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the Socialist

Issue 1188

14-20 July 2022

formerly **Militant**

ORGANISE TO



KICK ALL THE TORIES OUT



PAUL MATTSSON

Strike together for a pay rise

Build a new mass workers' party

Join the socialists

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JOHNSON GOING, TORIES IN TURMOIL

Socialist Party WHAT WE THINK

On the morning of Friday 13 December 2019, as the country awoke to find Boris Johnson had been elected Tory prime minister with a landslide majority, the Socialist Party argued that, "the seeming strength of Johnson's government will be shattered by coming events."

"In 1987 Margaret Thatcher had a majority of 102. Within twelve months the campaign of mass non-payment against the poll tax, led by Militant, now the Socialist Party, had begun. It turned the Iron Lady into iron filings, forcing her resignation in 1990."

"Today the Tory Party is far weaker than it was then. It is bitterly divided, and Johnson has only been able to win by distancing himself from his own party, using populist rhetoric to falsely claim he is standing up for 'the people'."

Now, just 31 months later, Johnson has been forced out. His departure is against the background of the first national rail strike by the transport workers' union, the RMT, which has begun to demonstrate the power of the working class to fight back against the cost-of-living squeeze. That national strike joined a rising tide of determined local action, and more national strikes on pay are looming across different sectors, including telecoms, post, education and more.

Just two weeks ago Johnson declared that it was necessary to "stay the course" and face down the RMT, but instead he is leaving the scene, presiding in the meantime over a zombie government.

For all those workers fighting for a pay rise, the government's meltdown is a confidence boost that it can be

Coordinated strike action could win inflation-proofed pay rises and force all of the Tories out of office

defeated. Coordinated strike action could win inflation-proofed pay rises and force all of the Tories out of office.

Tory splits

In the 24 hours before he agreed to stand down, Johnson's last line of defence was that his resignation would only lead to chaos in the Tory party, likely to be followed in short order by a general election and defeat for the Tories. For once he was telling the truth. The lying, corrupt character of Johnson and his government is not an aberration, but reflects the sickness of British capitalism and the long, slow inglorious decline of its main party: the Tories.

Of course, Britain's capitalist elite has never been a homogenous bloc, and their differences - between industrial and financial bosses, for example - have long been reflected within the Tory party. However, historically the Tory party was generally extremely successful in mediating those interests, largely behind closed doors, away from the eyes of the working class.

Today they are openly at each other's throats. Nadine Dorries MP, a Johnson loyalist, said of the leadership contest: "The hounds of hell have been unleashed. People will shred each other to pieces in the media. It is going to be a bloodbath." As the Economist put it on 11 June: "A party that was ruthless, pragmatic and efficient is now cowardly, incoherent and inept."

This is not primarily as a result of the personalities of Tory politicians, but because none of them have a way forward. The anger of the mass of working and middle-class people is surging as inflation soars, resulting in real wages plummeting in the year to April 2022 by 4.5% on average.

Corporate, government, and personal debts are at record highs. Investment levels are low. Exports have fallen. There is no capitalist policy that offers a road to healthy growth and increasing living standards.

This is not primarily as a result of the personalities of Tory politicians, but because none of them have a way forward

