

Ukraine crisis WORKERS' UNITY AGAINST WAR AND CAPITALISM



War is the inevitable consequence of an international capitalist system based on profit, exploitation and oppression. The main beneficiaries of war in Ukraine will be the billionaires and the oligarchs, the bosses of the arms industries, and the capitalist profiteers.

It will be workers and ordinary people in Ukraine who will suffer: killed and injured by bombs and missile attacks; forced to uproot themselves and flee their homes. This, on top of the economic problems they were already facing under the Zelensky government, backed by rich Ukrainian oligarchs.

Putin's invasion of Ukraine is in part to divert attention from the growing anger by workers in Russia at the economic crisis his regime has presided over. He's terrified that an uprising of workers, like the one in next-door Kazakhstan, could overthrow his rotten, authoritarian, gangster-capitalist rule.

And here in Britain, rising oil and gas prices and

economic instability resulting from the war will be another turn of the screw in the cost of living crisis. We have already seen energy, food and other prices go through the roof, while the rich get richer under Boris Johnson's watch.

Johnson and the Tories have been happy to take the dirty money of rich Russian oligarchs to fund their party. Both Tory and Labour governments have welcomed them into Britain with open arms. The same governments that have waged brutal wars in Iraq and elsewhere to defend the profits and prestige of their capitalist backers.

Working people can have no trust in pro-big business capitalist governments to defend our interests whether in Ukraine, Britain, the US, or in Russia. We need to build workers' unity and international solidarity in a struggle to kick out the warmongers and the profiteers.

That means also building mass workers' parties that can offer a real political alternative to the defenders of this unequal and brutal capitalist profit system: a socialist alternative that doesn't just seize the assets of the Russian oligarchs, but takes economic control out of the hands of the major monopolies and the entire super-rich capitalist elite, so that society can be democratically run by the working class in the interests of the majority, based on planning and cooperation, not the cut-throat competition in pursuit of profits and prestige that causes poverty, exploitation and war.

- Stop the war in Ukraine
- Withdraw Russian troops and end the bombing
- Withdraw Nato troops from Eastern Europe
- For workers' unity, for self-determination and full democratic rights for all minorities
- No trust in Johnson, Putin, Biden or Zelensky. For an independent workers' movement
- Fight for a socialist alternative to capitalism and war

BUILD AN INTERNATIONAL MOVEMENT OF WORKERS AND YOUTH AGAINST WAR IN UKRAINE

The Socialist Party is affiliated to the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI). The material below is mostly taken from a statement produced by the CWI immediately following Putin's invasion of Ukraine.

Socialists and the wider working-class movement must condemn Putin's military invasion of Ukraine, which will bring the death of many innocent civilians, create potentially millions of refugees, and cause widespread destruction. We stand resolutely opposed to all capitalist warmongers and reactionary nationalist chauvinism that pits workers against workers.

We also oppose Nato and the

western capitalist powers, which are also responsible for the ratcheting up of military tensions in the region that have now resulted in a new war in Ukraine.

It is the working class of Ukraine, Russia and beyond who will pay dearly for the war, not the oligarchs and ruling elites in Moscow, Kyiv and Washington.

The international workers' movement needs to mobilise against the war, independent of the ruling classes and pro-capitalist political parties. We must oppose any attempts to set aside the struggles of workers and youth, and the class interests of the workers' movement, because of pressures to follow the approach of pro-capitalist forces regarding the war in Ukraine.

Why should the working class have any faith in the motives of pro-capitalist governments, which have presided over Covid policies that have left millions dead and are now trying to make workers pay the economic cost of lockdowns?

The western powers act from the class standpoint of the ruling elites and billionaires both at home and abroad.

When it is in the interests of western imperialism, it has not hesitated to invade and occupy smaller countries as we have seen over three decades.

Working-class people have no interest in supporting US-led Nato, the main imperialist military force in the world, or the smaller but brutal imperialist power of Russia.



We stand resolutely opposed to all capitalist warmongers who pit workers against workers

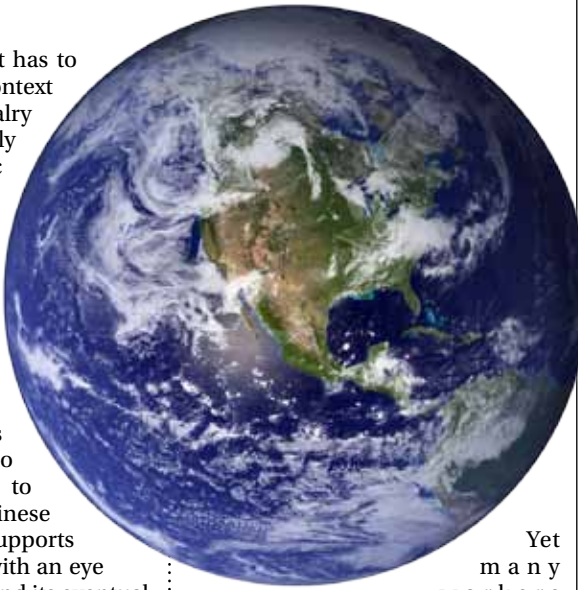
- Stop the war in Ukraine
- Withdraw Russian troops and end the bombing
- Withdrawal of Nato troops from Eastern Europe
- Build an international movement of workers and youth against the war
- We will not pay for capitalist wars. Cap energy and heating costs and nationalise the energy sectors under democratic workers' control and management
- Expropriate the wealth and property of the oligarchs and ruling classes. Bring the main sectors of the economy under public ownership, with democratic management and control by the working class
- Expropriate the arms industry and transfer production to public ownership for social use
- For the building of independent trade unions and mass workers' parties in Ukraine, Russia and the region
- No to ethnic division and cleansing; for the right to self-determination and full democratic rights for all minorities
- For workers' unity and a common struggle against warmongers, oligarchs and the system of capitalism that creates poverty, joblessness, ethnic divisions and wars. For a socialist society

International rivalry and conflict

The Ukraine conflict has to be seen in the context of the ongoing rivalry between the relatively declining economic power of the US, which is still the largest military power, and the rising economic and increasing military power of China. Biden partly took a hard line against Russia in recent weeks because he wanted to send a strong signal to China. Indeed, Chinese president Xi Jinping supports Putin over Ukraine, with an eye to claims on Taiwan and its eventual 'reintegration' into China.

Russia is Beijing's biggest recipient of loans from official sector institutions, worth as much as \$151bn between 2000 and 2017. According to the Financial Times, China will probably help Russia weather sanctions "mostly through resource deals and lending by several state-owned banks, while seeking to avoid damage to its own economic and financial interests". Beijing will continue to try to strike a balance between backing Putin and its own self-interest in the region's stability and regarding its worldwide trading links.

Nato powers have stated that they have no intention of militarily intervening in Ukraine and directly confronting Russia. Such an intervention would clearly not be in the interest of both nuclear arms-holding Nato and Russia, despite Putin placing Russia's nuclear deterrent on high alert.



Yet many workers and youth are understandably fearful of the Ukraine crisis leading to a wider war. There is a danger that other forces can be drawn into skirmishes. Western forces' leaders are concerned that the Russian air force may chase the Ukrainians into Polish airspace. That, according to Financial Times journalist Gideon Rachman, could lead to a direct clash between Russia and Poland, a Nato member.

The war in Ukraine is yet another dangerous escalation of the development of hostile military blocs on a world scale. The main task of socialists and the workers' movement is to oppose all imperialist powers and their warmongering ruling class at home; to struggle for workers' unity and against the coercion and oppression of all nationalities and minorities, as part of the programme for a socialist society.



Build international working-class solidarity

While the working people of Ukraine have the right to live free of Russian military threats, coercion, and attacks, they can have no faith in the Zelensky government. In response to Putin's military operation, Zelensky proclaimed 'martial law'. This comes on top of a 30-day state of emergency, which gives the president far-reaching powers, including banning political parties and protests.

Under these conditions, workers' rights will be quashed. Since a bloody coup brought a pro-Western

regime to power in 2014, Ukraine has been ruled by right-wing, authoritarian governments, involving far-right nationalists and fascist elements, which have curtailed democratic rights and are no friends of the workers' movement. Ethnic Russians in Ukraine face discrimination.

International working-class solidarity is essential to build a mass anti-war movement everywhere. We should support any attempts at genuine cross-community unity taking place on the ground in Ukraine,

including democratically organised self-defence.

All possible action should be taken to aid the building of genuine independent workers' organisations in Ukraine, Russia and throughout the region. This includes constructing independent trade unions and mass parties of the working class with bold socialist policies. A socialist programme can unite workers across all national and ethnic lines, to oppose the local warmongers and oligarchs and the outside imperialist powers.

Sanctions: A blunt tool that will mainly hurt ordinary workers



Having ruled out direct military intervention into Ukraine, western governments have instead increased weapon supplies to Ukraine's government and applied punitive economic sanctions on the Russian state.

These new sanctions are targeted at oligarchs and Russian banks, including barring the latter from the Swift international payment system. The Nord 2 gas pipeline from Russia to Germany has also been put on hold by Berlin. Although it seems that western governments will not block Russia's profitable oil and gas exports.

Nonetheless, cutting off financial and technical links to world markets will hurt Russia's economy. However, sanctions are a blunt instrument that will hurt ordinary Russians more than Putin and the oligarchs that surround him. Already Russian banks have massively increased domestic interest rates as the rouble collapses in value internationally.

