolation caused by past Russian military action in Chechnya and Syria, but do not include Fallujah in Iraq, devastated by US action in 2004, in their list of cities recently wrecked by war.

Nato's expansion eastwards over the last thirty years, which Putin is now trying to push back against via this invasion, has had nothing to do with protecting democratic rights, but is motivated by defending the interests of western, particularly US, imperialism.

Of course, the capitalist powers in the US, UK, France, etc, are trying to use the current crisis to build their

domestic support. Johnson, who was on the verge of being booted out, has, temporarily, been able to gain a little breathing space. More broadly, they are trying to build support for their system.

Francis Fukuyama, the philosopher who famously predicted the collapse of Stalinism would mean 'an end of history', with capitalism delivering peace and prosperity to the world, is once again pontificating.

Having long since had to admit that capitalism cannot offer peace and prosperity for all, he is now using this war to make a rearguard appeal for the world to rally to the banner of 'liberal' capitalism, under threat from dictatorship and war.

In reality, of course dictatorship and war are a product of the capitalist system that Fukuyama defends. Keir Starmer, pro-capitalist leader of the Labour Party, has also taken advantage of the situation to inflict further defeats on the remnants of the Labour left. Eleven left Labour MPs who had signed a very weak statement from the Stop the War Coalition were threatened with being forced to join Jeremy Corbyn, no longer able to sit as Labour MPs. They immediately retreated and withdrew their names.

John McDonnell MP then went further and withdrew from speaking at a Stop the War rally, saying: "My response is that people are dying on the streets of Ukrainian cities. This is not the time to be distracted by political arguments here. Now is the time to unite." But the most possible thing that the workers' movement could do - both for the working class of Ukraine and of Britain - is to 'unite' behind, which means uncritically support, our capitalist elite.



An independent class appeal by Ukrainian workers' organisations to Russian workers and soldiers could have a far greater effect than those of Zelensky

Look at the question of Ukrainian refugees. The initial response of the Tory immigration minister made clear their real attitude to helping ordinary Ukrainians when he suggested they could get visas to work as fruit pickers!

Neither the Tories nor the Labour leadership are prepared to offer asylum to more than a very limited number of those fleeing war in Ukraine, never mind those fleeing other wars around the world.

Refugee rights

Nonetheless, under pressure from below, Dominic Raab has now rhetorically called for the housing of the refugees in the Russian oligarchs' mansions. The workers' movement should take that and demand more - why stop at mansions owned by Russian oligarchs? Why not appropriate the empty mansions of all the super-rich in order to house all of the homeless (see page 5)?

And despite the cynical attempts of Johnson, Biden and Co. to use this war to bolster their domestic support, there is no prospect of the long term strengthening of western capitalism or its governments. It will not only be Putin's regime that will be weakened by these events but also the Nato powers.

Not long ago US imperialism was not even paying lip service to uniting with the other Nato powers. On the contrary, Biden pulled out of Afghanistan without even consulting them. Now there is a temporary coming together.

But the increased divisions within the Nato powers ultimately reflect the decline of US imperialism and the crisis of the capitalist system, which

means they are bound to find a new expression (see also pages 12-13, 'Nato, the bringer of peace or war?'). At the same time, the Ukrainian war is deepening the crisis in the world economy. Energy and grain prices are soaring, and overall commodity prices are at their highest level since 2008.

The shortage of semiconductors is growing again, as a result of 50% of the world's neon gas - a vital component - being produced in Ukraine.

Cost-of-living crisis

Living standards, already under the cosh from inflation austerity, are set to suffer further. Growing numbers of workers have to choose between 'heating and eating'.

The rash of strikes for pay to at least keep up with inflation needs to be extended. National action for decent pay rises, including coordinated strike action, is urgently on the agenda. Johnson and the other capitalist politicians will cynically use the war to try and distract workers from these issues, but they will not succeed.

An industrial fightback is vital, but it is not enough. This nightmarish war throws into high relief the need - in Russia, Ukraine, Britain and every country - for the working class to have its own mass parties, independent of all the rotten capitalist elites.

Such parties need to fight for power to be taken out of the major corporations and banks that dominate the economy, so that society can be run democratically in the interests of the majority, based on planning and cooperation, instead of capitalism's ruthless pursuit of profit which leads to poverty, environmental destruction and war.



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Editor of the Socialist Sarah Sachs-Eldridge socialistparty.org.uk Editorial staff Dave Carr Scott Jones Circulation manager Ian Pattison Chris Newby Josh Asker

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"The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it." Karl Marx

Workers' action an alternative to bosses' sanctions

HELEN PATTISON

SOCIALIST PARTY LONDON REGIONAL SECRETARY

Still following their plan to not intervene militarily against Russia in its war on Ukraine, western capitalist powers have instead turned toward economic sanctions. As a consequence, at the time of writing, the Russian stock market remains closed.

These sanctions, while supposedly aimed at the oligarchs and big-business traders, will still have the biggest impact on the poorest in Russian society. The rich never pick up a bill they don't have too, and will find any way they can to make the working class pay.

Cost-of-living crisis

Similarly, outside of Russia, the impact of sanctions on oil and gas prices, given the large amount of reliance on Russian oil and gas internationally, will be passed on to the working class with rising prices. Prices were set to rise dramatically already, and now the likes of Boris Johnson will try to blame the war in Ukraine for the cost-of-living crisis.

Protests have taken place internationally, including in Russia against Putin's actions. But the working class can go beyond protests. Dockworkers in Cheshire, organised in Unite the union, have refused to unload Russian oil from a German-registered vessel, and dockers in Kent and the Netherlands have turned around shipments of Russian gas.

As opposed to sanctions imposed from the top by capitalist



PHOTO: PAUL MATTSOON

governments, which have the potential to drive sections of the Russian working class towards support for Putin, worker-imposed sanctions can make the appeal to Russian workers to exercise their own strength against Putin and the Russian capitalist class.

As part of workers' action across Europe, dock workers could send messages of solidarity to the Russian maritime workers. But support must also be sent to the Russian and Ukrainian seafarers, which together make up a whopping 14% of all

International workers' solidarity

When workers at Lindsey oil refinery were on strike in 2009 because the company they worked for wanted to undercut wages and super exploit a group of Italian workers, they found ways to reach out to the Italian workers. They translated their messages, painted them on big sheets and held them up near the boats where the Italian workers were forced to stay.

In Ireland, workers refused to touch goods from apartheid South Africa. And South African and Italian workers have previously refused to load arms being sent to Israel. When Pinochet came to power through a bloody coup in the 1970s, dock workers internationally refused to transport Chilean goods or fix Pinochet's fighter plane engines.

seafarers internationally, to organise action for themselves.

Worker-imposed sanctions can give confidence to the working class to move into struggle against their own capitalist classes, whether in Britain, Ukraine, Russia or elsewhere.

Workers unity and a socialist alternative to bring an end to war



PHOTO: CATHERINE CLARKE

We need to be clear that war is a result of the international capitalist system based on profit, exploitation, oppression and racism.

The people who will benefit from war in Ukraine are the billionaires, bosses and profiteers. We know it is the workers and ordinary people who will suffer: killed and injured by bombs and missiles, and forced to flee their homes. This on top of the problems they face already under the Zelensky government which is backed by rich Ukrainian oligarchs.

Of course, Johnson and the Tories have been happy to take money off the Russian oligarchs to fund their party. Both Tories and Labour governments have welcomed them in with open arms. These are the same governments that backed brutal wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere. We can have no trust in pro-big

business governments, which are there to defend the interests of the bosses.

Whether it is in Ukraine, the UK, the US or Russia, we need to build workers' unity and international solidarity in the struggle to kick out the warmongers and profiteers. And that also means building mass movement political parties that can provide a real alternative to these brutal capitalist governments.

We need a socialist alternative that won't just seize the assets of Russian oligarchs, but take economic ownership and control off the major monopolies, so that society can be democratically run by the working class in the interests of us - the majority - based on planning and cooperation. And not in the pursuit of profit and prestige that causes poverty, exploitation and war.

Strip the assets from the oligarchs

Bring them under democratic workers' control

JOSH ASKER

SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

Michael Gove, the Tories' levelling up minister - feeling the pressure mounting about the Conservative Party's receipt of donations from Russian billionaires close to Putin - has made calls to seize the assets of Russian oligarchs. It appears that this threat is about as substantial as the Tories' pitiful levelling-up plans.

For all the bluster, the Tory government has targeted fewer oligarchs, with less stringent measures, than the US and the EU. Senior civil servants are apparently examining how to make the expropriation of an individual's assets legal without paying compensation.

Does the government need reminding that they make the laws? Or are they afraid of setting a precedent of taking the assets off the super-rich guilty of warmongering and exploitation? How many MPs and their big-business friends could find themselves on the wrong end of such measures?

As it stands, huge swathes of land and property in Britain are in the hands of anonymous owners who hide behind shell companies registered in tax havens. Legislation in the pipeline, as part of the economic crime bill, gives these shady owners a handy six months to move their money - no doubt a consequence of these characters' cosy relationship



Socialist Party members march in London LONDONSP

with Johnson's government of the rich. But it has taken several years to get to this stage, and the legislation itself simply registers who owns what.