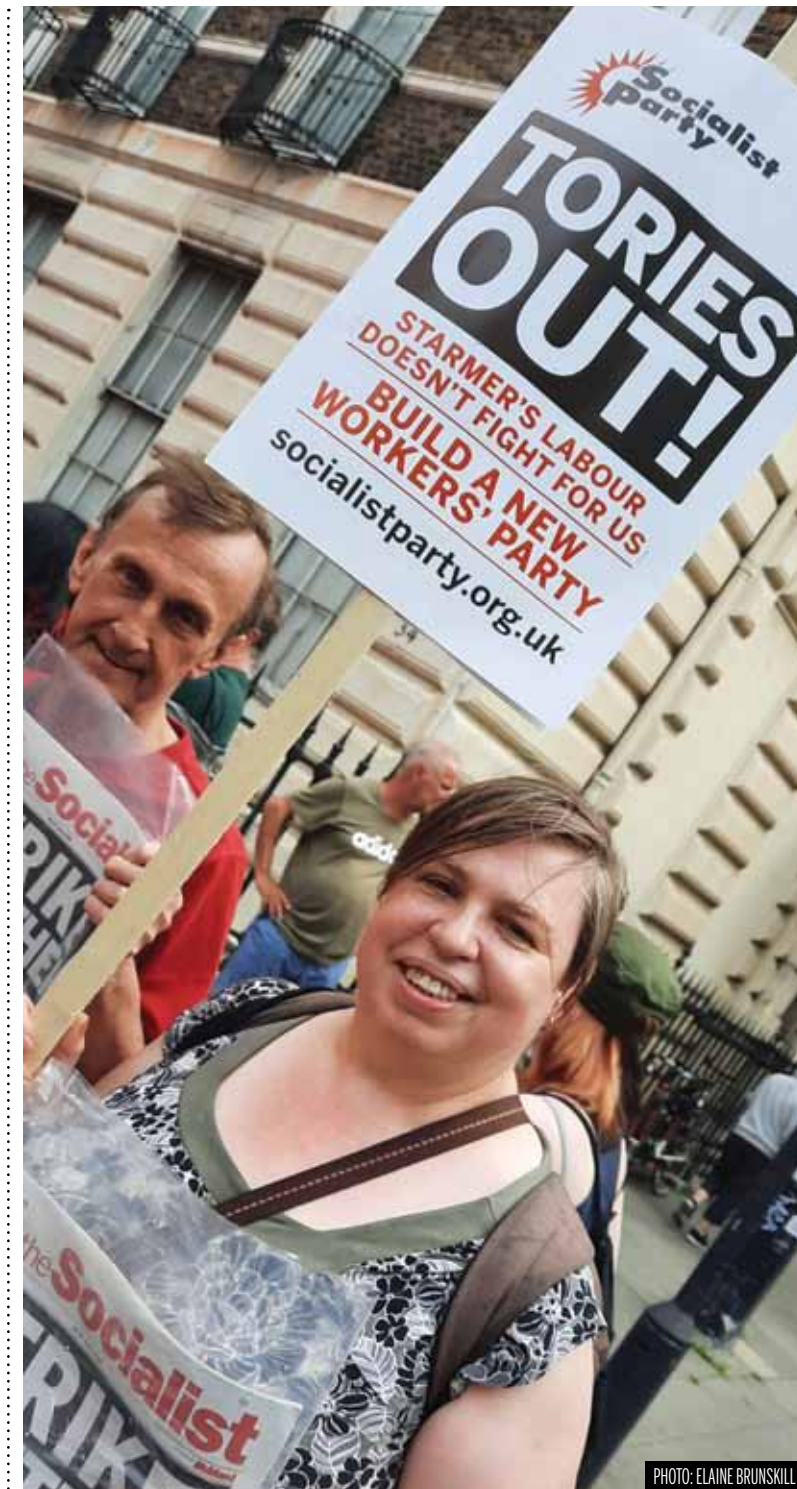


PHOTO: ELAINE BRUNSKILL

That is the root cause of the Tories' disintegration.

For a very brief period, Johnson, as a result of a successful populist appeal in the 2019 general election, was able to paper over the fissures in the Tory party.

As the electoral shine came off him, that period came to an end and civil war once again raged - finishing in an unprecedented 54 ministers resigning in the course of 24 hours as they tried to force Johnson out. Some, like the momentary education minister, Michelle Donelan, were in office less than two days before they resigned. She will still be paid £17,000 for her 36 hours of cabinet membership however!

Now Johnson has been dragged out kicking and screaming, the capitalist class is desperate for the Tories to unite around a candidate who could be relied on to act in their interests, and could be put into place as quickly as possible. They know the chances of achieving that are very slim, however.

Unity around Johnson was only achieved because all sections of the capitalist class, and all wings of the Tory party, were desperate to prevent the then left leader of the Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn, from winning a general election. Now that threat has gone, with Labour led by Starmer - a Blairite pro-capitalist politician - the Tories again resemble cats fighting in a sack. One anonymous senior ex-minister even admitted to the Observer, that the Tories "will struggle to survive this," and that he thought: "We will split."

The Financial Times summed up the desperation of the capitalist class when it concluded that the way out of the chaos would be "scrapping the drawn-out process of tendering the vote to all party members". In other words, abolishing what Tory party democracy exists, and leaving the decision of who should lead them to Tory MPs.

While it is certainly true that the Tory party's membership - only around 120,000 compared to three



PHOTO: NUMBERTWO/CC

million at its peak - could not be relied upon to elect a candidate that would act reliably for British capitalism, nor can its deeply divided parliamentary party be relied on for that. Ex-chancellor Sunak, married to a billionaire, is seen by the Financial Times and the Economist as a relatively safe pair of hands, but the populist wing of the parliamentary Tory party are frenzied in their hatred of him as a "high tax chancellor".

