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RMT STRIKES GIVE WORKERS CONFIDENCE

WE CAN FIGHT AND WIN ON PAY



“The last two weeks have been a game-changer as far as the trade union movement is concerned.”

These were the words of National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) chair Rob Williams when he opened its 2022 conference on Saturday 2 July.

Up to 100,000 marched through the streets of London on the Trades Union Congress (TUC) demo on 18 June. Three days later,

50,000 RMT members shut down the national rail network and London Underground.

All workers are struggling to keep their heads above water during this cost-of-living crisis. The bosses are floating on a sea of profits and bonuses, but they tell workers we should be grateful for a 2-3% pay ‘rise’, and thankful for a job, when inflation is nearly 12% and energy prices are rising by 100%.

That’s why a majority of workers support the RMT strikes.

Unite the Union alone has 300 disputes all over the country. And most unions have members taking action or moving towards it: British Airways check-in staff, hospital workers, bin workers, bus workers and more.

CWU has members striking in the Post Office, members who have just voted to strike in BT, and its Royal Mail members are balloting now.

Striking barristers outside the Old Bailey applauded the RMT banner when solidarity

was given to their action. Doctors in the BMA have sent a message of support to the RMT and are now threatening action on pay.

Rob said: “The strikes that have grown over the last year, and the crises within the Tories, are giving workers confidence that it’s possible to fight, to defeat the bosses and the Tories.

But the surest way to do that is to bring together workers across the private and public sectors in a joint fight on pay and jobs.”

Organise to strike together!

ORGANISE TO STRIKE TOGETHER! REPORTS FROM THE NSSN CONFERENCE pages 2, 3 & 4

“Privatisation has no place in the NHS”

Helen O'Connor, GMB regional organiser, spoke about the battles of out-sourced workers in companies such as Mitie, where workers at St George's Hospital in South London are fighting against privatisation.

“The NHS has been subject to cuts and privatisation for decades. Unless we organise now to defend it, in ten years' time we will not have a national health service left. Privatisation has no place in the NHS.”

GMB members working for Mitie at St Georges have taken ten solid days of strike action. Predominantly black and migrant workers are fighting for equal pay for equal work. They rejected the divisive tactics of the company, who told them they should not allow a white woman to organise them into a union. In an affirmation of class struggle over identity politics, they marched to the RMT picket line.

After calling Starmer and Lammy “a disgrace”, Helen O'Connor said “The battle on the picket line can't be separated from political representation. If they won't support workers they should stand aside.”



GMB Mitie strikers with Helen centre HELEN O'CONNOR



“More action than I can ever remember”

SARAH WOOLLEY, GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE BAKERS' UNION BFAWU (LEFT)

“There's more people taking industrial action that I can ever remember. Who would have thought that criminal barristers would take industrial action.”

Sarah told the conference how proud she is of BFAWU members

and reps, who “fed the nation” during Covid. She described bakers' union members as the “forgotten” key workers, treated as if they ‘deserve’ zero-hour contracts and the minimum wage. Yet skilled and one mistake could be catastrophic. That's why the BFAWU fights to scrap zero-hour contracts and for a £15-an-hour minimum wage.

Bosses say “refrain from crying”

Annoesjka Valent (right), national official for Napo, the union and professional association for family court and probation staff, explained the reality of what the cuts and privatisation has meant to the probation service and family courts.

Members suffer stress and

distress. Management say “try to refrain” from crying too much, so as to “not burden your colleagues”!

Annoesjka said that Napo had only ever had four or five strikes, “but this is going to change, because members have had enough”.



Teachers' pay campaign

DANIEL KEBEDE, NEU NATIONAL PRESIDENT (LEFT)

Daniel agreed with the conference that the RMT has inspired the trade union movement to fight back.

“People know they can't wait for a Labour government, the Corbyn avenue has been shut off, so they are turning to the RMT and they'll be turning to all of us to be the answer to the grotesque conditions this government want us to live in.”

He argued that the cost-of-living crisis involves an extraction of wealth from our schools, children and communities.

In real terms, teachers have lost 17%; the more experienced have lost 20%. Teaching assistants have lost £4,000 a year in real terms since 2010.

He anticipates that the pay review body is likely to offer a pay cut, and the NEU has started a pay campaign. Schools also face a monumental funding crisis.

Images: JIAN PATTISON, ISAI MARUJERIA, MIKE CLEVERLEY, LAWANYA, PAULA MITCHELL

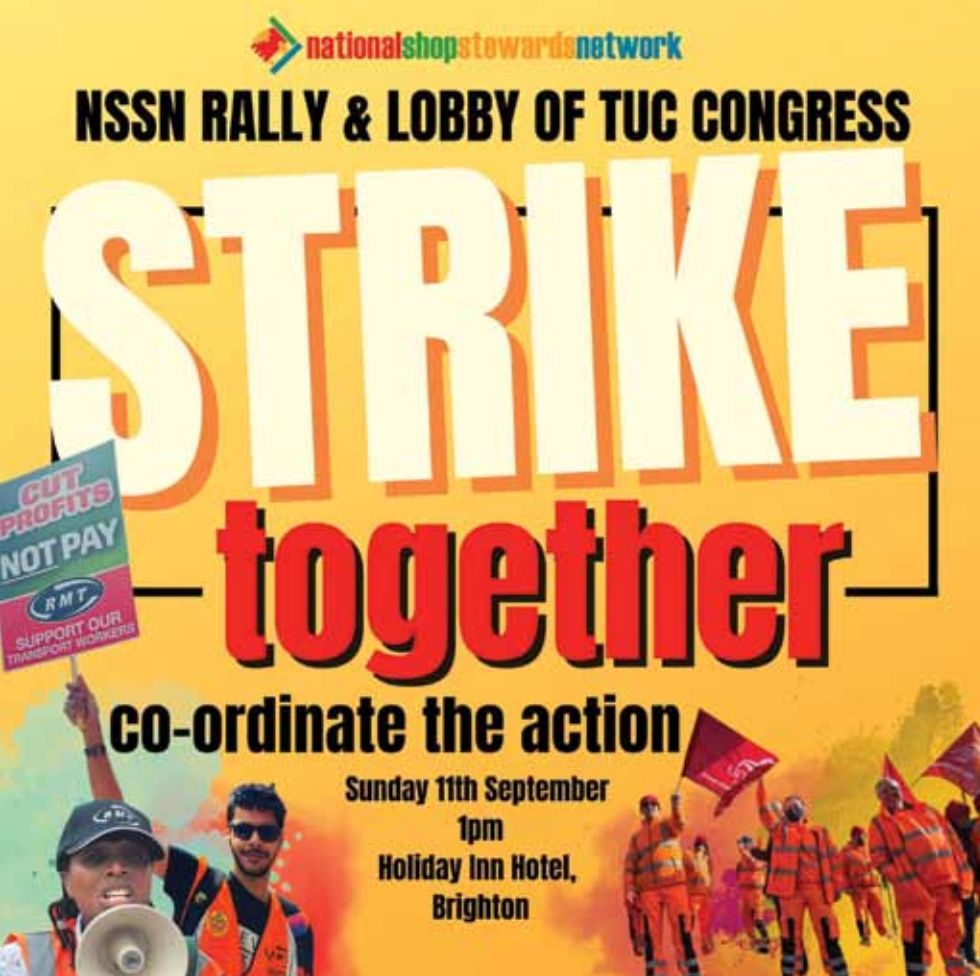
NSSN conference: Organise to strike together

“See you all on the picket lines in a summer of discontent, and then an awesome autumn of winning for members!”

Speaking from the floor in a personal capacity, National Education Union (NEU) national executive member Sheila Caffrey summed up how everyone felt after a day of inspiring discussion and serious debate.

The 2022 conference of the National Shop Stewards Network brought together leaders of, and participants in, the working-class struggle taking place and being prepared today.

As well as hearing inspiring speeches and reports, it was an opportunity for an exchange of ideas about what needs to be done, between different trade unions and sectors, and between members and leadership. It was a chance to raise demands and debate a way forward. There is no other event like it.



Unions must “get in the room together” to build widest possible action



“We will fight”

TERRY PULLINGER, CWU DEPUTY GENERAL SECRETARY, POSTAL (RIGHT)

“There is nothing more honourable than spending your life representing fellow workers. As for politicians, I think it's great that the unions are shifting their position and talking about industrial trade unionism again. All my working life I've seen politicians



of all persuasions let down ordinary decent working people.

The people who make the difference are trade unionists. Of course we would rather a Labour government, but we would still have to do our work.”

Terry argued that Covid was a game-changer, “the sun came out”

on the key workers. That's why there is a lot of support now from the public.

1,500 members in the Post Office have taken four days of action. “The vote by telecoms workers – that's not happened in years. And now we're balloting 115,000 in Royal Mail – you wait to see the result of the ballot!”

The union made a deal to protect the service and the security of workers, in good faith, in 2021. The company has announced £746 million profit. The CEO has been given a £140,000 bonus, but there's nothing for the workers. “Not on your life – we will fight!”

No cuts budgets

UNITE NATIONAL LEAD OFFICER ONAY KASAB (BELOW) BROUGHT SOLIDARITY GREETINGS FROM GENERAL SECRETARY SHARON GRAHAM

Kaz reported on the ‘solution’ to the cost-of-living crisis he had seen from one Labour MP, Stella Creasy: “Buy secondhand goods”. Instead, Kaz argued, Labour councils could “at a stroke” do something about the cost-of-living crisis today, by agreeing no-cuts needs-based budgets in every authority they control, like Liverpool council did in the 1980s.

Kaz lambasted Labour politicians who speak against cuts and the cost-of-living crisis at the weekend, and implement cuts on a Monday – such as the leader of Hackney council, who refuses to negotiate with Unite members who want a decent living.

Kaz also gave a warning to bus companies nationally that “Unite is coming for you”. He invited conference to imagine the impact if bus workers were out at the same time as the RMT.



Coventry bin strikers COVENTRY SP

“Fair pay for a fair day's work”

PETE RANDLE SPOKE ON BEHALF OF STRIKING UNITE COVENTRY BIN WORKERS

“Our strike is about to enter the seventh month. We've been out on strike for 125 days. What led us to going out on strike was simple. We'd had enough. It was time to organise.”

Pete explained: “This is a Labour council. Or is it the Tory B team?”

“We're out for fair pay for a fair day's work. The Labour council is trying to discredit us. They have brought

in a scab workforce. A Labour council bringing in strikebreakers, to try to bring the union.

Labour in Coventry is highlighting the Labour government that Starmer could one day lead. Labour should be on the side of working people, not supporting the Tory front bench.”

Pete's conclusion is that trade unions need to fight industrially, but also “extending that political arm” and “possibly find a new political home.”

against the cost-of-living crisis, that is providing leadership and winning support from workers and even sections of the middle-class.

Rail strike inspiration

“No wonder that it has been reported that Google searches for ‘join a union’ have increased by up to 200% in the last week, while the TUC's ‘join a union’ website has seen visits up 800%. It's why there is particular support for the rail strike: we the working class, really are all in this together.”

“Side by side with taking action, the union movement should inscribe on our banner socialist renationalisation of the railways and transport network, Royal Mail, BT and the energy companies.”

“At the same time as we support each other's disputes, all the unions must urgently get in the room

together to coordinate industrial action ballots to build the widest possible action. As they did at the TUC Congress in 2011, when 29 public sector unions coordinated strike ballots, leading to what was effectively a public sector general strike of two million workers that November against the Tory attacks on pensions. There is even more potential for mass joint action now, as workers across all sectors are struggling against spiralling price rises while real wages fall.

“We lobbied that TUC Congress and we have again called an NSSN rally to lobby the TUC Congress on 11 September in Brighton – it has never been so important.