The Russian oligarchs should have their assets seized, the wealth and resources could be used to provide housing and services for working-class people, including refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine. Emergency legislation could be passed to make this possible. But Gove, Johnson and the rest could in no way be trusted to use these assets in the interests of the

working class. Elected committees of workers, including housing workers and their trade unions, would be much better placed to plan the use of London mansions and assets seized from gangster capitalists in the interests of Ukrainian refugees.

The same is true of the economy as a whole. That's why we fight for democratic public ownership, so the resources in society can be planned under the democratic control of the working-class majority - not the capitalist minority, or the politicians who represent them.

Ukraine refugees: Seize the oligarchs' wealth to provide safety and living standards

ADAM HARMSWORTH

COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

Out of five thousand Ukrainian refugees who have applied for visas to the United Kingdom, in the first 48 hours after the government's scheme opened, just 50 were granted. Boris Johnson, while making excuses for the government barely lifting a finger so far, has said: "The UK will be as generous as we can possibly be". 1.7 million people have fled Ukraine in under two weeks, and we're meant to believe that Britain, the world's fifth richest country, accepting minimal numbers of refugees is generosity? Real generosity comes from

ordinary Brits themselves raising £100 million for the DEC Ukraine Humanitarian Appeal and the solidarity of ordinary working people in Poland and neighbouring countries to Ukraine.

Refugees and people escaping war and crisis shouldn't have to rely on a whip-round of workers already hit by a cost-of-living squeeze, nor should they need certain qualities to be allowed a visa.

A safe and unbureaucratic passage should immediately be created for all refugees fleeing the conflict, and under the democratic control of workers, trade union and community organisations.

The Covid crisis has already shown that this government can find plenty of money when it wants to. If the Tories insist they need more cash before they can help refugees, they could seize the Russian millionaires' assets held here. They're reluctant to do that in case more of us start looking at how much wealth all bosses and oligarchs are hoarding! The trade unions and anti-war movement must demand refugee rights and the money for homes and services for all.



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WHAT WE STAND FOR

The Socialist Party fights for socialism - a democratic society run for the needs of all and not the profits of a few. We also oppose every cut, fighting in our day-to-day campaigning for every possible improvement for working-class people. The organised working class has the potential power to stop the cuts and transform society.

As capitalism dominates the globe, the struggle for genuine socialism must be international. The Socialist Party is part of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) which organises across the world.

Our demands include...

PUBLIC SERVICES

- No to ALL cuts in jobs, public services and benefits. Defend our pensions. No to privatisation and the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). Renationalise all privatised utilities and services, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need. Fully fund all services and run them under accountable, democratic committees that include representatives of service workers and users. Free, publicly run, good quality education, available to all at any age. Abolish university tuition fees now and introduce a living grant. No to academies and 'free schools'! A socialist NHS to provide for everyone's health needs - free at the point of use and under democratic control. Kick out private contractors! Keep council housing publicly owned. For a massive building programme of publicly owned housing, on an environmentally sustainable basis, to provide good quality homes with low rents.

WORK AND INCOME

- Trade union struggle for an immediate increase in the minimum wage to £15 an hour without exemptions. For an annual increase in the minimum wage linked to average earnings. Scrap zero-hour contracts. All workers, including part-timers, temps, casual and migrant workers to have trade union rates of pay, employment protection, and sickness and holiday rights from day one of employment. An immediate 50% increase in the state retirement pension, as a step towards a living pension. Scrap Universal Credit. For the right

to decent benefits, education, training, or a job, without compulsion. Scrap the anti-trade union laws! For fighting trade unions, democratically controlled by their members. Full-time union officials to be regularly elected and receive no more than a worker's wage. Support the National Shop Stewards Network. A 35-hour week with no loss of pay.

ENVIRONMENT

- Major research and investment into replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy and into ending the problems of early obsolescence and un-recycled waste. Public ownership of the energy generating industries. No to nuclear power. No to Trident. A democratically planned, low-fare, publicly owned transport system, as part of an overall plan against environmental pollution.

RIGHTS

- Oppose discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, disability, sexuality, age, and all other forms of prejudice. Repeal all laws that trample over civil liberties. For the right to protest! End police harassment. Defend abortion rights. For a woman's right to choose when and whether to have children. For the right to asylum. No to racist immigration laws. For the right to vote at 16.

MASS WORKERS' PARTY

- For a mass workers' party drawing together workers, young people and activists from workplace, community, environmental, anti-racist and anti-cuts campaigns, to provide a fighting, political alternative to the pro-big business parties.

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

- No to imperialist wars and occupations. Tax the super-rich! For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and the banking system that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working-class control and management. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need. A democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, and in a way that safeguards the environment. No to the bosses' neoliberal European Union and single market. For a socialist Europe and a socialist world!

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PHOTO: JUDY BEISHON

Tories ask health workers to work for nothing

ANDREW BROMHALL
RETIRED NHS WORKER

After two years of pandemic, and many years of savage Tory cuts and underfunding, the NHS in England has announced an extension to its reservists scheme.

The scheme, a brainchild of Tory MP Alan Mak, asks volunteers to work for 30 days a year in a variety of NHS roles, including on the frontline, to prop up the ailing health service.

Loyal NHS workers have faced unprecedented levels of stress and vastly increased workloads over the last two years. Staff have been leaving the NHS at a rate of over 400 a week during this period. But many of us ex-health workers are being

asked to make further sacrifices, such as coming out of retirement to volunteer in the beleaguered service!

The roles on offer are for both qualified and non-qualified staff. And it is stated on the government website that 'full training' will be provided - although no details are given.

Rather than looking for quick fixes and asking its staff to make further sacrifices, the government should be investing in the future of the NHS. This includes funding a proper recruitment programme that includes: scrapping training fees, re-establishing training bursaries, and an inflation-busting pay rise for NHS staff, not the paltry 3% the Tories have offered.

Tory care home vaccination U-turn

● Fight for £15 an hour to address worker shortages



LINCOLN SP

GLYNN DOHERTY
SOCIAL CARE TRADE UNION ORGANISER

The government's U-turn on compulsory vaccinations for care home staff confirms what many socialists, trade unions and even social care sector employers said: it was an ill-thought out populist policy, playing on the fears of ordinary working people about safety for the elderly. It also demonstrates this is a weak Tory government stumbling around from one scandal or shambles to another.

The Socialist said at the time "Adding to this [social care staffing] crisis by sacking workers is the height of irresponsibility and stupidity" (see

'Sacking non-vaccinated care workers will not save lives' at socialistparty.org.uk). Tens of thousands left social care in 2021 either through burnout, low pay or the 'no job, no pay' policy. Care home residents have suffered reduced services because of staffing shortages and too many have died. The government has blood on its hands.

For the government to glibly say workers who were sacked can now apply for their old jobs back is totally inadequate. Anyone who was dismissed under this policy and wants to return to social care should be reinstated with no loss of continuous service benefits. Many, unfortunately, will not wish to go back.

The trade unions must use the U-turn to launch a major campaign to increase pay in the sector. Over 60% of social care workers automatically receive an annual pay rise - because if they didn't their pay would fall below the legal minimum wage! But the April 2022 rise in the minimum wage to £9.50 an hour is not enough. It has already been swallowed up by energy price rises and other increasing costs.

The unions must submit claims to all separate employers across the sector for a £15-an-hour minimum wage and launch a membership organisation and recruitment drive to fight for this. This should be linked to a campaign to bring the whole sector into public ownership.

Big energy capitalists use war as excuse to cash in

Domestic gas and electricity bills are set to triple this year, with the average annual household bill reaching an unpayable £3,000.

Low-income households, especially those on pre-payment meters, are faced with huge increases in 'standing charges', even before paying for the actual energy used. They will end up sitting in dark, freezing rooms.

Boris Johnson and the Tories will no doubt try to blame the war in Ukraine on soaring bills. But less than 1% of UK gas supplies come from Russia!

There is no global shortage of

fossil fuels, and the price of extracting them from the ground has not shot up. However, we are now paying ten times more for North Sea gas than we did 12 months ago.

In other words, speculation has led to price gouging, with big oil and gas companies making billions more in profits without having to invest in extracting new supplies.

Moreover, since August, some 30 domestic energy supply companies have gone bust, leaving four million customers stranded. The cost of transferring over these customers to bigger companies amounts to a £4 billion bill, in total. This huge sum

is now being charged to domestic customers.

Labour is calling for a one-off windfall tax on big energy corporations to mitigate the cost to consumers. But that won't prevent more price gouging and profiteering in another 12 months' time.

Only nationalisation of 'big energy' can stop customers being continually shafted by price hikes, and provide an economic tool to rationally plan energy supplies, shifting to renewables, and initiating a programme of insulating homes.

SIMON CARTER
EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY



CARDIFF SP

● Nationalise big housebuilders for affordable homes

Britain's biggest housebuilder, Persimmon, has announced 2021 profits of £970 million - an increase by nearly a quarter.

Closer examination of the results shows that it built 14,551 homes in total, making a profit of £66,000 per

house. They received £3,449.7 million in sales of homes, meaning that each house sold on average for £237,000. That makes the profit on each home 27%!

If housebuilding companies like Persimmon were publicly owned, and houses sold at cost price, they would be sold for less than three quarters of their current price. How about that as a quick route to making new houses more affordable?