The workers' movement internationally should oppose sanctions by capitalist states, which will hit working-class people in Russia hardest. Russia has a smaller GDP (total output) than Italy, and has an average standard of living of less than a quarter of that of people in the UK.

Crippling sanctions against Iraq in the 1990s failed to unseat dictator Saddam Hussein, but they did pauperise ordinary Iraqis and

undermined their health system.

In recent years, Moscow has taken action to alleviate further possible sanctions. The economy is more self-sufficient after meat, fruit, vegetables and dairy exports were banned when sanctions were imposed in 2014 following the annexation of Ukraine's Crimea peninsula by Putin's military.

The Power of Siberia gas pipeline to China is another example of diversification by the Russian state, with Power of Siberia 2 already approved by Putin.

Russia has also used earnings from oil and gas exports to build substantial financial reserves. It has foreign currency reserves of about \$500 billion and very low levels of national debt by international standards.

Sanctions against Russia can cut both ways. Russia provides 40% of the EU's oil and coal, and 20% of its gas. Western countries are looking for alternative sources but a cut in supplies would lead to even higher energy prices for businesses and homes, accelerating existing deep problems in the European and world economy.

Disrupting wheat exports from Russia would also increase prices and food insecurity worldwide. Russia is also a supplier of key components for global manufacturing, including car parts, and cutting these supplies will have far-reaching consequences for both industry and the economy.



Crippling sanctions against Iraq in the 1990s failed to unseat dictator Saddam Hussein, but they did pauperise ordinary Iraqis and undermined their health system

Guarantee safety for refugees Seize the wealth of Russian oligarchs to fund jobs and homes for all

The human tragedy unfolding in Ukraine could lead to up to four million people fleeing the country looking for safety, according to UN estimates. Boris Johnson's promise to "receive those who are fleeing in fear of persecution" is, like most of what he says, hypocritical and hollow.

At the time of writing, fleeing Ukrainians can only find safety in Britain if a close relative is already resident, or by applying to work under a seasonal worker visa. Displaying the Tories' real attitude to refugees, Tory minister Kevin Foster dismissively told Ukrainian workers fleeing for their lives that they should be applying to be fruit pickers! At the same time, the Tory government is pushing the Nationality and Borders Bill through parliament, which will criminalise refugees fleeing war and disaster.

A safe passage for all those fleeing the conflict in Ukraine must be made available, regardless of their nationality, professional qualifications, or whether they have close family members in Britain. Under the democratic control of workers and the trade unions, immigration policies should be decided in the interests of workers, not the exploitative bosses who seek to divide.

And there must be decent conditions on arrival, including the right to work and an end to the horrific conditions asylum seekers in Britain are currently subjected to. The billions of pounds of assets held by Russian oligarchs in Britain could be seized, and the wealth used to provide decent housing and secure jobs on trade union-agreed rates of pay for all workers.



Russian oligarchs in bed with the Tories

Liz Truss, foreign secretary in Johnson's Tory government, recently said: "There would be nowhere to hide for Putin's oligarchs or Russian companies involved in propping up the Russian state."

Perhaps she should have added the rider: "Apart from the Tory party's coffers, and the property and financial markets in London."

Donations from Russian oligarchs, some with links to Vladimir Putin, have amounted to an estimated £2.3 million since Johnson became prime minister.

At the time of the Skripal poisonings in Salisbury in 2018, the widow of Alexander Litvinenko - the British-naturalised Russian defector, allegedly murdered on orders from Moscow - called on the Tory party to return money donated by various super-rich Russians. The Tory party refused.

Back in 2015, the Tory government under PM David Cameron claimed to have halted the 'Golden Visa' used by Russian oligarchs to buy British residency and citizenship. Prior to this, between 2008 and 2015, some 700 wealthy Russians entered the UK on 'Tier 1 investor

visas' in return for £2 million, and with no questions asked.

However, since the 2015 'clamp-down' more than 200 Russian millionaires, plus family members, have bought their way into the UK using 'golden visas'. According to Transparency International, London-based oligarchs are among the 0.01% of Russians who own more of their country's wealth than the bottom 99.8%.

These oligarchs have obtained so much property in the capital - more than 85,000 properties in the UK are owned anonymously by companies and trusts registered abroad and not subject to sanctions - that the exclusive Eaton Square in London has been nicknamed 'Red Square'.

The lightly regulated City financial markets have also provided a welcoming haven for Russian oligarchs' loot.

The government's much vaunted 'unexplained wealth orders', giving the National Crime Agency powers to investigate dirty money laundering from rich oligarchs, failed miserably when, in 2020, the daughter and grandson of former Kazakh dictator president Nursultan Nazarbayev won their court case against the Agency.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has pushed the Tory government into saying it will tighten up on oligarchs' unexplained wealth, but seeing is believing. The solution is simple, nationalise their money and assets, and then use this wealth to tackle social problems such as the shortage of affordable housing.



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

Vicious rail bosses hold down heroic train cleaners’ pay

Atalian Servest

TED WOODLEY
RMT COVENTRY NO 1 BRANCH
(PERSONAL CAPACITY)

Passengers on expensive Avanti West Coast trains will be shocked to learn that while the train manager is entitled to free train travel, a final salary pension and sick pay, the cleaner working on the same train, at the same time, gets nothing.

These cleaners have worked throughout the pandemic and, like all key workers, were applauded for their efforts by the great and the good. Yet when these same workers ask for an improvement in their lot, apparently they just aren't worth it!

They are employed by outsourcing firm Atalian Servest which makes big profits by driving workers' pay and conditions down to the lowest possible rate, and spiriting away as much as it can to its shareholders in France.

These workers earn just £9.68 an hour. The RMT union has revealed that this company's shareholders pocketed over £10 million last year - enough to increase hourly pay to £15 several times over. Yet the company is absolutely determined to keep our members on poverty pay.

RMT members took two days of strike action for the second time from 24-25 February at depots and stations across the Avanti West Coast network.

We demand our cleaners are paid at least £15 an hour. But Atalian Servest's most recent offer has included an additional pathetic 6p in order to reach the so-called 'living' wage of £9.90.

One member on the picket line at Oxley depot told me that she would have been less insulted if they had

been offered nothing at all, as 6p an hour shows what management really think we're worth!

As well as low pay, our train cleaner members are faced with appalling working conditions. I was shown a video by a picket of mice running across the Oxley staff canteen. Another described mushrooms growing out of the floor and leaking windows in the same area. RMT is currently challenging the employer to urgently address these unsanitary facilities.

We learned that, as well as being a poverty-paying employer, Atalian Servest is a callous one as well. It recently reduced bereavement leave from three days to one, and one staff member was even asked to come into work in the middle of his paternity leave, days after the premature birth of his child.

Pickets outside Birmingham New Street station told me that, while the directly employed train crew are given time off and support immediately after railway fatalities, the cleaners get nothing.

So far, four days of strike action has been called in pursuance of the RMT's pay claim. It is clear we are dealing with an exceptionally hard-nosed employer, that sees its staff as nothing more than numbers on a spreadsheet.

Therefore, we should be discussing escalating the dispute and coordinating future strike action with our train cleaner members at other companies such as Churchill's who are also fighting for improved pay.

RMT cleaner members on both Oxley and New Street picket lines enthusiastically supported the idea of holding a protest outside Avanti HQ to draw wider public attention to their disgusting employment practices and force them to intervene to address our members' grievances.



Churchill

MIKE SARGENT
RMT MEMBER

Five in the morning outside Dover Priory Station on 23 February and it's dark and cold. Very cold! Members of the local RMT union assembled to support the strike against Churchill, which operates many cleaning contracts on the railways across south east England. This is a scene that was repeated at 40 stations across London and the south east.

The ballot for strike action returned a huge mandate, and quite rightly! These workers have put up with low pay and disrespect from employers whose only intent is to squeeze as much from the workforce as possible.

No sick pay, having to pay to travel on the trains they clean, and incomprehensible payslips that often underpay them. I was shown an electronic pay slip that showed a wage of over £11,000 with £500 deductions that left £1,200!

Empowered by their action, hundreds travelled from over the south

to attend an upbeat rally at Westminster (see back page). Accompanied by music and dancing, the crowd of hundreds of cleaners were supported by solidarity from other workers and unions, before heading off to the rail company headquarters to make their feelings known - banners, placards, whistles and flags to the fore!

These parasite employers (Churchill paid out millions last year in bonuses and shareholder payments) have to learn that the low-pay model won't work any longer, that workers must be respected and retained through decent employment practices, or they will move on to other employment.

With the soaring rates of inflation and energy costs, those workers on minimum wage will need in excess of £1,200 a year increase simply to keep pace!

That evening, the pickets were back in place, largely uncontested, and the workers involved took strength from an outstanding day of solidarity and unity.

This was day one of concerted action and is unlikely to be the last. £15 an hour? Not much really for those who were hailed pandemic heroes!

NHS unions must unite to reject government's 3% pay offer

JOHN MALCOLM
UNISON HEALTH SERVICE GROUP EXECUTIVE
MEMBER (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

NHS staff have faced two years of sacrifice during the pandemic and are exhausted. We have worked above and beyond expectations to maintain services and deal with increased workload. Up to 400 staff per week are leaving the NHS. Trusts face severe staff shortages, sickness levels and burnout.

