

PILE ON THE PRESSURE

NICK CHAFFEY
SOCIALIST PARTY SOUTHERN REGION

Under pressure, Rishi Sunak and Boris Johnson have found some cash to bail out families facing the sharpest rise in prices since the 1950s.

Their initial puny proposal was never enough, and this latest announcement still isn't! It will not halt the anger from boiling over as millions face impossible bills and struggle to buy food.

But this latest U-turn does show that the weak and divided Tory government can be forced to act.

Pressure has come from backbench Tory MPs who can see defeat looming at the next general election. New polls show the Tories would lose 85 key seats, including Johnson himself!

More importantly, pressure is also coming in the form of strike ballot victories, especially the vote of 42,000 rail workers in the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union to strike. It shows workers are not prepared to accept cuts to their living standards and can see the need to fight.

Other unions are now lining up to ballot, such as the Communication Workers Union and their members in Royal Mail and BT, alongside a wave of local strikes. Workers in the public sector, including teachers and civil servants, are set to vote on strikes in the autumn. The potential exists for coordinated national strike action that could fatally undermine Johnson and the Tories.

Tories split

Divisions have widened between the Tories. Johnson has been forced to U-turn again. Imagine what organised pressure could do to exploit these splits.

The Trades Union Congress (TUC), which brings together over six million trade unionists in Britain, has organised a demonstration on 18 June. If it is used to put out a rallying call for coordinated national strike action to demand inflation-proofed pay rises for all, including increases in benefits and pensions, pressure on the Tories will grow further.

Trade union members, especially through the organised left unions, can build support for such an approach, and force the leaders of the TUC to act. This needs to be linked to a socialist programme to make the 1% pay through nationalisation of energy, the banks and big monopolies that dominate the economy, as the means by which a decent standard of living can be provided for all.

U-TURN TORIES CAN BE FORCED TO PAY US MORE

• Demonstrate on 18 June • Organise for coordinated strikes

RMT: Nationwide rail strike looms

Resist pay cuts and job losses

JARED WOOD

RMT NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
(PERSONAL CAPACITY)

The government and rail industry bosses have been shaken by the tremendous ballot results returned by the Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers' union (RMT). It is no exaggeration to describe these results as historic. They were achieved in spite of all the obstacles placed in front of the RMT by the anti-union laws, government propaganda, and a dirty management campaign that involved appealing to members not to take part in the ballot in order to fail the turnout thresholds.

The massive 'yes' votes returned by members working for Network Rail and thirteen Train Operating Companies (TOC) show the massive anger of rail workers and their determination to defeat the government and bosses' plans to decimate the industry.

The government and bosses are using Covid as a pretence to introduce flexible working and job cuts. They have formed a group called the Rail Industry Recovery Group (RIRG). This group has been discussing the bosses' agenda, including massive job cuts and a reorganisation based on flexible working. RMT insisted that pay and a no compulsory redundancy agreement be included in talks. They were included, but the employers have offered nothing.

Having endured two years of pay freeze, and with the threat of mass job cuts and the destruction of terms and conditions, members have returned massive 'yes' votes. In Network Rail, 90% of members voted to strike on a 70% turnout. Similar votes were returned on several TOCs. Every one of the TOCs achieved a legal strike mandate too, apart from GTR (Govia Thameslink) where RMT fell just five votes short of the 40% threshold. RMT is to reballot these members.

The RMT national executive will now consider reports of any responses by the employers before deciding on dates for strike action. It is essential that members' demands on pay, jobs and conditions are addressed.

The movement into strike action of these members, numbering over 40,000, opens up the opportunity to coordinate action with strikes already being taken by RMT members on London Underground.

The RMT National Executive will be looking at further strike dates on both London Underground and on the national rail network. The possibility of a national rail strike which included the London Underground is now absolutely real.

Such a strike would demonstrate the importance of our rail network. The Tories are crying that rail is too important to allow workers to strike. They are threatening further legal restrictions on the right to strike

including legally enforceable minimum service levels. RMT General Secretary Mick Lynch has quite rightly threatened a ferocious response to any such attempt.

Of course, the rail network is of huge strategic importance, and that is why it should not be left to be exploited by spivs dishing out dividends to billionaire owners. We need a renationalised and publicly owned rail system run as a public service.

But as the experience of Scotrail shows, nationalisation alone is not enough. RMT members are balloting to strike after a derisory 2.2% pay offer, despite the franchise having been taken over by a Scottish government-owned body from April. We also need to fight for full funding and democratic workers' control.

Run democratically, and not in the interest of profit, any spare capacity from an easing of passenger demand following the pandemic can be used to provide less crowded, improved passenger services, and to get freight off the roads and onto electric trains.

RMT will face an onslaught from the government, which wants to teach the trade union movement a lesson and roll out post-Covid austerity as their solution to a cost-of-living and broader economic crisis. The whole movement must support the RMT in this fight. Pay cuts, job losses and flexible working must be defeated in the rail industry and beyond.



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London Underground workers strike for pensions, jobs and working agreements

RMT members on the Tube took rock-solid strike action on 1 and 3 March after London Underground refused to abandon pension attacks, job cuts and flexible working proposals on London Underground stations.

Further strikes are inevitable unless assurances are given that pension attacks identified in the recent misnamed 'Independent report' are shelved. The report, outrageously compiled by the former TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber, presented management with a list of potential attacks on pensions that could reduce the value of future accruals by around 30%.

In addition, RMT is demanding that no jobs are cut and that agreements, covering rostering and other terms and conditions, are not changed unless agreed with the union.

Management's attacks on Tube workers are being driven by demands

from the Labour mayor, Sadiq Khan, and the Tory government for savings of £500 million a year. The mayor has agreed to make Transport for London self-financing, an impossible dream that has ended up with him adopting a policy that he has called 'managed decline'.

RMT members on the Tube are not prepared to see their network decline year on year, and will fight for a proper funding arrangement that protects the service provided, and guarantees their pensions, jobs and conditions.

City of London bonuses are back at record levels. There is no excuse to starve London's transport network of funds.

Every trade unionist in London should be demanding that the government reverses its policy of self-funding for public transport and an end to the disastrous policy of managed decline. Passengers and Tube workers deserve better.

Tories prepare for class war escalation, union leaders must act



WHAT WE THINK

Tory chancellor Rishi Sunak's screeching windfall tax U-turn was a vain attempt to cut across growing anger at falling living standards, and the mass protests that could result. As even the right-wing Sunday Times pointed out, however, the amounts offered "won't touch the sides of this crisis". For example, "By autumn, Ofgem expects the energy price cap to stand at £2,800 - £1,500 higher than at the beginning of the year. So for millions of working households, an extra £400 is a plaster, not a painkiller."

We urgently need the trade union movement to lead the kind of struggle that the Tories rightly fear could force them out of office: focused on a serious fight for a £15-an-hour minimum wage and for pay rises across the board that, at least, match real inflation. These demands should be combined with others, including the nationalisation of the energy companies under democratic workers' control.

TUC demo

There are currently 6.6 million trade union members in Britain, a potentially very powerful force, and a serious campaign on these issues could win millions more. The TUC demo on 18 June to 'demand better', if organised on this programme, has the potential to be huge, and could act as a springboard for the kind of coordinated strike action that is needed.

There is another demand that needs to be emblazoned on the banner of the TUC demo. It should declare complete solidarity with the struggle of the transport workers' union, the RMT, and pledge to mobilise against any attempts to introduce new anti-trade union laws, or use the existing ones to block strikes.

The RMT is in the frontline of the struggle against inflation austerity. As reported opposite, its members have delivered huge 'yes' votes for strike action on pay, jobs and conditions, first on London Underground, and now nationally. Immediately, the government responded to the national ballots by threatening a new raft of anti-trade union laws to 'ensure minimum service levels' which, if implemented, would undermine effective strike action by rail and other essential service workers.

Frightened by the scale of the RMT's 'yes' vote, Johnson and Co have dusted off this proposal they first raised back in 2019, although

there have not yet been any moves to bring it into law. Nonetheless, this does not mean that the Tories' threats can be dismissed as empty posturing. The Tories know that the RMT is in the frontline of the battle to defend workers' rights and has already taken some measures to prepare to take them on.

The government's Great British Rail initiative was the biggest change to the operation of the railways since the Tories initiated privatisation of British Rail in 1994. While a confession of the bankruptcy of the profit-driven rail system, it was also an attempt to prepare for battle with the RMT and other transport unions by guaranteeing the income of the Train Operating Companies (TOCs) regardless of ticket sales.

A victory for the RMT would be a huge defeat not just for the TOCs and Transport for London, but for the government, and would be a major victory for the whole workers' movement and the fight against inflation austerity. Therefore the whole workers' movement needs to stand shoulder to shoulder with the RMT in its struggle.

In response to the threat of new anti-union legislation, outgoing TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady declared: "We will fight these unfair and unwelcome proposals to undermine unions and undermine the right to strike, and we will win." These 'warm words' are welcome but they



Alongside industrial action to defend our pay and conditions, the working class also needs a political voice

need to be accompanied by a preparedness to act, and to show that the trade union movement will not be prevented from defending its members by undemocratic and unjust laws.

When, in 2016, the last round of vicious anti-trade union laws was introduced, they passed without a struggle. The TUC leadership, including O'Grady, never went beyond 'warm words'. This time needs to be different. If the TUC leadership doesn't both act in solidarity with the RMT, and also to coordinate strike action against inflation austerity, then the left-led unions need to form a 'coalition of the willing' to do so.

The statement of Sharon Graham, general secretary of Unite, gave a hint of the kind of determined approach that is needed, when she declared, "If you force our legitimate activities outside of the law, then don't expect us to play by the rules." We are suffering the worst fall in living standards since 1956; the anti-democratic anti-trade union laws cannot be allowed to prevent an effective struggle to defend workers' rights.