“We marched together on 18 June, now we organise to strike together!”

“And this time, we fight until we win!”



Pete Randle (left), Paul Reilly (centre) COVENTRY SP

“Tories want to crush us but they're failing”

RMT speakers were greeted with a standing ovation

PAUL REILLY, RMT BRANCH SECRETARY, MAINTENANCE REPRESENTATIVE AND FORMER NEC MEMBER, IN A PERSONAL CAPACITY

“The strikes were the proudest moment of my 31-year RMT membership. Seeing all the photos, all the support we got from people, from reps and the general public, because they're living the issues.”

Paul explained that the national rail dispute is about pay and conditions, but also whole swathes of workers being made redundant: “We deserve a pay rise but there's no good having a pay rise if you've no job”. Members are up for this fight. The CEO is on half a million pounds a year and the rail companies made hundreds of millions of pounds in profit during Covid.

“It was great to see the Coventry bin workers turn up to our picket lines, and I've been to theirs. This is going to be a great summer because everyone is saying enough is enough. If we all come out and if we

can have a general strike that would be another proud day!”

NOREEN HAYES, AN OFFICER OF THE RMT LONDON TRANSPORT REGIONAL COUNCIL, IN A PERSONAL CAPACITY

“The Tory thresholds are made to crush us but they're failing miserably.

The Tory government is telling our bosses to take our pensions away; they want £100 million a year out of our pension fund. I've paid into my pension for 23 years and I don't intend to give it up to the Tories any time soon.

Boris Johnson, when he was London mayor, shut ticket offices and tried to take away 600 jobs. We took strike action and we won those workers back. Now he's prime minister and its 600 again. So it's under the guise of Covid, but in reality these are Tory plans that have always been there.

The Labour mayor Sadiq Khan has told us it will be ‘managed decline’ of our London transport system.”

“Never seen a mood like it”

Lively discussion took place from the floor (Union reps all spoke in a personal capacity).

Gary Clark (right), CWU Scotland No. 2 branch secretary, reported: “I’ve never seen a mood like it”. Speaker after speaker reported on the galvanising effects of the RMT strikes and now CWU ballots. But coming together to

debate what’s needed next has an effect on those workers in return. RMT member Lee said: “We’re under attack. It can be demoralising thinking you’re the only union that’s out there. Four hours ago, ‘solidarity’ to me meant a fist in the air. Now it means all these unions shoulder to shoulder.”



“We need unions balloting and striking together in the public sector”

Sheila Caffrey (right), executive member of the NEU, which is balloting in the autumn, reported from a union meeting in the southwest. In a discussion about what level of pay rise to fight for, some members had said 15%, some said 20%, and others said 40%!

Members thought that support staff should be part of the same fight as teachers. Support staff are among the lowest-paid people in communities, many with second or third jobs, and going to food banks.

An NEU member in adult learning explained the need to link fighting on pay with struggling against casualisation – sessional pay, fixed-term and zero-hour contracts.

Unite member and NSSN officer Dave Gorton reported on the devastation in social care. In 1979, two thirds of social care was run by NHS and councils. Now 84% is for profit. As a result of the RMT strikes, the confidence



Conference participants spoke to the Socialist

ELLEN BARZEY AND JACQUIE SEY, UNITE MEMBERS IN BARTS NHS TRUST

“We want equality and equity for all workers, we don’t want to let the bosses divide and rule us, we want to all fight together.”

DEBBIE, A YOUNG WORKER NEWLY EMPLOYED IN A GALLERY

“It’s the first time I’ve been to anything like this. With the cost of living, everything is a stretch. It’s good to know it’s not just me that feels like this, to meet people on the same wavelength. I feel inspired and fired up to go back to work and talk to fellow workers.”

PADDY BRENNAN, FORMER UNITE CONVENOR IN THE CAR INDUSTRY, AND LONG-TIME SUPPORTER OF THE NSSN:

“There’s never been a ripe time to galvanise workers. Communities are being affected. Workers who wouldn’t normally withdraw their labour, like care workers, are being forced to fight. Even the police in Scotland are working to rule. There’s a class war going on. Through collectivising all the issues, we could make a big impact. And the Labour Party has totally lost it.”

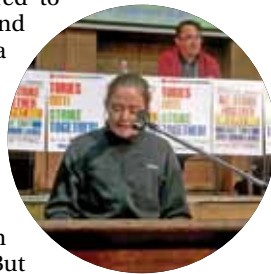
WINSTON RICHARDS, CWU GREATER LONDON COMBINED BRANCH, COMMENTING ON THE BT BALLOT RESULT IN A PERSONAL CAPACITY:

“The ballot result showed the strength of feeling. This has been building for a number of years, management have treated us and our union with growing levels of contempt. It is disgusting that BT thinks they can impose a pay settlement that hasn’t been agreed through negotiations with the union.”

Young people

Many young workers attended NSSN conference for the first time, looking for a way forward. Some came with questions about what it is possible to win and how. Several young workers felt inspired to go back to their workplaces and encourage workmates to join a trade union.

Young worker Amy (right) explained the low level of trade union membership among young people, who are often in industries that are difficult to unionise and with short-term fixed contracts. But events like the TUC demo and the RMT strikes can have a big effect. “They are realising they have the power to change things.”



Refugee rights: fight for jobs, homes and services for all

Lawanya (below), NSSN steering committee member and Refugee Rights campaigner, spoke of the huge outrage and anger at the Tory’s Rwanda immigration policy. She stressed that “the Tory Party can’t be trusted to offer a prosperous future for anyone, except big business and the rich. We fight for jobs, homes, and investment in services. The struggle of refugees and migrant workers should link up with all workers in a mass movement.”



Where is our political voice?

In response to David Lammy, Labour’s shadow foreign secretary, saying that a serious party doesn’t go on picket lines, Dave Nellist (right), former Labour MP, Socialist Party member, and national chair of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), said:

“A picket line is a line. There’s workers on one side, and bosses on the other. If you don’t stand on the side of the workers, then you’re no use to working people.”

Dave argued for the trade unions to call a conference so we can start talking about a new party. He said that Jeremy Corbyn should declare he’ll stand as a socialist independent and call on the rest of the Labour Party Socialist Campaign group of MPs to declare the same now, rather than wait to be picked off one by one.

But, he said, “we can’t wait for that”, so TUSC is looking for 100 trade unionists, socialists and anti-cuts campaigners to stand as parliamentary candidates, and is opening up a consultation on a programme for the general election.

Young CWU member Deji Olayinka (right)

stated if people like Lammy “won’t defend workers on TV, then they won’t in parliament.” He thought it was important that the CWU is encouraging members to stand as candidates, but pointed out that “socialists are being kicked out or barred from shortlists. Trade unionists trying to stand would meet the same.”

Coventry CWU retired members’ secretary, Judy Griffiths, reported that Coventry retired members have agreed a motion which calls on the leadership of the CWU to call a special conference to debate the disaffiliation of the CWU from the Labour Party, and appealed to others to do the same.

Members are really angry at Keir Starmer. BT members need a political party that will support them and renationalise BT.

And RMT member Lee stated clearly: “This country needs a new political party. Labour has betrayed all of us. We need a voice. Working-class communities need our voice heard in parliament.”



Labour has betrayed all of us. We need a voice. Working-class communities need our voice heard in parliament

NHS privatisation kills

JON DALE
SECRETARY, UNITE NOTTINGHAMSHIRE HEALTH BRANCH, AND SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBER

New evidence published in the respected medical journal, The Lancet, confirms what NHS workers and campaigners have long argued: privatisation leads to worse treatment and more deaths.

The NHS has just turned 74 years old. For over thirty years, governments have claimed private companies could provide better care more ‘efficiently’ than the publicly owned NHS. Every prime minister since Thatcher has said patients didn’t care who provided their treatment so long as it was free at the point of use.

The Tory-Lib Dem coalition’s 2012 Health and Social Care Act compelled the NHS in England to let private companies provide NHS services. This accelerated earlier changes begun by John Major’s Tory, and Tony Blair’s Labour governments.

£11.5 billion of outsourced contracts were grabbed by profit-seeking companies between 2013 and 2020

- over 6% of total NHS spending by pre-pandemic early 2020.

The new Lancet research from Oxford University shows every ten million pounds of NHS spending awarded to profit-seeking health companies could have led to three preventable deaths the following year - 557 preventable deaths between 2014-20.

If this seems a relatively low figure (still shocking - lives sacrificed to boost private profit), it’s just the tip of the iceberg. For each person who died, several will have suffered worse treatment and a poorer recovery. The figures don’t include those who died as a result of earlier privatisations that cut cleaning and increased hospital infections like MRSA.

557 is too many, but dwarfed by the 231,000 deaths in England estimated to have been caused by savage cuts to all public services between 2010-18, with many more in the years since then.

On 1 July, the latest Tory attack on the NHS took place. 106 undemocratic, but relatively local, Clinical Commissioning Groups have been

Big-business NHS takeover with links to Tories and Labour

The latest corporate raid into the NHS is the £1.24 billion takeover of EMIS by US giant, United Health - the world’s biggest health corporation.

EMIS is a medical records software company used by over 4,000 general practices, many community pharmacies and hospital departments. It keeps patient records digitally and so easily shared between GPs and other health professionals. Started 35 years ago by two Yorkshire GPs, many GPs have freely contributed ideas over the years to improve it.

United Health’s subsidiary, Optum, is expanding within the NHS. The new Integrated Care Systems brought in by the Tories allow private companies like Optum into commissioning - deciding how the NHS budget is spent.

Controlling patient data through EMIS could help Optum steer NHS money towards other private health services it owns.

In March, United Health paid \$5.4 billion for Lafayette Health Care, the largest provider of home nursing care in the USA. The EMIS takeover could help United Health move into this growing area of care in the UK.

Egerton Capital Hedge Fund owns \$834 million of shares in United Health (31 March prices). It’s founder and director, John Armitage, has donated £3 million to the Tories.

In January, Labour’s shadow health secretary Wes Streeting declared he too had received £15,000 from John Armitage. Hardly surprising then that Streeting said in January a future Labour government would pay private hospitals and services to deliver NHS care, just like Blair and Brown’s Labour governments!

Government net-zero plans amount to nothing



SAM HEY
PLYMOUTH SOCIALIST PARTY

As the working class hurtles deeper into this cost-of-living crisis, we prepare for what seems like an inevitable winter of colossal fuel bills. Meanwhile, “the UK continues to have some of the leakiest homes in Europe and installations of insulation remain at rock bottom”, according to the government’s own Climate Change Committee (CCC).

The owners of British Gas, Centrica, have predicted that annual profits this year will hit the top end of expectations. Alongside the deliberate lack of action from the government to insulate homes, rising profits of the



National NHS demo in 2018 MARY FINCH

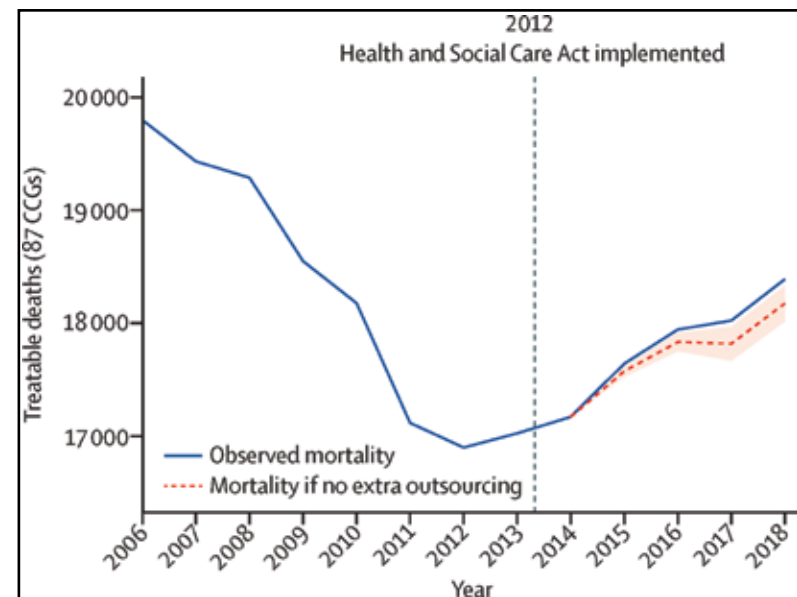
replaced by 42 undemocratic and more remote Integrated Care Boards. Private companies can have seats on these boards which will decide on how NHS money is spent, including outsourcing to profit-making companies.

