

RICH GET EVEN RICHER

WE CAN'T PAY OUR BILLS

Take the wealth off the super-rich

Join the socialist fightback

TOM BALDWIN
BRISTOL SOUTH SOCIALIST PARTY

While most people worry about the rising cost of living, a handful of the super-rich are thriving.

2022's Sunday Times Rich List shows once again the huge wealth divide in British society. Collectively UK-based billionaires increased

their wealth by £55 billion, up 9.4% on last year.

The increasing concentration of wealth among a tiny minority means that the top 250 entries in the list now own more wealth between them than the top 1,000 did just five years ago.

While the rich get richer, most of us are getting poorer. A recent poll showed 89% of Brits are cutting back on spending. One-in-three people are buying less food and one-in-six are turning their heating off altogether.

The supermarket Iceland is now offering credit, allowing customers to buy food on the 'never never'

They've done this because there's a need for it; their managing director admitted that they're losing customers to food banks and to hunger. Another poll showed more than half the population think that the cost-of-living crisis is already impacting on their health.

Them and us chasm

What is the government doing in the face of this growing crisis? There has been precious little offered to help those who are struggling, and no attempt whatsoever to close the gaping chasm between the super-rich and the working class.

That should come as no surprise. The Tories represent the interests of the billionaire class. In fact, Chancellor Rishi Sunak has become the first frontline politician to join the Rich List. Along with his wife, Akshata Murthy, he's placed at number 222 in the list, with a combined fortune of £730 million.

The contrast between the prospects for the richest and the rest of us could not be starker. But it is not coincidental. Karl Marx described how under capitalism "accumulation of wealth at one pole is at the same time accumulation of misery

at the opposite pole." Those words are just as true as when they were written.

It is workers that create the wealth in society. The super-rich are parasites who amass fortunes by underpaying and exploiting us. We need to take the wealth off the billionaires by bringing the biggest businesses and banks into public ownership, to be run democratically in the interests of all.

By taking these steps towards the socialist transformation of society, inequality, poverty and exploitation could be ended for good. Join the Socialist Party to fight for it.



Food bank in London, May 2022 PHOTO: TONY SAUNOIS

● Food price hikes

30% - The increase in the price of unleaded petrol in the year to April. A pint of milk is up 21%, and a tub of margarine is up 24%. We are paying more to eat, and more to get to work. It will take a serious fight against the bosses to win pay rises close to those figures.

The increasing numbers of NHS staff forced to go to food banks to feed their families has been much reported. Now, an NHS trust has set one up to feed its own staff! A spokesperson for Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust said it would "do everything [it is] able to help".

A decent pay rise for staff would help, accompanied by a campaign directed at the government to demand the money needed to ensure a decent service and an NHS that doesn't pay poverty wages.

Foodbank network the Trussell Trust has seen demand increase 14% since last year. No doubt it will continue to rise while the cost of living spirals upwards.

● Fuel poverty to double

Boss of energy supplier E.ON, Michael Lewis, says 40% of its customers will be in fuel poverty by October when the government is set to lift the energy price cap further, doubling the current rate. Perhaps Mr Lewis should consider his company's pricing structure?

Soaring wholesale gas prices have seen a number of smaller gas suppliers go under. But the 'big six' energy companies, which includes E.ON, raked in billions in profits over the last decade.

Can't pay

Mr Lewis went on to suggest that the government's one-off Warm Homes Discount scheme should increase from £140 for three million households, to £600 for six million. The suggestion is unlikely to be motivated by concern for his customers; more likely a concern about the tidal wave of unpaid bills from customers who simply cannot pay.

The energy price crisis displays a failure of the capitalist market. Working-class people increasingly can't afford to buy goods and services. In this instance that equates to people facing up to a winter freezing in their homes, or riding buses and sitting in libraries to keep warm.

● Nationalise now!

Even Tory voters back nationalisation. 65% of 2019 'red wall' Conservative voters want energy in public ownership, according to polling by campaign group 'We own it'. 66% want nationalised water, 63% rail and 63% Royal Mail.

Those voters are very unlikely to get what they want with a Tory government, just as they won't be 'levelled up'. Then again, Labour won't offer public ownership either.

For socialist nationalisation of energy and other utilities, we need a new mass workers' party to fight for it.

Sue Gray report: Johnson on the brink

Workers' action needed to beat the bosses and the Tories

Months and months of waiting, for a report which we already know the contents of: Boris Johnson and the Tories think they can make and break the rules.

Given his own way, there would be no consequences for Johnson's rule breaking. Legally, he has got away with a solitary £50 fine, just one of 126 Downing Street fines given to 83 different people. Predictably, Johnson is happy for more junior staff to take the flack.

Contrast Johnson's £50 to the £10,000 fine given to the Manchester nurse who organised a protest demanding a pay rise, or the teenager fined £184 for meeting three friends in a park the day before

Downing Street's cheese and wine party.

For those of us who went into work during the pandemic, it was no soiree. Particularly for those on the frontline, and including those tasked with helping the prime minister recover from his bout of Covid. For those who worked from home, many without a garden, swamped by het-up kids, it wasn't much fun either.

Whatever the contents of the report, the biggest consequence of 'partygate' is its political damage. Although, as much as parliament wants to discuss it, its proportions are dwarfed by the size of the damage done by the ongoing falling of

living standards and impending recession.

Workers and the trade union movement are not just idle bystanders. By taking action for a pay rise and to end the cost-of-living crisis, the working-class movement can hasten the end of Johnson and the Tories.

A new mass workers' party, if it existed, would transform the situation by fighting for a £15-an-hour minimum wage, RPI-inflation-busting pay rises and massive investment for the NHS. That's why we need to fight to help bring one into existence, as a first step towards ending the rotten capitalist system epitomised by this rotten Tory government.



Pay, benefits, pensions

- An immediate above-inflation pay rise for workers to restore wages after over a decade of pay freezes and below-inflation rises
- Regular pay increases for all, linked to trade-union agreed measures of inflation
- Raise the minimum wage to £15 an hour, without exemptions
- Restore the pension triple lock
- Restore the additional £20-a-week Universal Credit payment. End the benefit cap
- Living benefits and pensions for all who need them, rising with the cost of living

Housing

- Freeze council and social housing rents
- Rent controls to cap rents – decided by elected bodies of tenants, housing workers and trade union representatives

Make the rich pay, not the workers

- No rise in national insurance or council tax, scrap student debt
- No worker should be made to pay more tax, raise tax thresholds in line with inflation
- Take the wealth off the super-rich, nationalise the top 150 companies and banks to be run under democratic working-class control and management, with compensation only on the basis of proven need

Price rises

- Reverse the rise in the energy price cap. Nationalise energy and other utilities under democratic workers' control and management to reduce bills by removing the profit motive

- No increase in public transport fares. Return transport into public hands, to guarantee a fully funded, free, environmentally friendly, sustainable transport system
- Stop price rises, end bosses' profiteering. Open the books of big retailers to inspection by trade unions. Nationalise the big retailers under democratic workers' control to be run to meet need, not for profit

Trade union struggle

- For a trade union-led struggle against the cost-of-living crisis
- The TUC-organised demonstration on 18 June must be used as a stepping stone towards coordinated strike action, uniting workers' struggles for pay rises
- For fighting, democratic leaderships of the trade unions

New workers' party

- No trust in Starmer's Labour to fight in our interests. For a new mass workers' party based on trade union and workers' struggle

Socialism

- End the chaos of the capitalist market. For a socialist plan of production, based on the needs of the overwhelming majority, not for profit

Join the fightback

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PHOTO: MARY FINCH

Tories torn facing price-rise, class-anger tsunami



WHAT WE THINK

Newspaper editors are blessed with an abundance of choice: which example to use of a government incapable of responding to society's problems.

New 'partygate' pictures predominate, showing prime minister Boris Johnson raising toasts at a party he said hadn't happened. Those images reinforce the sense of a government out of touch with millions who have little to celebrate. The number living in extreme poverty here is set to rise to 1.2 million people.

The main national publications are divided between the food crisis and impending national strike action on rail. These have replaced the stories about the millions unable to pay their energy bills. But the number in fuel poverty is set to double to 40% this autumn when prices rise again. That story is going nowhere.

Tory division

Ubiquitous, however, is the division among the Tories over what to do. Pressure to act is mounting. News of their Australian cousins' eviction from government is no doubt focusing Tory minds, especially after May's local elections here revealed a massive lack of enthusiasm for their party. Food shortages have brought down prime ministers in Sri Lanka and Pakistan already this year.

The spring budget was bereft of measures that would defend working-class and middle-class people from the perfect storm of price rises, shrinking pay, pensions and benefits



Some sections of the capitalist class fear a lack of action will undermine confidence in their system



Health workers, members of Unite, at Barts hospital trust in east London, took strike action to win a pay rise and to be brought back in-house ISA PRIYA

cut in real terms, rising interest rates, and a housing crisis.

Some sections of the capitalist class fear a lack of action will undermine confidence in their system. Even the chair of Tesco is demanding a windfall tax on energy companies to help people shop. Michael Lewis, E.ON energy boss, reports that a million of its eight million customers are already in arrears. He demands government action to help the millions more who will otherwise be unable to pay. Patriotic Millionaires UK, a group of super-rich people calling for the introduction of a wealth tax, fear that Britain's blatant inequality provides a "shocking insight into our political system".

The main discussion among Tories



The capitalist system they defend is increasingly exposed as unable to offer a decent future to most people

appears to be on Starmer's idea of a windfall tax on energy profits. While some fear that Rishi Sunak will lose the next election by not introducing such a tax, others say it's 'unconservative' to even consider a new tax.

However, Sunak, chancellor of and for the Rich List, is now said to be considering a version of a windfall tax that offers companies different rates of tax based on what they are prepared to invest.