Political voice

Alongside industrial action to defend our pay and conditions, the working class also needs a political voice. As Mick Lynch, general secretary of the RMT, has pointed out, Keir Starmer and the Labour frontbench have said nothing in support of the RMT dispute. Mick Lynch also pointed to the strikebreaking behaviour of Coventry Labour council, and predicted that more unions would disaffiliate from Labour, saying: "My union isn't affiliated with the Labour Party, but I see many other unions, general secretaries and leaders thinking: what is the point of this connection?"

Disaffiliation alone is not an answer, however. For the trade unions

to stand aside from politics would just leave workers with a choice between different brands of capitalist parties. Look at the question of the London mayoral election, for example. One of the major battles the RMT is facing is on London Underground, where the Labour mayor, Sadiq Khan, is dutifully implementing cuts in jobs, pensions and conditions of the workforce. Yet back in 2020, the RMT London Transport regional council, noting that "Ken Livingstone won his first mayoral election standing against the official Labour candidate", proposed "that Jeremy Corbyn be approached by the RMT and offered support should he be prepared to stand" in the mayoral election scheduled for May 2021.

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

That is an illustration of how the struggle against inflation austerity would be immeasurably strengthened by the trade union movement taking the steps needed to building a mass party of the working class, which would fight in our interests in parliament and in the council chambers. The RMT is affiliated to the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition – a small first step which provides a banner for trade unionists to stand in elections – but can play an even more critical role in the struggle for working-class political representation. A conference called by all those unions looking for a left alternative to Labour would be an important next step.

East Sussex bin strikers undeterred by arrests

Gary Palmer, regional organiser for the GMB union, and two other pickets were arrested in Hailsham, East Sussex, on Friday 27 May. Bin workers, employed by Biffa for Wealden District Council, are involved in a four-week strike to demand a decent pay rise.

The picketers were released, and Gary returned to the picket line on Monday, where again they were successful in picketing the bin depot. Gary reports: "I was instructed again by the police to move, Biffa had instructed the police to arrest us. We had been successful in turning away a vehicle at the depot and a stand-off for 30-35 minutes ended with the police filming us but moving away without making arrests."

"We are determined to continue this strike... We have announced a further two weeks of action and are receiving support and requests from other workers who want to organise and fight this cost-of-living crisis. We've got to seize the time, we've got to build the movement and show that the trade unions offer a way forward for our members."



Current TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady meets Tory chancellor Rishi Sunak and head of the CBI. We need fighting trade union leaders HM TREASURY/CC

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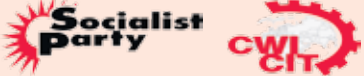
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"The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it."
Karl Marx

Tory windfall tax: Why only temporary? Why only energy? Nationalise to end cost-of-living catastrophe

IAIN DALTON

SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

After weeks of dithering, Rishi Sunak was finally forced to unveil a windfall tax or 'temporary levy' on the North Sea oil and gas producers' soaring profits. He says his 25% levy, with some loopholes for investments, will raise £5 billion.

But no sooner than it has been announced, the pitiful nature of it is becoming clearer: the offsets against investment probably mean less than £5 billion will be raised. In fact, subsidies already exist for such investments: tax breaks were given to these companies worth £3.1 billion in 2019-20 and £2.5 billion in 2020, according to the New Economics Foundation.

Inadequate Labour

But it also shows up how inadequate Labour's proposed windfall tax was; they only proposed to levy 10% and raise £2-3 billion! Just this year alone, BP and Shell are expected to make combined profits of £40 billion.

Moreover, the basic payment of £400 is just half of October's planned increase in the price cap. But even those receiving Universal Credit, due to get an additional £650, will still be worse off. By autumn the price cap will have risen by £1,500.

And that's just domestic energy bills. What about the costs of travel, with petrol prices skyrocketing, the much trumped 5p cut to fuel duty has not been passed on, and food prices climbing each week?

A temporary levy on one set of profiteers simply isn't going to cut it. It was even cheered on by the boss of Tesco, as if saying: 'Tax their profits rather than mine!'

Instead of letting all the capitalists rip us off, and then getting a few



A temporary levy on one set of profiteers simply isn't going to cut it



PHOTO: GARY BEMBRIDGE/CC

crumbs back off only some of the energy giants, we need control over all these vital industries: energy, fuel, transport, and food production and distribution. Along with housing and other utilities, they make up the vital necessities of life.

Why are we letting huge profits pile up while people are forced to go begging to food banks or pensioners travel all day on a bus to keep warm?

These industries should all be nationalised with compensation only to

those who need it. Publicly owned, and democratically controlled costs could be kept low and workers paid properly, rather than wealth being syphoned off into the bosses' bank accounts.

A socialist plan of production, based on the democratic public ownership of the top 150 companies and banks, could ensure an end to price rises, a decent home for all, and an end to the chaos of the capitalist market.

Queen's Platinum Jubilee: What's to celebrate?



PHOTO: GARRY KNIGHT

PAULA MITCHELL

WALTHAM FOREST SOCIALIST PARTY

According to the Roman poet Juvenal, the ancient Roman emperors aimed to placate their subjects with "bread and circuses." It would seem that the capitalist class in Britain is hoping for a similar effect with the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. Except that, with the growing cost-of-living crisis, falling pay and soaring food and fuel bills, they seem to have forgotten the bread!

No one would turn down an extra bank holiday. Many workers will be looking forward to a long weekend, spending a bit of extra time relaxing with family and friends. That is, those of us who work for employers who acknowledge the existence of bank holidays - a rarer and rarer occurrence these days.

What's more, it holds powers in reserve that can be used by the bosses when all else fails to defend the interests of capitalism. The monarchy can dissolve governments, call elections and even declare martial law. These powers were used when the Queen's representative in Australia removed the elected Labour prime minister Gough Whitlam in 1975.

That's why the Socialist Party stands for the abolition of the monarchy, and it's also why the capitalist class puts a lot of effort into trying to maintain social support for them.

As popular support for the institutions of capitalism has fallen following years of austerity and

struggle to get by, millions are being lavished on this four-day extravaganza of pageants and parties to 'celebrate' a particularly rich family.

The Queen retains popularity with a layer of older workers in particular. And quite a lot of people probably think this jamboree is harmless, even if they don't support it.

But there is actually a serious aspect to this Jubilee weekend. The monarchy is more than just an expensive sideshow. It serves a useful purpose for the capitalists, engendering a sense of nationhood that can help to paper over the gaping class divide.

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As popular support for the institutions of capitalism has fallen following years of austerity and

impoverishment, support for the royal family has remained fairly constant, for the Queen especially. But the events of recent years have substantially undermined that support. Most notably Prince Harry and Meghan's public falling out with the royal family, and the horrible sex scandals around Prince Andrew.

The Queen has been the most popular royal for a long time. She has appeared to sit dignified atop the wayward behaviour of the generations below her. But there's no getting away from the fact that her 70th anniversary means that stability is coming to an end.

The bosses, the rich and the Tories might hope this Jubilee weekend will burnish the royal family. But really they know that no amount of money spent this weekend will stave off the huge anger among working-class, young, and many middle-class people at the crisis they face.

So enjoy the weekend off, if you get one. Use it to recharge your batteries ready for the national trade union demo two weeks later. Or join one of our many campaign stalls around the country, fighting for the rich to pay for the crisis, not the working class.

Instead of a street party - try joining the Socialist Party!

What's changed?

In 1952, when the Queen was crowned, Britons lived under a regime of rationing. 70 years later, surely things have improved?

Well, the price of a pint of Guinness has gone up from sixpence, to £4.21 – had the rise been in line with inflation it would have been just £1.40, according to the Financial Times. Inflation adjusted, an average home would be just £42,310 - six times cheaper than today. And NHS prescription costs should have risen to £1.12, instead prescription charges now stand at £9.35!

So what has changed? Wealth inequality has grown further.

Want to work for the Queen?

To work in 'hospitality' at Buckingham Palace you can earn a "competitive" £7.97 an hour, with accommodation - £1.53 below the minimum wage, according to a job ad shared by Unite Hospitality.

£115,000

The estimated annual cost of cleaning windows on the royal family's 27 properties.



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.

to decent benefits, education, training, or a job, without compulsion.

- Scrap the anti-trade union laws! For fighting trade unions, democratically controlled by their members. Full-time union officials to be regularly elected and receive no more than a worker's wage. Support the National Shop Stewards Network.
- A 35-hour week with no loss of pay.

ENVIRONMENT

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

RIGHTS

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

MASS WORKERS' PARTY

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

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

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

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PCS conference agrees autumn strike ballot

Leadership under pressure from members and the Broad Left Network

A CONFERENCE DELEGATE REPORTS

The PCS Annual Delegate Conference met in Brighton 24-26 May. A number of conference debates and decisions confirmed the move to the right of the union's 'Left Unity' leadership.

Also apparent was the emergence of the Broad Left Network (BLN – the left group which the Socialist Party is part of) as the group challenging this trend.

The conference took place against a background of the cost-of-living crisis and the threat to cut 91,000 jobs in the civil service.

The 'Left Unity' leadership had failed to organise any pay campaign or opposition to government attacks in 2020 and 2021, and faced with an entirely predictable 2-3% limit on pay for 2022, they put off preparations for action.

Conference was presented with a choice between two alternatives on pay. General Secretary Mark Serwotka, for the national executive (NEC), argued that time was needed to prepare for a statutory strike ballot on pay, pensions and redundancy terms. He said it should start on 1 September.