BILL REED
WEST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

● Tory bus funding U-turn

Like with emergency funding for Transport for London, the government has been playing brinkmanship with local bus services and transport workers' livelihoods.

Having threatened to remove Covid funding, up to one third of bus services were under threat (see 'bus services under threat' at socialistparty.org.uk).

Now, under pressure, the government has made a temporary U-turn. Emergency funding will continue until October. But how many services had already been cut ahead of the initial 1 April deadline? And what of the long-term future of these vital services?

Privatised public transport has failed, and operator bosses have pocketed profits from public subsidies for too long. We say bring public transport back into public ownership, with compensation

only on the basis of proven need. Invest in free, reliable mass transportation for all - paid for by taking the wealth of the super-rich profiteers.

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MASSIVE VICTORY FOR BARTS HOSPITAL WORKERS

Strike wins pay rise and an end to outsourcing

ROB WILLIAMS
SOCIALIST PARTY INDUSTRIAL ORGANISER

Unite union members in Barts NHS Trust in east London, the largest in the country, are celebrating a fantastic victory after two weeks of strikes. We send our congratulations to Unite and its members and reps, including the union's branch secretary Len Hockey, a longstanding member of the Socialist Party.

The low-paid workers, porters, cleaners, catering staff and security, are employed across five east London hospitals, including Whipps Cross, Royal London and St Bartholomew's, by notorious outsourcing giant Serco, with an estimated turnover of nearly £4 billion. During the pandemic alone, Serco has been responsible for multiple strikes by Unite members in London - from the Bexley bin workers to the Ealing traffic wardens.

The Barts workers rejected the miserly 1% pay offer from Serco last year, but always placed the issue of ditching the parasitic privateer and being brought in-house on NHS contracts, central to the dispute. Just by winning their strike ballot, the bosses were forced to up their pay offer to 3%, mirroring that offered to workers directly employed by the NHS. But because they are outsourced, the real gap is far wider, at up to 15%.

Unite rejected this offer when real inflation was rising, now beyond 7%, and moved to an industrial action ballot, which was won with a 97.7% yes vote. However, the other recognised union at Barts Trust, Unison, broke ranks and put the 3% pay offer to its members.

Incredibly, a Unison full-time organiser has claimed credit for this victory: "Unison is proud of the deal we negotiated, but it wouldn't have been possible without the support of our members at Barts." But it was the brave, well-supported, and vibrant strike action by Unite members that forced bosses to the negotiating table.

Workers took to the picket lines at the three hospitals in the first two weeks of February. There were huge mobilisations, with well over 100 at the hospitals, often singing and dancing. They organised strike demonstrations outside

each hospital of hundreds of striking workers and their supporters across the labour and trade union movement. Management was in no doubt that the action would continue and escalate unless an acceptable agreement was reached.

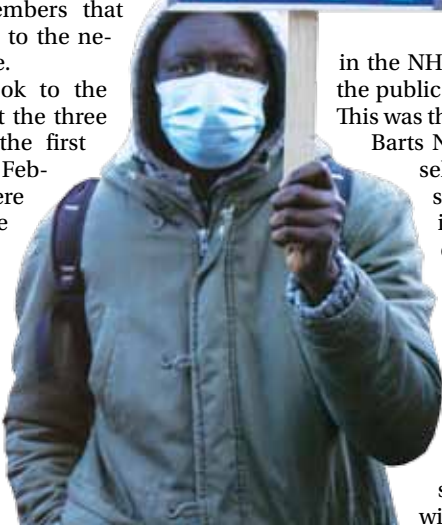
That improved offer includes the 3% pay rise backdated to last April, plus a one-off payment of £400. But crucially, it also confirms that the workers will be brought back in-house on 1 May 2023. The workers have insisted that this is done on NHS pay, terms and conditions. If there is any delay, the agreement commits to backdating any NHS pay rise to the time of transfer.

On this basis, the reps agreed to suspend the first of their next two weeks of planned strike action, particularly as the Barts NHS Trust board was meeting on 2 March to confirm the insourcing. Some, like the Socialist Workers Party, wrongly criticised this decision, saying that it was a mistake. But the reps knew that they were close to an important victory that was then confirmed on 3 March. If the Trust board meeting went back on commitments given, reps and members were prepared to go ahead with the second scheduled strike week. They will now be vigilant to ensure that the agreement is delivered by the Trust management, which knows that workers will resume the action if they renege.

This dispute is part of the growing strike wave that has developed as the Tories and the bosses look to squeeze workers' incomes, trying to make them pay for the Covid crisis. Workers are showing that they won't accept this and are fighting, and increasingly winning, as the Barts NHS strike shows.

But as well as securing a wage rise, they have also pushed back against the privatisation agenda that has been used to attack the livelihoods of workers in the NHS and elsewhere in the public sector for decades. This was the experience of the Barts NHS workers themselves. Their victory should be seen as an inspiration for other outsourced public sector workers and for NHS staff as they face up to another paltry 3% pay offer, that is in reality a massive pay cut. Barts strikers have shown that action wins.

Workers are showing that they won't accept this and are fighting, and increasingly winning, as the Barts NHS strike shows. But as well as securing a wage rise, they have also pushed back against the privatisation agenda that has been used to attack the livelihoods of workers in the NHS and elsewhere in the public sector for decades. This was the experience of the Barts NHS workers themselves. Their victory should be seen as an inspiration for other outsourced public sector workers and for NHS staff as they face up to another paltry 3% pay offer, that is in reality a massive pay cut. Barts strikers have shown that action wins.



Len Hockey addresses Whipps Cross rally ISAI PRIYA

Len Hockey, Unite Barts convenor and Socialist Party member, says:

"Who's got the power? We've got the power! What kind of power? Union power!" These words chanted regularly by workers on the Serco Barts strike picket lines, marches and rallies, sum up the key lessons of this historic victory. That is that when workers are provided leadership, are conscious of their strength and mobilised in action, then they are an unstoppable force for changing their pay and conditions.

The victory by Unite members employed by Serco in Barts health branch (LE7384L) was not pre-ordained, but was rooted in the combined factors of the raw experiences of exploitation under the capitalist policy of outsourcing on the one hand, and on the other, the

implacable will and confidence of the local collective trade union leadership to carry forward the campaign to a successful conclusion.

A landmark win, the deal, along with a rise in basic pay at 3% and lump-sum pay increases of £400, has secured a commitment from the Trust that the NHS pay rates would be backdated should delay occur post transfer date of 1 May 2023. Also, it includes lump-sum payments for agency workers. Paid breaks are achieved for all, in addition to the existing non-paid ones, and where there were previously none (this is something which is not included in the NHS national Agenda for Change agreement). Unite must now use the example of this victory widely, to build confidence and give the example that where health workers fight, they can win.



Royal London PAUL MATTSSON

A lesson to all outsourced workers: if you fight, you can win!

NAOMI BYRON
OUTSOURCED NHS WORKER AND UNISON NATIONAL EXECUTIVE LOW-PAID SEAT (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

The Barts victory is fantastic news. 1,800 staff will be brought back in-house on NHS pay and conditions from 1 May next year.

I visited the picket lines. The strike was powerful. Hundreds of workers walked out for two weeks, proving in practice what everyone knew already: hospitals cannot function without domestics, porters, security or catering staff.

The picket lines were fantastic. Pickets really believed in the action. Many said: 'this isn't about the money, this is about fighting for the NHS, this is about treating us as human beings.'

It's very sad that they were forced to go on strike to win such a basic demand. But they were forced to by the Trust's inaction.

This is a lesson for all outsourced workers: if you fight, you can win!

The strike in Barts Trust didn't come from nowhere. It was prepared over years, with good union organisation and active reps on the ground. A strike last year against shift changes and bullying had already forced Serco to withdraw from the contract.

It will inspire other outsourced workers to follow their example.

PLACE A MAY DAY GREETING IN the Socialist



Support the working-class press in 2022

- Calling all union branches, community campaigns and student groups!
- Visit socialistparty.org.uk/mayday

Whipps Cross ISAI PRIYA



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NSSN bulletin: shopstewards.net

Workers' representatives on a worker's wage

The by-election campaign began amidst talk of a no-confidence vote in Boris Johnson by Tory MPs as the 'partygate' scandal fed the widespread disgust at the capitalist establishment politicians, all seen as being in it for themselves.

Dave Nellist's record as a workers' MP on a worker's wage, only taking the wage of a skilled worker in his nine years in parliament from 1983-1992, was an obvious counterpoint.

But even on this simple issue of fact the BBC was subtly misleading, if not deliberately confusing the position. In their obligatory mention of Dave in the list of candidates standing in Erdington, they wrote that "during his time as a Labour MP, Mr Nellist said he donated most of his salary to charitable and political causes". Not that he did - irrefutably, with documented evidence, and not to 'charity' but to workers and community campaigners in struggle - but that he "said", making Dave out as an individual do-gooder acting on a personal whim, not an accountable representative of Coventry workers.

In fact, Dave's parliamentary accounts, including his wage calculated from figures compiled across ten Coventry factories by the AUEW engineering workers' union (now part of Unite), were presented annually to the Coventry South East Constituency Labour Party general management

committee (GMC), composed of trade union and local ward party delegates, and open to those delegates' inspection.