One Tory appears wiser than the others: they say enacting Labour's proposal wouldn't amount to more than "pissing in the wind", and would not make enough of a difference given the scale of the onslaught on household budgets. It would raise £2 billion at most. A one-off 20% levy on the obscene wealth of the richest 250 families and individuals would raise £140 billion more!

That 80% of the public backs a windfall tax is unsurprising, timid though it is. It's the only show in town in the absence of a mass political voice for workers fighting for

energy nationalisation to lower bills, RPI inflation-proof pay, pension and benefit rises, council house building and rent control.

The danger for the Tories is that the appetite of the working class is bound to grow with the eating - that one little measure won't satisfy and anger will grow, not dissipate. The pandemic showed that when the pressure is on, Johnson was forced to act. It also gave workers a certain confidence in their essential role in society. This has found some expression in the current mini strike wave. If it is properly built for in workplaces, the Trades Union Congress demo on 18 June in London could be the start of bringing this together.

The biggest danger making the Tories panic is that the Patriotic Millionaires are right - the capitalist system they defend is increasingly exposed as unable to offer a decent future to most people. That will start to find expression too - and needs to be organised around a programme for socialist change.

The Socialist production schedule

The next issue of the Socialist, issue 1182, will be published a day early on 1 June. The bank holidays mean that in order to get our paper distributed to Socialist Party campaigners ahead of the weekend, production needs to be moved. This may also mean fewer pages.

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Boris Johnson at a party DIANNA BONNER/CC

the **Socialist**
*formerly **Militant***

Issue 1181
26 May - 1 June 2022

DO YOU HAVE NEWS FOR US?
The Socialist is written, read, sold and bought by ordinary workers, trade unionists, young people and Socialist Party members. We want you to write for the Socialist.

Send us reports of your workplace and community campaigns, short letters on working-class issues, or ideas for other articles.

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The Socialist is the weekly newspaper of the Socialist Party, the England and Wales section of the Committee for a Workers' International
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ISSN 1366-9621
Published by Socialist Publications,
PO Box 1398, Enfield EN1 9GT
Registered as a newspaper at the Post Office
Printed by trade union labour at Reach Printing Services

Militant issue 1: October 1964
The Socialist issue 1: 7 February 1997

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

Union action needed to close 38% gender pension gap



Trade union action by Glasgow Unison won equal pay and hundreds of millions of pounds in back pay

JANE NELLIST
COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

If you thought the gender pay gap was bad, there is an even bigger gender pension gap which has huge consequences for women, not only now but in the future.

19 May this year was 'Gender Pensions Gap Day'. For the first four and half months of the year, on average, retired women go 'without' a pension compared to men.

According to a report by civil service union Prospect, the average pension income gap between men and women is a massive 38%. The gender pay gap is 15.5%. Even more women are condemned to live in poverty when they retire.

Women are more likely to take career breaks or take part-time work because of the burden of caring responsibilities. This has a huge impact on their pension contributions.

The government has no strategy to address the crisis. It's likely to get worse with the cost-of-living crisis and the huge increase in precarious and part-time work, as well as the massive increase in costs of childcare and elderly care.

A report on poverty from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation shows that 20% of women pensioners live in poverty. That's over 1.2 million women, and that is only going to increase with the economic crisis.

To add to the problem, the impact of the increase in state pension age for women born in the 1950s (WASPI women), from 60 to 66, means that many women are having to work longer.

Gaps in National Insurance contributions, when women have been unable to remain in continuous full-time employment, forces more to continue working beyond retirement age or face receiving less state pension.

For all workers, Britain's state pension is among the lowest in Europe, below the official poverty line. Tory attacks on the 'triple lock' threaten increasing misery as inflation rises.

Because the amount workers contribute to an occupational pension is usually a percentage of their salary, the 15.5% gender pay gap means that women have less salary from which to contribute from. A worker who earns less than £10,000 a year, more likely for women workers, has no requirement to be opted into an occupational pension.

And then of course there are the millions of workers in insecure work, with no automatic pension contributions.

For those struggling to survive on low wages now, thinking about retirement is far from the mind. When circumstances are so bleak now, who has time to even think of their future?

Countless workers who should

be enjoying retirement are forced to continue to work, unable to afford life on the state pension. Because of the inequality inbuilt into the system, many of these will be women.

There is plenty of wealth in society that could be used to solve the crisis straight away, it's just that it's in the wrong hands!

Trade union action is needed to address the gender pay and pension gap. Like that in Glasgow where strikes of largely women workers, supported in solidarity action by mainly male sections of the workers, won equal pay and hundreds of millions of pounds in back pay from the SNP council.

We need urgent action to ensure that pay and pension equality is addressed and all workers have the right to retire on a decent living pension which affords them dignity in retirement and guaranteed high-quality care when they need it.

We say:
● Reduce the state retirement and pension age to 55. For decent living pensions, linked to inflation
● A £15-an-hour minimum wage for all, without exemptions, rising with the cost of living
● No detriment for those unable to make National Insurance contributions
● Free, good quality childcare and social care for all

March with the socialists 18 June!

The Socialist Party will be joining thousands of trade unionists and workers marching against the cost-of-living crisis on 18 June in London, join us!

- Saturday 18 June
- Assemble from 10.30am at Portland Place near Oxford Street, London
- March departs 12pm
- Rally 1pm at Parliament Square
- Visit tuc.org.uk/DemandBetter to book transport from your area
- See pages 8-9 for more



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Tories threat to restrict the right to strike

United action needed to force back attacks



A MIDLANDS RMT MEMBER

The Tories are discussing bringing forward new attacks on the working class, in the form of a tightening of the anti-union laws. The Tories correctly fear the power of the organised working class, and its response in the face of sharply declining living standards for the many and the soaring wealth of those at the top. They want to reassure the capitalist class that they will be determined fighters on the side of the bosses in the coming battles.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps has taken to the pages of the Telegraph to talk up forcing a guaranteed minimum level of service on the railways and in other business-critical industries.

Britain already has the strictest anti-union laws in the advanced capitalist world. The hated Con-Dem government of the last decade introduced draconian minimum turnout and 'yes' vote requirements.

In anticipation of a potential nationwide railway strike, Shapps probably wants to say what he thinks a

section of his voters want to hear. But such is the scale of the cost-of-living crisis, an increasing number of what would have been traditional Tory voters will have sympathy with railway workers fighting to defend their jobs and pay.

The Trades Union Congress (TUC), which brings together most of the trade unions in England and Wales, is once again finding itself with the responsibility of the whole trade union movement on its shoulders.

Its response to the vicious attacks on trade union rights throughout the period of austerity in the 2010s was lamentable. In 2011 there were up to two million public sector workers on strike to defend pensions, before the TUC and some right-wing union leaders scandalously agreed a shoddy sell-out deal behind the scenes.

Then in 2016 a raft of new anti-union legislation was introduced, without a shot being fired back in response by those same 'leaders'.

Transport union RMT has promised "fierce resistance", and Unite General Secretary Sharon Graham has said: "If you force our legitimate activities outside of the law, then

don't expect us to play by the rules".

The Prison Officers Association (POA) had its right to strike removed by the Blair government. But that has not stopped its members defying the law to take strike action.

Any attacks on workers' right to strike must be resisted, and attempts to prevent future action would be best met by defiance and the solidarity of the rest of the trade union movement.

The TUC-organised demonstration on 18 June must be used as a launch pad to coordinate planned strikes and those already under way, bringing together more workers in both public and private sectors into the action.

The way to force back the attacks from the bosses and the Tories, is through united action. If the TUC is once again unwilling to take the lead, then a coalition of those unions who are must come together and take the initiative.

Many of the very best trade union fighters will be at the National Shop Stewards Network conference on 2 July and will be discussing how we can fight back together during this stormy period.

NSSN conference 2022: Why I'm going

2022 National Shop Stewards Network Conference

Saturday 2nd July

11am-4.30pm Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL

Workers fight the cost-of-living squeeze

Trade union lead never more needed!

speakers include:

Sharon Graham, Unite general secretary

Steve Gillan, POA general secretary

Coventry bin striker

www.shopstewards.net

LEN HOCKEY

The richest of the rich have grown their wealth to such an extent that the top 250 entrants on this year's Sunday Times rich list now hold as much wealth as the top 1,000 did in 2017.

This obscene level of wealth accumulation underlines the years of inaction from national trade union leaderships, and their failure to mount national action to stop the plundering of our living standards by the elite and their politicians.

The National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) conference, coming soon after the TUC demo on 18 June, provides a national focal point to rally together ordinary grassroots worker militants, like the victorious Unite Barts strikers.

The NSSN can act to build up a mighty pressure, including on the left union leaders, to organise coordinated strike action across services and industries, to defeat this weak, split government of the rich. I will be attending to help make that happen!



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!

Do you agree? Join the fightback!

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UCU disputes continue in universities

Unifying strategy needed to prepare for new term



Strikers in Durham ELAINE BRUNSILL

KAT GWYTHYR

UCU MEMBER (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

Since the end of 2021, University and College Union (UCU) members in universities around the country have taken significant action on pay, pensions and related issues. Although this has been disaggregated, UCU has been the only public sector union so far to take national action.

UCU announced a marking boycott to begin on 23 May 2022, agreed

by delegates at a meeting of UCU's higher education (HE) special sector conference, as an escalation of the ongoing disputes across university campuses.

Members were recently balloted on whether to continue and escalate industrial action in the two disputes over pensions, and pay and conditions. 36 universities voted in support of industrial action on pay and conditions, while 24 universities backed further action over pension cuts.

The success of the reballots demonstrates that there remains a clear mood to fight back. However, building a successful fightback in the face of increases in redundancies and workloads, pay inequality, and casualisation is no easy task. There are serious issues that need to be considered, including a unifying strategy in order to win.