Socialist Party member Dave Semple made the case for the ballot to start no later than 1 July. He pointed out that members faced the cost-of-living crisis now. An urgent response was required. The ballot should include jobs and office closures in addition to pay, etc.

In agreeing the 1 September ballot date, the conference accepted

the NEC's argument that more time is needed to win. An argument that would have had no force if the leadership had made preparations to take on the Tory attacks.

Despite differences expressed in the debate, Socialist Party members will be tireless in our efforts to win the ballot – and in holding the leadership to account.

The BLN's call for a collective response to Covid threats – which the leadership had failed to do – was well received. Sensing a defeat, rather than oppose the motion the executive pushed for it to be remitted and this was voted for by conference.

NSSN

A motion to affiliate to the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) was submitted in response to the decision by the NEC to end PCS's 16-year relationship with the NSSN.

From the platform, the national leadership made a disgraceful attempt to attribute to the NSSN entirely justified criticism made of the leadership by individual PCS members.

Conference delegate Katrine Williams, who is NSSN vice-chair, challenged the lie that the NSSN had ever attacked the PCS. She pointed to the key role of the NSSN, which is backed by nine national trade unions, in helping to rebuild the labour movement from the bottom up, by engaging with rank-and-file activists across unions, and the NSSN support for disputes.

The motion to reaffiliate was narrowly lost on a card vote, 35,171 votes

PCS members on strike in 2019, supported by the NSSN PAULA MITCHELL



to 39,170, showing support for the NSSN among PCS activists.

Political strategy

Differences in the debate on the union's political strategy centred around the BLN demand that PCS should give support in elections only to candidates who support union policies. Mark Serwotka falsely claimed, in persuading conference to support the NEC, that this would prevent the union from seeking support from MPs who did not always agree with PCS.

Marion Lloyd, in her contribution, rejected this nonsense. In the

successful campaign against the closure of her office in Sheffield, demands were made of all local politicians, but who the union chose to support in elections was a different matter.

Marion reminded conference that the union's policy was 'no to all cuts', and said the motion sought to restore the union's policy to its pre-Corbyn position.

Earlier in the conference, Serwotka said Labour's move to the right under Starmer meant no reliance could be put on politicians, and the unions were now the main opposition. His criticism would have had more force

had the logical conclusion been drawn that it is time to build a new workers' party.

The test for the union and its leadership in the months ahead will come on the issues of immediate and direct interest to members: pay, jobs, office closures, and perhaps also Covid. These are the issues on which Socialist Party members and BLN supporters will demand action from the executive.

This leadership resorts to consultative exercises rather than face up to its responsibility to lead. Well it's time to fight back, and this cannot be put off any longer.

Ballots and debates in train drivers' union: members are ready to fight

ASLEF MEMBER

With twelve to fourteen different disputes and ballots going out for strike, including my own workplace, there is a major build-up of industrial action taking place within train drivers' union Aslef.

In my area, West Midlands Trains, we are balloting over a pay dispute.

This is taking place alongside the fantastic ballot victory of transport union RMT members across Network Rail and the train operating companies (TOCs). Things are gearing up for a major battle on the railways.

For the biggest collective impact against a common employer, Aslef should coordinate action with the RMT.

Just like other many other workers, we have been called 'key workers' and 'heroes' throughout lockdowns and Covid.

But our employers refuse to put their money where their empty platitudes are and raise our pay to match inflation.

However it is important to stress that these upcoming industrial

battles are not only about an inflation-match pay rise, or a specific workplace agreement.

A battle is taking place between railway unions and the Tory government, who want to smash us, smash collective bargaining, and throw us down to the bottom of the scrapheap.

The Department of Transport is backing up TOCs and the freight operating companies (FOCs) in these attacks on the unions and railway workers, to weaken the collective strength across the workplace and to claw back what they deem to be 'lost profits'.

Members are ready for this fight, not just for our terms and conditions here and now, but for the future generations of drivers to come.

Affiliation

Aslef's week-long conference (the AAD – annual assembly of delegates) has recently taken place.

One of the most serious discussions was on political affiliation. Three separate branches had submitted motions calling for the union to disaffiliate from the Labour Party.

In the run up to conference, the union magazine was full of articles referring to the Labour Party.

This included a front page of the March edition which promoted the pledge of the shadow transport secretary to "bring railways back into public ownership".

But the article admits that Keir Starmer has "rowed back" on many of Jeremy Corbyn's pledges for nationalisation. He has not put any detailed position on ownership of the railways.

Although most motions were published before conference so members could read them, these political motions were not. The conference voted to remain affiliated to the Labour Party.

However, members are sick and tired of the austerity-lite 'alternative' being offered by Keir Starmer's leadership.

The upcoming industrial battles will be likely to have a big effect on Aslef members, including more members looking for anti-cuts and socialist ideas, and discussing how they can get a political voice that boosts their industrial fight.



LUXURY TRAIN CLUB/CC

18 June TUC demo: Union leaders must prepare for a serious fight

LINDA TAAFFE

WALTHAM FOREST SOCIALIST PARTY

Something's in the air. Masses of workplace strikes are bubbling everywhere - bin workers, bus drivers, education workers to name a few; and rail workers in RMT now threaten a national strike, the first for 30 years.

At long last, the Trades Union Congress (TUC) - forced to respond to the increasingly desperate situation facing millions of workers - has convened a national demo.

Will it successfully tap into the seething working-class anger at the spiralling cost of living and mobilise hundreds of thousands onto the streets? Will it use the opportunity to kick-start the serious class struggle needed to beat the bosses?

A letter from TUC leader Frances O'Grady, that I received as secretary of Waltham Forest Trades Council, announced a national demo, described as a "We Deserve Better" march.

Ok, at least some action here, but hmmm... not exactly the slogan to set the world alight; more than a ring of Oliver Twist about it. "Please sir, may I have some more?" Well, we know what happened to poor starving Oliver, he got a bash over the head with a ladle from the master!

I later received a bundle of TUC demo leaflets. The event had now become a "We Demand Better" march. Ok, a step in the right direction, a bit more anger, despite appearing to copy the despicable Boris Johnson's 'Build Back Better' catchphrase.

The leaders of the individual unions themselves must step up and inspire members to get along to the demonstration.

The approach of public sector union Unison leadership is to list seven reasons to be on the London demo. It's a day out to see the sights. Get some sun, as you can't afford to go on a real holiday.

Get physical - get out of your chair and move around a bit, stop being just a keyboard warrior. Find love - after all there'll be thousands there to choose from, including other Unison



The union leaders must step up and inspire members to come along

members. And finally, what a wonderful opportunity to get dressed up - in union colours of purple and green of course.

I didn't know whether to fall about laughing or just fall down in despair! The left-led national executive of Unison urgently needs to get a grip of this campaign.

Fortunately, thousands of active trade unionists in their workplaces and trade union branches will do their bit to persuade members to protest.

We understand that, as well as having a nice time, it's going to take more than a fun day out to beat this capitalist class of British bosses and the rotten Tory government.

Yes, we the working class most definitely do deserve better. We keep the wheels of society turning all the time, even during the pandemic, while the only job the super-rich have is to stuff their own pockets.

We also agree that we must demand better! But here's the rub. We must be clear what it is that we are demanding, not leave it hanging in mid-air. We must be clear on how we can organise together in our unions to achieve those aims.

What about raising clear slogans demanding:

- Pay workers an RPI inflation-proof pay rise
- £15 minimum wage now
- Introduce rent controls, freeze council and social housing rents

- Scrap student debt, establish free education at all levels
- Restore the £20-a-week Universal Credit uplift
- Restore the triple lock on pensions
- Take fuel companies into public ownership so all profits go back into the system and not into private pockets
- Nationalise P&O
- Drive private companies out of health and social care

Many workers - young and old long-standing union members and those who never even thought a union was for them - could be inspired by these aims to come along and then be active in campaigns to fight for these goals.

The TUC leaders must come to the demo armed with plans for the next stage: to build up co-ordinated action, to explain to the crowds what is coming next. Most importantly, bring plans to convene a conference open to all to discuss how we can link up, take the fight forward, win our demands and stop the billionaire class from ruining everyone's lives.

This is a serious fight. A national demo is a good start. Woolly slogans and half-hearted platitudes from the leadership of six million trade unionists will not cut the mustard. The bosses are preparing for a fight. Our side must be battle-ready too.

Come to the conference of the National Shop Stewards Network on 2 July to plan for what comes next.

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
- Text 'TUC demo' to 07958032071 with your name and post code



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Saturday 2nd July

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Workers fight the cost-of-living squeeze
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Steve Gillan, POA general secretary

Sarah Woolley, BFAWU general secretary

Coventry bin striker

www.shopstewards.net



Teachers on strike JAMES IVENS

The experience of casualisation in education

A TEACHER AND NEU MEMBER

“Teaching used to be a good job!” That’s what people say, when I describe the conditions of my workplace.

As a teacher of adults, I work in a sector which has been cut to the bone since the Conservative-Lib Dem government of 2010. The result is that contact time between students and teachers is reduced every year, while the number of short courses which are crammed into an academic year increases, in order to meet funding targets. This lack of funding is used as an excuse to cut pay and casualise staff.

There are very few full-time permanent jobs, and staff on temporary contracts are made to compete with each other for permanent jobs which come up. Hourly paid, sessional work is the norm, and staff hired on this basis lose out on holiday pay and sick pay. Casual contracts allow managers to delay offering secure, permanent jobs, and make staff on these contracts feel as though they are constantly ‘on probation.’

Teachers who willingly give up their time, to support students academically and mentally, are often disappointed by the lack of concern from



If I had a penny for every time “funding” was mentioned at work, I would be very rich indeed! Perhaps rich enough to compensate for my pay cut of several grand a year

management for their own wellbeing. Money always takes priority. If I had a penny for every time “funding” was mentioned at work, I would be very rich indeed! Perhaps rich enough to compensate for my pay cut of several grand a year.