Keir Starmer’s last major speech on health in January didn’t mention privatisation once in 2,900 words.

A Labour government would resume Blair’s policies, further opening the NHS for big business. We

need a new mass workers’ party fighting for:

- **A fully funded NHS**
- **Reversal of all privatisation and out-sourcing**
- **Democratic workers’ and community control**
- **Nationalisation of pharmaceutical, medical supplies and all other companies profiteering from the NHS, as part of a socialist planned economy allowing everyone the healthiest life possible**



Treatable deaths increased with austerity, made worse by privatisation THE LANCET

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“The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.”

Karl Marx

Protest in support of Brighton pub strike

BRIGHTON SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS

On 25 June, around 100 demonstrators protested outside the St James Tavern in Kemptown, Brighton, to support the ongoing strike of hospitality workers at the pub. Supported by the United Voices of the World union, staff are demanding an end to zero-hour contracts, a pay rise from the minimum wage of £9.60 to £11.50, and full sick pay that includes cover for Covid-19-related sicknesses.

The £11.50 is in line with what other local employers offer. The full sick pay demand follows a similar campaign run by a former employee of the Walrus Pub, who gained a settlement when dismissed due to whistleblowing over the policy to deny sick leave to those with Covid-19.

Representatives from Brighton and Hove Trades Council, Communication Workers Union, RMT, National Education Union, GMB, Fire Brigades Union, Unison, Unite and others all showed up in solidarity with the striking bar staff. In the evening, one of the workers was reportedly assaulted by the pub landlord in the street outside St James Tavern.

The strikers have also been subjected to alleged abuse from their employer, as well as discrimination following allegations of transphobia, sexism and antisemitism. A manager has been suspended by the landlord due to his involvement in the organisation of the strike. St James Tavern has also attempted to hire strike breaking staff, before ultimately closing the pub at 3pm on the day of the strike. On 30 June, it was announced that two of the strikers have been fired by the pub.

Greater Anglia train drivers walkout

IAN PATTISON
ENFIELD AND LEA VALLEY SOCIALIST PARTY

Greater Anglia train drivers walked out for a pay rise on 2 July. The drivers have had their pay frozen since April 2019, and earn a lot less than the lies of £59,000 paraded by the Tories. Previously, these Aslef union members in the east of England were out with the RMT during the national rail strike on 23 June.

90% of trains were cancelled during the latest strike, and my station - Waltham Cross - was completely closed. When we visited the RMT picket line at Broxbourne during the previous strike, which is also on this line, the handful of trains running were almost completely empty.

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with the NSSN bulletin
shopstewards.net

Stagecoach bus drivers' pay strike in Liverpool

NEILL DUNNE
LIVERPOOL SOCIALIST PARTY

Stagecoach bus drivers, represented by Unite, went out on strike in Liverpool on 4 July after originally accepting a pay offer, but unwilling to compromise on a backdating system which has been in place.

Hundreds of professional bus drivers, considered key workers on the front line during the pandemic, are no longer given the same status when it comes to pay offers in a time of a cost-of-living crisis.

Dave Roberts, regional officer for Unite, explains the struggle: "The company turns over £50 million annually and has just been acquired in a £600 million takeover, so there's money for bosses' payouts, shareholders and dividends, but ask them to honour backdating at the same wage increase offer, and they say they can't afford it".

It's clear how the strike will affect the Liverpool region and surrounding areas as the two big bus companies in the city, Stagecoach and Arriva, have carved up the bus routes, allowing each firm to control the majority of certain areas.

For example, no main routes operate in or out of Kirkby by Arriva, and Stagecoach run, virtually all of the services, whereas Arriva dominate



UNITE NORTH WEST

other areas like Netherton and Huyton. So Kirkby will lose all services on strike days, but the service has struggled this past few years and the passengers are supportive of the strike.

A Kirkby resident explained: "Prices have gone up, why won't they pay the drivers the skilled wage and increase it as expected. A driver was brutally beaten up this past week."

A Unite rep explained the importance of bus drivers: "The bus companies have a lot of business in the city, entering city centre bus terminals and the airport, so with that comes responsibility. This is a public service that Stagecoach are only stewards of, but make vast profits."

Just like the rail strikes by RMT members, the bigger picture must be looked at. All depot staff are important cogs in the machine, and that includes cleaners, refuelling staff and catering staff.

Unite members are expecting to be held to the highest standards that the public expect of the service, and that means professional drivers on a clean bus. On future action, Dave Roberts confirmed: "The next strike date for the Gillmoss staff is 15 July. That gives Stagecoach eleven days to meet the demands of the workers."

Arriva bus workers in Unite and GMB in the North West have also voted for strike action over pay.

Wabtec workers go 'all out' to beat 'fire and rehire'



Wabtec pickets read the Socialist

ALISTAIR TICE
YORKSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY

Striking rail engineering workers at Wabtec in Doncaster felt their power in last week's strike as nothing moved inside the site, apart from a few brushes sweeping up! On Thursday at a mass gate meeting, the Unite and RMT trade union members agreed to go on indefinite strike action from Friday 15 July, to stop the company's threat to 'fire and rehire' workers on worse terms and conditions, and impose a well-below inflation pay rise.

The management claimed that when strike supporters stopped a train carriage from getting into the plant for three hours on 13 June, it cost them £40,000. So imagine how much they've lost in the last week's strike, or will lose during an indefinite strike?

This makes many workers think that the real aim of the

American-owned multinational is to break the power of the trade unions. Because, despite big redundancies in recent years, the site remains extremely well-organised with Unite and RMT reps working together and coordinating action.

Over 170 of the approximately 250 shop-floor workforce attended picket lines every day of the strike, with pickets at the main site entrance and on a station bridge. All have signed a petition statement saying that they signed the new contracts "under duress", rubbishing management claims that 90% have accepted the new 'Flex' contracts.

Hopefully, the resoluteness of the workers demonstrated during the strike will force the company to back down. But if not, the Wabtec strike will need the support of the trade union movement locally and nationally to defeat another fire-and-rehire scandal.

Yorkshire Arriva bus strike forces increased offer



IAIN DALTON

IAIN DALTON
YORKSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY

After four weeks of strike action across Yorkshire, Arriva bus workers have forced the company to increase their offer over these negotiations, to the point that the strike committee has suspended the action while a ballot of the members takes place on the latest offer.

While not meeting Unite's full demands, the latest offer is much closer to the rate of inflation than before, and even above it for those on the lowest rate. It is the same in cash terms across all rates, unlike previous divisive offers, when Arriva management tried to play different groups of workers off against each other.

Apart from a handful of school bus services, and a service provided by another company, the strike has been solid. Our Socialist Party stalls

in Castleford, Dewsbury, Selby and Wakefield have found overwhelming public support, particularly from other key workers facing below-inflation pay offers.

Given that strength, some workers will worry it is a mistake to suspend the action for the ballot rather than potentially pushing for more, while others may feel that the four weeks of action have pushed the company some distance from their previous offer, and worry about how much longer they would have to be out to win more.

Regardless of how the ballot goes, the lesson that has already been taken on board by many workers on the picket lines is confidence that they can successfully strike, and that taking action works in terms of forcing concessions from the Arriva bosses. Many other workers preparing for action will also take confidence from those facts.

BT workers' huge vote for strike action over pay

30,000 BT Openreach engineers and 9,000 BT call-centre workers in the Communication Workers Union (CWU) have voted by 95.8% and 91.5% respectively to take strike action over pay. A BT worker tells the Socialist why they are walking out:

"This was a vote of pure anger. BT workers across every part of the group have made it clear they are fed up with the rubbish pay offers, increasing bullying and pressure from a management that doesn't care about them or their livelihoods, while the company happily takes more of the profits.

We used to get offered BT shares each year, now that has stopped, while BT management days out, ie piss-ups, increase!

Management have brought foodbanks into offices where workers can donate food and workers can take from, if they are in need - we now call the CEO 'Foodbank Phil'!

BT thought it had divided the workforce by bringing in new workers in the last few years on lower-paid contracts. They offered them 8%, and older workers on the older, better contracts 2.7% - many of whom have



BTPHOTOS/DUW/CC

been forced to work at new offices after a massive round of building closures, in most cases adding at least an hour to their commute.

But the raw anger was too strong for BT. Despite many of the office and call centre-based staff now working from home, and in many cases never having met their team in person, they have hit back.

Management thinks that so-called 'well-done days' where workers are wine and dined at the Birmingham NEC, will make up for a shoddy pay rise: as the ballot result shows, it won't!

This anger has been building for years, the mood is there for a fight and there is determination to win."

Socialist Party members in the CWU have been at the forefront year in year out at the BTFS (telecoms section of the CWU) conference for over ten years, raising the need to ballot on all these issues and build support for a national ballot for strike action. The leadership has been pushed in this direction. That pressure needs to continue to make sure the days are named to bring BT and much of the telecommunication network across the country to a standstill showing who really makes the profits and keeps BT running.

In EE CWU members voted 95.5% in favour of action but fell just eight votes short of the government's undemocratic threshold.

Usdaw leaders must take on Morrisons over pay

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN USDAW

The post-Covid employers' offensive is well and truly in progress. After being forced to offer improvements in sick pay and one-off bonuses during the Covid-19 pandemic, the supermarkets and other retail bosses are now determined to put us back in our place at the bottom of the pile.

The pay offer from Morrisons bosses of just 2%, when RPI inflation has reached over 11%, is an insult and has been rightly rejected by workers.

Morrisons shareholders aren't strapped for cash! In the last half-yearly report to investors, Morrisons reported that it expected profit before tax to be higher than the year before. Bosses "remain confident of a year of meaningful profit growth."

Last year, when Tesco distribution workers were offered 4%, they rejected it and successfully balloted for strike action - forcing the company to increase their offer to a total pay rise of 6%. Even the threat of action can be enough to win improved offers.

If Morrisons management is allowed to get away with a pay offer far below inflation, then it's likely that other retail companies will attempt the same.



REPTONJW/CC

It is vital for Usdaw to mount a strong challenge to this pay insult. The rejection of the pay offer is a great start. But that is only the beginning, not the end, of what will be necessary. No trust should be put in Acas, which last time a pay offer was rejected sided with Morrisons bosses.

Instead, Usdaw should be organising members' meetings, either in-person or via Zoom if necessary, to discuss what action would be needed to force the company back.

The union leadership could mobilise members to join protests outside of Morrisons head offices or outside key stores. If such steps do not convince Morrisons to up the offer, then the question of a strike ballot is posed.

While there are practical difficulties given the dispersed nature of retail and lack of traditions of strike action, we should take inspiration from the successful strikes of retail workers at Lidl in Belgium and Stop and Shop in the USA in recent years.

A disaggregated ballot could enable those manufacturing sites, distribution centres and stores which reach the Tory-imposed 50% turnout threshold, to take action as a step towards building wider action.