If he hadn't stuck to his pledge he would have faced the possibility of deselection by the GMC. But with the long-ago transformation of the Labour Party from a workers' organisation into Tony Blair's capitalist New Labour - GMCs lost their power to select candidates in 1993, even before the abolition of Labour's socialist Clause Four in 1995 - it is no surprise that there is limited understanding of what it means to be a workers' MP on a worker's wage. Jeremy Corbyn's biggest mistake was not to use his leadership to spearhead the retransformation of the Labour Party into a democratic mass working-class party.

Nevertheless, if the 1 March announcement that MPs would get a £2,200 rise to bring their bloated pay up to £84,144 in April had not been swamped by the coverage of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, launched as polling day approached, the echo for Dave's stand as a workers' MP in Erdington may well have been even bigger.

Most importantly, the principle of workers' representatives living on workers' wages as a means of keeping them in check has been revived for a new generation.

TUSC and the Workers Party

The first post-Erdington meeting of the TUSC all-Britain steering committee will be considering a proposal to give observer status to the Workers' Party of Britain, led by the former Labour and then Respect MP George Galloway.

The Workers Party is not just George Galloway, having senior level supporters for example in the other two railway worker unions, ASLEF and TSSA. But neither should its strength be exaggerated. It has reported 4,500 members but only an annual membership income of £21,000: at £4.70 a head per year, less than the political levy paid as part of their £280 annual union subs by RMT members.

Electorally, its 25 council candidates in May 2021 polled at the same level as the 272 council candidates standing under the TUSC umbrella. And while George Galloway, of course, has twice been elected to parliament in opposition to New Labour - in Bethnal Green and Bow in 2005 and Bradford West in 2012 - he has also polled more modest votes, 1.4% in West Bromwich East in 2019, 1.4% for London mayor in 2016, and 1.5% in the South Scotland Scottish parliament region in 2021.

And Galloway is certainly not an unproblematic figure in the workers' movement: not least for his position on Scottish independence, his failure to turn the positive aspects of the support he has amongst workers and youth from an Asian Muslim background into a bridge towards other

sections of the working class - he left behind little in Bethnal Green or Bradford - and what can only be described, mildly, as his divisive social conservatism on issues such as trans rights that will not unite the working class around a shared programme.

TUSC faced a not dissimilar situation when considering the participation of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in 2010, with Bob Crow and the Socialist Party critical of their position on the 2009 Lindsey oil refinery workers' strike and the RMT-initiated No2EU European election challenge of the same year.

But TUSC was established as a federal 'umbrella' coalition, with core policies for different elections only agreed, after debate, by consensus. Participating candidates and organisations are accountable only for their own campaigns - a 'united front' marching separately but striking together under the same banner at the ballot box.

And so it was felt that the drawbacks of the SWP's involvement could be overcome, as it proved. They only withdrew from TUSC in 2017 because they decided they would no longer stand in elections and have been invited to rejoin in the new circumstances of Starmer's leadership.

The Socialist Party takes the same approach to the Workers Party as any other political trend in the workers' movement and, while continuing to raise our criticisms of them, will support the proposal for observer status.

After the Erdington by-election

WHAT WAY FORWARD FOR THE TRADE UNIONIST AND SOCIALIST COALITION?

The message from Erdington



WHAT WE THINK

The Birmingham Erdington by-election showed, with a pitiful turnout of just 27%, that the task of building a new vehicle for working-class political representation following the defeat of Corbynism within the Labour Party will not be an easy or straightforward one.

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), whose candidate in Erdington was the Socialist Party member and former Militant Labour Coventry MP Dave Nellist, took third place on 3 March.

The actual vote was undeniably modest - 360 (2.1%) - and well behind Labour and the Tories. But it put TUSC ahead of the Liberal Democrats, the Green Party, the Brexit Party (now renamed as Reform UK) and six other contenders.

Under a heading playing on the weather conditions during the rushed-through campaign, 'Labour survives four storms and a local earthquake - but there's a little tremor from the left', the Sky News chief political correspondent, Jon Craig, wrote that TUSC's third place showing was still "a performance that will cheer up all veteran left-wing comrades and Starmer critics".

But the most important takeaway from this by-election - held against the backdrop of a two-year global pandemic and a war in Ukraine, and as the revival of Blairism in Keir Starmer's Labour makes the different faces of the capitalist political establishment essentially indistinguishable - is the evidence that Erdington provides of the profound alienation and angry disengagement from 'politics' of broad layers of the working class, in Birmingham and nationally.

And that TUSC, despite being well-received amongst the small segment of the population it was able to reach in



its campaign, did not have the authority or weight at this stage to become a mass outlet for the underlying rage.

Alienation

Out of the 62,996 registered electors in Erdington - and there were thousands not registered after the changes made by the 2010-15 Con-Dem coalition government - just 17,016 people voted: the 27% turnout was the tenth lowest in a by-election since 1945, not counting the Southend West and 2016 Batley and Spen polls which were effectively uncontested after the assassinations of the sitting MPs.

Labour's highest vote in Erdington since 1997 was the 21,571 it polled in 2017, as part of the national 'Corbyn wave' in that election in response to the anti-austerity message symbolised in his leadership. This time, with Starmer determined to distance himself from 'Corbynism' and its radical reformist policies at all costs, Labour polled 9,413 votes - down 8,307 even on its 2019 general election score - but still enough to defeat the Tories, who also lost almost eight thousand votes.

Reform, who had come third in Erdington in 2019 on the back of the Brexit Party winning the national vote in the European parliament elections that year, lost over a thousand

votes, finishing behind TUSC. The Liberal Democrats, just seven years ago a 'party of government' and still with councillors in a ward that neighboured Erdington, were even further behind.

And yet the BBC excluded TUSC from its pre-election hustings radio show, defending what it admitted was its 'editorial discretion' to include TUSC or not, on, of course, purely 'objective' grounds. Once again TUSC can say that it polled better than the share of establishment media coverage it received.

An unfulfilled vacuum

The capitalists' political representatives really do have a weak social base to lean on. But they will need to lean on it heavily in order to impose the massive post-Covid austerity attacks they are planning on workers' living standards and public services in the period ahead.

None of the capitalist parties any longer have deep social roots. This will be a problem they face not just in Erdington but in every corner of Britain too.

But it is also true that alienation and disgust expressed through electoral abstentionism will not solve the problems that the working class faces.

Indeed, aside from the exceptional circumstances of an organised mass boycott of 'politics' in favour of an alternative power, it is actually also a form of individual acquiescence to what 'those up there' seek to impose, not a collective response.

The working class needs its own party, to bring together its different discontents and concerns - and above all, its different struggles - to point a way forward and develop an encompassing governmental alternative. Without organisation, in unions but also in a mass workers' party, we can only face up to all the consequences of the capitalists' control of society as individuals not as a class.

Helping to build a new workers' party is, the Socialist Party believes, the key task that TUSC must continue to pursue, and the key message from Erdington. The third place won was an important step, and needs to be followed up with a drive for candidates to stand in the May local elections and a renewed campaign in the trade unions.

But it won't settle the debate on how to fill the gaping vacuum that exists and the Socialist Party will continue to patiently argue for the steps the workers' movement needs to take to find its political voice.



The debate in the RMT union

As the Erdington by-election was under way, the RMT transport workers' union met in conference to continue its 2021 annual general meeting (AGM), which had closed with an uncompleted agenda business late last year.

TUSC was co-founded in 2010 by the then RMT general secretary Bob Crow, and from the 2012 AGM the union has officially participated in the coalition, with representation on the TUSC all-Britain steering committee. But, and particularly so since Bob's tragically early death in 2014, there has always been a section of the union leadership who have not been convinced of his commitment to the principle of building a new workers' party to politically represent the working class. They either hope for change within the Labour Party - even after the defeat of Corbynism - or effectively argue that trade union action alone is enough. This debate resurfaced at the reconvened AGM.

A motion had been tabled recognising the continued refusal to readmit Jeremy Corbyn to the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) and the decision of the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers' Union (BFAWU) to disaffiliate from Labour after 119 years membership. It proposed that the RMT approach the BFAWU to jointly "call a conference of trade unionists to discuss how we can take steps towards the creation of a bonafide party of trade unions and the working class", which would have an important impact on the debate in the trade union movement on what needs to be done.

But the motion was defeated, with the general secretary Mick Lynch speaking against. He criticised TUSC's votes record in order to argue that the union's political activity should concentrate on supporting 'broad-based campaigning against cuts' rather than electoral activity.

Events, however, won't allow the issue to be evaded. How can workers be politically represented? Ironically, days later, as 10,000 striking RMT members brought the London

underground to a halt, Mick was quoted in the media correctly criticising the Blairite Labour mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, for not "standing up to Tory ministers who want to attack jobs, pensions and conditions of key transport workers. It is this political failure", he went on, "that has left tube workers with no choice but to strike". (The Guardian, 2 March)

But lessons need to be drawn. In 2020 the RMT London Transport regional council, noting that "Ken Livingstone won his first mayoral election standing against the official Labour candidate", proposed "that Jeremy Corbyn be approached by the RMT and offered support should he be prepared to stand" in the mayoral election scheduled for May 2021.

A Corbyn mayoral candidacy, backed up with anti-austerity candidates for the London assembly, could well have been successful. Then the current battle of the RMT to save jobs and pensions could have been on a completely different terrain, with a supportive mayor (of one of the biggest cities in Europe) with the potential to mobilise public support against a weak Tory government.