Zero-hours and casualised contracts are austerity for austerity’s sake. They allow the employer to hold all the cards and further their own agenda at the expense of workers. This is why the Socialist Party stands for an end to insecure working, for the right to full-time work for all who want it, and a ban on zero-hour contracts.

THE GIG ECONOMY AND CASUALISATION

The unorganised get organised

ALISTAIR TICE
SHEFFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

The cost-of-living crisis, on the back of the pandemic lockdown, has drawn, and will draw, new layers of workers into struggle.

One such layer is gig economy workers, most of whom are classified as ‘independent contractors’, self-employed and freelancers. As such, they have no protection against unfair dismissal, or rights to redundancy pay, the national minimum wage, holiday and sickness pay, and pensions.

Just Eat delivery drivers in Sheffield, working for Stuart Logistics, are currently engaged in the longest gig economy strike in the UK at well over 100 days. They have been taking action since 6 December when their base pay rate was cut by 24%.

The gig economy is where workers are paid for completion of tasks or ‘gigs’, usually accessed online through a website or app, instead of being on a contract paid by the hour. It has expanded massively in the last few years. By the end of this year, 7.25 million workers are expected to work in the gig economy, three times as many as just six years ago. Nearly half of these will have a full-time job as well, so gig work is a second job; but for 30% it is their only or main source of income.

Most familiar are the 3.7 million takeaway food couriers, parcel delivery drivers and taxi drivers. But there are also nearly five million gig workers in online office work, legal, accounting and professional services, domestic and gardening services, and personal services such as hairdressing.

The Sheffield Just Eat couriers strike has been inspiring. 90% of the drivers are from Black, Asian or minority ethnic backgrounds, or migrant workers, often coming from repressive regimes such as Yemen, Somalia and Eritrea.

They are self-employed, so normally in competition with each other to get the best-paid gigs. This means solidarity is not organic to their employment. And they are employed by an app, with no access or communication with any physical boss.

All these factors militate against organising collectively. So far around 100 to join the Independent Workers of Great Britain (IWGB), a small independent union which organises in this sector, and carry out ‘targeted’ strike action for so long, is a huge achievement.

Targeted strike action means the striking drivers picket the outlets of

big clients of Just Eat, such as McDonald’s and Greggs, at key times to persuade other couriers not to accept or pick up deliveries on the Just Eat app. This is in order to put financial and bad publicity pressure on Stuart. This type of strike action has allowed the couriers to still work at other times, and even on other platforms, and so earn money, which has helped sustain the dispute over several months.

The strike has been combined with direct action, such as blockades of McDonald’s and KFC drive-throughs, and invasions of Just Eat and Greggs HQs and warehouses. In fact, the Just Eat UK Managing Director has been driven out of Sheffield twice by protests, as has the McDonald’s UK boss!

But Sheffield drivers realised from an early stage in the dispute that Sheffield couldn’t win alone, so acted to spread the strike. So either inspired by Sheffield or arising independently, the strike has spread to around 15-20 other towns and cities over the last six months.

From Chesterfield, West Yorkshire, Sunderland, Teesside, Blackpool and Kent, drivers have taken different forms of strike action at different times, although not usually sustained for a long time.

With the rising cost of living, especially of petrol prices, it is inevitable that there will be more strikes by couriers, especially as Uber and Deliveroo are cutting pay rates as well. In fact, some Uber Eats drivers joined Sheffield’s latest day of action on 17 May, and will be formulating their own demands to join with the Just Eat strike.

The Covid lockdown led to a big growth in gig economy workers. There will be an extra 2.5 million from when the pandemic started by this year end. The sector will probably continue to grow as

employers outsource more work to cut labour costs.

But the coming recession will have a big effect. As more workers are made redundant, many are likely to seek work in the gig economy. Increasing competition between workers would drive down earnings further. And recession will likely cut demand for many gig services, as people would have less spending power, due to unemployment and real-term pay and benefit cuts. This makes more disputes and strikes inevitable.

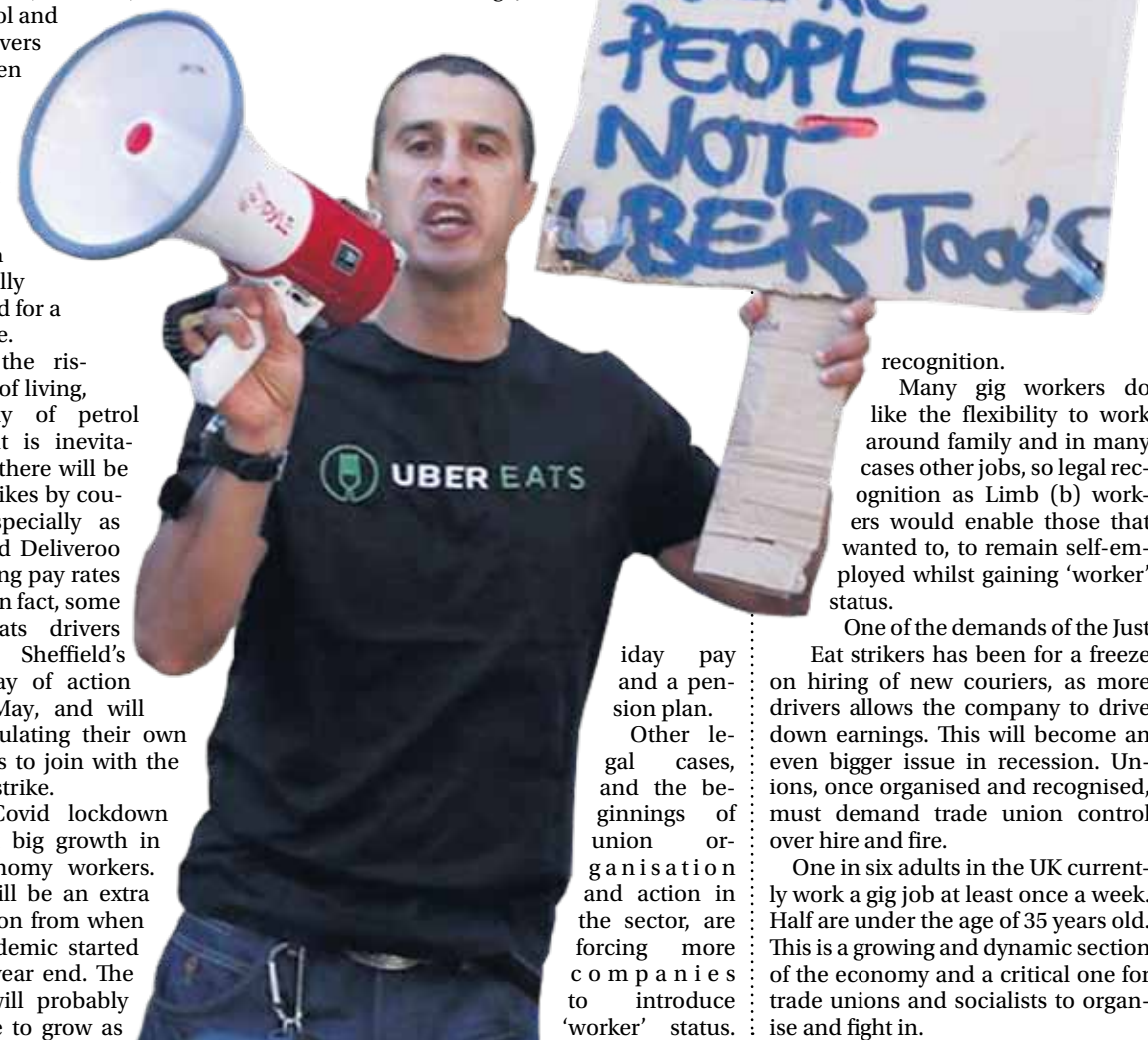
This raises important questions about trade union organisation and demands.

The Supreme Court finally ruled last year that Uber taxi drivers should be legally recognised as ‘Limb (b)’ dependent contractor workers, gaining certain employment protection and rights. On the back of this, the GMB union signed a formal recognition agreement with Uber, which included the national living wage (the Tories’ term for the minimum wage), hol-

But as the minimum wage and workers’ rights are so poor in the UK, it will require bold and innovative union recruitment campaigns linked to organisation and strike action to drive up wages and conditions.

It is of concern then, that the GMB now appear to have signed what the IWGB regards as a voluntary agreement ‘sweetheart’ recognition deal with Deliveroo, undermining the IWGB’s attempts since 2016 to force a statutory recognition agreement. This deal would still leave Deliveroo couriers without holiday or sick pay, and working for less than the minimum wage for their time at work.

All trade unions organising in the gig economy should demand £15-an-hour minimum wage (without exemptions), secure contracts, guaranteed hours, holiday pay, sick pay and union



recognition.

Many gig workers do like the flexibility to work around family and in many cases other jobs, so legal recognition as Limb (b) workers would enable those that wanted to, to remain self-employed whilst gaining ‘worker’ status.

One of the demands of the Just Eat strikers has been for a freeze on hiring of new couriers, as more drivers allows the company to drive down earnings. This will become an even bigger issue in recession. Unions, once organised and recognised, must demand trade union control over hire and fire.

One in six adults in the UK currently work a gig job at least once a week. Half are under the age of 35 years old. This is a growing and dynamic section of the economy and a critical one for trade unions and socialists to organise and fight in.



Unite Hospitality protest LONDON SP

ELECTED OFFICER IN UNITE BAR AND RESTAURANT WORKERS (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

Before the pandemic, workers in the hospitality sector were already facing huge problems. We are one of the most overworked, mistreated and underpaid set of workers. Now, following lockdowns, the sector is facing one of the worst recruitment crises.