Further education staff join the struggle for better pay

DUNCAN MOORE
PLYMOUTH SOCIALIST PARTY AND UCU MEMBER
(PERSONAL CAPACITY)

University and College Union (UCU) members are voting on strike action at 33 colleges across England.

Since 2009, college staff have seen their pay fall by 35% in real terms. Now, with RPI inflation running at 11.1%, the Association of Colleges (AoC) representing college employers has recommended that colleges offer a pay 'rise' to staff of just 2.25%.

This comes one year after the government announced an 8.4% increase in funding for further education in England, the biggest rise in funding in more than a decade, as a result of sustained joint campaigning by the UCU and the AoC.

The UCU estimates that this extra funding means colleges now have an additional £400 million that could be spent on a decent pay rise for staff. But local colleges decide pay.

UCU is campaigning for national pay bargaining. The college strikes last autumn were coordinated, and as a result all those who took action won a better pay offer than the national recommendation.

A UCU member at City College Plymouth, one of the 33 colleges where ballots are being held, spoke to the Socialist:

"We're disrespected by the college executive. It's not about quality of education anymore, it's about 'bums on seats' and making money. Our workload increases year on year and yet

our pay stays the same. The college is constantly restructuring and none of us feel safe in our jobs. Dozens of colleagues in my department who have only joined the union in the last couple of weeks have voted 'yes' to strike action which they've never done before. Staff turnover is so high, morale is so low, and we just feel like we can't go on like this."



UCU colleges pay strike 2021 ENFIELD AND LEA VALLEY SOCIALIST PARTY



WHAT WE STAND FOR

Capitalism is an ailing, crisis-ridden system based on the exploitation of the majority of the world's population by a small, super-rich elite who own most of the wealth and the means of producing it. This way of organising society, in which the pursuit of profit comes before everything else, causes poverty, inequality, environmental destruction, wars and oppression across the globe.

The Socialist Party organises working-class people to fight against the attacks from this rotten system on our lives and livelihoods, and for a socialist alternative: a society which takes the wealth out of the hands of the super-rich and is democratically run by working-class people to meet the needs of all not the profits of a few.

Building fighting democratic trade unions in the workplaces and a new mass workers' party is a vital part of the struggle to change society along socialist lines.

Because capitalism is a world system, the struggle for socialism must also be international. The Socialist Party is part of the Committee for a Workers' International which organises across the world. Our demands include:

WORK, PENSIONS AND BENEFITS

- A £15-an-hour minimum wage for all, without exemptions. For the minimum wage to automatically increase linked to average earnings or inflation, whichever is higher.
- Share out the work. A maximum 32-hour working week with no loss of pay or worsening of conditions. The right to flexible working, under the control of workers not employers. An end to insecure working, for the right to full-time work for all who want it; ban zero-hour contracts.
- All workers to have trade union rates of pay, employment protection, and sickness, parental and holiday rights from day one of employment. End bosses using bogus 'self-employment' as a means to avoid giving workers rights.
- No to austerity through inflation. For all wage rates to be automatically increased at least in line with price rises.
- Open the books of all companies cutting jobs or claiming they can't afford to pay a real living wage. State subsidies, where genuinely needed, for socially-useful small businesses.
- For trade unions independent of the capitalist state, with members having democratic control over their own policies, constitutions and democratic procedures. For all trade union officials to be regularly elected, subject to recall by their members and paid a worker's wage.
- Reduce the state retirement and pension age to 55. For decent living pensions.
- Replace universal credit and the punitive benefit system with living benefits for all who need them.

PUBLIC SERVICES

- A massive expansion of public services including the NHS and council services. Reverse all the cuts, kick out the privateers. Bring private social care and childcare facilities into public

ownership under democratic control, in order to provide free, high-quality services for all who need them. Expand services for all women suffering violence.

- For local councillors who are committed to opposing austerity and all cuts to local services, jobs, pay and conditions.
- For a socialist NHS to provide for everyone's health needs, including dental and eye care – free at the point of use and under democratic control. Kick out the private companies! Nationalise the pharmaceutical industry under democratic workers' control and management.
- Renationalise privatised utilities – including rail, mail, water, telecoms and power – under democratic workers' control and management.
- Free, publicly funded and democratically run, good-quality education, available to all at any age. Abolish university tuition fees and write off student debt, end marketisation, and introduce a living grant. No to academisation. For all schools to be under the genuine democratic control of local education authorities, school staff, parents and student organisations.
- The right to a safe secure home for all. For the mass building of genuinely affordable, high-quality, carbon-neutral council housing. For rent controls that cap the level of rent. Fair rent decisions should be made by elected bodies of tenants, housing workers and representatives of trade unions. For cheap low-interest mortgages for home buyers. Nationalise the privately owned large building companies, land banks and estates.

ENVIRONMENT

- Prioritising major research and investment into replacing fossil fuels and nuclear power with renewable energy, and ending the problems of early obsolescence – where products are designed to 'wear out' and be replaced - and unrecycled waste.
- Nationalisation of the energy companies, under democratic workers' control and management, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need, in order to carry out a major switch to clean, green energy, without any loss of jobs, pay or conditions.
- A democratically planned, massively expanded, free to use, publicly owned transport system, as part of an overall plan against environmental pollution.
- For a major, publicly funded, insulation and energy transition plan for existing housing stock.
- Agribusiness to be taken into democratic public ownership. For a food processing and retail industry under workers' control to ensure that standards are set by consumers, small farmers, and

all workers involved in the production, processing, distribution and retail of food.

DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

- For united working-class struggle to end discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, disability, sexuality, age, and all other forms of prejudice and oppression.
- Repeal the anti-trade union laws and all others that trample over civil liberties. For the right to protest and to strike! End police harassment. For the police to be accountable to local committees, made up of democratically elected representatives of trade unions, local community organisations and local authorities.
- For the right to choose when and whether to have children – for the right to access abortion, contraception and fertility treatment for all who need it.
- For the right to asylum – with democratic community control and oversight of emergency funding resources. No to racist immigration laws.
- Expand democracy. For the abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords. For all MPs to be subject to the right of recall by their constituents at any time, and to only receive a worker's wage. For proportional representation and the right to vote at 16.
- For the right of nations to self-determination. For an independent socialist Scotland and for a socialist Wales, both part of a voluntary socialist confederation of Wales, England, Scotland and Ireland.
- Oppose the dictatorship of the billionaire owners of the media. For the nationalisation of newspaper printing facilities, radio, TV and social media platforms. Access to these facilities should be under democratic control, with political parties' coverage being allocated in proportion to the popular vote at elections.
- For a new mass workers' party, based on the trade unions, and drawing together workers, young people and activists from workplaces, and community, environmental, anti-racist and anti-cuts campaigns, to provide a fighting, socialist political alternative to the pro-big business parties.

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

- No to imperialist wars and occupations!
- Take the wealth off 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, not to the fat cats.
- 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 the EU bosses' club. Organise a campaign with European socialists and workers' organisations to use the talks on post-Brexit relations to tear up the EU pro-capitalist rules. For a real collaboration of the peoples of Europe on a socialist basis as a step towards a socialist world.

Do you agree? Join the fightback!

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STURGEON'S INDYREF2 ANNOUNCEMENT: MASS WORKING-CLASS STRUGGLE NEEDED TO DELIVER DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

SOCIALIST PARTY SCOTLAND STATEMENT

The Scottish National Party (SNP) and Scottish Green government has announced its intention to hold a second independence referendum on 19 October 2023.

Socialist Party Scotland supports the right to indyref2 and advocates a mass mobilisation of the working class and trade unions in the streets, workplaces, schools and colleges to deliver it.

This weak and divided Tory government can be defeated on this issue as well as on the cost-of-living crisis by the workers' movement taking mass coordinated action.

Tory prime minister Boris Johnson will yet again be asked by the Scottish government to agree a 'section 30' order to allow a legal referendum. A 'section 30' order allows for a joint agreement between the Holyrood and Westminster parliaments to allow indyref2 to take place.

Johnson will of course refuse. Indeed, within minutes of Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon's announcement, the UK government, said: "We are clear that now is not the time to be talking about another independence referendum."

Courts not neutral

The SNP's strategy to overcome this obstacle? Ask the unelected, pro-capitalist judges of the UK Supreme Court to decide on the competency of Holyrood to legislate for the referendum, which the Tories say is beyond the scope of the Scottish parliament.

Sturgeon even went as far as to say that if the Supreme Court rules against the Scottish government, it won't be the fault of the court and the judiciary, only that of the Westminster government.

But how many times have workers and trade unions seen the legal establishment used to declare strike action illegal after majority votes for strike action, including the Communication Workers' Union in 2019?

Why would the Supreme Court rule in favour of the Scottish government on this issue, given what is at stake? Under capitalism the courts are not neutral. They reflect the class nature of society and can in no way be relied on by those fighting for workers' and democratic rights.

Should it be the case, as is likely, that the court rules Holyrood cannot legislate for a 'legal' indyref, the next UK general election will be a "referendum on independence", claimed Sturgeon. With the SNP standing on a single issue: the right to negotiate the terms of independence with Westminster.

Yet the SNP won a majority of Westminster MPs from Scotland in 2015, 2017 and 2019. It has also been the



Sturgeon and Johnson PHOTO: NUMBER 10/CC

ruling party at Holyrood since 2007. Another election victory in 2024 will deliver what exactly?

An election campaign as a platform to advocate mass working-class struggle for the right to self-determination and for a socialist solution to the cost-of-living crisis would be a different matter.

But Nicola Sturgeon et al are mortally afraid of such a scenario.

The SNP is complacent about the growing anger against its pro-capitalist cuts policies and utter failure to advocate a way out of the cost-of-living crisis.

The SNP may not find winning another general election leaning on the national question as easy as previously.

Already sections of the SNP and the independence movement are demanding that only SNP candidates should stand against unionist parties, with all other forces including the socialist left standing aside.

Socialist Party Scotland opposes this approach, which would actually undermine building a working-class mass movement for the right to indyref2.

Instead, we would support a wide,

socialist stance, including the Scottish Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, to offer a fighting alternative.

'Parliamentary cretinism'

'Parliamentary cretinism' was a term coined by Karl Marx to describe the illusion that a vote in parliament or appeals to the ruling class to abide by the "democratic will of the people" could suffice.

That "incurable disease", in the words of Engels, could easily be applied to the ruling class who seem to have no understanding of the entrenched hostility of the capitalist class as to the consequences that the break-up of the UK would have for its economic and geopolitical interests.

There was not a word from Sturgeon in her speech about the need to build an extra-parliamentary campaign based on mass struggle for the right to decide.

On the contrary, the entire premise of the SNP strategy was, "a referendum must be lawful and constitutional as a matter of principle or it would not be recognised by the international community otherwise."

Yet, as was so clearly demonstrated in the Catalonia referendum in 2017,

the so-called "international community" did not lift a finger following the brutal suppression by the Spanish state. In fact, the EU and all the main capitalist institutions supported the actions of the Spanish government in repressing the independence movement.

It is not ruled out that a mass movement in favour of indyref2 could force the capitalist class to concede to another referendum. Appeals to the courts and official 'public opinion' dominated by capitalist interests are designed to fail.

Right now, with support for independence running at around 46%, and with the fear of the impact that a majority independence vote would have in further destabilising Northern Ireland and Wales, it is not a road that the main parties of British capitalism want to go down. And that includes Keir Starmer's Labour Party.

The SNP leadership's insistence that capitalist legality must decide the rules of the struggle is absolutely linked to their support for capitalism.

Rightward turn

Indeed, there has been a marked turn to the right in the social and economic

policy of the nationalists since 2016.

This was seen most recently when the Scottish government unveiled its spending plans for the next five years at Holyrood.