One key question is the balloting strategy. Many branches narrowly missed the 50% threshold, in

some cases due to ballots arriving one or two days after the balloting period closed. The short turnaround undoubtedly played a factor in branches missing the threshold; UCU announced the balloting days before it opened with only a three-week turnaround.

There are questions to be asked about why there was such a short turnaround and why more attention and support was not given to branches which are hovering around the threshold.

Branches, too, have been consistently balloted on a disaggregated basis. This should be used as a step to grow the action with the aim to build towards more nationally coordinated action with an aggregated ballot ready for the new term. It is clear that there is still a mood for struggle.

Defend members

There are also concerns about retaliation from employers. The marking boycott could lead to a 100% withdrawal of pay for failing contractual obligations. University bosses have already threatened this over 'action short of strike', and so this is a serious concern. The union has to fight any victimisation of reps and members.

The next steps in the dispute should focus on supporting sustained strike action. The scale of the assault on

workers in the HE sector means that there is no alternative but to resist.

To do this effectively, there needs to be clear direction from the national union leadership about the future direction of the disputes, especially as universities are bringing in cuts while members are out on strike against those cuts. There must be clarity about what the expectations are for the dispute moving forwards, and members' role in that.

The union should commit to cover the loss in wages in order to mobilise as many members in industrial action as possible. Connecting with the wider trade union movement for solidarity donations could also help with this.

Wider solidarity and coordination with other unions could also strengthen the fight. UCU should coordinate with other campus unions that have strike mandates, for example Unison.

These disputes are taking place with the backdrop of growing industrial action on a national scale. We should anticipate that the situation could rapidly develop, and that a win is possible as workers begin to put pressure on bosses.

UCU should take the lead on approaching the other public sector unions to offer joint strike action on pay.

'Left Unity' leadership overturned at PCS DWP group conference

DAVID SEMPLE

SECRETARY, PCS WIGAN AREA (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

Despite a relatively slow start, filled with speeches from the rightward-drifting leadership of the PCS union in the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), a new combative spirit is beginning to emerge at DWP group conference, which began on 23 May in Brighton.

The last year has seen the total collapse of any serious attempt to ensure that DWP is Covid-safe, the erosion of members' pay by at least 10%, and the decision to close 40+ offices and get rid of 4,000 jobs. The union's

leadership has simply not proven up to the task of doing anything except indulge in angry rhetoric.

Motion A18, put forward by Broad Left Network (BLN) supporters and Socialist Party members, pushed for a serious campaign on pay, staffing and working conditions.

The leadership opposed it, and encouraged their supporters to launch desperate personal attacks on those reps who moved and supported the motion. This failed.

Reps held their nerve, and made it clear that the time has come to correct six years of industrial silence in DWP, and to fight for thousands of additional staff, for an end to

Saturday working and late nights, and for a minimum 10% pay rise.

They voted by 19,387 to 17,058 for the motion BLN supporters put forward.

Our union has lost thousands of reps and tens of thousands of members, demonstrated by the much reduced size of the DWP group conference, with a hundred and sometimes fewer delegates voting.

The complacency of the union's leadership must be defeated, and they must be ousted by a serious socialist alternative. It is therefore good progress that six BLN supporters have been elected to the group executive in the recent elections.



HMRC group in PCS needs fighting programme

JP ROSSER

PCS MEMBER (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

This is the first physical Revenue and Customs (HMRC) group conference in three years and it's a different looking group.

Covid didn't stop the office closure programme, so a number of PCS branches no longer exist. Many branches have also struggled to identify a full delegation. So HMRC, the second biggest group in the union, is represented by just 75 delegates.

It's a conference with a friendly tone but a lack of confidence and fire.

There are motions on many important issues, especially around pay and contract reform. Yet the standard instruction is to ask the group executive to negotiate. It's a concerning trend and must change.

It's clear only the BLN will bring forward a programme to rediscover the campaigning and fighting group that HMRC can be.

work with our privatised members, and build on the campaigning spirit of our London South branch, which led the recent disputes in ISS and Aramark.

This fighting spirit has been reflected in the group election results, where a socialist leadership on a fighting campaigning programme has been returned and the work will start almost immediately to drive through the campaigns agreed upon.

Delegates supported, almost without exception, the fighting programme set out in the conference agenda.

This included the fight on office closures in the Insolvency Service, the cuts to come across the group, potential privatisation in the shared service centres, and supporting members in Acas confronted with mass organisational change.

The programme also included how we are going to develop the

Postal worker union rep reports to the Socialist

Mass gate meetings are taking place as postal workers in the Communication Workers' Union (CWU) prepare for strike action on pay.

Tam Dewar, CWU Divisional Rep, Scotland, writes in a personal capacity.

Cost-of-living crisis or class war?

Postal workers, members of the CWU, are being balloted for strike action in support of an above-inflation pay rise.

The CWU believes that the workforce has earned the right to keep pay above inflation following their remarkable performance during the deadly Covid pandemic: keeping communities connected, sustaining e-commerce, and providing a life-saving service delivering and collecting test kits, often at personal risk. RPI inflation, at the time of writing is 11.1% and forecasted to rise further, heralding the biggest fall in living standards amongst workers since the 1980s.

Constant battle

Postal workers have been involved in a constant battle with successive Royal Mail boards since the formerly profitable postal service was privatised by the Tory-Lib Dem coalition. Flogged cheap to their spiv friends, the postal service has been held hostage by greedy investors and lamentably poor chief officers, committed to a vision of a low-wage, two-tier workforce, driving pay and conditions down to Amazon levels.

A groundbreaking deal, secured in 2021 by the CWU through collective action, protected terms and conditions and resisted the privatised market model of zero-hour contracts, no right to sick or annual leave pay, and no pension in retirement. Despite this, the employer continues to push a deterioration in terms to channel even more profits to shareholders and senior executives.

In response to a scheduled pay rise due in April this year, cack-handed managers have offered an insulting pay rise of 2% backdated to April - if the workforce accepts new terms for new staff. These would deprive them of existing benefits secured by previous generations of workers. Lower start pay rates for mainly part-time staff would effectively mean a two-tier workforce, where workers doing the same job would be paid differently.

Managers want a reduction in sick pay benefits and annualised hours. Sunday working would no longer be voluntary, and existing allowances for additional duties would be scrapped, forcing later start times and later deliveries for communities. If the workforce accepts these cuts in conditions, another 1.5% pay would be awarded on deployment.

Executive pay

This is as executive pay and pensions rocket, and as the company returns £400 million to already-rich shareholders - one shareholder's return being £56 million alone. These profits were generated not by part-time cushioned board members, but by postal workers on the ground. Could there be any clearer example that this cost-of-living crisis is no less than a class war?

The CWU's strength lies in its network of local workplace reps who are currently engaged in gate meetings and passing information to members to encourage participation in a ballot, if further negotiations fail to move the employer from its position.



Gate meeting at Mount Pleasant, central London ROB WILLIAMS

The CWU has pioneered social media trade unionism and has delivered 'yes' votes above the obstructive anti-trade union legislation turnout requirements - often above 90% 'yes' votes. I have no doubt that postal workers will again respond to a request from our union for support.

In the wider context, the CWU has long campaigned for a new deal for workers. The union leadership strongly backed the former leadership of the Labour Party and secured commitments to policies that would improve workers' rights. The relationship with the new Labour leader is more fractious.

The CWU has tried to coordinate action amongst sections of the TUC to lead a fightback against diminishing workers' rights, with limited success. The draconian anti-trade union laws, designed to neuter the organised working class, limit the TUC to demonstrations and lobbying. When

you consider the hours of broadcast media, glimpses of workers' representatives from the trade union movement are as rare as hens' teeth.

On the ground there is a different story emerging, of organised workers' involvement in individual disputes across the sectors. University and college staff have fought a lengthy battle against pension cuts and deskilling. Rail workers have had a perpetual struggle in the privatised rail sector. Bus drivers have had some success in securing pay awards and truck drivers have seen pay increase substantially.

In line with low corporate and personal taxation, withdrawal of cradle-to-grave welfare, and the move from direct to indirect taxation, it now seems that the poor and those in work subsidise the already rich. Our history since 1979 has been of a mass transfer of power and wealth into the hands of the few.

In the absence of elected representatives at all levels of government dedicated to the cause of labour it falls on workers organised into trade unions to defend existing terms and conditions and to protect what we have for the next generation of workers.

Anti-union laws

Coventry and Rugby bin workers' fight for a living wage goes on

Debt and pension-deferral insult fuels workers' determination

DAVE GRIFFITHS

COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

The strikes of Coventry's HGV drivers and Rugby bin workers have continued into yet another week, but if anything the determination of the workers has increased.

As the Rugby dispute loomed, their council rushed out 'support' letters, offering anything but a pay rise. It offered debt advice, loans, and even a deferral of pension payments.

This 'offer of help' was "the insult that tipped the ballot for strike action," said one of the Rugby workers. "They offered us to go into debt or have a lousy pension. That told us how inadequate our wages really were."

Not to be outdone, Coventry council also wrote offering to support the workforce regarding the cost-of-living crisis, also looking at loans, and helping with access to food banks!

Union members responded that a pay rise might help!

Both the Tory council in Rugby and Labour council in Coventry have

encouraged their workers into debt rather than pay a fair wage.

So it was a very disappointed bin worker, Alan Checklin, who addressed a cost-of-living crisis rally in Coventry. He explained that he had been a Labour Party member for years but, "they don't seem any different to the Tories. [The two parties] are two cheeks of the same arse."

"I burnt my [Labour] card the other week... A Labour MP had offered help, but nothing came of it... Not once has any Labour councillor visited us on the picket to talk or ask questions."

Talks in both disputes continue. A deal fell apart in Rugby when it became clear that loaders would have to work extra hours to get their rise. Perhaps the council was following the advice of Tory ministers who tell us all to work more hours to survive this crisis.