The Office for National Statistics reported that between November 2021 and January 2022, empty roles in the sector were at a high of 178,300. This is an increase of 84,000 on that period in the previous year, and a 13.6% increase from the previous quarter.

And it’s only getting worse. I’ve experienced it in my own pub, where we can find staff but we always seem to be one member short. On the one hand, this presents a real problem as the staff that are already overworked will be made to fill the gaps. However, if we are able to organise, it puts us in a very strong position to win demands off the bosses.

This is happening, although still in an embryonic stage. Hospitality workers like myself are organising. The national Unite leaders in our sector are regularly coming together to map priorities for the industry and what is needed to achieve real change. For instance, in London bars and restaurants we’ve highlighted the success of coffee-shop organising in the US, and are looking to replicate that here.

Similar to the industry itself, the activists and lay officials are mostly young workers. Like me, they have

only known rampant neo-liberalism - privatisation and deregulation - and extreme austerity, and have been looking for an alternative.

Under the Labour leadership of Jeremy Corbyn, many saw avenues a fightback and got involved in the union to change our industry. Even though Corbyn was defeated in the Labour Party, this mood hasn’t dissipated. Young workers involved in struggle haven’t gone anywhere and Unite Hospitality is a great example of that. We are young workers who see real change is needed for us to live our lives.

That change includes an end to zero hours, £15-an-hour minimum wage without exemptions, safe travel, proper training, consultation on rotas, trade union recognition, and fair tipping policies! But most of all we need socialism!



We need a £15-an-hour minimum wage without exceptions, safe travel, proper training, consultation of rotas, trade union recognition and fair tipping policies... and most of all we need socialism!

Undercover Policing Inquiry

Police spying on an industrial scale

PAUL HERON
PUBLIC INTEREST LAW CENTRE SOLICITOR
(PERSONAL CAPACITY) AND HACKNEY SOCIALIST PARTY

The Special Demonstration Squad (SDS) was established in 1968. At its inception it was a secret unit of undercover police officers created to infiltrate, monitor and record the activities of the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign.

That campaign was targeted because of the mass demonstrations it had organised against the Vietnam war. The activities of the spycops did not end there, they developed and continued.

The latest tranche of hearings at the Undercover Policing Inquiry covered 1968 to 1982. There are five more tranches to go. This latest tranche, however, examined the role SDS managers played.

It is now becoming abundantly clear that SDS officers not only reported on political activity of the Marxist left. They also formed relationships with members that lasted for years, and tricked activists into friendships and sexual relationships.

Intrusive and personal

SDS officers entered the homes of activists, betrayed their trust and exploited them. Their reports were extensive, intrusive and personal - details of thousands of members, including their personal lives, physical appearances, homes, children, finances, jobs, holiday plans, weddings, sexuality, trade union affiliations, health, childcare arrangements, vehicles, studies, and opinions.

What is missing is reporting on issues of public disorder or violence, given that was the stated reason for the establishment of the SDS! Clearly, very quickly its remit changed as it became a vehicle for MI5.

The security services tasked spycops to collect information about what they considered 'subversion'. That was a signal from the secret state to collect and record every piece of



PAUL MATTSOON

information they could. SDS managers accepted that they should Hoover up information, no matter how personal or seemingly irrelevant.

When giving evidence to the inquiry, SDS managers tried to say as little as possible. They all denied that they knew officers, under their control, had formed sexual relationships. They justified the spying on children - some as young as 14.

The SDS's task was assisted by the

Counsel to the Inquiry - the inquiry's barrister, supposedly independent of the state and non-state participants. The inquiry's barrister was unwilling to follow up questions when an opening occurred.

They were willing to adopt the narrative of the police managers. They quickly formed a view that the racist National Front fought the 'ultra-left', with the police innocently in the middle.

Front and far right were not. It is remarkable the reasons the managers gave for this.

Barry Moss, SDS head in 1980, told the inquiry: "There was probably a policy decision at that time not to deploy anyone into the far right, because they were too violent, and we were concerned what the officer may have to do to prove his credentials." Geoffrey Craft, who led SDS in 1976 and 1977, explained that police had "other sources in the far right", so it was not necessary to place undercover officers from his unit in fascist groups.

On the far right, former police detective inspector Angus McIntosh said: "It was a very violent section, and it was often involved in crime, so to put an undercover officer into that would have been very, very difficult." So apparently if the far right is violent and committing crime, its best to leave the National Front alone.

Disclosed documents reveal that a chief superintendent directed senior SDS officers to meet with Lady Jane Birdwood at her home in 1968. She was a well-known far-right activist, lifelong racist and anti-Semite, and associated with the National Front and British National Party. Why infiltrate the far right if you can have tea with your 'excellent sources' on their lawn?

Blacklisting

The inquiry provides a clear insight into the close working relationship between MI5, Special Branch and SDS on what they call 'vetting'. There was a close and mutually profitable relationship between Special Branch and employers. Intelligence gleaned from SDS operations was used for blacklisting.

Pertinently, for many workers, this included banks, the BBC, government departments, and even the Post Office. They could ensure that people never worked again.

Once those lists were passed on, there was nothing to stop them being passed on again, and again, among federations of employers. The lists were continually updated by SDS.

The scale of monitoring was on an industrial scale. It was Stasi-like.

Activists want more information from the inquiry as to who spied on them and when. Individual files, currently held by Special Branch, must be released. We support that demand, alongside the inquiry being more accessible, public and accountable.

In 1979, anti-fascist Blair Peach was killed by police at a demonstration against the National Front. At the inquiry, we saw evidence that an undercover officer was warned not to go - most likely because the police knew the anti-fascists would be getting a pasting. They didn't want one of their own getting one too.

It is striking that although numerous socialist organisations were infiltrated and monitored, the National

OISIN DUNCAN
LEEDS SOCIALIST PARTY

Leeds University vice-chancellor Simone Buitendijk has finally agreed to meet with UCU and Unison unions. Students occupied the vice-chancellor's office for more than 100 hours, demanding Buitendijk meet with the unions.

In response to the UCU's marking boycott, the university secretary threatened to deduct entire salaries for any staff taking part. While clearly part of the vice-chancellor's duties, Buitendijk had refused to meet them, prolonging the UCU's 'four fights' campaign and Unison's struggle for a pay rise.

In a video released by the occupiers on Twitter, Buitendijk demonstrated

the arrogant attitude of Leeds Uni management - unsurprising given their six-figure salaries. It remains to be seen whether the vice-chancellor will simply ignore what the unions have to say.

Nevertheless, this occupation provides an example of how students can unite with staff to fight for a fairer, more democratic education system. The next step is to build on the occupation, and the rallies organised in support, and convince more students to support UCU and Unison in their industrial action.

Socialist Students will continue to support these efforts, while making the case for a fully funded, democratically controlled higher education system that works for all, not just university managers and big business.

My experience as a first-time Wales TUC delegate



John Williams marching with Youth Fight for Jobs. John successfully moved a motion congratulating the campaign

JOHN WILLIAMS
CARDIFF WEST SOCIALIST PARTY

Between 24 and 26 May, around 200 delegates attended the conference of the Wales Trades Union Congress (TUC). I attended as a delegate from Cardiff Trades Council. As a young hospitality worker, I was keen to see what the trade union leadership in Wales had to offer. As a 26-year-old, by far the youngest attendee, I was slightly nervous.

Youth Fight for Jobs

I moved a motion from Cardiff Trades Council on youth employment rights, with demands such as scrapping zero-hour contracts, and a living wage for all workers, regardless of age. The motion also congratulated the Youth Fights for Jobs campaign, and was passed unanimously.

Unite called for congress to support the #getmethomesafe campaign, aimed at workers in the hospitality sector who have to get home at night, a safety issue for women in particular. A motion from Caerphilly Trades Council was passed, calling for the Welsh government to give NHS Wales workers a 15% pay rise and to recruit at least 2,000 new nurses. Cardiff's motion for the Welsh government to fully and permanently nationalise rail was also passed.

However, due to recommendations from the general council (Wales TUC's governing body), motions that



Wales TUC attendees get leaflets and buy the Socialist from delegates in the Socialist Party ALEC THRAVES

would put pressure on the Welsh government to nationalise the energy sector and buses in Wales were rejected. They said that there are currently negotiations between the Welsh government and the bus companies, and although public ownership was the "desired outcome", the motion would tie their hands.

On nationalising energy, they claimed that the Welsh government hasn't got the power to nationalise energy in Wales. Socialist Party Wales has always argued that the Welsh government should campaign for more devolved powers so they would be able to nationalise industry.

Socialist Party members and many others were frustrated at the running of the event. We were asked to vote on emergency motions that nobody saw as, by mistake, they weren't given out. The president tried to block Socialist Party member Alec Thraves from speaking to oppose the decision to not reopen the discussion,

but allowed him to speak after pressure from the floor.

The standing orders committee curtailed speakers, claiming we were behind time. But, amazingly, we then had a two-hour rally of political and trade union leaders, including Wales First Minister Mark Drakeford and TUC secretary Frances O'Grady. But the conference actually finished two-and-a-half hours early!

Undemocratic

Many delegates had prepared contributions that we weren't able to give. It's already difficult for young people, women, LGBTQ+, and BAME people to get involved in politics, and to effectively be told that our voices don't matter as much as politicians is a disgrace. In discussion with other angry delegates, we are proposing to complain to the general council about the undemocratic nature of the congress. It is now the position of the Wales TUC, for example, to lobby Welsh government for more investment in nuclear energy. This was passed with no proper debate.