Issues that were there before the pandemic have only been made worse. Some trusts are offering golden handshakes of up to £3,500 for nursing staff. This will only see staff moving from trust to trust, rather than addressing the long-term staff shortages, and is no substitute for a decent, lasting pay rise.

NHS unions representing workers covered by the 'agenda for change' agreement, have submitted their

evidence to the pay review body (PRB), which considers recommendations on NHS pay. But last week the Tory government recommended a 3% pay offer to the PRB. This falls far short of inflation nearing 8%, and also fails to address the cost of living squeeze and relative loss of pay since the start of austerity in 2010.

The supposedly 'independent' PRB routinely follows the government recommendations. NHS unions need to be building the campaign on pay now, and not waiting until the PRB figure is announced.

The unions are effectively continuing the pay

campaign from last year, when there were a number of consultative ballots or indicative ballots for industrial action over pay. Unfortunately, despite a high percentage voting in favour of action, across all of the unions that balloted, none of the union leadership bodies moved to a formal ballot.

Socialist Party members and other left-wing activists on Unison's service group executive argued consistently to move to a formal strike ballot. Around 29% voted in the Unison consultative and indicative ballots. This would fall short of the 50% required by the Tories' anti-union laws in a formal ballot. But the

turnout would have been higher had the union's leaders built a decent campaign and given a fighting lead.

This year, the NHS unions have agreed to a joint campaign. Although, at this stage, a percentage claim or flat rate has not been agreed, it is positive that the unions are taking a united approach. Last year, each union was campaigning for a different percentage increase or flat rate, causing some confusion among NHS workers, and the view that some unions were trying to outdo each other with varying claims. Hopefully this unity can be maintained.

Health unions must prepare now with a united campaign for the 2022 pay offer and an above-inflation pay claim, demanding it is paid on 1 April. If there is no sign of a decent pay rise from the government, then NHS unions should start to ballot for action.



RMT strike shuts down tube network



SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN THE RMT

The tube strike in London got off to a solid start on 1 March as workers in the RMT union on the Underground in all grades walked out against job and pension cuts. Every tube line was suspended or closed and there was gridlock on the streets.

Osip on the Brixton picket line said: "We worked throughout the pandemic getting frontline workers safely to and from work, but now they're coming for us. Khan is no longer a 'Labour' mayor with his attacks on tube workers. Six hundred jobs to go for starters, which means safe travelling done for in central London."

Socialist Party members joined the strikers right across the city.

London City Hall and the government in Westminster want to take away pensions, work-life balance, and thousands of jobs, as they impose over £508 million of cuts to London Underground as part of £2 billion of cuts across Transport for London (TfL).

Strikes on 1 and 3 March must be followed up with a programme of strike action that makes clear to the politicians that there will be no acceptance of these cuts, and be the start of a fight to secure funding for public transport in London.

This is a fight that must be won to defend public transport services in London and to maintain jobs, conditions and pensions for transport workers.

Trade unionists and passengers

across London should support the fight of RMT members against cuts. Further steep fare increases will also result from the mayor and government's funding arrangements, adding further to some of the most expensive fares in the world for urban transport.

This is a fight that can be won. London Underground is an essential part of getting London back to some kind of normality following the pandemic. Neither the Mayor nor the government are popular, and neither will want to take responsibility for these strikes.

A determined strike, followed up with the threat of further action can secure a new funding arrangement and defend the jobs, conditions and pensions of tube workers.



University strike: “We are not machines”

JOSH CURTIS
NORTHAMPTON SOCIALIST PARTY

Socialist Party members joined the University and College Union (UCU) strikes outside of the University of Northampton on 22 February, to show solidarity with the 'Four Fights' campaign.

A dedicated group of picketers assembled to brave the cold, windy weather and voice their frustrations with the growing casualisation of

contracts, and the gross overwork of university staff. As one staff member put it on the UCU Northampton branch's blog: "We are not machines who can just keep pumping out work week after week, year after year. With the average week in academia now 50 hours, no wonder referrals to occupational health have risen by 64%."

We were told on the picket lines that the previous day's chanting could be heard as far away as

Northampton General Hospital. The strikers positioned themselves on the side of the road, outside the university's main gate, in an effort to convince cars to turn around as they entered.

Calls for the public to stand for fair pay and against the gender pay gap were successful in turning back a number of cars, showing that some among the British public still go by the old adage 'never cross a picket line'.



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 £12 an hour without exemptions as a step towards a real living wage of at least £15. 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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Ukraine and the ‘national question’

Why workers’ governments and socialist internationalism are the only guarantor of self-determination

The war in Ukraine has revisited the ‘national question’ in Europe, ie the language, culture, and democratic rights of populations to territory, in a bloody manner, not seen since the Balkans Wars in the 1990s following the breakup of Yugoslavia. **Niall Mulholland** of the Committee for a Workers’ International (CWI) explains how capitalism cannot peacefully solve the national question in a lasting and equitable way. Only a democratic socialist society can create the material conditions for the realisation of a country’s right to self-determination.

Ahead of Russia recognising the ‘People’s Republics of the Donetsk and Luhansk’ and invading Ukraine, Russian President Vladimir Putin made a televised address where he attacked the Ukrainian government and Ukrainian oligarchs as tools of the West. He went on to blame the revolutionary socialist leader Vladimir Lenin for having unnecessarily ‘created’ Ukraine.

Putin argued that after the 1917 socialist revolution, the Bolsheviks’ “main goal was to stay in power at all costs, absolutely at all costs. They did everything for this purpose,” including satisfying “any demands and wishes of the nationalists within the country”... Soviet Ukraine is the result of the Bolsheviks’ policy and can be rightfully called ‘Vladimir Lenin’s Ukraine.’ He was its creator and architect.”

According to Putin, Lenin’s artificial creation of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, and the subsequent breakup of the USSR in 1991, led to the “historical mistake” of Ukraine becoming an independent state.

Putin’s invective against Lenin and the Bolsheviks, denouncing the October Revolution and the existence of the Soviet Union as a federation of states, is thoroughly reactionary. His views reflect those of much of the oligarchic capitalist ruling elite in Moscow. Putin’s tirade is reminiscent of oppressive Tsarist rule and its denial of national rights, and under Stalinism, which revived some of the worst features of ‘Great Russian’ chauvinism.

Challenging issue

The ‘national question’ is one of the most challenging and complex issues facing socialists and the workers’ movement today. As capitalism enters a new phase of deepening crisis, national tensions and national oppression will worsen.

Conflicts and wars can break out, as we see in Ukraine, where the rights of nations and national sovereignty, and self-determination for oppressed nationalities, are invoked by all sides.

To analyse these processes, and to formulate a programme for the workers’ movement on the national question, we need to start by looking at the ideas and programme of the great Marxist thinkers on this question, not least Lenin.

“Whatever may be the further destiny of the Soviet Union,” Lenin’s co-leader during the October 1917 revolution, Leon Trotsky, wrote in 1930, “the national policy of Lenin

will find its place among the treasures of mankind.”

Lenin argued that to oppose the right of self-determination under the rule of the Tsar was to give succour and support to the Great Russian landlords and capitalists. A new socialist world could not be built with the slightest taint of national oppression of the 57% non-Great Russians - a majority in the Tsarist empire.

Lenin argued that only by standing for the right of self-determination could the confidence of the oppressed nationalities be won. Liberated nations could then voluntarily remain within a socialist federation after the overthrow of Tsarism, landlordism and capitalism.



As capitalism enters a new phase of deepening crisis, national tensions and national oppression will worsen

This principled programme cut across national chauvinism and divisions. It allowed for the Bolsheviks to achieve maximum unity of the working class, and was essential for the victory of October 1917.

Lenin’s principled position on the right of nations to secede, should they so desire, was realised in the case of Finland, where the wish of the Finnish people for independence was granted by the Bolshevik government in December 1918.

The situation facing the Bolsheviks in Ukraine after the October Revolution was more complicated. The Tsarist Empire was, as Lenin put it, “the prison house of nations.” Tsarist Russia built an empire which consisted of territory occupied by Russians and many other groups.

During the course of the 19th century, as part of the process of the development of the modern capitalist nation-state in Europe and elsewhere, national consciousness had awoken in varying degrees among these groups.

The Great Russian chauvinism of Tsarist rule tended to regard Ukrainians and Belarusians as also being Russian because they were also Slavic, spoke languages similar to Russian, and were mainly Orthodox Christian. The Tsarist empire labelled

Ukrainians as “Little Russians.” Today’s western Ukraine was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, where many of its inhabitants were and still are Catholics, and were referred to as ‘Ruthenians.’ However, many Ukrainians came to see themselves as a separate, distinct nation.

The Bolsheviks’ support in Ukraine after 1917 was complicated by the fact that the Ukrainian population was mainly in the rural areas. Other national and ethnic groups, such as Russians, Poles and Jewish workers, tended to be in towns and cities.

The Kiev Rada ‘provisional government’, formed after the February 1917 revolution, was dominated by forces hostile to the Bolsheviks’ socialist programme, and claimed to be the spokesperson for the Ukraine nation.

Following the coming to the power of the Bolsheviks in the October socialist revolution, a civil war broke out when the Tsarist White armies, backed up by the capitalist western powers, attempted to crush the young workers’ state. The counter revolutionary forces found some support among the petty-bourgeois in Ukraine by exploiting the national question.

Political sensitivity

Given this situation, Lenin argued that it was essential that the young workers’ state adopted a sensitive approach on the national and land questions to win over Ukrainians.