Councils may be tripping over themselves offering advice, but workers see action as the way to secure a defence of their living standards.

Reading the Socialist on the Coventry picket line LEN SHAAL



PCS BEIS group adopts fighting programme

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN BEIS

Reps in the Business, Energy, Industry and Science (BEIS) group of PCS union came together on Monday 23 May to discuss their response to the onslaught of attacks across all constituent parts.

Group president Marion Lloyd opened the conference with a fighting speech calling on delegates to "get mad and get even". She congratulated all reps for working

tirelessly all year despite the constant stream of attacks, and the fact that they and their families weren't immune to the cost of the pandemic.

Their hard work was a testament to the commitment of reps and was reaping success - notably the fact that union membership across the group had jumped by almost 100 in the 24 hours following the closure and cuts announcements in the Insolvency Service.

Delegates supported, almost without exception, the fighting programme set out in the conference agenda.

This included the fight on office closures in the Insolvency Service, the cuts to come across the group, potential privatisation in the shared service centres, and supporting members in Acas confronted with mass organisational change.

The programme also included how we are going to develop the

ROB WILLIAMS
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL INDUSTRIAL ORGANISER

On Saturday 18 June, the Trades Union Congress (TUC) has organised a national march and rally in London.

Under the slogan ‘we demand better’, the TUC leaflet declares that “working people have had enough. Everything is going up but our wages. Ministers partied while people died. Now they do nothing while living standards plummet and P&O lays off hundreds of workers on the spot. It is time for a new deal for working people, real help with energy bills and a pay rise.”

While the demonstration’s demands are too limited, it has nonetheless been called over the issues that are to the forefront of all working-class people’s minds. If the turnout was dependent on the anger of workers, it would be massive and on the scale of the TUC demonstration in March 2011 against the Tory-Lib Dem cuts offensive.

Today it is even clearer that the Tories don’t have any solutions, and that action is needed to address the cost-of-living crisis. Rishi Sunak’s entry into the Times Rich List could also be a spur.

The Socialist Party will fight for the maximum possible turnout, and for the demonstration to be the springboard for coordinated strike action against inflation austerity.

However, the leaders of the TUC have been slow off the mark. The demonstration was called belatedly and many trade union activists have been concerned that it was organised as a tick-box exercise after the TUC called off a demonstration in Blackpool earlier this year outside the Tory party spring conference.

And it is clear that many trade union leaders have no idea how to mobilise for a mass demonstration. For instance, Unison recently posted on its website: ‘TUC demo: Seven bonus reasons to enjoy a day out in London’, which sought to attract members on the march through sightseeing and even finding romance!

It is this paradox that is the biggest

challenge facing union activists, and this is related to the crisis of leadership in the unions, which has been particularly exposed by the Covid pandemic. Nonetheless, despite the obstacles at the top, the huge anger of workers could find an expression on the streets of London on 18 June.

Covid totally disorientated the bulk of union leaderships. They succumbed to the pressure of national unity, as the media and the capitalist establishment attempted to repeat the claim of Tory Prime Minister David Cameron in 2010-11 as he unloaded brutal austerity, that “we are all in this together.” It was a fallacy then as well as now.

But in the first few months of the pandemic, the union movement effectively shut down. Most official disputes were suspended or called off. Many union offices were closed and national executives barely met. The pandemic exposed that many union leaders had lost confidence over the last decade of onslaughts by the bosses and their Tory governments.

However, unions were never more relevant or necessary. In what was literally the fight of our lives, a layer of workers took unofficial action to ensure that they and their workplaces were safe.

The national unity consensus was broken after a few months - by the employers. They sensed that the deep economic contraction, with many workers furloughed, had put them in a strong position to go on the attack. Their weapon of choice was the imposition of worse pay and conditions through ‘fire and rehire’. Disgracefully, in the summer of 2020, alongside British Gas and British Airways was the cutting Labour council of Tower Hamlets in east London.

This vicious offensive, which saw workers such as those in British Gas lose over £10,000 a year, provoked a series of brave strikes. Even right-wing union leaders were forced to sanction action. Many of them were of a far more intensive character than has been seen in the recent past. Instead of isolated one-day stoppages, many of the strikes were escalated, some indefinite.

As the lockdown was lifted and the



MILITANT INDUSTRIAL MEASURES NEEDED TO FIGHT THE COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS



economy recovered, the confidence of workers in some sectors was restored, as the immediate threat of losing their jobs receded. Indeed, the shortages of labour and of skilled workers, such as HGV drivers, tilted the balance of forces back in favour of some workers.

This has been the basis for offensive strikes to recover lost wages, in particular for lorry drivers. That had a knock-on effect on bus and refuse workers, where a layer of drivers had left to take higher-paid jobs in haulage.

There has been a series of disputes on the buses, from South Wales to south London, and on the bins, from Sheffield to Eastbourne and Worthing. In these misnamed ‘soft south’ areas, the class and income polarisation is perhaps felt more than most.

An explosive situation can open up. Two weeks ago, binworkers in Welwyn Garden City walked off the job against bullying management and won a victory.

Perhaps the most prominent bin strike, and certainly against the most vicious employer, is that by drivers in Coventry. The Labour council has used brutal strike-breaking methods that the most hardline private sector

boss would be proud of. It has spent over £3 million trying to smash the strike and the workers’ union Unite. But it has been met by determined well-led resistance by Unite and its members, who have understood the need to fight on both the industrial and political planes. This is a lesson that will be learnt by many workers during this period.

Spiralling costs

Spiralling inflation, especially with the catastrophic spike in energy prices, has added a powerful impetus to the predominately private sector strike wave that has developed over the last year. In January 2021, RPI inflation was 1.4% but it is now running at 11.1%. Gas and electricity have gone up at least 100% with more to come, forcing the Tories to consider a windfall tax of the energy companies. It has been estimated that already this year, workers’ incomes have been reduced on average by 12.5%, and this is on the back of a decade of pay cuts and freezes.

This has opened up a new stage in the struggle. The brutal sackings of P&O workers are a reminder that the bosses will be prepared to adopt

vicious methods to protect their profits. As the economy shows signs of slowing into ‘stagflation’, job losses and even closures can again come onto the agenda.

The most militant industrial measures will be needed. On top of all-out strikes, the idea of workers occupying threatened workplaces can grow, along with demands that plants and companies be nationalised to defend jobs and save communities. It is also essential that unions raise the demand of re-nationalisation of the energy and utilities companies to answer the claims by the private profiteers that they have no option but to raise prices.

However, the experience of ScotRail underlines that this cannot be nationalisation with the same bosses and the same underfunding: the demand must be for nationalisation under democratic workers’ control and management.

Raging inflation also raises the need for coordinated action in the public sector. The TUC demo in 2011 was called against the austerity budget of the Tory-led coalition of Cameron, Osborne and Clegg. It was the platform for action to defend public

sector pensions in June, and then the mammoth N30 strike of November that year. Two million public sector workers in 29 unions walked out together, in what was effectively a public sector general strike. There were demonstrations, rallies and protests in towns and cities nationally.

These should have been continued and escalated into early 2012. There was the potential to inflict a serious, possibly terminal, defeat on the ConDem government. But the right-wing leaders of the TUC, Unison and the GMB moved to accept a rotten deal and de-escalate the struggle. The effect was to embolden Cameron to roll out his brutal austerity programme.

Some of the left unions did attempt to salvage the pensions fight. In January 2012, at short notice, PCS Left Unity, with Socialist Party members and the National Shop Stewards Network playing a key role, organised a rank-and-file conference of over 500 union reps and activists. While not being able to resurrect action on the scale of N30, it did lead to the last pensions strike in May 2012.

This was joined by a national walk-out of prison officers in the POA, who were forced to take unofficial action

after being denied the right to strike. In addition, that day, 35,000 serving police also marched through central London in protest against Tory cuts. The Tories were warned of the current mood of the police when delegates to last week’s Police Federation conference attacked Home Secretary Priti Patel over pay, claiming that some police officers were using food banks.

This is a far cry from the position that the PCS leadership is now playing. Infamously, at the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020, PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka produced a video where he announced that the union was “parking” the full national pay claim.

This was a week before the PCS NEC had met! This rivalled the craven partnership of soon-to-be-departed TUC general secretary Frances O’Grady, when she stood alongside the head of the CBI bosses’ federation and Tory Chancellor Sunak, when the government planned to water down furlough.

This inaction has been reflected across most of the public sector during the last two years. But there would be huge potential to build a

strike on the scale of N30 on the issue of pay, bringing in individual union issues, such as fighting the 91,000 jobs slaughter in the civil service, or teachers’ workload. There should be an urgent meeting of the public sector unions to coordinate RPI inflation-proofed pay claims and strike ballots.

One of the important but positive differences between now and 2011 is that then, the public sector pensions strike took place in a relatively quiet period as far as strikes in the private and other sectors were concerned. This opened up the opportunity for the Tories to try and play off workers in the private sector from those in the public sector, who they and their allies in the media dishonestly claimed enjoyed ‘gold-plated’ pensions.

Strike wave

This time, the strike wave that has developed has to date been largely in the private sector. There are national strike ballots taking place or impending on the railways, Royal Mail and British Telecom.

Tory transport minister Grant Shapps has threatened to ban rail strikes unless a certain number of

staff still work. These proposals were first raised by Boris Johnson in 2019. Any such attempts must be met by a far greater fight by the trade union movement than happened against the Tory 2016 legislation that brought in undemocratic thresholds, when not one national demonstration was called.

The potential exists for a rising tide of strike action in a similar fashion to the ‘Winter of Discontent’ in 1978-79. Following strike action at Ford, waves of low-paid public sector workers went on strike to break the right-wing Labour government’s pay restraint, in another period of high inflation.