Despite this, Socialist Party members had a good impact, selling over 40 papers. Listening to our contributions gave me even more confidence that we have the ideas to change society, and that there is support for more fighting policies. What's missing is the militant leadership to take the fight to the political establishment in Westminster and in Wales.



Crown Bevcan workers fight back

BRENT KENNEDY,
CARLISLE SOCIALIST PARTY

Workers at Crown Bevcan in Carlisle, which makes cans for the drinks industry including well-known brands Coca Cola, Heineken, Brewdog and Magners, have taken two days of strike action in May and are planning several more days in June over an insulting 3% pay offer.

The 70% vote in favour of strike action on a 70% turnout - for the first time since 1976 - was reflected in the upbeat mood on the picket line.

Members of Carlisle Socialist Party have stood on the picket lines, supporting the workers in their fight to defend their living standards during this cost-of-living crisis.

The strikes will impact day and night shifts at the factory, potentially leaving Crown Bevcan unable to fulfil its summer orders.

Of course, like all employers, Crown Holdings, which includes several other factories around the

country and in Europe, claims they "can't afford" the workers' modest demands - yet they made a profit of £32 million last year. This was a whopping annual increase of 29% and an increase of 47% in three years.

Unite General Secretary Sharon Graham has said: "Crown Holdings makes billions yet it expects its Carlisle workers to accept what amounts to a pay cut... Once again, business puts its greed ahead of workers' needs, rewarding shareholders while telling workers to take a pay cut. This is just not acceptable to Unite."

Rishi Sunak's £400 sop won't pay the bills. Forcing the bosses to pay up is the only way. A victory for these workers would give others locally and at Crown factories elsewhere the confidence to fight to protect their living standards too. We have put out the call to other trade unions and workers in Cumbria to give their support, and will be organising solidarity events.

Yorkshire bus strike

IAIN DALTON
SOCIALIST PARTY YORKSHIRE SECRETARY

Over 650 workers at five Arriva Yorkshire depots in Castleford, Dewsbury, Heckmondwike, Selby and Wakefield are due to take indefinite strike action from Monday 6 June, in the first strike action taken by these workers since 2016.

Arriva has offered just a 4.1% pay rise, far below RPI inflation of

11.1%. The drivers' starting salary of £9.78 is just 28p above the minimum wage.

Labour's West Yorkshire mayor Tracy Brabin was elected on a platform of taking back control of the buses in West Yorkshire. But instead of bringing them into public ownership and paying drivers decent wages, she has struck an 'enhanced partnership' with these low-paying bosses.

AREA	\$ RECEIVED	\$ TARGET	Q2: APRIL-JUNE 2022				DEADLINE: 30 JUNE 2022			
Eastern	1,718	1,200								143%
East Midlands	2,396	1,850								130%
South West	2,113	1,800								117%
London	4,258	4,600								83%
West Midlands	2,059	2,600							79%	
Yorkshire	2,011	2,550							79%	
Northern	574	750							77%	
North West	810	1,150							70%	
Southern & SE	1,595	2,350						68%		
Wales	1,437	2,300						62%		
Other	3,245	3,850							84%	
TOTAL	22,217	25,000							89%	

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Oisín (left) with Socialist Students at a protest in support of the unions and the student occupation

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How radical really is the Green Party?

ALISTAIR TICE
SHEFFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

Adrian Ramsay, the Green Party co-leader, claimed after this May's council elections: "The phenomenal results for the Green Party... demonstrate that people up and down the country are looking for a credible alternative to the establishment parties, and are finding it in us."

The Greens certainly scored their best-ever council election results, reaching a record-high 545 councillors on 166 councils. This follows on from a record share of the vote in last May's elections for both the Scottish Assembly (8.1% in the regional list seats) and the London Assembly (11.8% for the all-London list).

They lead a minority administration in Brighton, have equalled the number of Labour councillors in Bristol, and chair committees in a "collaborative" Sheffield council. Newcastle and Cardiff are now the only major cities in the UK without a single Green councillor.

The Greens have had 'surges' before. In the June 2011 EU elections they won 12%, and were the fourth-biggest party by vote share. In 2014-15, in the run up to the 2015 general election, their membership trebled to 60,000. And since 2019 and the end of Corbynism, they have enjoyed a steady and incremental increase in support.

With opinion polls showing climate change as an increasing concern across the population, especially among young people, and a political vacuum on the left as a result of Starmer re-Blairising Labour, the Greens are seen as a more radical protest vote than the Lib Dems.

But exactly how anti-establishment are they?

Looking at their manifesto and policies, there are many reforms

proposed that would improve people's lives that socialists support. These include: increased government spending on public services, the scrapping of student fees and debt, council house building and retrofitting of homes, an uplift in Universal Credit, promotion of renewable energy, and investment in green jobs.

Limited and vague

But many of their policies are very limited and vague on how they would be paid for. For example, they do not even call for a windfall tax on the energy companies (let alone nationalisation), a policy now even being implemented by the Tories. They called in 2019 for Corporation Tax to be increased from 19% to 24%, which is less than the 25% the Tories propose to increase it to next year.



In order to appear "credible" means that Green Party policies are constrained within the limits of the market-based capitalist system

Even on climate change, their ambitions don't rise beyond the international agreements arrived at, but not implemented, by capitalist governments.

Their main environmental demand is for a carbon tax on all petrol, diesel, shipping and aviation fuels. But without the necessary investment in and public ownership of

public transport, such 'green' taxes

and levies, as a means of trying to enforce changes in behaviour, can be seen as nothing more than a money-raising exercise, putting up prices and increasing scepticism about climate change.

Fundamentally, while they can be radical on policies to distribute the wealth created, they do not answer the question: who should own and control society's means of producing that wealth: the elite capitalist class, or the majority – the working and middle classes?

Such moderation in order to appear 'credible' means that Green Party policies are constrained within the limits of the market-based capitalist system, something they accept as permanent. Hence they supported remaining in the neo-liberal EU, and Green Parties in other countries have entered national governments with unsavoury right-wing parties. They have supported anti-immigrant policies in Austria, pro-military and war policies in Germany, and anti-austerity policies in Ireland and elsewhere.

And their record in local government in Britain is not much better. In Brighton, Greens first formed a minority administration in 2011, elected on an anti-austerity ticket. However they ended up implementing over £50 million of budget cuts, provoking a month-long bin workers' strike against pay cuts in 2013 (for which they were labelled "Tories on bikes!"). By 2015, Brighton was ranked 302 out of 336 councils for re-cycling.

The Brighton Greens formed a second minority administration in 2020, after the preceding Labour administration collapsed. Again, the Greens provoked another bin workers' strike in 2021.

In Bristol, the Greens have not been in power as such, but did take



PHOTO: EVELYN SIMAK/CC

seats in the cabinet of the so-called 'independent' mayor between 2012-2016 which implemented big cuts. In fact, the Greens were the only party with all their councillors voting for every one of his budgets.

Last year, the Greens did a deal with the Tories to become leader and deputy leader of Lancaster council.

Sheffield

In Sheffield in 2021, the Greens entered a 'co-operative' executive with three cabinet portfolios to prop up what had become a minority Labour council. They did not vote against, but abstained on a £50 million 'salami' cuts budget and the setting up of cost-cutting reviews into libraries, early intervention services and hardship payments.

In Sheffield, the Greens won their first council seat in 2004 and only had two councillors up till 2013. As part of not fighting the Tory government funding cuts, the Labour council had signed up to a £2.2 billion Private Finance Initiative deal for the Amey multinational company to repair and maintain the city's highways and street lighting. Under the mis-named 'Streets Ahead' project, Amey, with the support of the council, cut down over 5,000 healthy roadside trees, provoking a four-year community campaign of civil resistance, especially in the leafier middle-class areas of the city. While the Green Party did not lead this campaign, one of its councillors did engage in direct action and was prosecuted by South Yorkshire Police.

As a result, Labour lost votes with the Lib Dems and Greens making gains, the Greens rising to eight councillors by 2019, and 13 in 2021.

Launching this year's Green Party council election campaign, Sheffield Green Party group leader Douglas Johnson said: "This was the first time the Green Party has entered the election from a position of being part of

the administration (the co-operative executive) running Sheffield City Council. In doing so, we showed we can take responsibility for difficult decisions and not shy away from them" - ie £50 million cuts!

He went on: "It is important for the city that it remains in no overall control... (which) means that parties have to co-operate with each other... (resulting in) collaboration and compromise..." No ambition, not radical at all, and now part of the establishment!

Since, the Greens have entered a 'collaborative' council with Labour and the Lib-Dems in a new 'modern' council committee system. The budget crisis has forced these parties together into a 'rainbow' coalition to try to avoid blame and responsibility for the cuts coming. In joining the administration, the Lib-Dem leader warned of: "How serious the budget deficit is, how serious our reserve levels are... I kid you not there is a real danger of commissioners, appointed by a Tory government, [that] may come in and take over". And the Greens have signed up to this!

This drastically illustrates that for all the well-meaning local 'projects' and a superficially different 'style', it's impossible to protect workers' living standards and public services, let alone protect the environment from climate change, by getting into bed with the politicians who represent the interests of the banks and big business.

It may have some members who think they are socialist, but the Green Party is definitely not socialist.

As the editorial in the September 2021 issue of Socialism Today explained: "Without an explicitly socialist ideological anchor to resist the pressure to follow the logic of pro-market policies, or a class anchor, not having emerged as an expression of workers' political interests and their trade union organisations, the Green Party is not the alternative needed."

Are the Greens an alternative for workers and their trade union organisations? The Green Party candidate in the upcoming Wakefield by-election launched their campaign with a tweet promising a strong "Green voice in Parliament" for the "people of Wakefield", "rather than making the rich richer, or being controlled by the unions." Enough said.