Lenin argued “only the Ukrainian workers and peasants themselves can and will decide at their All-Ukraine Congress of Soviets whether Ukraine shall amalgamate with Russia, or whether she shall remain a separate and independent republic, and, in the latter case, what federal ties shall be established between that republic and Russia.”

From 1917-1921, Ukraine was overrun by various forces, including the Polish and German armies (the Rada tried to find favour with the occupying German forces, which dissolved it), until the Bolsheviks won control. In 1922, Soviet Ukraine became one of the founding republics of the Soviet Union. In the 1920s, the Soviet state supported Ukrainian education, culture and language.

Great sensitivity towards nationalities was required by the Bolsheviks when drawing up a federal structure for the new Soviet Union.

Lenin and Trotsky strongly criticised Stalin’s original draft constitution for the young workers’ state, which asserted that the Caucasian republics must adhere to Soviet



Above, Ukraine’s president Zelensky (left) and Russia’s president Putin give each other the ‘cold shoulder’ in an earlier failed diplomacy over the ‘national question’ PHOTO KREMLIN.RU



Lenin (centre) with fellow Bolsheviks Trotsky (left) and Kamenev. Lenin’s principled ‘right of nations to self-determination’ has been attacked by ‘Greater Russian’ chauvinist Putin

Russia. This revealed a disregard for a genuine equality of rights for all the nationalities of the Soviet Union, including the right to separate, which was enshrined in the early Soviet Union’s constitution..

On the eve of the twelfth congress of the Communist Party, held in 1923, Stalin also proposed a tripartite division of the nations of the Soviet Union based on their economic development. Again, this trampled on the principles of equality among nations and ethnic groups.

Stalin was rebuffed on these positions by Lenin and Trotsky. However, as the Stalinist degeneration of the Soviet Union set-in, due to the isolation and economic underdevelopment

saw Ukrainian cultural and language rights rolled back.

These conditions led to Trotsky’s Left Opposition gaining a strong base of support in Ukraine. But widespread Stalinist purges were carried out, eliminating the most class conscious and self-sacrificing working-class Marxists.

After their invasion of Czechoslovakia, the Nazis then had a territory under their control with a Ukrainian-speaking population. The Nazis had managed to gain support in Ukraine because of the deep hatred of the Stalinist dictatorship. Famine, mass deportations and national oppression fuelled opposition to Stalin’s rule. Trotsky pointed out that October

revolution drew the working masses of the Soviet Union together, while Stalinism caused division and separatist tendencies.

Forced into exile by Stalin, Trotsky put forward the slogan of an ‘independent Soviet Ukraine’ as a way to appeal to peasants and to cut across Ukrainian nationalist collaboration with Hitler.

The call for an independent Ukrainian workers’ state would also give a huge boost to a political revolution that could see the working class overthrow the Stalinist bureaucracy across the Soviet Union and restore workers’ rule: “Naturally, an independent workers’ and peasants’ rule. Trotsky pointed out that October

Soviet Federation; but voluntarily, on conditions which it itself considers acceptable, which in turn presupposes a revolutionary regeneration of the USSR.

“The genuine emancipation of the Ukrainian people is inconceivable without a revolution or a series of revolutions in the West, which must lead in the end to the creation of the Soviet United States of Europe.

“An independent Ukraine could and undoubtedly will join this federation as an equal member.” (The Ukrainian Question, April 1939)

World War Two saw collaboration between ultra-right-wing Ukrainian nationalists and Nazis that led to horrific pogroms and mass killings of the Jewish population in occupied Ukraine. But many Ukrainians joined with their working-class Russian comrades and other peoples of the former Soviet Union, heroically resisting and eventually defeating Nazi barbarism.

The post-World War Two situation saw a growth of living standards, for a period, under the planned economy in Ukraine and throughout the Soviet Union. But years of economic stagnation, due to the dead hand of the ruling bureaucratic elite, saw inflamed national and ethnic tensions.

Dissolution of USSR

The collapse of the Soviet Union saw Boris Yeltsin, then president of the Russian republic, agreeing with the leaders of Ukraine and Belarus to formally dissolve the Soviet Union in December 1991.

Capitalist restoration in the former Soviet Union entailed the looting of state assets by gangster-oligarchs and a dramatic fall in the living standards of working-class people. To consolidate their unpopular rule, the new capitalist forces whipped up and exploited national and ethnic divisions in Ukraine, Russia and throughout the former Soviet Union.

Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, Ukraine has vacillated under the rule of right-wing, pro-Russian presidents, and right-wing, pro-Western presidents. Mass discontent at grinding poverty, and a corrupt, brutal pro-Moscow Victor Yanukovich regime, erupted into a revolt in 2014.

But the lack of a working-class alternative allowed reactionary forces, with Western imperialist backing, to dominate the protest movement. As a new pro-Western regime was consolidated, ethnic divisions dangerously deepened. Democratic rights were curtailed, the fascist Right Sector paramilitaries were incorporated into the Ukrainian armed forces, and discriminatory language laws introduced against Russian speakers and other minorities.

During the events of 2014, the CWI stood for the right to independence of Ukraine, but totally opposed the Kyiv regime and its policy of leaning on neo-fascists and right-wing Ukrainian nationalists in its suppression of the

rights of ethnic Russians and other minorities.

The CWI firmly opposed the cynical and hypocritical meddling by western imperialist powers and the bosses’ EU in the affairs of Ukraine.

Equally, we opposed the Great Russian chauvinism of Vladimir Putin. We called for class independence in the struggle for a socialist confederation of the region.

It is vital to support the genuine democratic and national aspirations of the different people of Ukraine and the region. Marxists oppose the forcible incorporation of distinct nationalities into one state against their will.

In relation to Crimea, the CWI gave support to the right of self-determination - including secession from Ukraine - which appeared to be the wish of the overwhelming majority of its population.



Genuine self-determination, to be independent or to join Russia, cannot be expressed in a free and fair manner under the shadow of Russian tanks and guns

At the same time, the CWI defended the rights of all minorities in Crimea, including the Tatars and others, and opposed the reactionary nationalism of Putin and the oligarchs in Russia.

With ‘disguised’ Russian troops on the streets of Crimea, it is clear that the 2014 referendum on independence was not conducted in a fair and free manner. Yet it seemed there was little doubt that a majority of the population favoured returning to Russia.

All doubts, however, the CWI argued at the time, could be removed either through the election of a revolutionary constituent assembly convened through mass committees to establish the will of the people, or a genuinely democratic referendum.

The bloody struggle between Ukrainian nationalist forces and ethnic Russian forces, particularly in eastern Ukraine, led to fragmentation and a process of cantonisation of the region.

The cities of Donetsk and Luhansk in the Donbas region declared their independence from Ukraine. These impoverished breakaway areas soon came under the domination of Putin’s regime and served the interests of Russian imperialism.

Volodymyr Zelensky was elected with a landslide in 2019 on a wave of mass opposition to the corrupt elite, poverty, and endless conflict in the east of Ukraine.

The new president said he would “reboot” peace talks with the

separatists fighting Ukrainian forces in the east, but he soon acquiesced to the agenda of the Western powers.

Ukrainian governments have subjected Donetsk and Luhansk to military attacks since 2014. In fighting between the two sides, over 14,000 people have died. Putin invoked the shelling of Donetsk and Luhansk by the Ukrainian army and Nato’s eastward expansion as the reasons for his ordering the Russian army to “liberate” the enclaves and to “demilitarise” and “de-Nazify” Ukraine.

The CWI supports the right of the people of these areas to be free of Ukrainian domination and, for that matter, from the domination of Putin’s regime. They should be allowed to decide their own future.

But genuine self-determination, to be independent or to join Russia, cannot be expressed in a free and fair manner under the shadow of Russian tanks and guns. All that Putin can offer the mass of ethnic Russians in Donbas is a continuation of impoverishment and endlessly facing off hostile military forces.

The invasion of Ukraine will serve only to further divide the Russian and Ukrainian working class.

Clearly, the people of Ukraine cannot determine their future while Russian forces invade and occupy. The international workers’ movement must demand the immediate end to the invasion and for the removal of all Russian forces from Ukraine.

But ‘self-determination’ for Ukraine under the auspices of the Western capitalist powers, of the Nato armed imperialist alliance, and the bosses’ EU, is illusory.

Thirty years after the independence of Ukraine, all the promises from capitalist politicians of prosperity and peace have turned into their opposite on the basis of the profit system. Ukrainian people are pawns in the rivalry and conflict between the big imperialist powers of Nato and the regional imperialist ambitions of Russia.

Way forward

It is up to the working people of Ukraine and Russia to end the rule of the oligarchs and reactionary governments in their countries, and to draw the poison of far-right nationalist and fascist elements.

The war in Ukraine underlines that only the removal of capitalism and setting up a socialist confederation of Ukraine and the region can end the ethnic and national clashes.

Putin traduces Lenin’s record, and the Western capitalist powers detest the leader of the first workers’ state, but for the working class only a revival of the socialist internationalism of Lenin can show a way forward.

Marxists call for the unity of the working class across all ethnic and national lines, and for the building of mass workers’ parties, which must inscribe on their banner the guaranteed rights of minorities and the right to self-determination of nations.