But the regional council's proposal was rejected, with the argument made again, of the need instead to build 'broad-based alliances' to protect members from cuts 'before and after the London elections', and hopes expressed that Corbyn might be reinstated to the PLP. A year on, who can say they had the greatest foresight?

A strategy of waiting for something to turn up doesn't meet the goal set by the RMT AGM in 2012 when it agreed to participate in TUSC in order to contribute "to the hard, long-term task of rebuilding political representation for working-class people and communities". With a passive approach, the RMT's predecessor union, the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, would never have played the key role it did in the formation of the Labour Party in 1900.

The debate in the RMT, and all other unions too, will go on.



Small NUS protest fails to reflect student anger

THEO SHARIEFF
SOCIALIST STUDENTS NATIONAL ORGANISER

The National Union of Students (NUS) day of action on 2 March was billed as a national demo in London. The turnout was only 500.

The low turnout on the day was not at all an indication of the lack of appetite from students to struggle. Two years ago, students organised the biggest rent strikes since the 1970s to protest our treatment as cash cows by university management. And what else have the climate strikes and Black Lives Matter protests been but struggles of working-class youth and students for our future?

Open mic

Socialist Students hosted an 'open mic' at the 2 March demo to give students the chance to speak about why they had come to the demo, and also to discuss out democratically what they thought needed to happen after in order to build the fight for free education. Many students spoke about the state of their campuses following years of cuts and underfunding. It was welcome that the NUS called a demo on 2 March. But no attempt was made by its leaders in the run-up to put forward a programme which linked the day-to-day issues facing students and staff to the need for a national student movement fighting for free education and government funding for our universities.

The small turnout was the result of the lack of organisation by NUS and local student unions, many of which didn't organise transport to London for the day. NUS didn't even bother to organise a march for students who

travelled to London, instead opting for a handful of stage-managed speeches and workshops.

Socialist Students' open mic was a welcome contrast, however, for any students in attendance searching for the strategy and ideas to build the fight for free education. We said students should continue to get organised once back on the campuses.

Socialist Students called for student unions to organise mass assemblies of students and staff on campuses. We invited student union representatives at the demo to work with Socialist Students to achieve this.

Democratic student assemblies

Such assemblies could draw up a balance sheet of what has been cut back on campuses over the last decade - jobs, student services, courses, housing, outsourcing - and mark the launch of a campaign to win back the funding stolen from our university campuses by the Tories.

Local joint protests of University and College Union strikers and students on 2 March are a glimpse of the potential for local and national joint action between us in the future. But this needs to be linked up nationally.

That's why Socialist Students is calling on the leaders of the NUS to set the date now for a national meeting of all organisations - student societies, student unions and trade unions - wanting to fight against cuts and marketisation and for free education.

Join the student fightback
JOIN socialist students
socialiststudents.org.uk/join

Striking Coventry bin drivers – why we joined the Socialist Party



Coventry bin lorry drivers are on strike against the Labour council to demand pay parity with other local authorities. Two of the strike leaders spoke to Coventry Socialist Party member Dave Griffiths about why they've joined the Socialist Party.

HAYDN JONES
UNITE CONVENOR, WHITLEY DEPOT

I've ripped up my Labour Party card. I'd given my loyalty to Labour for years, but they haven't given us any. They're just like the Tories, not listening but telling. I realised that Labour is 'Labour' in name only, and do not represent people like me who are working class. They are a party I don't recognise.

Stop the Kirby incinerator

Lancashire County Council's planning application to build a medical waste disposal facility in Simonswood, virtually on the boundary with Knowsley, is coming up against opposition from residents for miles around. A campaign has begun in Kirby, a Knowsley town with many schools, 40,000 residents, and one of the worst lung cancer rates in Britain.

Because the proposed site is outside of Knowsley, by literally metres, the planning won't be determined by that council. Kirby residents feel that they've been stranded with a toxic plant and that no one is looking out for them.

Knowsley Labour council has held meetings on this issue for years. But now they're delivering leaflets claiming they know nothing about the proposed incinerator.

But residents' fury has turned to

The only party I can see that is anything like what I want is the Socialist Party, a party that represents working people. The Socialist Party welcomed me - warts and all - with genuine open arms.

PETE RANDLE
UNITE DEPUTY CONVENOR, WHITLEY DEPOT

I've followed politics for some time, and have always cast my vote for Labour. I thought I always would.

However, times now have taken a dramatic turn in politics for working-class people. I personally have been part of the HGV bin drivers' dispute in Coventry, and attacked by a Labour council.

This isn't what Labour was

founded for. It was always to protect the working class in society. Labour have since become the Tory 'B' team. It was spouted a few weeks ago: "Labour is under new management." I'm not down for that personally.

What I am down for is a party that fights for no cuts and supports the working class. A party that doesn't bow down to big businesses, as part of its own agenda, and led by fat cats.

I'm a trade unionist and support the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) movement as well as socialist values.

Do you agree?
JOIN THE SOCIALISTS
socialistparty.org.uk/join



action. We have met and zoomed in order to organise the campaign, gain support, seek donations and find experts in the field to stop the incinerator.

Hardworking campaigners, trade unionists and independent candidates in the elections this May are

actively involved. West Lancashire Borough Council has been forced to back the campaign. And Knowsley Trade Union Council and Unite union branches are supporting us and have given donations.

NEIL DUNNE
LIVERPOOL SOCIALIST PARTY

Erdington by-election – fighting for an anti-cuts alternative

NICK CHAFFEY
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

In a very short time, led by Socialist Party members in Birmingham Erdington, the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) mobilised an enthusiastic army of activists that managed to touch the entire constituency. We spoke to over 5,000 voters offering a bold, socialist alternative to the establishment parties.

Many responded to our canvassers with the view: "They're all the same." It's difficult to cut across this understandable disillusionment with establishment politicians in just a few weeks.

But our candidate, Socialist Party member Dave Nellist, a former socialist MP on a workers' wage, was able to begin to offer a real alternative to the gravy train of the Westminster political elite. We enthused a layer we met with our anti-austerity message.

Many took window bills and our election flyers to read. Hundreds bought a copy of the Socialist that featured reports of the by-election campaign each week, and a four-page special for election day.

Cost of living

The cost-of-living crisis dominated the campaign. This squeeze on already squeezed pockets bears down on working-class families.

Labour offers nothing to fundamentally challenge failed Tory



Dave Nellist (right) with some of our campaigners in Erdington

policies. Our arguments for a pay rise for all, a £15-an-hour minimum wage, rent control and the nationalisation of the energy monopolies got an enthusiastic response.

Over 50 attended the eve-of-poll

rally to hear Dave Nellist, alongside Bakers' Union president Ian Hodson, argue the case for socialism and the need for a new mass workers' party. The latter could mobilise the mass discontent in working-class

communities into a fighting force for real change.

New people at the meeting were keen to speak about their concerns. We need to build on the by-election campaign - TUSC candidates are

coming forward to stand in the May local elections. Convinced by our arguments, new members have signed up to join the Socialist Party and back TUSC.

On election day, teams set out from 7.30am to leaflet bus and train stations, then on to schools, before beginning the mammoth task of knocking up all those we had canvassed in the previous weeks.

Low turnout

The turnout of just 27% showed what a challenge that was for our small team. But many of those we met on the day reaffirmed their support for Dave and TUSC's socialist message. It shows how important these founding footsteps are, laying the basis for future class battles that are looming around the corner.

Many may doubt that socialists can conquer the battleground of Westminster and local council elections. But as workers move into mass struggle to defend their living standards, it is certain to find its reflection in the electoral arena, as they look for a political alternative to the deepening crisis of capitalism and the horrors it throws at us.

All the hard work carried out in Erdington will get its reward, as will that of all TUSC candidates this May, pioneering the case for independent working-class political representation.

For more on the Erdington result and what next, see pages 8-9

London protest against Putin's invasion of Ukraine

NIALL MULHOLLAND
EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

The protest in central London on 6 March was a few thousand strong. Attacks by the media and others, including Labour's leadership, against the Stop the War Coalition, probably had an effect on the turnout.

People are also confused about the situation in Ukraine. They have sympathy for the people in Ukraine and oppose Putin's invasion, but they may not see how protesting can make a difference at the moment.

Nato

The Labour leadership will not accept any criticism of Nato. So John McDonnell and Diane Abbott decided not to speak at a Stop the War meeting on 2 March, and eleven Labour 'left' MPs took their names off a petition against the war.

But only one of the speakers at the protest correctly called this a "capitulation". The MPs involved have not even attempted to explain their decision to not sign the petition.

The Socialist Party found a good response to our leaflets. The front page of the Socialist called for an end to the war, a withdrawal of all Russian troops, and no trust in Nato. We will not be silenced like so many Labour Party members. Passers-by that didn't even know about the protest liked what we said.



There have been lots of protests called by Ukrainians living in London, including Russian-speaking Ukrainians, against the war. Unity of working

people can be forged in these trying circumstances in Ukraine and Russia. Stop the War's rally coincided with one of these protests.

Selling the Socialist
Just some of the events where the Socialist newspaper was sold in the past week...