It included plans to cut tens of thousands of jobs across the public sector to "reshape and refocus the public sector post-Covid and the spending review calls upon all of the public sector to look creatively at ways to sustainably address that challenge."

This comes hot on the heels of the SNP/Green coalition's decision to hand over vast swathes of wind energy capacity to big energy.

As we reported: "Large areas of the Crown Estate in Scotland are being handed over to energy multinationals and investment funds by the SNP-Green Scottish government."

"Climate-destroying big business is being welcomed with open arms to largely run at least 15 giant offshore wind farms off the coast of Scotland."

Every page in the Scottish government's recent 'National Strategy for Economic Transformation' document mentions "entrepreneurship." Sometimes there are two mentions in a single sentence.

For example, this gem of an aim to: "Establish Scotland as a world-class entrepreneurial nation founded on a culture that encourages, promotes and celebrates entrepreneurial activity in every sector of our economy."

The same pro-business approach applies to the latest economic case for independence. Ireland, Belgium and the Nordic countries were all cited as examples of what a successful independent capitalist Scotland could achieve.

There was nothing said about the cost-of-living crisis tearing through Europe, with rocketing inflation, the rising cost of housing, and food, and collapsing working-class living standards, including in Ireland and the

other countries they want to model an independent Scotland on.

The capitalist crisis that is raging internationally can only be resolved with socialist policies, nationalisation under workers' control and management of the economy and a socialist plan to end poverty and inequality.

Socialist struggle

We stand for a united struggle of the working class in Scotland, England and Wales against the Johnson government and for a socialist alternative.

That's why Socialist Party Scotland fights for an independent socialist Scotland and a voluntary socialist confederation with England, Wales and Ireland as part of the struggle for socialism internationally.

For an end to capitalism and the profiteering billionaires that are destroying the lives of the working class globally.

We argue for the building of a new mass working-class party led by the trade unions to fight for self-determination and for socialist change.

The struggle for the right to indyref2 is a struggle against capitalist interests. Whether that's Boris Johnson's Tories, Keir Starmer's Labour or the UK Supreme Court.

The SNP's support for capitalism and big business means they are incapable of leading the struggle for democratic rights, never mind for socialism.

Nor are they able to overcome the opposition and hesitations of workers who are doubtful about the SNP's increasingly pro-capitalist policies.

A new mass workers' party and socialist policies could, in contrast, unite the working class and cut across the inevitable divide and rule tactics of the Tories and the capitalist class.

Join the struggle for socialism today.

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Leicester: Scrap the Workplace Parking Levy

HEATHER RAWLING
LEICESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

Leicester Labour council plan to charge employers £550 a year for every parking space in the city. The council's own literature suggests: "Employers may want to pass the charges on to their employees". This is another financial burden on workers, already hit by the cost-of-living crisis. The charge would be linked to inflation, so could cost even more. The council says that it needs money for its transport plan – claiming that this will support the needs of 60,000 new homes, achieve net-zero carbon by 2030, improve air quality and walking/cycling targets. The council plans to raise £95 million over ten years. But this money will go to private bus owners making a profit.

We need a decent transport system. But the council should be demanding money from the government not the workers! Even the council admits its plan would take eight years to complete. In the meantime, employers will pass the levy onto workers, without any immediate improvement in the frequency and accessibility of buses. Public sector union Unison, the National Education Union and bakers' union BFAWU have all passed resolutions opposing the Leicester parking levy. The Socialist Party is in favour of taking measures to tackle the climate crisis. But the current public transport system doesn't meet the needs of workers doing shifts, picking up children from school etc. Why should workers pay for this when just 100 companies have been responsible for 70% of greenhouse

gas emissions since 1988? Leicester Labour council has slashed local services as the government has cut funding. But Leicester Council has hundreds of millions of pounds in reserves. It could use those reserves to reverse cuts and start to improve public transport locally. That has to be part of building a huge campaign to force the money needed from the government. Leicester Socialist Party says:

- Scrap the Workplace Parking Levy
- Public transport should be publicly owned, subsidised and democratically run
- Trade unions and communities to democratically plan a sustainable transport plan
- The council must use its reserves to buy time to build a mass campaign to demand extra funding from the government

Workers' strikes get a hearing at Pride

LILY DOUGLAS
WALTHAM FOREST SOCIALIST PARTY

The Socialist Party participated in London Pride, on its 50th anniversary, to show solidarity with the LGBTQ+ fight, and to call for trade union action. We say: "Fight together, strike together". Despite the mass commercialisation of Pride, there was a political mood that people were ready for change. Many people attending the parade stopped to talk to us about the rail strikes, to buy the Socialist, and even buy some of our posters. A couple of people spontaneously stopped to help us get signatures for our petition and to hand

out our leaflets, demonstrating the widespread support for action against the cost-of-living crisis. After two hours, our small team ran out of leaflets. We also got the chance to speak to two British Airways workers; one had taken part in the 2014 and 2017 BA strikes. They spoke about the need for a general strike, and for the trade unions to coordinate together to bring society to a standstill. People are coming to these conclusions through their own experiences, and the Socialist Party was there to provide a programme for how we are going to strike together, and our next steps afterwards.



Socialist Party members at Pride LONDON SP

Selling the Socialist

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

Wakefield – bus strike

To help build support for striking Arriva bus drivers in West Yorkshire, and get the main Unite union message over, the Socialist Party organised town centre campaign stalls on 11 and 12 June. The employer can hardly ignore the huge public support for the workers' action. 28 people buying a copy of the Socialist – with an article that exposed the employer's latest 'improved' pay offer as anything but – reflects this. The generous donations the Socialist Party received enable us to continue helping rally wider solidarity and produce an updated leaflet in support of the strike. A case of workers in struggle, the public and the Socialist Party going hand in hand!

JOHN VASEY

Selby – striking together

Socialist Party members recently expanded our solidarity campaign stalls for Arriva bus drivers beyond Wakefield to Dewsbury and Selby. In Selby on 23 June, we found a high level of support for the strike in what is a Tory safe seat. Being outside a Morrisons store, we spoke to a number of staff all disappointed with their pay rise, but supporting the idea of striking together for better pay.

BERNARD DAVIES

Ponders End – striking workers are brilliant

When the Socialist Party was campaigning in north London on 22 June, I met a former nurse who worked for the NHS for 39 years from 1966. She was pleased that health workers have been asking for a 15% pay rise, because "we never had that when I was working there". When I asked her about the rail

strikes, she simply replied: "I think it's brilliant!"

IAN PATTISON

Daymer Turkish and Kurdish festival

Speaking after Labour's Hackney mayor, Unite union's national lead for local government, Onay Kasab, talked about the Hackney council strike: "You cannot be a weekend revolutionary without dealing with your own workers first and foremost". One of the many people who stopped by the London Socialist Party stall spoke about the huge gap between rich and poor. Another told us about the dire situation facing the working class in Turkey. 40 people bought a copy of the Socialist, and many signed our petition calling for trade union action for inflation-proof pay rises.

BERKAY KARTAV

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Vote TUSC in Binley and Willenhall on 14 July

MICHAEL MORGAN
TUSC CANDIDATE FOR BINLEY AND WILLENHALL

Coventry Labour council has shown its true colours. It has spent over £3 million of taxpayer money trying to break the HGV bin drivers' strike – trying to ensure the workers don't get the fair pay rises they deserve. The council has brought in Tom White waste services to run a scab service and lied about workers' salaries. The money is clearly there to give workers a fair deal. Labour councillors just won't use it. The council managed to give the Tom White workers a 12% pay rise. They should be able to cough up for their own workers. The Labour council has done little to defend working-class people in Binley and Willenhall – where there is a council by-election on 14 July – from Tory funding cuts. The Labour candidate even celebrated the strike-breaking operation on his leaflet! Local services are now either non-existent or operating at a reduced level, like Willenhall library, which was relocated to a much smaller

location. The council charges special educational needs and disability (Send) pupils up to £600 a year for transport services to get to school. This is a disgrace. Yet the Labour council will not fight these cuts and enthusiastically implements them. The council now has £123 million in reserves – three times the amount it held ten years ago. It talks about saving reserves for a rainy day. Have they not noticed the storm going on for working people? The Socialist Party says the council should use these reserves, which they can do legally, to combat vicious Tory cuts, while campaigning for the return of money stolen from Coventry by the government. We need an alternative to cuts. The establishment parties won't provide one. We need to elect socialist councillors who fight cuts, PFI privatisation and poor working conditions. With the cost-of-living crisis, we cannot wait for the Labour Party to get its act together. This is why the Socialist Party is part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), and I'm standing in this by-election.

Socialist Party Fighting Fund smashed

We are pleased to announce that the Socialist Party has smashed its quarterly target of £25,000 and finished the quarter with £33,116. This is an amazing achievement and shows the confidence that exists for socialists ideas. We want to thank everyone for the donations and the fundraising activities that were carried out in the branches throughout England and Wales in the last three months. Our public activities and stalls on

fighting the cost-of-living crisis, for nationalisation of the energy companies to lower our bills and to save our NHS, jobs and services have received support and this was reflected in the donations we received and the number of paper sold. We also had an inspiring and energetic Socialist Party conference which raised £18,433 and have also had good fighting fund donations at the regional conferences.

AREA	\$ RECEIVED	\$ TARGET	Q2: APRIL-JUNE 2022	FINAL
Northern	1,273	750		170%
South West	2,933	1,800		163%
Eastern	1,898	1,200		158%
East Midlands	2,902	1,850		157%
West Midlands	3,642	2,600		140%
Southern & SE	2,965	2,350		126%
London	5,784	4,600		126%
Yorkshire	2,866	2,550		112%
Wales	2,574	2,300		112%
North West	955	1,150	83%	
Other	5,475	3,850		142%
TOTAL	33,266	25,000		133%

On the streets fighting for abortion rights

Sheffield

AMY COUSENS
SHEFFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

400, mostly young women, gathered at the town hall on 27 June to demonstrate solidarity with US women, and all those who need abortion, against the abhorrent overturning of Roe v Wade. The mood was fear and anger. Anger that such a fundamental human right could be taken away in a supposedly 'progressive' western country, and very real fear that if it can happen there, it could happen here too. Calls for action to defend our rights here were met with large applause. By far the best received speaker was Holly from Sheffield Socialist Party. Holly put out a call to action, and linked the struggle for abortion rights to wider societal struggle. She pointed to how people can organise to not only defend our right to abortion, but give women real choice about whether or not to have children. That includes a fight for higher wages and benefits, affordable social housing, fully funded childcare and many other demands that would lift the livelihoods of the working class, and therefore make having children affordable. Holly made the link that striking workers are part of this struggle for real choice. Their victories in winning higher pay give confidence to other workers to do the same, paving the way towards better pay nationally. It is only with this broader understanding and direction that the fight for abortion rights will succeed in the US.



Socialist Party members on the protest MIKE LUFF

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Solidarity with arrested Wealden bin pickets



Defend the right to strike

JAMES ELLIS
EAST SUSSEX SOCIALIST PARTY

Socialist Party members attended a protest outside Hastings Crown Court on 29 June in solidarity with three GMB union pickets, recently arrested on a picket line. Bin workers were in a dispute over pay with Biffa, the private company which manages refuse for Wealden District Council. The GMB members were arrested under the guise of the Highways Act, legislation aimed at stopping the blocking of roads. The true causes of the arrests are clear. They were carried out by the police on behalf of Biffa management,

intended to break the strike and stop effective picketing. Gary Palmer, a regional GMB organiser, and one of those arrested, spoke at the protest before heading into court. He and the other pickets were in good spirits and grateful for the solidarity. Biffa had been attempting to move refuse trucks out of the depot. One was driven by a manager without the required safety training. These arrests were clearly intended to intimidate bin workers into calling off the strike. They failed! Those arrested were back on the picket lines the next day, determined to continue the strike. The strike ended in success, with the

bin workers winning pay rises of 24-27%. The three GMB members pleaded 'not guilty' and rightfully so. The only 'guilty' parties are the people who were trying to drive refuse trucks across a picket line, and the employer for using the police to try enforce poverty wages. While the strike ended in success, the charges still currently stand. This is an attack on the whole trade union movement; we cannot allow these threats to go unanswered. The next hearing will be at Brighton Court on 16 November. The Socialist Party will be there in solidarity and we invite you to join us!