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the Socialist

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WORKING-CLASS PEOPLE NEED A VOICE



PAUL MATSSON

**A WORKERS' MP ON
A WORKER'S WAGE
VOTE SOCIALIST
IN ERDINGTON
ON 3 MARCH**

DAVE NELLIST

Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition



Voting for more of the same will only get us more of the same. And, when that 'same' means soaring energy bills for us - and soaring energy profits for them - we can't take any more of the same! Cuts to public services hit us hard, while billionaires get even richer.

A vote for Labour or the Tories will be seen by Boris Johnson, or Sir Keir Starmer, as support for their approach: to carry on privatising our NHS, letting the bosses get away with fire and rehire, saddling our young people with tens of thousands of pounds of student debt, and so on.

At best, there will be a discussion on how working-class people should pay for the crisis we didn't cause. No party in Westminster says 'make the billionaires pay instead' - because working-class people don't have our own political voice, our own party.

Dave Nellist, a member of the Socialist Party, is standing as the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidate so we can use our vote to send a message to Westminster that we have had enough and want an alternative to their 'same old, same old'.

Dave will be a voice for us instead. He has a record of being a workers' MP who only took a worker's wage and as a fighter for working-class people. The result in this by-election won't change the government, but a vote for Dave can shake up the establishment. Dave's campaign is also part of the fight to build a powerful voice for the working class - a new mass workers' party.

No to war

- See inside for a working-class and socialist opposition to war

ERDINGTON BY-ELECTION SPECIAL

Nationalise to save jobs at GKN



Socialist Party members leafleting the GKN factory
SOCIALIST PARTY

Birmingham's unemployment rate of 12.6% is the highest of any major British city. Now Erdington's GKN plant is set to close with the loss of 500-plus skilled jobs. Johnson's Tory government could have intervened, nationalised and saved GKN, but instead it let it go to the wall. The Socialist Party fights for the nationalisation of GKN under democratic workers' control and management.

A workers' alternative to a bosses' Brexit



Dave marching with No2EU-Yes2Democracy in Birmingham, 2009
SOCIALIST PARTY

Boris Johnson claimed the Tories wanted Brexit to 'level up' working-class communities, but their Brexit is about freedom for the bosses to exploit us. Dave, in contrast, led one of the three national campaigns to leave the EU, explaining it is Thatcherism on a continental scale which limits a government's ability to defend working-class interests - for example to nationalise plants threatened with closure.

Johnson's plan for Brexit is the same as the EU's: giving big employers more liberty to attack workers' pay, rights and conditions and to sell off our NHS to US private health companies. We need an MP to cut through both Tory and Labour Brexit jargon and put workers first.



Birmingham bin and home care workers in solidarity
CORINTHIA WARD

Join the socialist stand against Birmingham's cutting councillors

Youth clubs, home care, school budgets, swimming pools, libraries - many have disappeared, and more have been cut beyond recognition, privatised by profiteering corner-cutting companies, or now carry hefty charges. The decent public services needed for dignity, support and a start in life are being destroyed.

These attacks represent political choices about which part of society should foot the bill - which class. The Tories made their position clear from the get-go in 2010, with the slashing of £40 billion of funding for councils in the years since. In that period, the amount paid by FTSE 100 companies in dividends to shareholders doubled to a record £110 billion in 2019. This is still the fifth-richest country on the planet.

Birmingham City Council, like all the Labour-led councils across the country, has dutifully accepted the Tory line - and cut over £770 million from services since 2010. Over 13,000 jobs have been slashed. Birmingham Labour council has closed 43 youth centres, 12 nurseries, 21 children's centres, five children's homes, four libraries and countless community and leisure facilities. And then privatised or sold off most of what's left, as it's trying to do with Short Heath playing fields too.

Labour cuts

The Labour candidate for Erdington, Paulette Hamilton, was a council cabinet member in 2018 when Birmingham care workers in Unison took strike action against the council plan to cut their hours. Some workers faced a cut from 37 hours to just 14 hours a week! Their 20-month strike defeated the plan, and the new rota was dropped. Unite and Unison refuse workers were also forced to strike against cuts in 2019.

Paulette has no defence, as she told LabourList: "I've had that portfolio for over seven years - they can only name two disputes. I have

managed a budget of over £354 million. I have also managed the public health budget each year of over £100 million. And they have highlighted two disputes that happened over five years ago, when we were looking at how we could upgrade a service. We had cross-party agreement when it was all decided." That's 'cross-party' with the Tories by the way...

In Coventry, the Labour council is brutally attacking the trade unions trying to defend services and jobs. That council is refusing to pay bin drivers the rate for the job. But even worse, it is paying outside workers twice the going rate to do the work of their own workforce, spending over £2 million in an attempt to break the strike in defence of fair pay.



The lesson is that cuts can be fought - but we require councillors and a party with a no-cuts programme. Labour is not that. A new party must be built

The socialist-led Liverpool Labour council in the 1980s provides a lesson of what a fighting council could do if it chose to represent and mobilise the working class. Its legacy is undeniable. It includes 4,800 houses and bungalows built; six new nursery classes built and opened; five new sports centres, one with a leisure pool attached; three new parks built; and rents frozen for five years.

The council defeated Tory Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, winning £60 million for Liverpool. It was achieved on the basis of workers and young people taking a democratic part in the decision process. That was in the form of mass meetings - but also mass demonstrations

and strike action to fight for what had been agreed in the council chamber.

Councils today have a lot of power to fight back against Tory attacks. Councils in England, for example, are responsible for over one fifth of all public spending. If they were to use their reserves and borrowing powers to produce budgets based on what's needed, and combine this with a Liverpool-style struggle, a mass movement could be inspired and built to end Tory austerity - and kick them out.

New mass workers' party

Today this type of struggle against the Tories is necessary - but it is impossible in Starmer's New Labour. As we go to press, Labour councillors who say they might vote against this year's cuts face being expelled; Jeremy Corbyn is not allowed to sit as a Labour MP; and Starmer takes the side of Coventry council against the workers. The lesson is that cuts can be fought - but we require councillors and a party with a no-cuts programme. Labour is not that. A new party must be built.

That can start now. Elections are taking place on 5 May with over 6,000 council seats up. In its existence since 2010, thousands of working-class fighters have stood as no-cuts candidates for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) - trade unionists, socialists, community campaigners, student activists - people with a record of standing up to the bosses and campaigning for their community and pledged to vote against cuts.

Standing no-cuts candidates has meant there's a real choice on the ballot paper in those areas. This can also help spread the idea of building a new mass workers' party. It can also be an effective way of putting pressure on councillors - they don't like a challenge to what they see as their right to rule. So why not be part of that?

● See www.tusc.org.uk for info.

FIGHT FOR A FUTURE FOR YOUTH

BEN ROBINSON

AN ORGANISER OF YOUTH MARCH FOR JOBS

Dave Nellist has been a long-standing campaigner for young people's rights. As an MP in the 1980s, Dave's maiden speech was against Thatcher's Youth Training Scheme forcing young people into low-paid work, and helping to build the movement against it.

Just over a decade ago, I was one of the Youth Fight for Jobs marchers who walked through Coventry on the way from Jarrow to London, following in the footsteps of the 1936 Jarrow march for jobs. In the aftermath of the 2007-8 financial crash, politicians and big business were asking working-class people to pay the price. Youth unemployment shot up to around a million 16 to 24-year-olds.

Again, Dave was one of our biggest supporters, joining us early in the march and helping to organise a rally and protest in Coventry, where he was a Socialist Party councillor. As we marched through the streets, local young people joined us and cheered as we spoke about fighting the Labour council's attacks, including to the local college, and the need for a socialist fightback.

These are just a few examples of Dave's record. With fresh attacks on education, and low pay and job insecurity still rife for young people, we need a fightback. Dave has proven time and again that he is a fighter for young people and the working class, and will use any position to build that fightback. Vote for a fighter, vote Nellist!



Dave addressing the Youth March for Jobs in Coventry SOCIALIST PARTY

Build a mass party that fights for free education

ADAM POWELL-DAVIES

SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Every year, hundreds of thousands of students leave university into a world of low pay and temporary contracts, owing the government close to £30,000. The moment we graduate, this figure starts growing. And that's just to cover tuition, leaving aside loans to cover the cost of rent and food.

However, there is no question that the wealth exists in society for education to be run as a free public service, available to all. After all, billionaires' wealth has increased by \$5 trillion to \$13.8 trillion since March 2021. The question is: who owns and controls this wealth, and how is it used?

Free education is entirely possible. After all, university tuition fees were not introduced in Britain until 1998, under newly elected New Labour prime minister Tony Blair. In contrast, as Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn showed the huge support for free higher education when students, young people and workers joined mass rallies in the run up to the 2017 general election. The 2019 election manifesto 'grey book'

estimated the cost of abolishing tuition fees and restoring maintenance grants for full-time and part-time students at £13.6 billion. The obstacle is the profit system and the defenders of capitalism.

Corbyn's anti-austerity programme was met with disdain by Tory and right-wing Labour MPs, who claimed there is 'no magic money tree'. Yet the same Tory government has shown that the money can be found when the capitalist system they defend is under threat - spending over £400 billion since Covid struck, including the £37 billion set aside for the botched test-and-trace system.

The current tuition fee system leaves university graduates saddled with debt for much of our working lives. In fact, the government predicts that only 25% of current undergraduates will have paid off their debt by the time they retire. The situation is only set to worsen following the Tories' announcement that the student loan debt repayment window will be extended - from 30 to 40 years - and the repayment threshold lowered.

Alongside free education, we

need institutions that are fully funded by government, and controlled by students, workers and the wider working class. This would bring to an end the university managements' vicious attacks on the conditions of staff in the name of 'balancing the books'.