Today, a 24-hour mass coordinated stoppage, effectively of a general strike character, would totally transform the situation. It would give huge confidence to workers, and act as a pole of attraction to the many young workers in workplaces not organised by the unions. It would put huge pressure on Johnson and the Tories, with the potential to drive them from power.

That would pose what political alternative is needed by workers, as Blairite Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer continues to move Labour back to the right, post-Corbyn.

In early 2021, Starmer opposed teachers resorting to strike action to prevent the Tories’ unsafe early full return of schools. At the end of May, Blairite shadow chancellor Rachel Reeves refused five times to say whether she would support strikes on pay in an interview with Andrew Marr on LBC.

This is reminiscent of 2011, when the then Labour leader Ed Miliband, now in Starmer’s shadow cabinet, refused to support public sector workers taking strike action in defence of their pensions.

In response to the brutal tactics of

Coventry Labour councillors in the bin strike, Unite general secretary Sharon Graham suspended councillors who were members from the union. This was the first action taken by a Labour-affiliated union against cutting councillors for passing on Tory cuts. Over the last decade, it has been the councillors who refused to vote for cuts who were disciplined by New Labour.

Unite is firmly on the front foot industrially under Sharon Graham’s leadership. And this is married to its new position, agreed at last autumn’s policy conference, of calling on Labour councils to refuse to pass on Tory cuts, and instead implement no-cuts ‘needs’ budgets.

Last autumn, the BFAWU bakers’ union disaffiliated from Starmer’s Labour in response to the party’s pro-business trajectory, after its national president Ian Hodson was expelled. In the last few weeks, the Fire Brigades Union and Aslef have had disaffiliation motions tabled at their conferences, while some CWU delegates wanted the cutting role of Labour councillors debated.

This debate will continue in the union movement as the crisis heightens, forcing workers to look for a political alternative to brutal capitalism. A growing layer can be drawn to a socialist programme. But a mass political vehicle is needed, based on the organised working class.

Covid triggered a speeding up of events. We have seen distinct periods follow on top of each other, caused by the worsening economy. The working class is being forced into action to protect its living standards. Unite and the RMT have been to the fore, but most unions have been pushed into action. These clashes pose the vital need for militant unions and a political alternative that can fight for a future for workers.

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MOXIE PRODUCTIONS/NETFLIX STUDIOS

TV review – Meltdown: Three Mile Island

Nuclear industry puts profit before safety

CALLUM JOYCE
OXFORD SOCIALIST PARTY

On 28 March 1979, the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant in Pennsylvania in the US suffered a partial meltdown of its reactor core. The release of radioactive material into the environment and the risk of a full meltdown could have rendered a large area of the state uninhabitable. This is the focus of a new Netflix documentary.

The programme reveals how the owners of the plant, General Public Utilities, and its subsidiary, Metropolitan Edison, allegedly destroyed unfavourable safety reports, and then intimidated employees involved in the cleanup to prevent them from raising concerns.

The US government's Nuclear Regulatory Commission oversaw the cleanup, which was contracted out to construction giant Bechtel. Even the regulator chose to ignore safety concerns!

Not only were companies taking risks with safety, but the government condoned this – unsurprising given the administration of Democrat president Jimmy Carter had been keen to support the growth of the nuclear industry as an alternative to foreign oil and gas.

The documentary shows how

the lives of people living in the area were affected, even decades later, by the poor handling of the crisis afterwards. The programme paints a damning picture of the way that private energy companies ruthlessly pursue profit above all other concerns – even when it means risking the safety of thousands of people.

Those who put forward nuclear power as a permanent alternative to fossil fuels must remember the human cost of this potentially dangerous technology. Nuclear energy is no replacement for proper investment in renewable energy, owned and controlled by the public to meet the needs of the majority, not to line the pockets of capitalist shareholders.

As Rick Parks, the whistleblower who exposed many of the safety concerns to the public, put it: “We’ll never have a viable nuclear industry in this country until we take the profit motive out of it. You can’t have a profit motive overriding nuclear safety”. General Public Utilities later merged with First Energy, and continues to operate today, paying just over \$1.2 billion to its shareholders in 2021.

● **Read more – ‘40 years after Three Mile Island disaster’ at socialistparty.org.uk**

Stop savage cuts at Wolverhampton, Roehampton and De Montfort universities

BIRMINGHAM UCU AND SOCIALIST STUDENTS MEMBER

The university managements at Wolverhampton, Roehampton and De Montfort have unleashed savage cuts to their education programmes and staff.

Wolverhampton has stopped taking applicants for 138 courses, including its high-ranking fashion course. Roehampton plans to lay off up to 226 academics after cutting many humanities courses, and De Montfort has announced 58 redundancies.

University staff are being made redundant when price rises are making living impossible. Socialist Students condemns these cuts.

They have been approved by managements who see their institutions not as places of learning, but as businesses. Their attention is with massive infrastructure projects and business partnerships, rather than teaching and research. In their blind pursuit of these, they are willing to cut even their best staff and programmes.

These cuts are also a consequence of the unsustainable financial model of universities. The lack of direct government funding encourages management to extort as much from students as possible in tuition fees, leaving them with a lifetime of student debt.

Because national tuition fees are

not enough to compensate for lack of funding, they rely heavily on international student fees. A slight reduction of these students, like during the pandemic, can make their whole financial model crumble.

Universities pack as many students as possible into their courses to draw as much income as possible. Therefore, when a programme – no matter how prestigious or well-regarded – fails to attract corporate investment or is considered to not have enough students, it gets mercilessly cut, making the university academically poorer.

As long as universities rely on this model, there will be more cuts, more laying off of staff, and a dramatic worsening in teaching and research quality.

Big business

These latest cuts have targeted humanities and arts courses. The reason? University bosses, in their own words, want to focus on “developing programmes with practical skills and industry/employer engagements” – i.e. for meeting the needs of big business.

Education must not become the preserve of a small elite. Socialist Students fights for an education system run for the benefit of students, workers and wider society, not in the interests of the bosses and the super-rich.

This means struggling for a socialist alternative to the chaos of the

capitalist system. This requires building a mass movement of students and workers to fight for democratic workers’ control of society’s massive wealth and resources to ensure that everyone can study what they are interested in – not what is meted out to us by the Tories and bosses.

Students need to organise to ensure that what is transpiring at Wolverhampton, Roehampton and De Montfort cannot happen again.

Education

SOCIALIST STUDENTS CAMPAIGNS FOR:

- Universities to be publicly funded by taking the wealth out of the hands of the super-rich
- Scrapping tuition fees
- Introduction of living grants for students
- Open publication of universities’ financial ledgers
- Democratic control of universities by workers, trade unions and democratically elected student representatives

Work and jobs

SOCIALIST STUDENTS ALSO FIGHTS FOR:

- Access to adult education and decent jobs for all
- An end to bogus apprenticeship schemes; instead there should be a guaranteed job at the end
- The possibility of combining training for a trade and formal education



150 Leeds staff and students rallied in support of the student occupations and workers' action

Leeds occupation – students back staff strike

ANTHONY BRACUTI
LEEDS SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Students at the University of Leeds have occupied the vice-chancellor's office in solidarity with University and College Union (UCU) strikers, and in response to management's punitive policy of 100% pay deduction for the soon-to-be-implemented marking boycott.

Staff in UCU were openly grateful for the action of these students: “It’s really heartening to see cooperation of this kind. We don’t want to strike. We don’t want to hurt students, so it’s encouraging to know that the student body understands that.”

UCU member have been striking for wage equality, an end to casualised contracts, and better pay, pensions and working conditions. One

UCU PhD student said: “Postgrads are really screwed over. We should have basic working rights”.

Over 150 students and staff showed their discontent with the bullying vice-chancellor at a rally on 23 May, the day the occupation started. Socialist Party member Iain Dalton – who was one of the Leeds Uni occupiers in 2010 – also spoke in support of the action.



Sanctuary Housing – “My union mates have come to support me”

NICK AUVACHE
UNITE HOUSING WORKERS

Unite the Union protested in support of one of our members, Chris, outside his disciplinary hearing.

Workers at Sanctuary Housing are no strangers to management's heavy-handed treatment. The relentless pace of work and bullying attitude of managers often get angry responses from workers.

Our loud and colourful protest made it very clear to management that poor treatment of workers must stop now. If not, there will be consequences.

The new union rep at Sanctuary said: “Workers working on voids are fed up being told we can only do bodge jobs on properties so they can

move in elderly tenants and young families to add to their already vast profits. I don't like my skills being abused.

“Sanctuary increased their profits last year from £42.4 million to £46.7 million. It's being invested in more properties to make more profits for the shareholders. How about they invest in their staff and the tenants?”

“This is not a charity anymore. It's a money-making machine and the tenants and workers bear the brunt.

“Today we not only supported our fellow member Chris, but we stood up for all workers who have been bullied, disrespected, undervalued and underpaid. We are pleased to receive support from our tenants, showing how much we have in common.”

Chris said: “When I went into the hearing, one of the managers said:

“There's a bit of commotion out there. I proudly said: ‘Yes, that's my union mates come to support me,’ with a great big smile.”

Someone from HR emerged from their office to ask what we were demonstrating about. One worker told her straight: “We are here because you are bullies.”

Unite wrote to Sanctuary explaining why we wanted to meet with them, but Sanctuary completely ignored our letter. No wonder then that workers prefer to take a more direct route.

This will give workers more confidence and show them that whether it is bullying management, intensification of work pressure, longer working hours or declining pay, we need a strong trade union at Sanctuary to hold the bosses to account.

● Stratford: Socialist ideas grow as cost-of-living crisis deepens

East London Socialist Party members were out again on 21 May in Stratford, campaigning for a socialist fightback to the cost-of-living crisis.