During May's local elections, the majority of voters stayed at home unenthused by any of the main parties. Notably, for some looking for an alternative to Tories and Labour, the Greens picked up a number of councillors. And in Tower Hamlets, east London, Aspire won leadership of the council. But do these forces offer a real electoral alternative for workers?

Tower Hamlets Aspire: voters reject Labour cuts

Now build a mass movement to fight austerity



Tower Hamlets youth protest in support of a no-cuts budget in 2017 LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

HUGO PIERRE
TOWER HAMLETS SOCIALIST PARTY

Right-wing Labour mayor John Biggs was defeated in Tower Hamlets, east London, after unleashing eight years of austerity.

In hustings in 2018, Biggs proclaimed he was proud to be representing the fastest growing party in the borough. This was during the Corbyn surge and after the 2017 general election – where, despite having little or no backing from MPs and councillors, Corbyn's radical programme took Labour to one of its highest votes in history.

What Biggs failed to mention was that he was a co-signatory of a letter to Corbyn from Labour council leaders demanding no interference in the autonomous decision-making of Labour groups in councils. This was at a time when Corbyn and his shadow chancellor John McDonnell, feeling the pressure of a new and more radical mass membership, were considering whether Labour councils could act against cuts imposed by the Tories.

Biggs then presided over an effective 'one-party state' council from 2018. Its first act was to increase councillors' allowances whilst driving through cuts.

In a perverse parody of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition

(TUSC) position, Labour used the borough's substantial reserves to help implement his cuts programme. The council rolled back local reforms that had granted free universal home care and a local Education Maintenance Allowance when it had been cut nationally.

Nursery closures

Despite a major, successful campaign in the borough against closure proposals under the previous administration, Labour privatised nursery provision, knowing this would lead to a driving down of working conditions. Such was the petty nature of Labour's cuts, they even closed an incontinence laundry service that cost just £41,000 a year to run, among others.

In the ultimate act, during the first Covid lockdown, the Labour council sacked its entire workforce to rehire them on worse terms and conditions, facing resistance from a strike of Union members. Close to 1,000 local Labour Party members signed a letter calling on Mayor Biggs to reverse the attack.

The reforms that Labour has been busily rolling back were a product of the administration led by the previous mayor, Lutfur Rahman, who had split from Labour and won as an independent. But he was subsequently banned from standing for five years

by a single, unelected electoral court QC, without an opportunity to state his case.

Rahman said on his victory this May: "The people of the borough gave a verdict today. I was in the court of the people and they said... they wanted Lutfur Rahman and his team to serve for the next four years."

In his manifesto, Rahman's promises included freezing council tax for four years, extending free school meals to all primary school children, building 4,000 social homes, bringing privatised services back in-house, and seizing long-term empty properties.

In a policy first put forward by TUSC, Rahman pledged to use landlord licensing to control rents. He also pledged to abolish 'Liveable Streets' (traffic calming) schemes – a complicated issue which causes some division, mainly stemming from Labour's top-down and sometimes ill-thought-through imposition.

Tower Hamlets is a borough of massive contrasts. The financial centre in Canary Wharf masks the huge levels of poverty. The average salary is over £70,000 a year for workers commuting into the borough, but average household income of residents is £30,000, falling to £23,000 if housing costs are taken into account. Estimates put the proportion of children

living in poverty at the highest in the country.

Tory governments have reduced the central grant to Tower Hamlets Council by 50% since 2010 when Rahman was last in power. They have plans to reduce it further still. This gives his administration even less room to manoeuvre and implement reforms.

Establishment pressure

Without a fight to reverse this, it would mean the borough relying on income from council tax and its share of business rates. Finance officers estimate the council faces a deficit of £9 million this year and a further £30 million over the next two. So Rahman will quickly face establishment pressure and conflict in delivering much of his programme.

As well as the executive mayor's position, Rahman's party, Aspire, won a majority of ward seats. This gives them full control of the council's agenda.

In the past, the Socialist Party and TUSC worked with supporters of Aspire who are now councillors to draw up a no-cuts council budget, using reserves and 'prudential borrowing' powers. We see this as a strategy to prepare the borough, and particularly the trade unions and community organisations, for a mass campaign to force money from the Tories for local council homes, jobs and services.

However, as well as important reforms, Rahman's previous administration balanced the books by passing

on some cuts. But it faced opposition on this: joint trade union strike action and major campaigns against nursery closures. Unlike right-wing Labour, he proved willing to bend to that working-class pressure.

Disbarment

But the lack of a broader strategy and mass campaign opened the door for the attacks on him that led to his temporary disbarment from office by the capitalist establishment. They didn't see him as a safe pair of hands to run a borough with a fighting tradition. This is a key lesson.

Tower Hamlets TUSC doubled its mayoral vote in this election, even though it was still modest. More importantly there was significant interest, from those we could reach, in campaigning for our fighting programme.

Rahman stated he wants to run a council for the people of the borough. To do this, and have any chance of implementing his programme, he will need to take the fight to the Tories and mobilise workers in the borough.

He could start by organising a local conference, inviting trade unions and community organisations, to develop a strategy to win the resources this borough needs. This must be linked to a national outlook: to work towards a new mass workers' party that could bring solidarity to a fighting council and spread that fight, opposing austerity and fighting the cost-of-living crisis.



Newly elected Tower Hamlets mayor, Lutfur Rahman ADAM KASIM/CC



Brighton bin workers strike against a Green council in 2013 BRIGHTON SOCIALIST PARTY

Finland: Public sector strikes - still no deal

EDMUND SCHLUESSEL
CWI IN FINLAND

Workers organised in Finnish trade unions OAJ and JHL, and several smaller unions, concluded nationwide rolling strike action with a week-long walkout that closed schools and disrupted municipal services across the country from 3 to 9 May. The first national strike in 38 years for teachers, the core issue of the complex dispute was pay, as public sector workers sought to catch up to the private sector following years of low raises.

Nurses meanwhile, organised in the unions, Tehy and SuPer, continued their dispute separately from the other unions. The nurses' unions called off their strike after a three-week walkout when the government threatened legislation to force them back to work. The nurses have switched tactics, and their unions now call for mass resignations instead of strikes.

Municipal workers and teachers were successful in winning an improved pay offer that will catch pay up by 1% per year over five years. These gains for welfare officers, teachers, and others would still fall well short of the estimated 10%-12% necessary to match private-sector salaries and fight the flow of workers away from these areas. But with the nurses' continued rejection, more strikes are now likely after the school holidays end in August.

Public sector workers ready

After two-and-a-half years of working under the difficult, stressful circumstances of Covid, public sector workers are ready for action. Indeed, thanks to workload and pay issues, they have been ready to strike for years. But OAJ's conservative leadership has preferred to play the role of a 'service union' instead of representing its members effectively. This spring saw the election of a new board for the union that, while hardly radical, sought to prove that it

has continued worth to its members. Members readily answered the call in early May, with 90%-95% striking in most workplaces.

Even then, hesitancy and the unwillingness to form a truly united front have hampered the unions' fight. The teachers' tactics were telegraphed by weeks of localised two-day strikes. Meanwhile, the nurses' decision to forgo strikes and coordinate with JHL and OAJ, can only be viewed as a mistake - especially as those nurses most likely to heed the unions' call to resign will be the most dedicated and established representatives. The despicable threat of a new law forcing nurses to work should have been challenged - both through legal means and through outright defiance by all public workers in a public sector general strike.

Nevertheless, three years of Social Democratic-led government have exposed deep breaches of the unions from their traditional parties. Education minister and Left Alliance leader Li Andersson would not give even words of support to the teachers. Labour minister and Social Democratic MP Tuula Haatainen used her cabinet powers to push the JHL and OAJ strike back two weeks, claiming the proposed dates were "too disruptive." The whole government, after weeks of arguing about public finances, could not stand the strain of the unions' demanded pay rises, yet they found billions of euros for supplementary defence spending just days after OAJ and JHL signed their pay deals!

It is clear that unions and their traditional parties now stand on opposite sides of a fundamental social struggle. The SDP and Left Alliance workers are united with the rich in opposing even mild improvements in workers' conditions. Finland's trade unionists and socialists - organisers for democratic workers' control of the economy - should launch a project for a new mass party of the working class, an internationalist and fighting force against capitalism and all forms of oppression.



JHL pickets ORJO PATTANIEMI

'Independents' breakthrough in Lebanese elections shows possibilities of change



Protests in Lebanon November 2019 KAEFORA-ENWIKI/CC

IAIN DALTON

On 15 May, Lebanese voters went to the polls in one of the strangest elections in recent years. The unprecedented social collapse in Lebanon over the last few years was the background to this election. Inflation is now running at over 200% and unemployment has tripled over the last couple of years. Neither has Lebanon escaped the fallout from the Russian invasion of Ukraine, with 80% of the country's wheat being supplied from Ukraine.

A significant feature of the elections was the official withdrawal from the race of the Future Movement, the Sunni-based electoral vehicle of the Hariri dynasty, whose leader, Saad Hariri, had been the prime minister at the head of a 20-strong parliamentary bloc at the last election. But others, including the incumbent prime minister, did not put themselves up for election.

Despite such withdrawals, a record 1,043 candidates stood in the elections. Following the 17 October 2019 uprising against the austerity measures of the then Saad Hariri government, and the mass protests that erupted after the tragic Beirut port explosion demanding accountability for the disaster, there were high hopes of seeing those outside the traditional sectarian, religious-based parties and blocs elected to parliament.

An opinion poll conducted in December 2021 reported that almost 45% of Lebanese voters wouldn't vote for the same party they had in 2018, while 40% were prepared to either vote for independents or supporters of the 17 October uprising. In particular, a number of parties had been formed explicitly on anti-sectarian lines, or on the basis of

support for the 17 October uprising.