But who will launch the fight for free education? Under Keir Starmer, the Labour Party has taken a clear rightward turn to the side of big business. As of yet, the current Labour leader has not officially renounced his 2020 campaign pledge to 'support the abolition of tuition fees'. But he has retreated from nationalising utilities, suspended Jeremy and introduced rule changes designed to lock out the left from taking the leadership again.

And where was Starmer when students were organising rent strikes last year? When Young Labour urged him to back the rent strikes, he did not respond. A Labour spokesperson refused to confirm the party's position. Starmer's right-wing machine has even gone as far as prohibiting access to Young Labour social media accounts, in an attempt to censor Labour's official youth wing.

Starmer is hell-bent on completing Labour's reconfiguration into a safe pair of hands for British capitalism. It is difficult to imagine him ever demanding the super-rich pay for education.

This is why it is time for students to build a new mass movement, starting with campus-wide rallies of students and university workers already on strike, to discuss the next steps to fight cuts and marketisation.

But without a political alternative outside the Labour Party, students would be fighting with one hand tied behind our backs. A mass movement of students fighting for free education would be strengthened by representatives in Westminster like Dave Nellist, fighting on our side against the bosses.

Even just a modest tax or levy on the vast wealth of the super-rich would be enough to provide free education and reinstate maintenance grants. But why should the capitalists maintain their control over our education, and over the economy and the rest of society?

Socialists fight for the wealth and resources to be owned and controlled

by the majority, the working class. By nationalising the banks and big business to be run under democratic workers' control and management, a socialist government could plan production to meet everyone's needs. Only such socialist measures, coordinated with socialist movements internationally, could guarantee a flourishing, free education system on a permanent basis.



As a founder and funder, and after 119 years of support for the Labour Party, our members decided that they could no longer be supportive of a political organisation riven by factionalism, and more interested in securing positions in its own ranks than dealing with the huge inequalities and hardship so many in our society face.

We have witnessed in recent weeks the actions of Labour in power with its treatment of its bin workers. They are no different to those of the Tory party. We need a fresh start, and Erdington offers an opportunity to send a real shot across the bows of the Westminster elite. By electing Dave Nellist, the people of Erdington will be sending one of their own - someone who will be a powerful voice for ending the hardship we see daily in our society. Be it food, energy or housing poverty, it is a political choice - by voting Dave Nellist you will be saying "it's time for change, and time for a better society for all."



Ian Hodson, President Bakers, Food and Allied Workers' Union



Pete Randall, Unite rep for Coventry bin strikers

Dave stands on the side of workers, the community and is honest. So honest, he pledges to take a worker's wage! This isn't about greed, it's about delivering for the people. He's done it before, he'll do it again.



Chris Williamson, ex-Labour MP and Resist

I have known Dave Nellist for over 30 years. He is a real community champion. No other candidate can match his track record. By contrast, the Labour Party ignores the interests of local people and Labour's response to the cost of living crisis is almost identical to the Conservatives.

'Why I'm backing Dave Nellist'

I am confident, that if elected, Dave would make a great MP for Erdington. Dave knows the West Midlands and has fought against the drop in workers' living standards as formerly skilled, well-paid jobs have been replaced with low-paid precarious work.

He supported and gave solidarity to the Birmingham bin and home care workers who were attacked by the Labour council.

As a trade unionist, support for your struggle is the key. I'm backing Dave in Erdington because he will have your backs. But workers across the country will also have a principled and determined socialist fighting for our cause.



Hugo Pierre, Unison NEC (personal capacity) and school worker

By voting for Dave Nellist, the voters of Erdington have the chance to make a real change to Britain's political landscape. With no real difference between Westminster's main parties and their careerist politicians, Dave is a refreshing breath of fresh air. Taking a worker's wage instead of lining his own pocket, standing up for people instead of big business, Dave is a real peoples' politician. A vote for Dave is a vote to change politics in Birmingham and beyond.



Tosh McDonald, retired President of ASLEF the train drivers union and former councillor for Doncaster Town ward

I support Dave Nellist simply because of who he is. Dave is a sincere, genuine working-class man who will speak up for his constituents in Erdington and will protect them from the devastating cuts which will come in the next few years. No other candidate is speaking up for the people of Erdington and giving them a voice in parliament - they will just take the money, sit on their hands and vote in favour of the party they belong to.

That is the exact opposite of what Dave will deliver, he will deliver a working-class voice on a working-class wage with a working-class agenda.



Joe Simpson, Deputy General Secretary of the Prison Officers' Association

If Dave is elected to Parliament again he will be a real workers' representative there. I know Dave will always fight to defend the NHS and for its renationalisation. He stands with health workers and outsourced workers. He fought against the Private Finance Initiative when New Labour introduced it, he is fighting against the Health and Care Bill, for proper NHS funding, and a proper pay rise for all.



Naomi Byron, Unison NEC (personal capacity) and NHS worker

Join the Socialist Party

The Socialist Party is part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, working with trade unions and others to stand no-cuts, fighting candidates, and take those first necessary steps towards building the new mass workers' party we so urgently need.

Within the campaign for working-class political representation, the Socialist Party fights for a bold socialist programme that shows how we can really transform

things. The first step is nationalisation of the biggest 150 banks and corporations that dominate the economy, under democratic working-class control and management. This would put the levers for the first steps towards a socialist planned economy, democratically run to meet the needs of all, into workers' hands - not those of the bosses.

The pandemic revealed the potential power of workers many times, forcing bosses to take safety

measures they didn't want to take. What could the six-and-a-half million members of the trade unions do if we acted together? Combine that with those not yet in a union, linked up with young people, and communities!

Key to bringing that potential power to bear is the mass organisation of workers, including building a workers' political voice. It also means strengthening the trade unions, the main workers' organisations in the workplaces, where workers confront the bosses in the struggles over safety, pay, and conditions.

But it also means joining the Socialist Party. We stand firm for socialism come what may - standing

up against the bosses, the Tories, and the Labour Blairites, charting a way forward to build the maximum unity of the working class in the struggle for socialist change.

Fighting for a socialist alternative to war, poverty and inequality is an international struggle against an international capitalist system. The Socialist Party is affiliated to the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) to build a worldwide struggle for socialism.

Do you agree?

JOIN THE SOCIALISTS
socialistparty.org.uk/join



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- Visit **socialistparty.org.uk/donate**
- or call **020 8988 8777**
- or make cheques payable to Socialist Party, PO Box 1398, Enfield EN1 9GT



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Socialist and anti-cuts – fund the election challenge

ISAI PRIYA AND CHRIS NEWBY
SOCIALIST PARTY FINANCE ORGANISERS

“Why should I vote? What difference would it make? They are all the same.” These were some of the questions that we had canvassing for Dave Nellist in the Birmingham Erdington by-election.

Members of the Socialist Party, part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), have talked to thousands of people in Erdington. Through the fog of disillusionment and demoralisation, socialist ideas and an alternative to the capitalist politicians have inspired many to say that they will come out and vote for Socialist

Party member Dave Nellist, standing on a worker's wage.

We are having a discussion on the doors about building a political voice for the working class. TUSC will be standing hundreds of candidates in the May local elections. Imagine how many thousands more conversations we will be able to have, and how many more people we can convince that there is an alternative.

An important part of these election campaigns is making sure we are armed financially to have the resources to mass produce leaflets, posters, placards and banners, etc to spread our socialist message as widely as possible.

The Socialist Party is a party rooted in the working class. Our financial support comes from campaigning on



the streets as well as donations from our members and supporters.

A big part of this quarter's fighting fund is going to be for our election campaigns. Reaching our fighting fund target is essential to make sure that we have funds to seize the opportunities.

That is why we are asking all Socialist Party members and supporters to donate. No matter what the size of the donation, every pound counts.

We are currently on 33% of our target. The quarter ends on 31 March. So fundraising needs to be stepped up straightaway.

We are asking every member to think about what else they can do to help reach our target. Can you help out on an extra campaign stall? Can you organise a fundraising meal or film night?

Can you sell some items either through a car boot sale or on eBay?

Do you know someone who would make a donation?

The more members and supporters raise, the more resources we will have to make these anti-cuts election campaign as successful as possible.

Help fund the fightback
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Wales	1,948	2,300		85%
South West	1,152	1,800		64%
East Midlands	865	1,850	47%	
Yorkshire	1,068	2,550	42%	
West Midlands	892	2,600	34%	
Southern & SE	685	2,350	29%	
London	1,040	4,600	23%	
Northern	145	750	19%	
Eastern	131	1,200	11%	
North West	66	1,150	6%	
Other	367	3,850	10%	
TOTAL	8,359	25,000	33%	

Socialist Students conference

Anger is growing, and we're part of student fightback

KAT GWYTHYR
LEEDS SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Socialist Students national conference – our first in person since the start of the Covid pandemic – was full of enthusiasm for building a fightback on campuses. Socialist Students national organiser Theo Shariff opened the meeting.

Students face a degraded future. But anger has grown as the pandemic has exacerbated the broken system created by the continued marketisation of higher education.

Staff have taken sustained strike action and students have fought back – becoming a powerful voice against university bosses and the rotten capitalist system. The student fightback has taken place through rent strikes, protests against A-level results, and against ongoing violence against women on campuses and in society.

But our student voice has not been amplified at a national level. A key question at conference was 'where is the National Union of Students (NUS)?'