Ukraine: Support for workers' unity in Reading

On 5 March, the Socialist Party had a campaign stall in Reading calling for workers' unity to stop Putin's invasion of Ukraine. 20 bought a copy of the Socialist, with our demands on the front page, and they donated £90 in total to help our campaigns. Working-class people felt that this war isn't for them, that it's a war between ruling elites, with working-class people suffering.

This campaign stall was one of the best Reading Socialist Party has had in a while. Not everyone agreed, some people didn't like our demand of no trust in Nato. But most did agree with our demands.

There were lots of good discussions. You could really feel people's anger, and the enthusiasm for change.

After explaining that we are a socialist, campaigning and internationalist organisation, a lot of people wanted to donate. It shows the real desire for change. Many people coming up to us came to the conclusion that we need a new system, and that system is socialism, in order to stop war.

ADAM GILMAN

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Wales	2,048	2,300		89%
South West	1,158	1,800		64%
East Midlands	968	1,850		52%
Yorkshire	1,089	2,550		43%
Southern & SE	992	2,350		42%
West Midlands	1,003	2,600		39%
Northern	218	750		29%
London	1,209	4,600		26%
North West	188	1,150		16%
Eastern	145	1,200		12%
Other	394	3,850		10%
TOTAL	9,413	25,000		38%

Nato, the bringer of peace or war?

Part of the background to the war in Ukraine has been the decades-long eastward creep in Europe of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) - the US-led western military alliance.

Indeed, Putin has attempted to justify Russia's brutal invasion and occupation of Ukraine in order to prevent the latter joining Nato, and thereby stopping hostile US-linked military forces being stationed on Russia's borders.

Of course, the perceived threat of Nato to Russia is not the only reason for Putin's war. He also wants to reinstall a pliant regime in Ukraine in order to pursue his grandiose scheme of re-establishing a Tsarist-style 'Greater-Russia' empire.

Nonetheless, as **Dave Carr** writes, it begs the question what is Nato, and what role does it play in the current geopolitical conflict?

Origins and history

Nato was established following World War Two when the rival superpowers of the US and its western allies on the one side, and the USSR and its satellite states in eastern Europe on the other, squared off during the 'Cold War'.

One of the main drivers behind the formation of Nato was Ernest Bevin, the foreign secretary in Clement Attlee's 1945 Labour government.

A former right-wing leader of the T&G union, Bevin's pro-capitalist credentials could knock Keir Starmer's slavish support of the profit-system into a cocked hat!

As Minister of Labour in Churchill's wartime coalition government Bevin pushed through 'Essential Work' legislation which outlawed strikes. He also used this legislation to deskill coal mining occupations by conscripting 50,000 young men ('Bevin Boys') to work in the mines.

It was more dangerous working in the coal mines than being in the armed forces. One-third of Bevin Boys were either maimed or killed during the first year.

In 1948, Bevin spearheaded a military alliance of five countries - Britain, France, Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg - in western Europe. But, with British capitalism enfeebled by the consequences of the war, he was anxious to include US imperialism in a pact to counter the

expansion of Stalin's Soviet Union (USSR), whose huge Red Army had defeated Nazism in eastern Europe in 1945. In its westwards march, the Red Army had eliminated capitalism and landlordism in its occupied territories, albeit without any workers' democratic control.

Bevin opposed the USSR, not because it represented a repressive Stalinist counterrevolution - a grotesque caricature of a workers' state in contrast to the Bolsheviks' socialist revolution of 1917 - but because he detested revolutions against capitalism, full stop.

US president Truman agreed with Bevin to form Nato but a sticking point arose over article five of the Nato treaty, which stated that 'an attack on one member would be considered an attack against them all. In the event of such an attack, each member would assist the party, or parties, so attacked.'

Some US senators, who didn't want to be dragged into a new European war, objected. Bevin was furious but a compromise was reached when the phrase 'as it deems necessary' was inserted.

Nato and the Warsaw Pact

The North Atlantic Treaty was signed by the Foreign Ministers of 12 states on 4 April 1949 and Bevin was later cheered by Labour and Tory MPs in Parliament.

In 1954, at a 'big four' summit with the US, Britain and France, the USSR's foreign minister, Molotov, proposed 'German unification, pan-German elections, the withdrawal of western forces and German neutrality'.

The West clearly regarded 'withdrawal of western troops' and 'neutrality' as meaning USSR control of Germany and rejected the proposal. Afterwards, the USSR tactically applied to join Nato 'in the interests of peace', but this disingenuous move was also rejected.

The incorporation of West Germany into Nato the following year prompted the USSR under Nikita Khrushchev, along with its eastern European satellite states (apart from Tito's Yugoslavia), to counter Nato by formally establishing the Warsaw Pact.

The existence of Nato and the Warsaw Pact cemented the 'Cold War', which was waged ideologically in Europe for decades, while localised wars, typically using proxy forces, were fought between East and West in the colonial and ex-colonial world.

Khrushchev did, however, use Warsaw Pact troops to suppress the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, when the working class rose up, arms in hand, in an attempt to establish a democratic workers' state. Similarly, Warsaw Pact forces were used to smother the 1968 Czechoslovakia uprising.

Nato forces did not intervene to support these uprisings in what was an agreed USSR 'sphere of influence'.

Nato did experience a temporary schism in 1958 when France's right-wing nationalist president, Charles de Gaulle, objected to being the 'bridesmaid' to the US and British governments and withdrew French forces from Nato's command structure. However, behind the scenes all parties continued to collaborate militarily.

Collapse of USSR

By 1989, in the absence of workers' democratic control over planning, the bureaucratic mismanagement of the nationalised economies in the USSR and eastern Europe had led to chronic economic stagnation and dysfunctional societies. This collapse of Stalinism led to the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact in July 1991.

After the collapse of the USSR the Russian economy was subjected to a rapid capitalist transformation, guided by western powers, but with enormous detrimental costs to the population.

While a small number of former state managers seized the assets of former nationalised industries to become super-rich oligarchs, Russia's economy shrunk by 50% in five years between 1990 and 1995, and life expectancy fell dramatically. A nascent middle class was also squeezed by an economic crash in 1998. Undoubtedly these national humiliations are etched into Putin's febrile mind.

Nato expansion

Putin has a point when he says the West reneged on an agreement not to expand eastwards. In February 1990, US secretary of state James Baker agreed with former Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev that Nato would not extend beyond East Germany's border following German reunification.

But despite Nato's *raison d'être* having evaporated as a result of the collapse of Stalinism, and despite its assurances to Russia, Nato continued to expand into eastern Europe.

In the 1990s, under Russia's proto-Western president Boris Yeltsin, Nato expansion was not objected to. Indeed, the 1997 Madrid Nato summit, attended by Russian government

representatives, issued a statement saying: "Nato and Russia do not consider each other as adversaries".

In 1999 the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland joined Nato, followed by Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Slovakia in 2004 and Albania in 2009. In 2016, an anti-missile shield was provocatively deployed in Romania close to Russia.

And while there was some drawdown of Nato troops, equipment and spending between 1990 and 2015, Nato increased its bloody interventions around the world, notably in former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, the Gulf Wars and the invasion and occupations in Afghanistan and Iraq at the start of the new millennium, and in Libya in 2011.

At the 2014 Nato summit in Wales, delegates agreed to increase spending to a target of 2% of each country's GDP. Most member states have increased their commitment, despite former US president Donald Trump repeatedly castigating other Nato members for letting the US shoulder the lion's share of Nato's finances.

Trump, a proponent of US isolationism and economic protectionism, reportedly had decided to withdraw the US from Nato if he had won the 2020 presidential election. This partly explains Putin's previous warm relationship with Trump.

Of course, that didn't stop Trump recently claiming: "It was me, as President of the United States, that got delinquent Nato members to start paying their dues... There would be no Nato if I didn't act strongly and swiftly".

One of the unintended consequences of Putin's war in Ukraine is an increase in US, UK and French troop deployments in eastern Europe and increased arms spending generally by Nato countries. Germany's Social Democratic Chancellor Olaf Scholz's response to the war is a massive €100 billion boost to defence spending.

This increased defence spending comes at a time when the majority of people's household incomes are being mercilessly squeezed through

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Nato's secretary general Jens Stoltenberg PHOTO NATO/CC

Anti-war Russians brave arrests and beatings to protest

CLARE DOYLE
COMMITTEE FOR A WORKERS' INTERNATIONAL (CWI)

As Putin's relentless assault on Ukraine has continued, Russian opposition to the war has not diminished.

Although a Russian opinion poll gives Putin 71% support, which is to be expected in the early phase of a 'patriotic' war, the general mood can change dramatically as the carnage and economic hardship drags on.

On Sunday 6 March protesters took to the streets and the squares of 53 cities. In the capital Moscow, 1,700 were arrested and in St Petersburg 750. According to the Russian independent monitoring group OVD-Info, over 7,500 protesters have been arrested since the start of the war.

Thousands came out to protest in cities as far away as Vladivostok and Irkutsk in Siberia, Ekaterinburg - Russia's fourth largest city beyond the Urals in Asia - and even in the Russian Baltic enclave of Kaliningrad. A woman there protesting against the war said she had survived the Nazi siege of Leningrad and did not want to see any such atrocity repeated in her country.

Young people in St Petersburg have told friends abroad that, last year, they hesitated to risk beatings and prison sentences by coming onto the streets in support of the arrested bourgeois politician, Alexei Navalny.