Vigils for Zara Aleena - end violence against women



ANIXA PATEL
EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

The brutal murder of Zara Aleena is really scary for all women's safety and shows up the faults in the system. We all know that street safety measures like lighting, housing and public transport have been cut. The police don't protect us, mental healthcare is in crisis, and more. The Socialist Party joined the vigil for Zara outside Stratford station on 1 July. Another was held on 2 July in Ilford. Our placards demanded: "End violence against women." Many took our leaflets calling for reversing the austerity that has cut safety and

Bristol

Socialist Party member Sheila Caffrey spoke to 600 protesters on 3 July: "I'm a teacher and I'm in the National Education Union (NEU). It's fantastic that we've got this going on today. The amount of people we've got out here, standing up, and saying this is what we need for us, our bodies and our lives. But unfortunately, that's being drummed out of education. Although we've taken it to the streets today, we need to take it back into our workplaces and back into education. If this government had its way, any of us here today then going back into schools or colleges on Monday could be done for standing up and saying it's our political right to make a choice. That is disgusting. We've got relationships and sex education which is totally inadequate. Instead of teaching things like consent, where to go if you need support, and what you should be allowed to do with your own body, all it is trying to bring it down to biology. That is not what we need. A decent curriculum should take up all the issues that people have raised today. It should be speaking to children, young people, students, teachers and educators, from every background and every area across Britain, to ensure that we have a curriculum that reflects what we want and what we need. And only then will we have a curriculum that is inclusive and totally free from prejudice and bigotry, which unfortunately is not what we're pushed to deliver as educators."

- Read the rest of what Sheila said and more on the struggle to defend US abortion rights on the back page

1972: dockers face down the Tory government

“Britain came within inches of a general strike”

For the 50th anniversary of the release of the Pentonville Five, we’re reprinting this article written in 2012 by Bristol North Socialist Party member Roger Thomas.

“**A**rise Ye Workers” read the banner as five London dockers were carried shoulder high from Pentonville Prison in London. The date was 26 July 1972. Five days earlier, the ‘Pentonville Five’ – Con Clancy, Tony Merrick, Bernie Steer, Vic Turner, and Derek Watkins – had been imprisoned for defying the Tory government’s anti-union laws.

Edward Heath’s Tory government suffered a crushing defeat brought about by strikes which swept the country. Britain came within inches of a general strike, which might well have rivalled that of France in 1968. Heath’s government was humbled and its attempt to use the courts to control workers’ activity shattered by mass defiance.

The dockers’ fight revolved around the Industrial Relations Act, a key part of the Heath government’s plans to control not just wages but, through the National Industrial Relations Court (NIRC), the activity of the unions and individual workers. The NIRC had the power to fine workers and unions.

Dockers’ fight for jobs

Dockers were locked in a fight for jobs and against the effects of containerisation, which transferred many dock jobs inland to be done by workers on lower pay. Between 1966 and 1972, 20,000 dockers’ jobs had been lost.

This struggle, and the government’s attempt to undermine the dock labour scheme, led to the development of the National Port Shop Stewards Committee. Action consisted of unofficial strikes and picketing of the container depots.

On 26 January, a one-day unofficial strike was supported by 25,000, and on 7 March 14,000 London dockers struck. The main dockers’ union, the Transport and General Workers’ Union (TGWU), was on the front line against the NIRC and its members’ actions brought the first fine.

The Trades Union Congress (TUC) policy was for non-registration with the NIRC court and non-attendance at hearings. But this policy was coming under strain, especially when a union of the TGWU’s size risked fines or loss of its funds.

The TUC felt that it could not continue to support the TGWU when faced with threats to its own funds and those of other member unions. TGWU members expected the national leadership to launch a national strike, but they continued to drag their heels.

Meanwhile on 1 May, Southampton dockers struck against fines, while Preston and Merseyside dockers struck to celebrate May Day.

The National Ports Shop Stewards extended the action to two transport firms in each port. In Hull, this led to another court case which Walter Cunningham, chair of the Hull stewards, refused to attend. A meeting in Hull saw him refuse to pay the fine, risking jail.

Unofficial action

With the unofficial national campaign extended, London dock stewards had selected Dagenham Cold Storage and UK Cold Storage to picket. However, few drivers were honouring the ban. It was therefore decided to picket the depots directly.

Picketing began at Chobham Farm in Stratford, east London, where lorries turned away from the port had been diverted. A mass picket of 1,000 started on 6 June.

Soon the number of lorries crossing the picket line were reduced, and the company offered to do a deal with the union to take on registered dockers and gradually phase out non-dockers who were paid considerably less. The stewards insisted there should be no job losses among the existing workers.



In the light of this revolutionary wave, the TUC – having argued against any solidarity action – was forced to call a one-day national stoppage

The Chobham Farm drivers and warehousemen – also in the TGWU – didn’t believe this, and went to the NIRC for an order to stop the dockers picketing. The court obliged, naming the port shop stewards and three dockers but not the TGWU.

At the time, Militant – the Socialist’s predecessor – suggested a conference of dockers and Chobham Farm workers on the issue of containerisation to work out a common policy in opposition to the employers.

The Court of Appeal – anxious to try to uphold the legal system’s increasingly fragile claim to impartiality – overturned an earlier NIRC judgement and reversed the fines on the union, saying that a union wasn’t responsible for its stewards’ actions, and that it was unjust for the union to be penalised simply because it was not registered.

Tory government minister Robert Carr called the decision “a torpedo below the waterline and effectively



Bernie Steer addresses the crowds on his release from prison TUC LIBRARY COLLECTION

destroyed government policy.” Redress could now only come against individual workers.

The NIRC now took out an order against the three pickets, threatening them with imprisonment for contempt of court if they failed to attend the court by 16 June. The national stewards met and called for indefinite strike action if any of the three were imprisoned.

Strikes broke out across the country involving 35,000 dockers. These were joined by car workers at Longbridge.

The stewards joined a mass picket at Chobham Farm to await the court official who was to make the arrests. But no arrests took place.

Official Solicitor

A shadowy figure – the Official Solicitor – enters the scene. He instructed the TGWU to apply to the Court of Appeal to have the orders set aside on a technicality for lack of evidence to justify imprisonment.

Judge Denning explained: “We were influenced by the state of the country, by the realisation that there would be a general strike, which would paralyse the whole nation.” This merely delayed the inevitable by a couple of weeks.

At Chobham Farm, a deal was signed to take on registered dockers, while the existing workforce were given alternative jobs.

On 4 July, Midland Cold Storage applied to the NIRC for an order to

stop picketing. The court summoned seven dockers to appear.

They didn’t attend, so a court order banned them from picketing or encouraging others to picket the company. They ignored the order and continued picketing.

The dockers were convinced that the government was now on the road to confrontation. The company returned to court, and on Friday 21 July NIRC president John Donaldson issued warrants for the arrest of five dockers for contempt of court.

Dockers jailed

After the decision, there were immediate stoppages of work in London and a mass picket at Midland Cold Storage. Four of the dockers were arrested that day and placed in Pentonville Prison. The fifth, Vic Turner, appeared in the picket line at the prison the next day.

The dockers shifted picketing to the prison itself. Strikes broke out in Liverpool, Manchester and Hull, with other scheme ports joining by Monday 24 July. 40,000 dockers were estimated to be on strike.

From the prison, delegates were sent out to argue for solidarity action. One group descended on Fleet Street, home of the national press. Through a series of impromptu meetings, the papers were brought to a halt.

Across the country, around 90,000 workers were on indefinite strike by the time the five were released on 26

July. 250,000 had come out for one or two days, and the south Wales miners’ executive had agreed to call its members out. A demonstration to the prison attracted 30,000 workers.

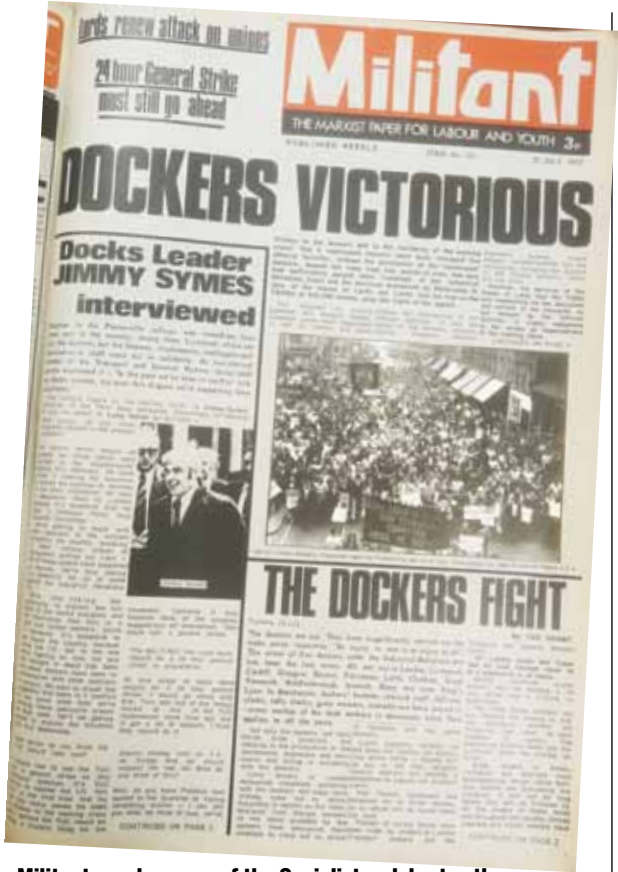
In the light of this revolutionary wave, the TUC – having argued against any solidarity action – was forced to call a one-day national stoppage for the following Monday. On 26 July, the Law Lords overturned the Court of Appeal’s decision, and ruled that the TGWU was after all responsible for the actions of its members.

Case collapses

Thus, the case against the five dockers collapsed, and they were released from prison. Ironically, they were imprisoned for contempt and had never purged that contempt. The decision was rushed through at the start of the summer recess by a ruling class in terror at the prospect of a developing general strike.

The release was met by jubilant scenes. The next day the official national dock strike began.

The Industrial Relations Act had been defeated by mass action that forced a reluctant TUC to threaten a one-day general strike – though only when it became clear that the dockers’ militancy had won and the Pentonville Five would be released. There are many lessons that can be learned from this militant episode in the class war from 1972.



Militant, predecessor of the Socialist, celebrates the dockers’ victory in 1972

1972 striking dockers give Labour and TUC hammering at memorial rally

KEVIN PARSLOW
UNITE LE1228 SECRETARY (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

The Pentonville Five and the London dockers’ campaign was commemorated in a rally at East Ham Town Hall in Stratford, east London, on 1 July.

Following a short film, Kevin Hussey, a striking docker at the time, emphasised that this was the rank and file of the trade union movement – through the National Ports Shop Stewards Committee – which took up the cudgel, not the full-time officers. Like a number of speakers, Kevin drew parallels with the current growing strike wave today. In particular, the RMT rail strike.

Kevin also criticised both the Labour Party then and now for failing to support striking workers – Reg Prentice, then a local MP, later ‘crossed the floor’ to become a Tory minister. Kevin said then Trades Union Congress (TUC) general secretary Vic Feather was an “absolutely useless waste of space”.