The NUS has been mostly absent

from the struggle. Local student unions and student groups have been left to fight alone.

Socialist Students has been vital in combating this isolation. We have been fighting alongside rent strikers, at protests, and have mobilised students in organised action – notably on 21 April 2021 at 24 campus protests calling for fee and rent refunds. But we cannot build the student fightback alone.

Strike

NUS has called a 'national student strike' for 2 March, timed with the last day of strike action by the University and College Union (UCU). But with an NUS organising meeting only due to happen two days before the walkout, and a lack of awareness about it from students and student unions, this is unlikely to restart a mass student movement.

Whatever happens, 2 March must be the beginning of reflecting on what the student movement needs next in the struggle for free education. Socialist Students calls on the NUS to set a date for a national

meeting that brings together all organisations – student groups like Socialist Students, student unions, and campus workers' trade unions – to discuss the next steps in the fight. Socialist Students will continue to play a key role.

At Socialist Students conference, motions on fighting sexual harassment and violence on campus and defending the right to protest were also discussed and democratically voted on.

The day ended with an energetic rally that reinforced the need for youth and student organisation, in workplaces and on campuses, and for socialism, here and internationally.

The conference took place in Birmingham, and Socialist Party member Dave Nellist – Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidate standing in the Erdington by-election – also spoke. He set out the need for a new political voice for students and young workers.

Socialist Students conference took place only a few days after the Tory government announced its plans to make it harder for working-class



students to reach higher education. The Tories' proposed changes in England include a 40-year tuition fee repayment scheme and a grade threshold to qualify for student finance loans in the first place.

A 40-year repayment scheme benefits the rich, and will enormously impact graduates who earn less. On top of this, young workers have also been hit most by recent increases to national insurance. Instead of making

the rich pay, young workers pay almost 50% of their income in taxes.

A fight against the capitalist chaos that rules our society, and our education system, must take place. Building Socialist Students is a first step towards this.

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

HOLLY JOHNSTON
NHS NURSE

SOS NHS campaign coalition says:

- Emergency funding to NHS now
- A fully publicly owned NHS and guarantee free healthcare
- Pay staff properly

We organised over 100 events for our 26 February day of action. Our own event in Sheffield galvanised more public support and attracted more NHS staff into the cross-union health workers' group that we formed last year.

The Tories' Health and Care Bill does nothing to address the staffing crisis. It leaves the door wide open for further privatisation, and will cost lives, with closures of A&Es planned.

I was one of the speakers raising the need to stop the profiteering, for public ownership of the NHS, to fight against cuts and privatisation, and the reversal of outsourcing. This was all linked to the need for a fairer system, and the need for socialism.

Health and deprivation

The health of the nation is worsening, health inequalities and deprivation have increased, and, for the first time, life expectancy has decreased in England. The working class are disproportionately affected.

Frontline staff spoke about the conditions in the NHS, the effect on patient care, and how morale of staff is at rock bottom. Midwives talked about the staffing crises and how cuts have affected the service. We raised the need to link up all our struggles across the public sector, across unions, across campaigns – the working class together.

Some terms and conditions in the NHS are nothing to be moaned about, such as sick and holiday pay. We support colleagues in the private sector striking to return to in-house contracts.

However, we need to fight to keep the terms and conditions that we have as well. We must not be pitched against each other in our individual fights, but mobilise collectively.

We are asking people to join a union, become a fighting voice in that

Over 100 events for NHS day of action



Leicester STEVE SCORE

union, vote for anti-cuts candidates, and support struggle across our class. There is always enough money for war, but not to fund vital services. It is the big bosses that profit time and time again.

Now it is important that we continue to mobilise public and staff support for the NHS, and have solidarity with all those in struggle, so we can see the demands of the campaign carried through.

Leicester

At one end of a busy shopping precinct, Metro Bank, with assets of £7.4 billion, was celebrating opening a

new branch. At the other end, 150 people were fighting for the NHS.

Metro Bank was calling on people to join their 'banking revolution'. Socialist Party members say the only banking revolution we want is to nationalise and use the assets to fund the NHS and public services.

In Leicester, the government promised to put money into hospital reconfiguration. But the local campaign has criticised the proposals. These involve the closure of Leicester General Hospital, and fail to provide sufficient capacity and beds for the future. Even then, the exact funding level is now in doubt, since the government asked the local trust to look again at cheaper alternatives.

After an impromptu march around the city centre, Socialist Party member Steve Score, chair of Save our NHS Leicester, said: "Last year, Britain's 117 billionaires increased their wealth by 22%. The money exists to properly fund the NHS and to pay all staff a proper pay rise, but it is in the hands of the super-rich. These protests should be the beginning of a campaign, led by national trade union action, to force the government to fund the NHS and stop privatisation."

HEATHER RAWLING

Kendal

Lines of people two or three deep thronged around our table to sign a petition against a proposed and deeply unpopular local hospital reorganisation. The day broke early to hang five banners on roadside furniture leading to Westmorland General Hospital demanding to keep our NHS public. Roads and thoroughfares leading up to our main venue in Kendal got saturated with A3 posters demanding to stop the privatisation of our NHS.

All four candidates standing for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) took to the megaphone to air our disgust at the government's attempt to kill off the NHS. We are all standing on an anti-austerity and save our NHS platform. It was a very good launch to our campaign for the local elections.

TREVOR BATCHELOR

Nottingham: Hundreds protest war in Ukraine

'Ruling class uses war, and the working class pay'

CLARE WILKINS
NOTTINGHAM SOCIALIST PARTY

400 people, including many Ukrainians, protested in Nottingham against Putin's invasion. The Socialist Party leaflet was snapped up and we ran out.

We were the only people stressing working-class unity to stop the war. Unfortunately, others on the left unconditionally supported the Ukrainian regime, and this fed into a nationalist atmosphere at the rally.

But a young Ukrainian woman said: "We are a peaceful country of Ukrainians, Russians and others living together in peace." An Estonian

woman said that there had been huge demonstrations in Lithuania.

John, a student at Nottingham Trent University, said: "Rulers do nothing to improve the lives of the working class in their countries, and want a distraction for the masses from what is going on at home. They use war, which the working class pays for with their lives and living standards. [Governments in] the US, Britain and others were calling out Putin as the aggressor, as if they have never been aggressors themselves."

• War in Ukraine - see more on pages 1-3, and 6-7



Protests around the world - 12,000 in Helsinki in Finland EDMUND SCHLUSSELL

ADAM HARMSWORTH
COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

Woke Capitalism provides a useful introduction to the well-deserved criticism of corporations co-opting and sabotaging progressive movements.

The author, Carl Rhodes, gives us plenty of examples of businesses adopting slogans, gimmicks, and campaigns on social issues: Ben and Jerry's 'Pecan Resist' flavour with profits going to charity, Nike's ad campaign with former American footballer Colin Kaepernick – famous for 'taking the knee' in protest at police racism – and Gillette's 'the best a man can be' anti-sexism ads.

There isn't much sincerity in the capitalists' bluster. This book is filled with examples.

Nike

Nike used Kaepernick in its ad campaign. But its well-documented use of sweatshops with child labour and dire pay have not been addressed.

At the 2020 World Economic Forum in Davos, leaders spoke about saving the planet by reinventing capitalism. The COP26 climate summit followed this with its completely insufficient measures.

Rhodes gives us a few reasons why companies are 'going woke'. The first is profit – the main motivator for capitalism.

Big business typically does well financially by piggybacking social causes. After its Kaepernick campaign, Nike gained \$6 billion in market value.

Rhodes makes the link between rising inequality and the corporate turn to 'woke capitalism'.

The collapse of Stalinism opened the floodgates for neoliberalism in the 1990s. Workers' parties moved towards capitalism, and hopes in socialism were set back.

But since the 2007-08 crash, no major capitalist economy has been able to reboot confidence in capitalism. The working class has paid for the failures of the rich through austerity and drastically increased inequality

Book review: Woke Capitalism



and poverty. Working-class anger is boiling below the surface.

Some capitalists recognise that their system is in crisis. Capitalism can pretend to be solving social issues, particularly in a way that doesn't threaten the profit system. They benefit from weakened workers' organisations and the absence of mass workers' parties that could really challenge capitalism.

Corporations are now running with this agenda – throwing money at charities and social causes and making progressive political statements. They are trying to divert anger.

Black Lives Matter becomes less about the millions of people demanding fundamental change to policing and an end to inequality, and more about Nike's donations. Climate change is about Shell and

Exxon promoting how individuals can reduce their 'carbon footprint', rather than how the way the capitalist economy is rigged causes the ice-caps to melt.

But the capitalist charade isn't working. The movements around Jeremy Corbyn and Bernie Sanders, the growth in trade union militancy, climate change walkouts, and massive BLM protests show that

working-class anger is not being stalled.

The economic conditions of capitalism are forcing people to question the system. Capitalism cannot resolve inequality and poverty.

Unfortunately, Rhodes does make an error. A conclusion he is determined to make is that "woke capitalism is a subterfuge for the corporate takeover of democracy".

He believes that rising anger at social issues is terrifying the ruling class enough that it will seek to take over the state and democracy itself, and run nations as a 'woke' plutocracy. The phrase he uses is 'neo-feudalism'.

Rhodes does not appear to recognise that the bosses already run the 'liberal democratic' state. They have their own parties that dictate policy and act in their interests. They use their economic might and press propaganda to steer countries in the 'right' direction.