Losing fear

Now, however, they have been coming out, without hesitation, to demand that Putin stops the war. "Bring back the army conscripts! Stop the killing of our brothers and sisters in Ukraine!" they call.

Organising a demonstration can entail a jail sentence of up to 20 years. But many people are demonstrating their anger in whatever way they can.

Social media circulated a small video of four young people holding a banner: "Peace to the people; death to the government!" There is a call for short 'warning strikes' this week.

Hundreds of people also demonstrated on 6 March in Almaty, Kazakhstan - the scene of deadly clashes



Moscow police arrest another anti-war protester

this January between protesters and state forces over the cost-of-living crisis and against the dictatorial regime - demanding an end to Putin's war against the Ukrainian people. Socialists in the city, however, have expressed disappointment that most of the protesters were calling for imperialist Nato troops to intervene and protect Zelensky's government.

In Russia, a split away from the misnamed Communist Party has been reported by some members who condemn the government for creating divisions between the workers of Russia and Ukraine. There has been some opposition expressed in Putin's tame parliament with three Communist Party MPs breaking from their party in defiance of party leader Zyryanov's support for the war.

The most effective opposition that could actually stop the war in Ukraine would be workers refusing to supply the military forces, striking in the arms industries and calling on the rank and file of Putin's army to refuse to fight.

This would mean a full-scale revolt being prepared and organised against the ruling oligarchic elite, paralysing Putin and the heads of the armed forces he has surrounded himself with.



Over 7,500 protesters have been arrested since the start of the war

Activists in Ukraine, interviewed on mobile phones when internet connections allowed, have spoken of their distress over not being able to make a difference in a rapidly deteriorating situation.

They have been involved in civilian defence forces, and were initially occasionally able to talk to Russian soldiers who have come against them.

But without effective unions existing in the mines and other major workplaces, or any workers' party that could speak out, no effective class appeal to the Russian workers in the invading army has been possible.

The tragedy of the situation in both Ukraine and Russia is the almost total absence of genuine, democratic workers' organisations - trade unions or parties with socialist ideas and principles in their DNA.

The history of both countries has made the building of such forces extremely difficult. After the collapse of Stalinism and the USSR itself, crash privatisations devastated both economies and left the 'commanding heights' in the hands of robber barons, kleptocrats and oligarchs.

With this war, the economies of both Russia and Ukraine have entered major crises.

A return to the fundamental principles of working-class struggle and the re-establishment of state ownership and workers' control are now the only way forward for both.

Kharkiv eyewitness: 'We're living in terror'

CLARE DOYLE

On the evening of 2 March, I spoke to Lyudmila, a 45 year-old Ukrainian teacher. She was sheltering in a basement in Kharkiv - Ukraine's second city - under siege by Russian forces. Lyudmila was pleading for help, knowing we were socialists with international connections.

She described the nightmare conditions she and her elderly parents were enduring. "There are 30 of us in a basement. There are no toilet facilities and a few rags to clean the place with." Everyone was terrified and did not know if they would survive another day.

The next morning I texted Lyudmila and received a message. They had survived the night, but: "Shells are constantly raining down on us. We are all still sitting in the basement, it's really terrifying!"

"Everyone is trying to get away. But you first have to get to the station, and there's constant shooting going on. We heard of one African student being killed.

"There's nothing left in the shops. Volunteers are bringing us bread. The pharmacies have run out of medicines for people with heart problems. It's frightening even to put your nose out into the street.

"There needs to be a ceasefire and an end to war. There must surely still be levers of influence that can be pulled against this madness. Stop this, I implore you! Peaceful people are dying for nothing! Huge gratitude to you for thinking of us!"

News finally came that Lyudmila was on her way to Lviv - a staging post for hundreds of thousands of refugees, forced out of their homes, possibly forever.



The rubble-strewn streets of Kharkiv after devastating shelling by Russian forces



Socialist Party members protesting outside the 2014 Nato summit in Newport, south Wales PHOTO WALES SOCIALIST PARTY

Geoff Jones - 1937-2022

Saluting a much-valued and longstanding comrade

The passing of Geoff Jones, after a long illness, has been met with sadness, but also pride and appreciation amongst those Socialist Party members in the Swansea and West Wales branch, throughout Socialist Party Wales and across the rest of the party, who had the opportunity of politically engaging with our longstanding comrade. This was particularly the case in Brighton, where Geoff began his lifelong commitment to Marxism within the Militant Tendency.

Early days

Geoff was among a small group of Marxist activists at Sussex University in the early 1960s who pioneered and formed the bedrock of what was to become known as the Militant Tendency in the Labour Party, now the Socialist Party.

Michael Crick, the witch-hunting political journalist, wrote in his infamous 1986 book, 'The March of Militant': "Another important figure at Sussex [University] was a physics lecturer, Geoff Jones, who provided continuity and an important link with the [Labour] party in Brighton Kemptown, which was eventually taken over by Militant in the 1970s and chose a Militant member, Rod Fitch as its parliamentary candidate for the 1983 election."

Geoff played a key role in Brighton for more than 30 years before retiring to the Mid-Wales village of Llanwrtyd Wells with his partner, our late comrade Kate Jones, and their young son Bryn.

Wherever Geoff lived became the centre of activity for Militant in Brighton - even more so when he got a house with a large basement which became a Militant meeting place and office for Militant's first full-time organiser in Brighton, the legendary Ray Apps.

Geoff was the only Militant supporter ever to be chair of Brighton Labour Party, and was also an active trade unionist in ASTMS (later MSF) and president of Brighton Trades Council from 1991 to 1996.

These proud socialist credentials inevitably meant that Geoff, alongside many other Militant class fighters, was expelled from a right-wing, degenerating Labour Party.

As well as writing his socialist

political pamphlets, reviews and articles for our publications, Geoff, in his 'daytime job' as a physics lecturer, contributed physics notes to the Encyclopaedia Britannica Yearbook and wrote short technical introductions to subjects including 'Atomic Physics'.

To Geoff's surprise, his book on 'Computers' was translated and widely circulated in China. Of course, there's no truth whatsoever in the rumours that Geoff had unwittingly contributed to the rise of China's economic powerhouse!

After retiring to the depths of mid-Wales in the late 1990s, it inevitably meant there was a certain physical isolation away from our day-to-day activities. But, nevertheless, both Geoff and Kate would drive as often as possible the 100-mile round trip to attend a Llanelli branch meeting or a Saturday paper sale.

Geoff continued his political work by setting up our first Socialist Party Wales website and becoming the editor of our four-page quarterly, Socialist Party Wales supplement, which we published for a number of years in order to take account of the new political landscape of the devolved Welsh Assembly that was established at Cardiff Bay.

After their move to Swansea, Geoff was able to participate more fully in our party branch and trade union activities, attending the Swansea and West Wales branch meetings on a regular basis, and passing on his experience and socialist understanding to many of the younger comrades, who were always inspired by his Marxist analysis.

However, ill health restricted Geoff's ability to be as fully active as he wanted to be. But on all the important protests, rallies and meetings in Swansea, Cardiff, and our annual 'Socialism' events, Geoff would make every effort to attend, flying our Socialist Party flag high!

Workers' history

His short pamphlet on the 'Working-class history of Wales' was not only a best seller among Socialist Party members, but was also more widely read among activists throughout the movement, and was stocked in many Welsh bookshops.

Geoff also assisted in encouraging



Geoff on the election campaign trail in 2017 pictured with his late partner and comrade Kate PHOTO WALES SP

our younger comrades to write and produce their own articles and pamphlets, providing not just a socialist analysis but also raising the much-needed cash from the sales that went towards our fighting fund.

Geoff's almost 60 years of membership seem to have flown by

because of the enormous amount of struggle, solidarity and socialism that's ingrained in the life of a revolutionary.

All our comrades greatly appreciate the role and dedication of Geoff Jones in our collective struggle for socialism. We salute the passing of a

much-valued comrade and pledge to continue the fight for a socialist world!

We send our condolences to Geoff's son, Bryn, his daughter-in-law Baru, granddaughter Emilia, his family, comrades and friends.

ALEC THRIVES

We need benefits we can live on

TANIS BELSHAM-WRAY
LEEDS SOCIALIST PARTY

The cost of living is rising exponentially. From gas and electric price rises to food costs and rent, many households are already struggling. Just gas and electric bills alone will see an average increase of £58 a month.

The retail price index is 7.5%. Yet Universal Credit (UC) is set to increase by just 3.1% in April.

For a single person over 25, the rise will be only £10.07 a month; for a couple, £15.81. This doesn't even come close to the extra for just fuel bills!

Last year the Trussle Trust handed out 2.5 million food parcels, a 33% increase from the previous year. 980,000 of these parcels were for children.

One benefit that hasn't gone up is childcare. At present, parents can claim up to £646.35 a month towards childcare costs. This rate hasn't increased since 2016.

But since February 2020, childcare costs have risen by 48%. These costs also have to be paid up front, which has meant many parents, especially women, have had to cut their hours or stop working altogether as they simply can't afford to work.