Former Unite general secretary Len McCluskey said society felt the power of the working class in 1972, and forced the hand of the TUC. The TUC general council voted for a one-day general strike only after lefts Jack Jones and Hugh Scanlon forced them to, responding to the pressure of the members.

Len criticised Keir Starmer, and said the trade union movement will be important in the next period. However, none of the speakers drew any conclusions from their criticism of the pro-big business Labour Party. But the trade unions will have to play a key role building a socialist alternative.



Met failings expose unaccountable police



Police in Dalston, London

JAMES IVENS
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

The Metropolitan Police has just joined five other forces in being put into special measures. Plummeting public confidence has pushed the national inspectorate to intervene.

This follows the resignation of Met commissioner Cressida Dick in February. She had till then stayed in post, despite repeated scandals, partly because of mutual benefit in shielding Boris Johnson as ‘Party-gate’ broke.

That exposed the ‘one rule for them, another for us’ nature of law enforcement. Police ignored Boris Johnson’s lockdown breaches for months – while fining protesters for resisting Tory attacks.

And the police’s institutional racism, sexism and homophobia have come back into view before and since. Black people were over twice as likely to receive fines for lockdown breaches. The disgraceful strip-search of Child Q, a young black woman in Hackney, led to a further eight strip-searches of children coming out.

In the first year of Dick’s tenure, starting in 2017, ‘stop and search’ – disproportionately used on black people – quadrupled. More recently there was public disgust at racist and sexist private messages sent by officers at Charing Cross, and lurid photos of murdered black women shared by officers at Wembley.

Sarah Everard was murdered by a serving policeman – reportedly nicknamed “The Rapist” by colleagues. The Met then violently suppressed a vigil for her, and advised women fearful of violent cops to hail a bus driver.

Police failed to do basic investigation work into gay victims of rape and murder as serial killer Stephen

Port tore through London. A new report has found that police around the country misuse their authority to undermine domestic abuse reporting.

And this is just some of what we know about now. The full report into the Met isn’t due out until August. But we can safely say even that will only scratch the surface.

Unfortunately, these scandals are not one-offs caused by temporary misleadership. The police are not ultimately accountable to working-class communities and the general public, but to representatives of the capitalist elite.



The Socialist Party demands democratic trade union and community control over police

The Met chief is appointed by the home secretary, and most others by elected but distant police and crime commissioners. There is no collective, democratic control by workers and local communities over how their areas are policed.

The current evidence doesn’t even suggest police forces consistently try to protect ordinary people from crime. In fact, Greater Manchester is in special measures for failing to report 80,000 crimes and closing cases without even trying. (The Cleveland, Gloucestershire, Staffordshire, and Wiltshire forces complete the current list where the state watchdog has stepped in.)

Failure to carry out this basic, day-to-day role has seriously undermined the legitimacy of the police. And with an unpopular government and

opposition facing a rising wave of industrial action, the capitalists need a force they can rely on in a pinch.

The ongoing Undercover Policing Inquiry has exposed the Met’s role in infiltrating and trying to undermine the democratic organisations of the workers’ movement. But the wider ranks of the police force are also a blunt instrument for the capitalist state to use against protest and strikes, as in 1984-85 against the miners.

Thatcher, by the way, was careful to pay them well. Today the police have suffered cuts and wage restraint alongside the wider public sector. Even the chair of the Police Federation – a pseudo-union controlled by management – has asked if this is “because, as many of my colleagues feel, we do not have a right to strike.” Police in Scotland have ‘withdrawn their goodwill’ by refusing to start work early and other measures, in response to real-terms pay cuts.

The Tory policing minister and Blairite mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, are busily trying to blame each other for the scandals. The reality is they both preside over a system built on inequality and division – capitalism – which the police force both protects and reflects. The working class needs a mass party of its own to challenge them, and the unions should take steps towards one now.

The Socialist Party demands democratic trade union and community control over police policy and hiring in every area to make safety, rather than defence of an elite, the goal. But we also fight for a socialist society, where planning to provide for the needs of all replaces the misery and bigotry that breed crime and violence – including the criminal attitudes and violence institutionalised in the police.

After the mass struggles, crisis deepens in Sri Lanka

In early July the Sri Lankan government declared that the country no longer has any fuel, or funds to import commodities. Prices of all essential food continue to rise. Food inflation has gone over 80% and continues to increase. According to some reports, the real inflation rate has now gone well over 130%, the second-highest in the world. The government continues to rely on 'handouts' from other countries in the region for essentials. Capitalists unanimously argue for further borrowing as a fix to the crisis and India continues to keep its credit line open, as the Indian vulture capitalists have been taking control of key resources. The Sri Lankan government is already making a special agreement with the International Monetary Fund for further borrowing. However, this borrowing is likely to worsen the situation, rather than find a fix for the misery that the majority of the population is now pushed into. Despite this crisis, key capitalists continue to make a profit, and the corrupt ruling Rajapaksa family and the capitalist class refuse to surrender the enormous wealth that has been looted. The United Socialist Party, the CWI section in Sri Lanka, demands the taking over of the wealth of the super-rich and the immediate implementation of an emergency economic plan, and for a government of workers and poor to implement such a plan. The following article by Srinath Perera summarises some of the past events.

Which direction will Sri Lanka take in the coming period? Will the establishment move towards consolidating its position, which was jolted by recent mass uprisings led by the youth? Or will the mass youth movement be able to chase away the corrupt capitalist leaders and come closer to building a new society?

The latter is the aspiration of thousands of young people who have been braving the inclement weather for weeks now in the hope that the corrupt individuals ruling the country can be brought to book to answer the multitude of allegations of corruption and fraud of public money.

The establishment was in complete disarray after the 28 April general strike and 6 May Hartal, which brought the whole country to a halt. This paved the way for Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa to resign in disgrace. However, the Rajapaksa family rallied again with the help of former Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe of the right-wing United National Party and a few members from the opposition who broke ranks for some perks and privileges, and were able to cobble up a government which seemed to be a stable one at the outset.

However, with increasing shortages and skyrocketing prices of essential items such as rice, dhal, vegetables and also fuel and cooking gas, this government has lost any semblance of legitimacy.

In reality, it never had any from its inception. The Prime Minister, who took office saying he undertook this responsibility in order to feed



people three meals a day, was now stating he wants people to have at least two meals a day. Malnutrition among children under five years has increased rapidly, and the nutrient food supplied to pregnant women, mothers and infants has been stopped for a whole year.

The youth struggle, which started as a response to the repressive measures of the present regime taken against people who were demonstrating in front of the residence of the President Gotabhaya Rajapaksa on 31 March, took a new turn on 9 April, with the commencement of a continuous occupation of the president's office in Colombo. The trade union sector, which has been lethargic for so long, apart from the episodic teachers' salary protest last year, was compelled by this rapid social upheaval, in which most of their members and workers in general were involved, to respond in a positive manner. The outcome was the hugely successful general strike that took place on 28 April. Then came the Hartal on 6 May, involving strikes, occupations and boycotts, which completely shut down the country.

The ruling class was vacillating and unable to understand what was happening and what had to be done to control the situation.

Pre-revolutionary situation

An almost pre-revolutionary situation started to emerge. The working class was fully geared to fight. Almost all the oppressed masses were in a fighting mood. They all clamoured for the ousting of the president and all members of parliament. The ruling class was in complete disarray and divided. Military leaders were not in a position to use lethal power. That meant that the objective

conditions were there even for a revolutionary uprising. However, the subjective factor, a revolutionary party which can transform the struggle into a revolution, was not there to carry through this process.

A small group around Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa had other thoughts. Rajapaksa was to be the first sacrifice of the ruling class in order to save the day for them. But he was not ready to give up office and he called his supporters to his official residence on 9 May. There were speeches full of hate against the youth in struggle, and at noon those Mahinda Rajapaksa supporters who really were goons of local politicians, bought for money and liquor, began to storm struggle points in front of the prime minister's and president's offices. They attacked protesters with clubs mercilessly and destroyed tents and other creations such as banners.

In response to this attack, local people got together and got hold of the buses on which the goons were travelling back, and assaulted them and pushed them into a lake in the city, destroying about 50 buses that had been used to transport those goons. By the evening of the same day, outside of Colombo more than 100 houses and other properties belonging to ruling-party politicians were set on fire and a member of parliament was murdered.

Such was the anger of masses which was hidden up until then. Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa had to resign in disgrace and was secretly airlifted to a naval base in Trincomalee in the Eastern Province.

With the resignation of the premier, the cabinet was automatically dissolved and there was a period of no government in the country. Many negotiations were held and deals were made between parties and

politicians in the ensuing days.

Finally, on 11 May, the leader of the right-wing United National Party, Ranil Wickremesinghe, who was defeated comprehensively in the last general election and came to parliament through the back door via the so-called 'National List' (MP positions available for parties that get a certain amount of votes), was appointed as Prime Minister by President Gotabhaya. Ranil, who has no mandate from people to lead a government, is now effectively covering and protecting President Gotabhaya. Gotabhaya, who is hated by millions of people who voted for him, has now started negotiations with the International Monetary Fund to bail out the country, which has gone bankrupt for many reasons, including mismanagement and looting of the economy by Ranil, Gotabhaya and all other capitalist leaders who have ruled the island nation in the last 74 years since independence from Britain.

Counterrevolution

So it seems that a process of counter-revolution has taken place and been able to supersede forces in struggle, and mass struggle has ebbed for the time being. Trade unions that mounted two very successful strikes in less than ten days are finding it difficult to gather a considerable number of workers for a picket line.

The reason seems to be that a mentality has developed which thinks the president is not going (meaning not resigning). Most seem to feel that there is no purpose in struggle any more as they could not force the resignation of the president. Nevertheless people have been converging at the struggle site on special occasions such as the Pride march on 25 June.

On the other hand, the working-class movement has also pushed

back after the aforesaid two mass strikes. Those two actions were called and led by two trade union fronts. After the goons' attacks on the struggle, these two fronts again called a strike from 10 May, and workers responded very enthusiastically.

However, with the appointment of Ranil Wickremesinghe as prime minister on 11 May, the JVP-led trade union front unilaterally called off the strike on 12 May. The calling off of this strike, which could have toppled the regime, had a huge impact on the working class, to the effect that resistance could no longer be sustained in the face of Ranil Wickremesinghe becoming prime minister and the forming of a new government, even though it is evidently feeble.

Though the fighting mood of people has been taken aback for the time being, the anger against the rulers, including the president, prime minister, and other politicians including ministers, is very much there. Fuel, cooking gas, electricity and essential food items are in short supply and prices have skyrocketed beyond the reach of vast majority. People are waiting for an opportunity to get rid of their present set of rulers; however they don't trust any establishment parties or politicians.

Even with this situation the left parties, which are in a historically weak state, have not been able to come up with a credible programme which would attract the oppressed masses. The formerly Maoist JVP, which has become an establishment parliamentary party with a nationalist posture, is trying to reap this 'protest harvest' with a constant outcry against corruption that has engulfed the political establishment and bureaucracy, and it has gained a certain echo in society.

The United Socialist Party, which fights for a socialist programme to overthrow the capitalist system and the misery it is creating, has been trying earnestly to break through the barriers to reach the youth in struggle and show them way forward. Our trade union wing is a part of the more left-wing trade union coalition and it has been pushing the leaders of trade unions to relentlessly pursue a combative path and mobilise ordinary workers from the rank and file. We have called for the formation of workers committees in the factories, offices and other workplaces, and protest actions to be sprung from below so that those rank-and-file workers can not only participate but also can lead them.