One pensioner told us of her shock when she received her energy bill. She explained that her pension pays the bills, while her husband's pension

pays the rent. Only a little gets left over for things like food and transport. We say the nationalisation of the energy companies is needed to meaningfully tackle growing fuel poverty.

Our call for a £15-an-hour minimum wage was popular, providing a concrete measure that could drastically improve the lives of working people now, as prices continue to spiral. As the cost-of-living crisis deepens, our socialist ideas are gaining more traction.

Five more people expressed an interest in attending meetings or

joining the Socialist Party. One school student asked if we had meetings before we had the chance to mention it ourselves.

Our success this week in reaching new people interested in our demands and our party points towards a growing mood that says: things can't go on like this.

ADAM POWELL-DAVIES

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Central West – ‘rent and service charge should be cut, instead they’re rising’

BEN GOLDSTONE
WEST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Central West residents gathered outside their building to protest against their housing association, Shepherd's Bush Housing Group (SBHG). The west London residents are angry at SBHG for rising service charges and rents, poor management, and the level of disrepair they have let the building fall into.

Their gas was stopped in June 2021, as a result of faulty pipework. Nearly a year later, they are still waiting to have it reinstated.

A resident reported they had to do all their cooking on hotplates. The building also has cladding issues.

Despite SBHG having a surplus in excess of £9 million, it still wants to raise social rents at the property by the maximum 4.1% allowed. Residents' frustration was palpable

at the protest, and the event ended with some voicing this over a megaphone.

One resident said the housing association should actually be lowering service charges, and the money should come from the super-rich and landlords – they continue to see profits climb, while tenants' energy and food bills soar, and the quality of living plummets.

Although housing associations can come across as more ethical alternatives to landlords, it is clear they still employ the same tactics in order to exploit the working class. Council and social housing rents should not be increased. In the private sector, rent control is needed to cap rents. This all needs to be decided by elected bodies of tenants, housing workers and trade union representatives, not landlords and the ruling classes.

Readers' opinion – Housing association sell off would pit Tories against banks

PAUL KERSHAW
UNITE HOUSING WORKERS CHAIR

Jack Jeffrey's article on the Tories' threats to introduce ‘Right to Buy’ for housing associations mentions that the idea has been mooted previously (see ‘Tories talk up social housing sell-off’ at socialistparty.org.uk).

In fact, it has been suggested in 2005, 2015, 2019 and 2022, but none of the previous attempts came to much. I think there are a few fundamental reasons for this.

First, few workers have enough money or job security to afford to buy their housing association home, even at a discount.

Also, levelling-up secretary Michael Gove says there is no new money for the plans. Therefore, no government compensation for the housing associations. The banks, which finance these property giants, would not like that.

Similarly, housing associations are private institutions. For the government to force them to offer discounts

selling off property would mean being at odds with rich investors, not something the Tories like to do!

There was a trial of Right to Buy in housing associations a year or two ago. The official evaluation found there were just under 1,900 sales, with an average discount of £65,000 at a cost of £124 million to the government.

It estimated that 224,000 housing association homes would be sold across the country over ten years if no limits were placed on demand. Based on the same average discount, that would make the cost to the government, for compensating the housing associations, a cool £14.6 billion. You could build a good number of council homes for that. Not that the government would!

Like Jack pointed out in his article, the announcement is likely to be an empty call to buy some popularity among Tory backbenchers. Still, it remains for us to fight for council homes for the 4.2 million people in need of social housing in England.



SOCIALIST PARTY FIGHTING FUND

AREA	£ RECEIVED	£ TARGET	Q2-3: APRIL-JUNE 2022	DEADLINE: 30 JUNE 2022
Eastern	1,519	1,200		127%
East Midlands	2,290	1,850		124%
South West	1,678	1,800		93%
Northern	554	750		74%
London	3,083	4,600		67%
Yorkshire	1,697	2,550		67%
North West	706	1,150		61%
Wales	1,288	2,300		56%
Southern & SE	1,253	2,350		53%
West Midlands	1,196	2,600		46%
Other	3,185	3,850		83%
TOTAL	18,448	25,000		74%

BEHIND THE BREXIT NORTHERN IRELAND PROTOCOL IMPASSE

The Tories have announced that they are preparing legislation which would allow them to unilaterally change the 'Northern Ireland Protocol', a key component of their Brexit agreement with the EU.

This is against the background of a nationalist party, Sinn Féin, emerging from recent Northern Ireland Assembly elections with the most number of seats, and the biggest unionist party, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), boycotting the Assembly, demanding the Protocol be scrapped (see Northern Ireland Assembly Election: A Political Turning Point at socialistparty.org.uk).

Going down this road risks provoking a trade war with the EU, aggravating the already serious economic crisis in Britain, and further destabilising the situation in Northern Ireland. Below we print an amended version of an article by **Clive Heemskerk**, which first appeared in the Socialist Party's magazine Socialism Today in May 2021, explaining the background to this Protocol crisis - one of the many facing this unstable and dysfunctional Tory government.

Before the December 2019 general election, the Socialist Party warned that Boris Johnson's withdrawal agreement with the European Union, which would "effectively leave Northern Ireland within the EU's economic jurisdiction" following the UK's exit, "will dangerously escalate sectarian tensions; spilling over into Britain too as in the past" (see socialismtoday.org)

The Socialist Party opposes the EU, which at bottom is a bosses' club attempting to co-ordinate the policies of different capitalist nation states on a continental scale in the interests of big business.

We backed a leave vote in the binary choice referendum on the UK's EU membership in 2016 from the standpoint of working-class socialist internationalism.

But that did not signify a commitment to offer even one ounce of support to the subsequent outcome of negotiations between the UK government and the 27 other EU member states on what the new relationships would be, including the so-called 'Northern Ireland Protocol'.

Johnson and the right-populist clique at the heart of the Tory government have acted recklessly throughout the Brexit process, even from the standpoint of the interests of British capitalism.

The overwhelming majority of the ruling capitalist class had wanted to remain within the EU or at least, when faced with the result of the 2016 referendum, retain a closer alignment to the EU single market than the 'hard Brexit' that Johnson sought.

One factor was the border between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic.

UK and Irish membership of the common EU economic area had seen the removal of customs controls in 1993 which, after the end of security checks under the 1998 Good Friday 'peace agreement', reduced the border's physical manifestation to changing road signage.

A capitalist hard Brexit, however, with a different UK customs and regulatory regime aimed to undercut the EU single market, inevitably posed its reinstatement as a hard border.

Former Tory prime minister Theresa May's proposed withdrawal agreement envisaged the UK as a whole remaining in a customs union with the EU unless and until alternative arrangements to avoid a border were

made in a new trade deal.

But Johnson was looking to the Tory party membership, a narrow social base of 150,000 or so, 73% of whom when polled in a 2018 Future of England Study saw Brexit as more important than preserving the Northern Ireland peace process.

Johnson dismissed May's deal as a 'Brexit in name only' and, as part of his campaign for her removal, pledged to the Northern Ireland Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) conference in November 2018 that he would never accept a regulatory and customs border in the Irish Sea.

Once installed in Downing Street, however, Johnson casually dropped his promise to the DUP, as his EU counterparts insisted on preserving 'the integrity of the single market'. The potentially ominous consequences for the working class were so much small change for the negotiators on both sides. "There was, in reality", we warned, "no prospect of capitalist politicians reaching an agreement that could recognise the national, religious and cultural differences - and the economic needs of the working class across Ireland - while not threatening workers' unity".

Only a programme for a socialist Ireland with full rights for the Protestant minority, and a genuinely equal voluntary socialist federation of Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England, could do that.

In the new period opening up of revived sectarian tensions, building support for such a programme - in the workers' movement in Britain as in Ireland - becomes an ever more vital task.

EU leaders also culpable

Since Britain's exit from the EU and the end of the transition period, the Johnson government has shown little sign of heeding warnings of escalating sectarianism from more serious strategists of capitalism, or the US administration of president Joe Biden.

But EU representatives too have shown imperial disdain. For the EU Commission, defending the common economic area for the interests of the big European corporations ultimately trumps empty declarations about the 'equal interests' of EU members.

This was starkly revealed at the end of January 2021 when the EU Commission president Ursula von der Leyen, without consulting the Irish government, threatened to invoke

Article 16 in the withdrawal agreement to block the export of Covid-19 vaccines into Northern Ireland, in order to ensure that the Commission's mooted controls on EU-manufactured vaccine exports to the UK could not be bypassed.

The DUP response

The dominant political force amongst Northern Ireland Protestants since 2003, the DUP had been undermined by the duplicity of 'Johnson the Lundy' (traitor) in accepting an Irish Sea border.

The Ulster Unionist Party, who the DUP had displaced, had already criticised Johnson's withdrawal agreement when it was announced for leaving Northern Ireland as a "hybrid part of the UK".

The Traditional Unionist Voice, a 2007 headline split off from the DUP, recently picking up polling support, had also denounced the deal as putting Northern Ireland in a "waiting room for a united Ireland".

So the then DUP leader Arlene Foster gratefully seized on von der Leyen's invocation of Article 16 to call for 'Unionist unity' to secure the scrapping of the Northern Ireland Protocol. The Sinn Féin then Deputy First Minister Michelle O'Neill retorted that "the Protocol is absolutely necessary", while lamenting that the EU Commission had given out "a rod to beat it with".

Days later graffiti appeared threatening customs checkpoint staff, who were withdrawn from the ports at Belfast and Larne.

In early March 2021 the Loyalist Community Council, including representatives of Protestant paramilitaries, announced that they were 'temporarily' withdrawing support for the Good Friday Agreement in opposition to the Northern Ireland Protocol.

And then from late March came ten days of nightly rioting in towns and cities including Belfast, Carrickfergus, Ballymena and Newtownabbey, initially in Protestant areas but then developing into sectarian clashes at a so-called 'peace wall' dividing Protestant and Catholic communities in West Belfast.