Spying and assassination

When the working class has flexed its muscles, corporations have made use of the state forces to bring in repression, from spying and subversive breaches of human rights up to outright assassinations, coups and wars.

Capitalism doesn't need 'woke capitalism' to claim the state – it already has it. Without that understanding of capitalism and the state, Rhodes cannot give us a clear conclusion about how to combat woke capitalism.

Rhodes asks for readers to "intervene to put the world on a path towards equality and justice for all". We can take up that task, but our 'intervention' has to be the removal of capitalism.

It has to be a revolution that removes the power of private businesses and banks so they can't interfere in a working-class democracy – a revolution that puts all of society's wealth in the hands of the working class to manage democratically. You can only end 'woke capitalism' by ending capitalism.

● **Woke Capitalism, published by Bristol University Press, is available for £12**

Construction workers march to site undermining conditions

Leeds Labour council backs company against workers

IAIN DALTON
LEEDS SOCIALIST PARTY

100 angry construction workers and their supporters marched to the Hitachi Zosen Inova site in south Leeds. A new energy-to-waste plant is being built. But the work is being done outside the NAECI national agreement on pay and conditions.

Construction companies have attempted to undermine the NAECI agreement repeatedly over the last decade, but have been repulsed by the strong rank-and-file organisation among construction workers.

A private security company, hired to keep the protest out, had put a gate on the road to the site. A sign claimed the gate was there because of repair work, but there was no evidence of

this. It didn't stop us marching to the site.

Most disgracefully, Leeds Labour council has granted planning permission for the site, despite an agreement with the unions to only allow NAECI sites. Discussions took place on the protest about suspending local funding to Labour from Unite and GMB unions, ahead of the upcoming council elections in May.

Scunthorpe scaffolders joined the march. They have been striking for months against subcontractor Actavo who is refusing to pay NAECI rates.

GMB and Unite organised the march. Union officers made strong pledges that this would be the start of a much bigger campaign to defend the NAECI agreement.



As well as joining the protests, Socialist Party members are raising this issue, and the role of Leeds City Council, in trade union branches.

● Very rich get even richer

The pandemic has been good if you're rich. 51,000 more people are now included among the 'ultra-wealthy' – assets of more than \$30 million.

But it's becoming a problem for places like Monaco, where 70% of the population are dollar millionaires. The reigning monarch is running out of space, so is planning to spend £1.5 billion to reclaim land from the sea.

● NHS vulture profit surge

Private company Serco – which runs swathes of the NHS – has had a surge in profits. Serco made £216 million profit in the last year, a 21% jump.

Serco was boosted by grabbing Covid-related contracts. £623 million of its income came from public money, funded by taxpayers in Britain. The NHS should be renationalised, with Serco's contracts brought back in-house.

Serco can only make vast profit by taking money out of the NHS and public services. For example, Serco workers at Barts Hospital Trust in east London have already taken two weeks of strike action against poor pay and conditions – see pages 4-5.

The workers want proper NHS contracts and a pay rise to £15 an hour. Its obvious Serco can afford to pay up.

● Climate change – time running out

The window to stop climate change scenarios, where one billion people are at risk from flooding, is "rapidly closing", according to a UN report by 270 scientists.

Capitalism prioritises the private profit of a tiny number of rich individuals. It is incapable of rapidly switching from fossil fuels to renewables, let alone without destroying working-class living standards.

Working-class people already face higher energy bills, worsened by Putin's invasion of Ukraine. The energy giants should be nationalised, and democratically run by the working class.

International Women's Day: Build a working-class political alternative to inequality, oppression and austerity

SUE ATKINS

SOUTHAMPTON EAST SOCIALIST PARTY, CHAIR
SOUTHAMPTON TRADES UNION COUNCIL

“I have had plenty of bad experiences. I was spiked last week in a pub, which I had considered to be a safe place. I've also had to witness some of my friends leave in ambulances, when they just came out to have some fun and a dance". These are the words of a young woman in Southampton, describing her experiences in the city.

Southampton has the second highest number of sexual offences reported in England, and has seen a 240% increase in recorded sexual offences over the past five years. This figure has been worked out following a 91% increase in referrals to a local victim support charity since the Covid pandemic began. These shocking statistics are not isolated, and will be familiar throughout the country.

A Safe Night Out

That is why the Socialist Party in Southampton is campaigning for a Safe Night Out, together with the trades union council and Socialist Students, on International Women's Day, 8 March.

Domestic violence and rape are on the increase too. In Southampton in 2021, there were 1,945 rape investigations and only 85 resulted in a charge or court summons. Nationwide, the Crown Prosecution Service prosecuted and convicted fewer people for rape in 2020 than in any year for which data exists.

For the victims, this lack of support and acknowledgement can be devastating. Indeed, of the people who told someone about being assaulted but did not report it to the police (five out of six women, and four out of five men), 40% said they were too embarrassed, 38% thought the police couldn't help, 34% thought it would be too humiliating, and 25% also thought the police wouldn't believe them.

While women are disproportionately affected by these issues, they affect all genders and we need a united campaign to address them. The local elections in May can play an important part in the struggle for



PHOTO: NORTHAMPTON SP

the services and resources that we need.

Many services that used to be run by local councils have been cut to the bone, disbanded, or handed over to charities or the private sector.

For example, local authorities now have a statutory responsibility to fund domestic violence services. However, this comes with no promise of sufficient funding from central

government. Local authorities have to fund these services on already stretched budgets.

The women's refuge in Southampton is run by Women's Aid, a charity that can offer support for only six months. While that is an important and welcome resource, what happens after that? With sky-high rents and a lack of affordable homes, it is important for local councils to build

new council houses to enable women and children to move on safely and securely, without the prospect of a possible return to the circumstances that they have escaped from.

There is much that Southampton City Council, and other local councils, could do, but it needs councillors with the political will to make it a reality. Labour, Liberal and Tory have all taken turns at running the council

in Southampton, and all have been found wanting.

We hear time and again from frustrated workers: "They are all the same - it makes no difference who you vote for". The consequence is that around 60% of the electorate don't vote, seeing no option on the ballot paper that will act in their interests. Labour were in control for nine years until 2021. In that time they cut 1,000 jobs and £160 million from the budget which devastated local services and resulted in the Tories regaining control last year.

Councils must fight

The struggle for women's rights benefits us all and should not be seen in isolation. If no-one else is standing up for women and our local communities, then we will. We need socialist councillors who will fight for:

- Fully funded services and support for all women affected by domestic violence, rape and abuse. This includes fully resourced refuges, and permanent, affordable social housing
- Safe, affordable well-staffed public transport and adequate street lighting
- A united struggle for zero tolerance of sexism and sexual harassment in workplaces, schools and colleges
- A legal, balanced, no-cuts council budget. Build a campaign to force the government to return the stolen millions
- Democratic community and trade union control of the police and criminal justice system
- A socialist transformation of society, to bring an end to the inequality and division of capitalism

Socialist Party members will be proud to stand in the local elections as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition. All the main political parties have failed us, and Labour under the leadership of Keir Starmer has made it clear it offers no challenge to the status quo.

It is time for a new mass party of the working class to be built as part of the fight for a socialist alternative to the sexism, inequality and crisis of capitalism, and we will play our part.

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“WE WANT A DECENT WAGE”



STRIKE BACK AGAINST THE COST OF LIVING CRISIS

IAN PATTISON AND SCOTT JONES

“They called us heroes, and now we’re back to just being a cleaner”, said one RMT union rep and a cleaner working on the railways. Socialist Party members went down to Parliament to support their strike on 23 February. (See pages 4-5) “We want what we demand - sick pay, free travel to and through from work, and a decent wage.” The cleaners are some of millions who are struggling with the soaring cost of living.

They need a pay rise of well over £1,000 just to keep up with inflation. The workers want £15 an hour. The Socialist Party thinks all workers should get at least £15 an hour.

The union rep continued: “This is long overdue. We’ve worked through a pandemic. It’s not good enough. They offered us 20p an hour pay rise back at the height of the pandemic. We rejected it outright. Now they’re trying to bring it back in and force it down our throats. We’re not having it.” Just like thousands of other workers in hundreds of strikes reported in the Socialist every week.

The cleaners marched to the offices of Go Ahead - shareholders of one of the train companies that have outsourced cleaning to Churchill - demanding that the Go Ahead CEO come and speak to them, while chanting “Mr Brown, come down!”

Outrageously, Go Ahead told Churchill it wasn’t allowed to give out a pay rise. And the workers have accused Churchill of ripping everybody off - taking money for cleaning contracts, when, in reality, the cleaning workforce is massively understaffed.

Of course, the bosses and bankers will tell workers not to demand more, just like Bank of England governor Andrew Bailey. Real pay rises eat into their ever-growing bloated profits.

But these hundreds of disputes over pay have won victories. As we go to press, low-paid hospital workers at Barts NHS Trust in east London, who have been on strike, have suspended their latest action after forcing an offer from management.

The cost of living crisis is deteriorating by the week, and could get worse as a result of conflict in Ukraine. Workers should not pay the price for any of this.

Join us in campaigning for democratic, fighting trade union leaderships that are up to the task of fighting back and winning. Join us in campaigning for a political voice for working-class people. And join us in campaigning for socialist change: for public ownership of the big monopolies like the energy and food companies; and for democratic socialist planning, so that no one has to struggle to survive while the wealthy get richer.