We say:

- No rise in the energy price cap. Nationalise energy and other utilities under democratic workers' control and management to reduce energy bills
- Scrap the planned rise in National Insurance - tax the rich
- Reintroduce the £20 a-week uplift to Universal Credit. End the five-week wait
- A £15 an-hour minimum wage, living benefits and pensions that increase with inflation

- End the benefit cap, including the cap on childcare, as a step towards affordable childcare for all
- Introduce rent controls. Fair rent to be decided by elected bodies of tenants, housing workers and trade union representatives
- No council tax rises. Councils to set needs-based no-cuts budgets and demand funding from government
- For a socialist plan of production to guarantee a living income, decent housing and the necessities of life for all

Waltham Forest private school back on strike against pension cuts



JAMES IVENS

JAMES IVENS
WALTHAM FOREST SOCIALIST PARTY

Private school workers in Waltham-stow, east London, went back on strike from 8 March to save their pensions.

The picket line outside Forest School was big, just like the first strike day on 23 February. Members of the NEU and NASUWT unions are surprised to find themselves taking action. But the bosses' pension cuts would put them on worse conditions than even the state sector!

Forest School management has treated staff like idiots. According to pickets, bosses made "vague promises" after the last strike day - but then "tried to force the contracts down our throats" with the same cuts.

These workers aren't having it. Nor, it seems, are parents, who were very

receptive of the unions' leaflets.

The Forest School strike is on top of a separate dispute in a group of 23 other private schools nationally. A sign of the times!

Meanwhile, the strike wave rumbles on. There are other NEU disputes at two east London schools in the state system, and a dispute brewing among Waltham Forest bin workers. The regional strikes by train cleaners and night tube drivers continue. University workers are gearing up for further action nationally.

A meeting of Waltham Forest Trades Council on 1 March drew many of these disputes together, alongside the historic Unite victory at Barts NHS Trust (see main article). The TUC nationally should do the same job. Link up the strikes to defeat the cost-of-living crisis!

Wakefield taxi drivers protest

WF1 taxi drivers being treated like second-class citizens by Wakefield Council was the cause of a strike and protest outside the Town Hall in Wakefield, West Yorkshire, on 2 March. Taxi union leader, Yasar Ahmed, reported to around 60 strikers how even their simple call for dialogue on the matter with the council was being refused.

The protest also heard a number of taxi drivers add detail to the injustices Yasar was trying to get resolved. The protest was to try and get the council to listen, as their livelihood in the taxi trade is being threatened by the council's severe penalties and treatment.

"If they pass a law, that law should be across the board for all public servants. Why should it just be for

taxi drivers? Why should we accept a policy that makes us second-class citizens," Yasar said.

The council will also not accept a vehicle that is over ten years' old, the drivers are expected to buy new more often. The policy is out of touch because, as Yasar points out: "They seem to think every taxi driver is a millionaire. They want us to go green but they won't extend the age limit or give a grant." Compare that with Bradford Council who grant £4,000 to buy a hybrid.

The GMB trade union had a compromise proposal on the table, which the taxi union leaders said would be acceptable to them, but the council rejected it. Frustration with Labour in local government, at giving no help, gave rise to the call for councillors to resign. Dashed expectations in them and the absorption of lessons from this encounter will increase the support for a new mass workers' party.

JOHN VASEY WAKEFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

Uni workers strike against real-terms pay cut

King's College London University was one of ten places out for Unison's strike of uni support staff from 2-3 March. **Mary Finch**, a Socialist Party member and a Unison union rep at King's spoke to the Socialist in a personal capacity:

We're on strike today at King's and ten other institutions across the country. Unison members are on strike with the University and College Union (UCU) over pay. We've been made a 1.5% pay offer, which is a real-terms pay cut. This is after university staff worked throughout the pandemic. We've worked tirelessly to keep universities open, to keep universities running. We've been insulted with a real-terms pay cut.

We're a central London university. The cost of living is going up. Transport for London fares are being increased. Some of the lowest-paid

members at this university have to travel in from the outskirts of London and spend loads of money on fares. And they're being insulted with a tiny pay offer.

King's has said: "Our hands are tied, the pay offer is negotiated nationally." But we're not stupid. We understand how that pay offer works. What we're demanding is that King's goes back to the university and college employers' association and demands and negotiates for a better pay offer for Unison members across the country in universities.

We're also on strike over things like the gender pay gap, the disability and ethnicity pay gaps, and over career progression. We want King's to take that seriously, and take actual action on that.

Workloads are a massive issue too. There are loads of teams that are massively understaffed, and being told 'we can't afford to pay you properly. We can't afford to hire more members of staff to give you a reasonable workload.' And yet some of

the most senior members of staff are on £100,000, £200,000, £300,000, and so on. At some levels as well, there's a complete lack of transparency of what these people are being paid. And yet we're being told we have to bear the brunt of the cost-of-living crisis. We want a better pay offer. But we also want action on all of these other issues that are affecting our members as well.

What do you think should happen after today's strike?

Continue to coordinate with UCU, first of all. I think it's fantastic they've stepped up the action from three days to ten days now. It's a real show of strength in the face of the employer. There are some really vicious attacks at some universities. Queen Mary University is trying to intimidate students for attending the picket line. So I think continuing to coordinate with UCU and act in solidarity.

I think our action at King's and other institutions will be a boost to Unison members at other universities where they didn't meet the ballot threshold. Hopefully, they can be rebaloted and they can join us in the next round of strike action.

And coordinating with students. Management have always tried to split us and pit staff against the students. Continuing solidarity between us and the students can give the employer what for.



MARY FINCH

Reinstate Usdaw rep Max! Join the week of action

Max McGee, a Socialist Party member and Usdaw representative and branch secretary at one of Tesco's distribution depots, is seeking reinstatement after being systematically victimised for standing up for his members. He was given a final written warning on trumped-up charges for which he successfully won a harassment grievance against his line manager. Yet the ruling was upheld regardless.

He was then fired after assisting a pregnant co-worker change a forklift battery, which led to him being electrocuted by faulty equipment. He was brought up on charges of falsifying his injury. But when Tesco was challenged with the first-aider's report, it simply modified the charge and sacked him for exaggerating his injuries.

The past victories of Usdaw in the depot include a pushback on unsafe business practices, of which this rep played an active role in organising, alongside building a mass grievance in relation to Covid safety and performance, as well as encouraging workers to cite Section 44 to combat these attacks through the union.

The timing of Max's sacking was not insignificant as it was during an industrial ballot on pay and conditions across a number of Tesco warehouses. Despite Max's victimisation and sacking, the depot voted overwhelmingly for strike action. This forced Tesco to come back with an improved offer on pay and terms, which members voted to accept.

With Usdaw's support, Max has exhausted all appeals and is preparing to go to an employment tribunal

to overturn the outrageous decision to sack him. The Reinstate Max campaign is keeping up the pressure on Tesco. We can increase Max's chances of getting some measure of justice whilst making it clear that trade union victimisation will not be tolerated.

● Organise a protest outside a Tesco store or depot during the 12-18 March week of action and invite Max to speak at your meeting. You can contact Max and send messages of solidarity, as well as order leaflets and posters, at reinstate.max.mcgee@gmail.com

● Can you help support the #Reinstate Max campaign by donating or getting your union branch to donate at gofundme.com/f/reinstate-max-usdaw-rep-socialist

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the Socialist

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formerly **Militant**



PAUL MATTSON

FOR ECONOMIC CRISIS AND WAR

- **Back workers' struggles for pay rises**
- **Build the working-class opposition to war and capitalism**

It's not a joke. After illegal parties during lockdown and inflicting real-terms pay cuts on the same NHS workers they had proclaimed as heroes, MPs are rewarding themselves with a £2,212-a-year pay rise from 1 April!

For working-class people, that same day will see an increase in National Insurance contributions, increases in council tax, and the energy price cap lifted to nearly £2,000. The bosses will use the war in Ukraine as an excuse to drive prices higher too. Most of us share a sense of dread in anticipation of the next months' pay cheques and bills.

The future is full of uncertainty. But one thing we can be certain of,

is that the Tories will continue to act in the interests of big business and the super-rich. And they don't just do the bidding of the British capitalist class.

For all the talk of sanctions against Russian oligarchs in response to the war in Ukraine (see p4-5), the Tory party itself is saturated in donations from Putin's friends in the Russian ruling class. One former Russian minister's wife donated £160,000 to the party in 2014 in return for a tennis match with Johnson when he was London mayor!

Alongside dread of the worsening cost-of-living crisis, there is revulsion at the horrors of war - both fuelled by the capitalists' lust for

profits. There can be no trust in the bosses' politicians to bring peace or prosperity. But as it stands, working-class people are without a political voice.

Labour leader Keir Starmer continues to back up the Tories - arguing in favour of harsher sanctions on Russia he warned British workers to be prepared for further "economic pain". The Labour council in Coventry continues to spend millions undermining action by bin lorry drivers striking for a pay rise (see p10).

Workers are taking action to demand a pay rise, and strike action is spreading across the transport network, in education and beyond.

And strikes get results! Health workers in Barts health trust, east London, after a successful two-week, are being brought back in-house with improved NHS terms and conditions (see p7).

We need a new mass party of the working class prepared to back up workers in struggle. The Socialist Party is fighting to make that happen, with others, by standing in May's council elections as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (see p8-9). And if you are prepared to fight against the bosses' attacks, we want you to stand too.

Join us to help build a workers' voice against poverty and war, and in the struggle for a socialist world.

Join the fightback

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