The immediate trigger for the riots was the decision announced by the Northern Ireland Public Prosecution Service not to prosecute senior Sinn Féin politicians for potentially breaching Covid restrictions when attending the funeral of the leading



Only a programme for a socialist Ireland with full rights for the Protestant minority, and a genuinely equal voluntary socialist federation of Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England, could unite workers



Boris Johnson meets Sinn Féin's Mary Lou McDonald on a visit to Belfast on 16 May ANDREW PARSONS/NO10 DOWNING STREET

IRA member Bobby Storey in June 2020, feeding into a narrative that Protestants are now the unfavoured community.

But the EU Withdrawal Agreement and its changes to the constitutional position of Northern Ireland provided the glowing underfire.

Workers' unity the only answer

Seeking to de-escalate the immediate crisis around the sea border issue, UK-EU talks have taken place on possible modifications to checks on goods entering Northern Ireland from Britain. But what is involved are not technical issues with the operation of the Northern Ireland Protocol but how to overcome the deep legacy of divide and rule bequeathed by capitalism to Ireland and for which it has no answers.

The interests of British capitalism today are different to what they were when they partitioned Ireland in 1921. The British ruling class imposed partition then primarily to cut across the revolutionary movement of the working class that developed at the end of world war one, which the leadership of the workers' organisations, fatally weakened by the execution of James Connolly in 1916, failed to lead to its inherent socialist conclusion.

But they also wanted to maintain



A glimpse of what is possible was seen during the 2021 riots when bus drivers, united across sectarian lines, walked out when they and their colleagues were threatened

access to the naval bases in the north and retain direct control of the most industrialised region of Ireland, factors which no longer apply.

Preserving the tools of divide and rule - whether racial, religious, national, gender or other differences amongst the working class - is a 'permanent interest' of the capitalists, who can only secure their rule as a truly privileged minority through such means.

But they can also spiral out of control. Declassified files released in Dublin in 2018 showed the despair of Margaret Thatcher, the alleged 'Iron Lady', when she confided to the then Irish premier Charles Haughey in June 1988 that "I do not know what to do about the border".

Any move towards a united Ireland would spark "the worst civil war in history", she said, which "would spread to the mainland".

That would shatter Britain's global position, not least in relations with the US with its more than 30 million strong Irish-American population.

The British ruling class today would have no fundamental objections to a united Ireland. But the results of their poisonous legacy cannot be wished away.

The 1998 Good Friday agreement, establishing a power-sharing Assembly in the north, contained but also

institutionalised sectarian divisions which are still reflected in daily life.

There are more permanent 'peace walls' than before 1998 and the proportion of children in integrated primary schools is only up from 3% in 2000 to 5.8% (in 2018).

But Catholics now hold nearly half the jobs in both the public and private sectors, with the majority of workplaces now mixed. And it will be the impulse for working-class unity against the interests of the bosses that holds the key to the future.

How else, for example, could the fears of Protestant workers of what a change in constitutional arrangements could mean for their livelihoods be answered except through a militant assertion of working-class interests against the capitalists?

History has shown what is possible and a further glimpse was seen during the 2021 riots when bus drivers, united across sectarian lines, walked out when they and their colleagues were threatened.

The fact that in the recent elections to the Assembly one-third of voters did not vote and one in six of those who did voted for anti-sectarian parties also shows the potential for building workers' unity through a non-sectarian and cross-community working-class party.

Trade union solidarity with Sri Lankan workers

Socialist Party members successfully moved the following motion at Unison's International Committee on 19 May in solidarity with the mass movement in Sri Lanka. The Socialist encourages other union bodies to do the same.

Unison sends its solidarity to the trade union coordinating committees that organised the Hartal (general strike) on 6 May in Sri Lanka and continue to take strike action.

This action follows protests that have taken place over the year, particularly by young people against food price rises and shortages, fuel shortages, power outages and shortages of medical supplies. This is a result of many years of neoliberal economic policies by successive governments, which were taken at an increased pace by the corrupt Rajapaksa regime. One of the effects of the Hartal was the forced resignation of Mahinda Rajapaksa as prime minister.

We condemn the violence used against the strikes and protesters by the regime, including orders to shoot to kill. Some of this violence is directly organised by supporters of the Rajapaksa regime, mobilising hooligan elements to attack rallies and demonstrations. This has caused uproar across Sri Lanka. We oppose the strict curfew imposed by the

government which is restricting the right to organise.

Since the successful Hartal, more action has been proposed and is taking place involving a variety of trade unions including all-out strikes. We give full solidarity to those actions. It is essential that the trade unions take decisive action to end the suffering faced by the majority of the population. Trade union action can ensure the solidarity and unity of the movement.

The replacement prime minister, Wickremasinghe, has a history of using brutal repression. His solution is to turn to the International Monetary Fund for loans to bail the government out of this economic crisis. This will only lead to further neoliberal measures that would further weaken the economy and increase the debt burden, increase wealth inequalities and poverty. Far from solving the crisis, it will lead to future struggles of workers and young people.

We support the protests in the UK in support of the protests taking place in Sri Lanka. We note that Tamil Solidarity, to whom we are affiliated, has called demonstrations in support of the protests and against the attacks by the regime.

We agree to make contact regarding any further actions they may call. We also agree to make direct contact with trade unions in Sri Lanka with the aim of developing links in particular with public sector trade unions to develop solidarity during this crisis.



London protest in support of the movement in Sri Lanka TAMIL SOLIDARITY

What it's really like working in libraries

27 million books, 9,000 workers and 800 libraries cut by Tories

LIBRARY WORKER

Senior management's business, profit-driven outlook prevents us from providing the service we could. The closure of libraries during lockdowns appeared to add weight to management's argument, as only online library services seemed accessible.

But the decline in physical visits to a Leeds library during lockdown was offset by "postal and delivery services for members that [was] greatly welcomed and well used... and as lockdown has lifted, members have returned to the library".

Cipfa accountancy auditors blamed the decline in library visits "on the increasing paucity of stock held by UK libraries, which has shrunk to 73 million books. In 2008, it was over 100 million".

Discourage visitors

Now, management at my library say that any book not taken out since August 2016 must be removed and disposed of. If libraries reduce their stock, the likelihood that we have the resources visitors need is reduced, discouraging more visitors from using the library. Who could have guessed other than everyone who works in a library!

Far from adapting to the changing role of libraries, management policies contribute to fewer people using the service.

Public funding for libraries fell by another £20 million to £725 million in 2020. It previously topped £1 billion.

Almost 800 libraries have closed



since the start of Tory-led austerity. No wonder there were 226 million visits to libraries in 2018, compared with 315 million in 2009-10. And the number of paid staff in libraries went down from 24,000 to 15,300.

The need for ever-increasing profit drives capitalism and capitalists to commodify, cut and privatise everything.

Libraries remain one of the few places which provide free access to books, e-books, journals and

other sources. We are priced out of the alternatives. Without libraries, working-class people - already in insecure work, with rising costs and stringent limits on their time - would be further cut off from free access to knowledge.

Library staff don't just catalogue books, and monitor their issue and returns. We do the same for laptops and mobile phones. We provide IT support, and answer enquiries via email and over the phone. We

produce material for events and awareness campaigns, and more!

Libraries provide a safe place for visitors to quietly relax, think, and meet friends. We support visitors' mental wellbeing, and are on the lookout for signs of visitors with safeguarding issues, such as abuse. Students gather in our library as, in their own words, "there is nowhere else to go to hang out", and they are right.

Outside of work hours, librarians

have to do our own performance evaluations, all just to be paid £1,300 a month - barely enough to cover the rent of a one-bedroom flat where I live.

A colleague applied to management to get a reduced working week on the same pay to help a family member with dementia. Management initially responded: "Do you really need three people?" Our response: "I don't think senior management really knows what we do".

Management finally backed down. But they wouldn't hire anyone to fill the gap.

New tech

At a recent training day, we saw a video of another library created in consultation with its visitors. All the new technology hadn't been acquired during a budget freeze, as we were initially told, but by getting access to a grant. If we were to get all this new tech, without the funds to hire more staff, who is going to help manage the visitor's interaction with it?

As long as workers have no say in how a workplace is run, so long as profit is put before everything else, including workers' needs and pay, work will remain what it is today: an alienating experience where the working day is taken up by cyclical repetitive tasks.

It doesn't have to be like this. When workers are organised together in unions that fight for their members, we are powerful. If library workers link up with communities opposed to cuts, we can stop the destruction of our service.

It's obvious why Liverpool booed William and anthem



Commemoration in Liverpool for the anniversary of the Hillsborough disaster EDMUND NIGEL GALL/CC

ALAN STEWART WAKEFIELD

At the recent FA Cup final, Liverpool football fans booed and barracked the reigning monarch's eldest grandson, William Windsor, as he was introduced to the teams. There was further booing and jeering during the national anthem.

The political reaction was predictable. The House of Commons speaker Sir Lindsay Hoyle said it was

"shameful". Former Tory culture secretary Karen Bradley described it as "totally unacceptable". And pompous Liberal Democrat leader Sir Ed Davey claimed the fans didn't represent their club.

Yet the reasons for Liverpool fans' action are clear.

In the 1980s, the Tories spoke of the "managed decline" of Liverpool. Closures were allowed and mass unemployment followed. When a Militant (now Socialist Party)-led

socialist city council fought back with social investment and house building, there were prolonged clashes with the Margaret Thatcher government in Westminster.

Then there was Hillsborough in 1989. 97 Liverpool fans died in the crush.

The Tories and the media slandered Liverpool fans in the aftermath. Police incompetence was covered up.

It was only after campaigning by relatives and the wider community that the truth emerged. However, despite public inquiries and inquests, no one was successfully prosecuted.