Officially, 13 independents were elected, although not all of them were genuinely independent of the existing blocs and parties. For example, several independents had links to Hariri's Future Movement, and a 17 October party, Taqqadom, that won two seats, stood on lists with the Kataeb Party, which emerged from one of the most vicious sectarian militias from the civil war.

But the independents who won also include Melham Khalif, who in November 2019 won the Beirut Bar Association elections as an independent. Perhaps, more promisingly, they also include Ibrahim Mneimneh, of the Beirut Resists campaign, had previously stood unsuccessfully for election in 2018 on the back of his involvement in the 2015 Beirut waste protests.

In a press speech after his election, Mneimneh emphasised opposition to sell-offs and attacks on living standards and rights, and concluded with the words: "The real battle has started today because elections are one of the frontiers against this regime. Our next appointment is in municipalities, unions, universities, and streets until we tear down the system and get back our present and future."

Real battle starts soon

That real battle will start soon, as the incoming government will try to steer through parliament the eight conditions placed on Lebanon for a new IMF bailout agreed in April. These include lower state spending, increased taxes, privatisations, and debt reductions, with much of the burden falling on the poorest sections of Lebanese society.

Carrying this out will be harder given the more unstable parliament

which has been elected, with the Hezbollah-Amal-Free Patriotic Movement bloc losing its parliamentary majority, but the opposing Lebanese Forces party not holding a majority either. Under Lebanon's constitution, the key positions in the state and parliament are each allocated to specific religious groupings like Sunni Muslims, Shia Muslims and members of different Christian denominations, a system which was implicitly rejected by the mass protests of 2015, and those between 2019 and 2021.

Thus, Nabih Berri, the outgoing speaker of parliament, and leader of Amal, will face a re-election vote, which Lebanese Forces and other 'Christian' groups in opposition will vote down. However, as the position has to be held by a Shia (Amal and Hezbollah hold all the Shia seats), he will likely be elected by default. Other more contested elections will take place for the deputy speaker (a Greek Orthodox) and the President (a Maronite) who have to also be elected by parliament.

Key to stopping the proposed attacks on the Lebanese masses will be the struggles of Lebanese workers, and their trade unions, alongside other downtrodden layers in Lebanon, such as the large numbers of refugees from various conflicts in the region. If those genuine independents base themselves on this layer, even one or two clear voices in parliament could act as a tribune for the kind of mass struggles needed to defeat these attacks on the Lebanese masses. This could set the stage for rebuilding the workers' movement in Lebanon and its own mass party which could begin the outline of a socialist alternative to the misery that capitalism has inflicted on the country.

2022 Australian elections A change in governing parties but much the same politics

JOHN GOWLAND
MILITANT LEFT (CWI AUSTRALIA)

The backdrop of the Australian federal elections centred around two issues: climate change and falling living standards.

Australia has had a continued growth rate for the past 30 years, mainly on the back of mineral exports to China. In the last few months, there has been a marked fall of living standards, with prices rising much faster than incomes.

As of today, the two major parties in Australia are the pro-capitalist Liberal Party with 35.8% (56 seats) and the pro-capitalist Australian Labor Party (ALP) on 32.8% (74 seats), which has just enough to have a majority.

ALP Prime Minister Albanese is claiming five non-aligned MPs who will not vote against Labor. The remaining third of votes went to independents and, less so, the Greens.

There will be small shifts in some of the final percentages, as late votes are counted, but they will not affect the outcome. The ALP will govern quite easily with the support of the Greens, and some of the 'teal independents'. The teal independents are effectively Liberals, both 'blue and green', because they campaigned on the environment.

This is not a very democratic system of deciding on a government. The ALP got fewer actual votes percentage-wise than the Liberals. The Greens got 12% of the vote but only three seats, and were the only party to increase their vote over the last

election. Both the ALP and the Liberals lost votes compared to the last election - the ALP by a slight margin but the Liberals by 5.6%.

The ALP and many of the right-wing union leaderships have ossified into unapologetic pro-market positions. They suffer from myopia, unable to envision a society that is truly democratic. They do not concretely pose the radical socialist measures needed to actually increase equality or lift the poor out of a world of debt and home insecurity. The word 'socialism' never crosses their lips, and they accept their role is only to 'modify' Australian capitalism.

Capitalism of any country cannot be modified to suit the majority; it is a predatory economic system where the rich reap ever more profits at the cost of falling living standards 98% of people. As Karl Marx pointed out, capitalism is a vampire, sucking every last drop of blood from the masses.

The ALP has long since joined the Liberal Party as the gatekeepers of Australian capitalism - even refusing to challenge Australia's 131 billionaires to pay their taxes! ExxonMobil Australia booked a total of \$15.6 billion and paid not one cent in income tax.

There is fundamentally no difference in policy between the parties. The small differences in policy statements let Labor squeeze a victory, although the media are running the story that it was a significant victory for Labor.

One of the biggest changes for Labor was its

War, cost-of-living crisis, low pay, climate change, housing crisis, racism, violence against women, working-class political representation,

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socialistworld.net



New Australian prime minister Anthony Albanese INTERNATIONAL TRANSPORT FORUM/CC

support from female voters, who supported the party's commitment to making childcare more accessible, enabling more women to work. There was also a commitment by Labor to support wage increases to fall in line with price rises of around 5% rather than stick to the present 2.5% yearly wage increases.

Cost-of-living crisis

A large part of the rising cost of living is related to mortgages and the ever-growing costs of buying a home. House prices are now so high that it is too high for young working couples to get a mortgage. Both sets of parents are now helping young couples pay the deposit and help with the mortgage repayments. For decades, financial advisors have encouraged Australian families to buy a second home for their future. Every interest rate rise means higher mortgage repayments.

With inflation increasing, the reserve bank has just raised interest rates and is warning of further two more increases in the next year. This would have a devastating impact

on families unable to continue to pay their mortgages. This is at a time when all the big four banks are raking in huge profits, expecting to report over A\$11 billion in the coming weeks. Australia's richest people have been announced for 2022 by The Australian's 'The List'. With a combined net worth of A\$520 billion, it has been record-breaking for 250 of Australia's most wealthy people, up from A\$470.07 billion in 2021.

The third policy commitment by Labor was to tackle climate change more vigorously. Not one of these three policy commitments was explained in detail. There are no costing estimations as to how these changes could be implemented. The Labor government could pass laws that forced the increase of wages but there is evidence to show they will do this. In fact, all previous and existing Labor national and state governments have restrained wages to 2.5%. So, there are no concrete plans to carry through any of these three major policy changes.

Nonetheless, these policy proposals are the most relatively 'progressive', as small as they are, since the Gough Whitlam Labor government in the early 1970s which was pushed left and made significant reforms.

US imperialism in the region

The Australian ruling class, with the ALP as its vessel, still chooses

to support USA imperialism, even though it reduces the revenue Australia makes from China. China has, in the last two years, introduced some very high import duties on Australian goods. This has almost put an end to the export of wine and other foods and beverages, which were rapidly growing, to China. Some of these export businesses have found alternative markets but others have not.

For the first time in 30 years, Australian families are facing a nightmare of huge increases in prices of food and fuel, and mortgage hikes. And all with stagnating income.

Militant Left calls for:

- Renationalisation of the Commonwealth Bank (CWB)
 - Reduce deposits affordable to all
 - A massive construction programme of well-planned high-quality public housing
- These measures are desperately needed to end the housing crisis. But we also need bold socialist policies to end the cost-of-living crisis, environmental destruction, and dangerous militarisation in the region. Militant Left in Australia argues that this requires building a new mass party of the working class in Australia and fighting for real socialist change - a planned economy, democratically run and managed by the working class - to bring about fundamental change.

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the Socialist

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formerly **Militant**

THE RICH GET RICHER - MAKE THEM PAY £15-AN-HOUR MINIMUM WAGE NOW

REECE WILSON

The price of everything is increasing rapidly - except the price of our labour! Petrol has shot up over 30% just this year, bills are going through the roof, and there are a record number of billionaires.

Yet if we ask for a wage increase, we are presented with all manner of arguments against it. The Socialist Party calls for an immediate increase of the minimum wage to £15 an hour, without exemptions. We also demand wages automatically increase, linked to average earnings or inflation, whichever is higher.

If bosses say they are unable to pay it, then open up the books and prove it.

The cost-of-living crisis has made this demand an absolute necessity, but its implementation is long overdue. If wages had continued to rise at pre-2008 financial crash levels, we would be £13,000 better off by the mid-2020s, so our living standards have been decreasing for years.

Young workers will struggle to remember a time before the financial crash, but they bear the brunt of this decrease in living standards. We are less likely to be able to rent or ever buy a place to live and we are more likely to work in insecure jobs that pay minimum wage. On top of this, youth rates pay young workers significantly less than their older counterparts for the same amount of work.

At minimum wage, an 18-year-old now would receive £2.67 less per hour than a 23-year-old - that's a difference of £433.88 per month for a full-time worker! If you are under 25 on Universal Credit, you will get £69.60 per month less than someone over 25! That's why we have launched initiatives like Youth Fight for Jobs which have won the support of fighting trade unions such as the bakers' union BFAWU.

The pandemic showed to all, as clear as day, that workers make society run. Yet it is our lives that are getting harder while the rich get richer. The gap between workers and bosses has increased by £250 billion from 1980 to 2020 - it will have increased even more over the pandemic, when someone became a billionaire every 30 hours.

£15 an hour will not be freely given - we need to fight for it in our workplaces and on the streets. Join the Socialist Party and help us in this fight.

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



MARY FINCH

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