Here are some of the demands that the United Socialist Party is putting forward:

- Confiscate the wealth of the Rajapaksa family and the super-rich
- Implement price controls for all essential commodities. Establish democratically controlled distribution of essential items to all in need
- Trade unions should take the initiative in building workers' committees in all workplaces. Workers, peasants, and poor committees should be formed in all villages and towns. Democratically organised committees should come together on a national level to form a national people's assembly
- Nationalise all the commanding heights of the economy

When the capitalist bubble burst - 25 years since the Asian financial crisis

STEVE SCORE

SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

Economic crisis and political instability are built into the system of capitalism. The banking collapse and recession of 2007-08 was a turning point in modern history, from which capitalism has not fully recovered, and new crises are now developing. But the Asian financial crisis of ten years earlier was a harbinger of things to come.

Politicians and advocates of the capitalist system attempt to portray its regular crises as temporary 'blips' before returning to 'normality'. They put forward policy tweaks and new models to 'prove' things have changed. But again and again these come up against reality.

The South Asian economies, such as South Korea, Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia, had been lauded as economic miracles, so called 'tigers'. Proof that poorer, less developed countries could grow rapidly and become 'emerging markets'. Some had seen average growth rates of around 7-8% a year from the 1970s.

Capitalist triumphalism

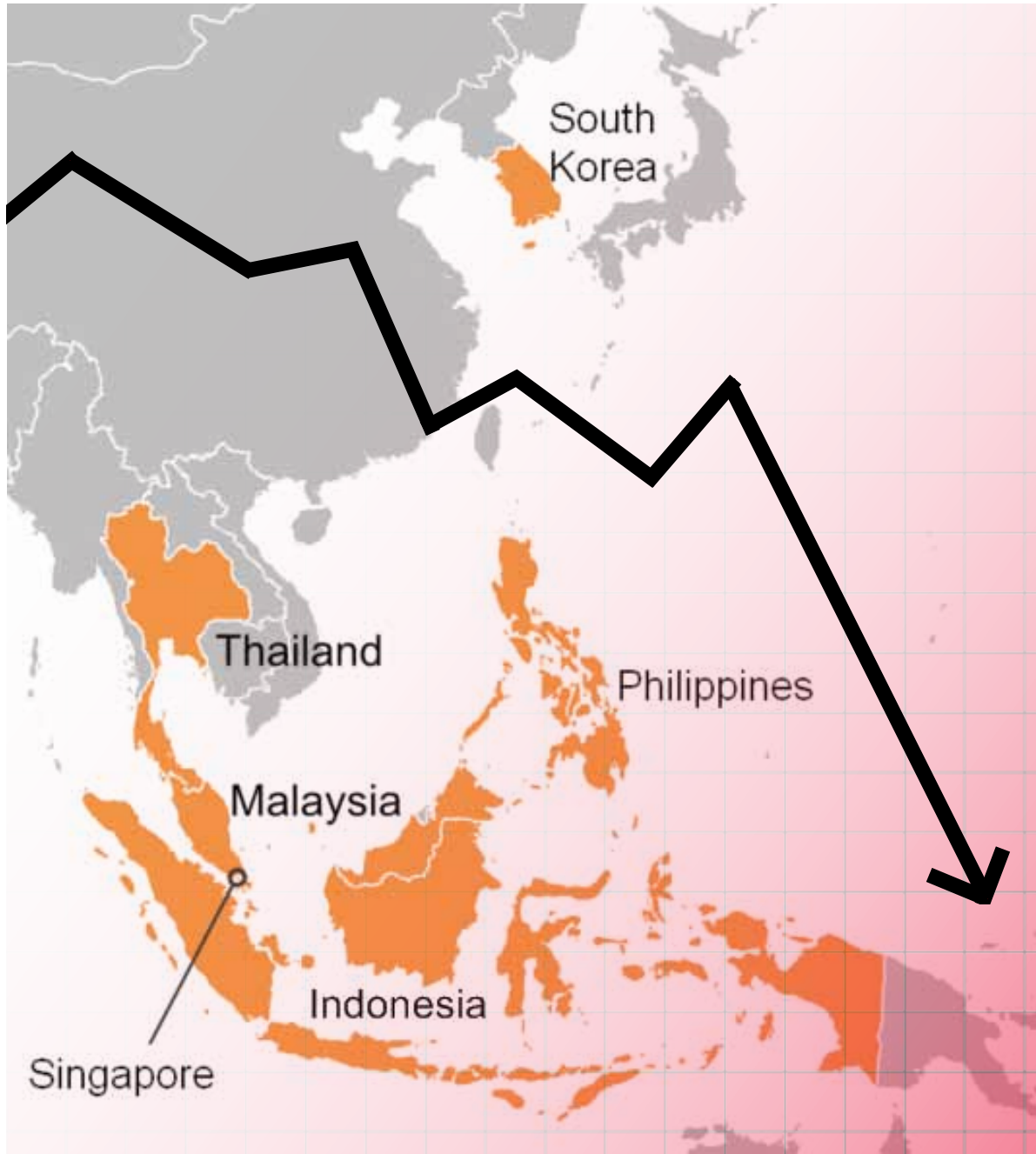
The political background in the 1990s had been the collapse of Stalinism and the return to capitalism in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. While these had not been genuine models of socialism, with no working-class democracy, nevertheless their demise enabled capitalism to portray itself as being the only game in town. Former workers' parties had shifted to the right, and socialist ideas were receding.

The imperialist victory in the first Gulf war of 1990-91 reinforced capitalist triumphalism. US president George Bush senior declared there was a 'new world order'.

'Globalisation' of the world economy - really an expansion of the ability of huge transnational corporations to exploit the world - along with neoliberal deregulated 'free markets', were to result in a new era of capitalist growth and stability.

The Socialist Party, and the Committee for a Workers' International of which we are part, argued that the underlying problems of capitalism had not been solved, that further economic crises would develop at some point and that ultimately they would have political effects. Globalisation meant that when economic crisis hit in one country or region, it could more easily spread internationally.

Mid-1997 saw crisis break out in Asia, beginning with the devaluation of the Thai baht. The Thai government ran out of the foreign currency, which it was using to try to stabilise the baht and went into freefall. This led to a chain reaction through a series of south Asian countries, including, South Korea, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Laos, Malaysia, and



The countries worst affected by the 1997-98 Asian financial crisis BAMSE/CC



Stock markets grew, with local investors borrowing huge amounts from abroad. Property prices rose, and speculation abounded. A classic bubble developed

the Philippines. Currencies crashed along with stock markets.

The financial crisis was accompanied with a huge collapse in the real economies. Millions lost their jobs. 10,400 people in Hong Kong, Japan and South Korea committed suicide because of the crisis. Social turmoil and political instability grew.

Social unrest

General strikes swept South Korea, popular mass movements led to the downfall of governments in a number of countries. In Indonesia, for example, where national income (GDP) fell by 13.7% during 1998, a mass movement of millions of working people and the poor confronted the army, leading to the downfall of the dictator Suharto. But none of the movements had drawn the necessary political conclusion that it was the capitalist system that needed to go, and that it was the working class, with the support of the urban and rural poor, that had the power to bring about such a change.

Economic growth in the region had been fuelled by huge inflows of capital from the advanced capitalist countries. Investors searched for super-profits by exploiting cheap labour, cheap materials, and growing markets. In part, this 'foreign direct investment' created factories and assembly plants, but increasingly resulted in short-term investment into shares and bonds. This so called 'hot money' could notoriously flow in and out again rapidly.

Speculative bubble

Stock markets grew, with local investors borrowing huge amounts from abroad. Property prices rose, and speculation abounded. A classic bubble developed.

However, by 1996 increased production of goods such as cars and microchips were reaching the limits of the market. The beginnings of overcapacity and dropping export sales resulted in growing trade deficits.

Countries such as Thailand had

'pegged' their currencies to the US dollar. This was to reassure foreign investors that their assets would maintain their value. But the trade deficits, exacerbated when the dollar began rising after 1995, effectively made the region's exports more expensive. A devaluation of the Chinese yuan meant China could undercut south Asian goods.

These factors made it increasingly hard for governments to maintain their currencies at such a level. When the Thai government ran out of reserves and 'floated' its currency, it sank! This triggered the financial crisis across the region, ultimately also impacting the world's stock markets.

The debt to GDP ratio of those countries, already high, rocketed further during the crisis - in some cases to 180%.

IMF assault

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) stepped in, aiming to get western money repaid with a \$40 billion bailout. But it was at the cost of 'structural adjustment programmes': cutting welfare and government spending, such as subsidies on food and fuel, privatisation, further deregulation, as well as raising interest rates and measures to stop banks from collapsing. In other words, making the working class and poorest suffer to serve the interests of international capitalism. No wonder placards appeared on demonstrations reading "IMF = I'M Fired" such as in South Korea.

The crisis at that stage did not develop into a worldwide recession. But the underlying weaknesses in capitalism had been exposed. Further bubbles over the following years allowed the illusion that capitalism had moved on from the crisis. But, as we pointed out at the time, the economic recovery was weak and fuelled by record levels of debt on a world scale.

Ten years after the south-east Asian crisis, another crisis developed, triggered by the banking collapses of 2007. This time it was a worldwide recession. Twelve years later we saw the huge economic collapse triggered by Covid, but reflecting the underlying problems of capitalism. Now, amid soaring inflation, a new recession threatens.

Like 25 years ago, this will lead to explosions of mass struggle as we have already seen in Sri Lanka (see pages 8-9), and Ecuador recently. In the inevitable unrest during this new period of economic crisis, in south-east Asia and across the world, the lessons must be drawn of past struggles: that capitalism has no solutions and only its overthrow and replacement with genuine socialism can find them.



When the Thai government ran out of reserves and 'floated' its currency, it sank! This triggered the financial crisis across the region, ultimately also impacting the world's stock markets



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UNITE TO DEFEND ABORTION RIGHTS

Tens of thousands have taken to the streets of the US to protest against the Supreme Court ruling that will deny the right to abortion to up to 40 million women.

This is the biggest attack on women's rights for 50 years, and it will be poor working-class and ethnic minority women who don't have the resources to travel hundreds of miles to an abortion 'sanctuary state' who will be hardest hit.

Key to defending and extending abortion rights in the US will be building a mass movement with roots in the workplaces, colleges, schools and communities: a movement that can link together the struggle for abortion rights with social movements against racism, for LGBTQ+ rights and, most importantly, the fight by workers in the workplaces against the cost-of-living crisis and for decent pay, jobs and conditions.

There can be no confidence in the pro-big business Democratic party to defend abortion rights. A third, independent party is needed, based on the workers' and social movements that can fight for the interests of the working class and oppressed groups.

Choice

Protests are also taking place in cities around Britain in solidarity with all those whose reproductive rights are under attack in the US.

Speaking at the 600-strong demo in Bristol, teacher and Socialist Party member Sheila Caffrey said: "I want to take up this idea of 'pro-choice'. Pro-choice should be that you are actually allowed make a choice.

"And that's not just having laws around abortion. We also need to have the right to say if and when we want to have children.

"We need to totally eradicate poverty. People should not want to have an abortion simply because they don't think they can afford to bring up a child.

"We need to also demand, in the workplace, free and flexible quality childcare. The amount of wages people are having to spend on just being able to look after their own children, while still being forced to work, is not a situation we should have.

"And let's come to wages themselves. We demand a really decent minimum wage. Not what we get at the moment. But at least £15 an hour.

"And proper maternity and paternity leave, so people, if they wish to, can spend that time with their children, instead of being forced back into the workplace. And the right for decent public housing.

"And this obviously needs to be a collective fight. It can't just be the ones and twos of us, when it affects us, but all of us banding together.

"As well as being our choice, we also need a society which is under our control. Otherwise, all our hard-won rights are just ripped away from us again.

"So let's take this fight to the streets, to education and to our workers to demand a society that is one we need, one we deserve and one we control."