Boris Johnson wrote in 2004 that Liverpool had an "excessive predilection for welfarism". Liverpoolians had a "peculiar and unattractive psyche". And they "wallowed in" their "victim status".

Little surprise then that the Tories are loathed on Merseyside. And little surprise that royalty are also despised. Liverpool fans reject the British establishment's born-to-rule ideology, its privilege and false talk of 'national unity'.

WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?
editors@socialistparty.org.uk

Assange faces extradition as US state seeks revenge

CATHERINE CLARKE SOUTHAMPTON WEST SOCIALIST PARTY

The fate of Julian Assange lays in the hands of home secretary Priti Patel, unless further legal proceedings succeed in delaying the Wikileaks founder's extradition to the US further.

Assange faces espionage charges in the US, for the 'crime' of publishing classified documents detailing US and UK horrors during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Assange's Wikileaks platform published the documents supplied by former US intelligence analyst and whistleblower Chelsea Manning in 2010.

If Patel decides to send Assange to the US, it will bring to an end his three-year incarceration at Belmarsh high security prison, despite having not been convicted of a crime. Prior to his incarceration, Assange had spent seven years in London's Ecuadorian Embassy to escape being

sent to Sweden on rape charges - investigations which have since been dropped.

If extradited, Assange will be prosecuted in Virginia, and face a jury selected from a population where 80% work at either the nearby Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and National Security Agency (NSA) headquarters, or in the Pentagon. The state has never lost an espionage case there. It is possible that he will receive a 175-year prison sentence.

The US state is hell-bent on revenge, assisted by the British state and others also implicated in the Wikileaks revelations. The name of the game is a concerted effort to deter other journalists from following Assange's example.

The capitalist states want to ensure a truth teller can never be freely allowed to publish the truth about our decaying capitalist system that has nothing left to support its goals but endless war and austerity.

Mob killing of student for 'blasphemy' indicates danger of descent into full-blown barbarism in Nigeria

PELUOLA ADEWALE

ORGANISING SECRETARY, DSM (CWI NIGERIA)

The Democratic Socialist Movement (DSM) condemns the brutal and gruesome killing on 12 May of Deborah Samuel, a second-year student at Shehu Shagari College of Education, Sokoto, Nigeria, by her schoolmates, for purportedly committing blasphemy. She was said to have made a comment on the class WhatsApp group which allegedly denigrated Islam. As a result, she was lynched and set ablaze by an irate mob.

Her death, and other cases of mob violence across the country like the brutal murder of sound engineer David Sunday in Lekki, Lagos State, and of an army couple reportedly in Imo state, indicate Nigeria is on the verge of descent into full-blown barbarism, unless the working masses fight to take political power, end the current rotten, chaotic, failing system and bring about a socialist Nigeria.

There is presently an urgent need for the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and the Trade Union Congress (TUC) to begin to organise a series of mass actions in order to mobilise the Nigerian working people to fight around issues of deepening poverty, the rising cost of living, democratic rights, and anti-poor policies. This is the only way to ensure that frustration at the worsening situation of the country does not find outlets in ethnic and religious clashes and sentiments.

The identities of Deborah's killers, as well as those who enabled

the killing, well known because the actions were filmed and circulated on social media. In fact, it is incontrovertible that some of the perpetrators are students of the school and Deborah's classmates. Hence, we warn against any attempt by the corrupt police and the Nigerian state to deliberately arrest and prosecute innocent people in an effort to weaken the case and allow the real perpetrators to escape justice. We also warn against any cover-up.

We consider the charges of criminal conspiracy and inciting public disturbance put forward by the Sokoto state government against the two killer suspects laughable. These weak charges, and the boastful speeches of the 34 lawyers arranged to defend the accused in court, indicate that this may be nothing but a show trial to further justify the killings.

Unfortunately, this is not the first time that such an act has been committed, the murderers released or discharged following a similar show trial. For instance, sixteen suspects in the murder of a Christian secondary school teacher, Christiana Oluwatoyin Oluwasesin, at the Gandu secondary school in Gombe, were released without charge in 2007.

Christiana, a married mother of two, was brutally murdered after a Muslim student falsely accused her of having torn a copy of the Quran. A



CWI Nigeria members campaigning DSM



Deborah Samuel Yakubu, a second-year college student, was killed by a mob of fellow students in Sokoto, Nigeria after being accused of blasphemy



few months after, her murderers were subsequently discharged on the basis of "no case to answer".

In our view, the inability of the state to respond to these developments is one of the reasons why such occurrences have become common. This, on the one hand, represents another feature of state failure in Nigeria, and the capture of the state by competing religious interests, particularly in the northern part of the country that deploys state institutions in the service of religious interests.

Nothing on earth can justify the brutal killing of Deborah and similar victims. If the state fails to act when grievances are reported, people should organise to fight to make the state act, or to overthrow the state altogether, and replace it with one that is more responsive. Resorting to self-help to kill and burn a student who simply complained about the conduct of other classmates on a common WhatsApp group is barbaric, reprehensible and outrageous.

Since this unfortunate incident, we have seen efforts by some reactionary Islamic clerics, scholars, members of the northern ruling oligarchy, and others to justify Deborah's death.

At the same time, we have seen other forces, especially from the south, trying to capitalise on the situation to further deepen the ethnic and religious divides in the country, by spreading false propaganda videos on social media.

While recognising the need to respect people's religious sensitivity, no one deserves to be killed or persecuted for expressing their freedom of speech and thought.

In the same vein, we consider blasphemy an archaic and barbaric conception which seeks to annul freedom of thought and conscience guaranteed in Nigeria's 1999 constitution. For instance on 5 April last month, a prominent Nigerian humanist and atheist, Bala Mubarak, was sentenced to 24 years imprisonment by the Kano State High Court for blasphemy and public incitement. All Bala Mubarak did was renounce his Islamic faith and publicly acknowledge that he is an atheist.

Socialists hold that religion is a personal affair. This is why we demand the separation of religion from the state. Unfortunately, it is the Nigerian capitalist ruling elite which has contributed to the rise of religious identity by using religion as a means of control and influence-peddling through sponsorship of pilgrimages, the building of mosques and churches, imposing religious teachings and morality in schools, and integration of religious leaders

in the affairs of the state.

As far as we are concerned, while we believe the peaceful coexistence of all the peoples of Nigeria is possible, this cannot be achieved by allowing any organised religion to dictate the limit of freedom of thought and conscience. To this extent, we condemn the blasphemy laws while, at the same time, emphasising the need for mutual tolerance and respect for people's religious sensibilities.

Ultimately, only the united struggle of the working masses, cutting across ethnic and religious divides, can offer hope for a resolution of the seemingly insoluble crises facing Nigeria.

All the recent attacks and mob violence across the country point to a rapid descent of Nigeria into barbarism. Only the urgent intervention of the working masses through a programme of struggle and a mass workers' political alternative armed with socialist policies can salvage Nigeria.

As we got to press we received the sad news that Segun Sango (born Segun Aderemi) has died. Segun was the founding general secretary of the Democratic Socialist Movement (DSM), the CWI in Nigeria. The Socialist sends its condolences to Segun's family, friends and comrades.

● See socialistworld.net for an obituary

£1/£2 solidarity price

socialistparty.org.uk



the Socialist

Issue 1181

26 May - 1 June 2022

formerly **Militant**

CAPITALISM CAN'T FEED THE WORLD



PUBLIC DOMAIN AND EC/ECHO/ANOUK DELAFORTRIE/CC

FIGHT FOR SOCIALISM TO END HUNGER AND POVERTY

THEA EVERETT
SOUTH EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

More food is being produced than ever before, yet world hunger has been rising since 2015 and is now back to its 2005 level of 811 million malnourished people. Nobody should go hungry. But capitalism is failing abysmally at feeding the world.

From climate change-induced famines abroad to rising reliance on food banks in the UK, amid a rapid cost-of-living crisis, the food system is in crisis as the bosses' need to make profit is put above our need to survive.

The surge in food prices of raw commodities like oil, coupled with the gas and energy price hikes (which have meant the cost of cooking an oven pizza has more than doubled), is proving catastrophic for ordinary working people.

The war in Ukraine has only exacerbated the problem. Some commentators and politicians have argued the need for international cooperation. But under capitalism - based on competition for profit - this is impossible on the scale required. 26 countries currently have restrictions on food exports.

Under capitalism, food is reduced to a commodity, and it can act as one of the starkest images of inequality.

A third of the world's workforce is employed in agriculture: from farming through to factory food production, food services and finally the food hospitality and retail sector. But many of the people whose labour produces the food we need are barely paid enough to survive themselves.

Just four corporations own 90% of the global grain trade, and nations are morphing into super-importers and super-exporters of goods. Trade travels through just a few routes such as through the Suez and Panama canals, the Turkish straits, and the straits of Hormuz and Malacca, which connect many places of production with places of consumption.

If these routes become vulnerable or blocked due to war or other factors, food shortages are inevitable, like the current shortages of the world's supply of sunflower oil (Ukraine).

Add to this the issue of climate change, and it is without a doubt that food precarity is only going to get worse.

Farming techniques could play a role in reducing and reversing climate change, as soils contain twice the amount of carbon in the atmosphere. If farming methods such as direct-drilling and methods which reduce soil disturbance were employed on a wide scale, this could have a monumental effect on

carbon emissions. But these are less profitable.

It's paramount that we loosen the grip major corporations have on the food industry. We need large farming businesses, food processors and packers, wholesalers and major supermarkets to be brought into public ownership for the future of our planet and humanity. Only the organised working class have the power to do this.

For genuine cooperation and to eliminate hunger, poverty, war and climate destruction for good, we need the socialist transformation of society, to reorganise society to meet the needs of the overwhelming majority, not the billionaires.

WHAT WE STAND FOR: THE SOCIALIST PARTY'S MAIN DEMANDS ►►► see column on page 3



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ISSN 1366-9621