Poundland Trump

During his time as prime minister, Johnson repeatedly acted as a 'Poundland Trump'. He was prepared to seriously undermine the institutions of British capitalism, by proroguing parliament in 2019 for example, while falsely claiming to be acting for 'the people'.

In his final days in office he was also willing to dynamite the Tory party, by refusing to resign and trying to call a general election. In the end, the absence of support among MPs for this Trumpist strategy meant he had to abandon it.

The main reason that even the most right-populist wing of the Tory party did not want to go down that road was because Johnson the 'populist' (who was never actually popular - Theresa May's initial personal poll ratings were higher than Johnson ever managed) is now no longer popular by any stretch of the most deluded imagination.

On the contrary, recent parliamentary by-elections show how widely hated he is. Before he finally resigned, a clear majority of Tory voters were calling for him to go.

However, Johnson's resignation speech continued his populist approach, claiming the mandate of the 14 million who voted Tory in 2019, while berating the "eccentricity" of Tory MPs for ditching him. Nor will

The Tories are not divided into two - or even three or four - clear-cut blocks, but are in the process of fragmenting in myriad ways

Johnson's demise be an end to the Tory party version of Trumpism. The Tories are not divided into two - or even three or four - clear-cut blocks, but are in the process of fragmenting in myriad ways.

Nonetheless, the right-populist wing has grown in strength. It is possible that Johnson could be replaced with a candidate who plays to the Tory faithful with 'Johnsonite' policies. These could include cutting taxes, but also, against the background of growing economic crisis, further state intervention measures. Such "fiscal incontinence", as the Economist describes it, could easily lead to the financial markets attacking sterling and a worsening capitalist economic crisis.

In such circumstances, the remnants of the old-school so-called 'one nation' Tories might well decide to act in the interests of their class and give up on their party. In the midst of the Brexit crisis, the likes of Michael Heseltine voted Liberal Democrat. That was when Corbyn led Labour.

More recently, the rumours of a block of six Tory MPs switching to Labour have been widespread. Clearly that is not on the cards during a leadership contest but, depending on the result, it could happen on an even bigger scale. Conversely, if a 'one nation' Tory was somehow to manage to win the Tory leadership, he or she would face open mutiny from the populists from day one.

On one issue, however, the Tory party remains united. It defends the capitalist system and expects working-class people to pay for its failings. What does it say about Starmer's Labour that it can happily welcome the likes of Christian Wakeford MP, who joined Labour in April of this year straight from the Tory benches, while its previous left leader, Jeremy Corbyn, is unable to sit as a Labour MP? Unfortunately, the answer is simple. Starmer's Labour also represents the interests of the capitalist elite, and not those of the working-class majority. As the Economist put it:

We need MPs in the houses of Westminster who can give a voice to the growing industrial fightback

"When Conservative MPs complain about the perils of Corbynism, Sir Keir Starmer can say he wholeheartedly agrees. He has purged the party of lefties, with the brutality that used to be associated with the Conservatives."

The workers' movement needs to draw the conclusions from this. Firstly, the necessity of building for coordinated strike action in both public and private sectors in order to win inflation-proof pay rises. The current government is weak and can be defeated. If it is forced out of office that would be a victory for the working class.

No quarter can be given though, to the pipe dream that waiting for a Labour government to act in workers' interests is a solution. When the shadow foreign secretary refused to support a strike because Labour is "serious about the business of being in government", he said everything about how Labour would act in government to defend capitalist interests. If the Tories melt down and Labour is thrust into power against the background of a growing strike wave, the working class would be in a strong position to fight to improve its living standards, but would still be facing a government that represents the interests of the capitalist elite.

New workers' party

This also poses the urgent need for the workers' movement to start to build its own political party. We need MPs in the houses of Westminster who can give a voice to the growing industrial fightback. Rather than waiting for some future date to start to tackle this issue, the workers' movement should take the first steps now, including preparing to stand candidates in the next general election.

Johnson's prediction that the next government is to be a 'coalition of chaos' - such as Starmer leading a pro-capitalist minority government, against the background of economic crisis - is likely to be correct.

Trade unions would have to organise to fight for workers' interests against such a government. That task would be significantly strengthened if there was a block of MPs from a workers' party - representing militant trade unionists. If such a party fought for socialist policies - starting with nationalisation, under democratic workers' control, of energy, rail, mail and telecoms; mass council house building and a £15-an-hour minimum wage - it could quickly gain mass support.



RMT strikers in Dover PHOTO: ERIC SEGAL



Unite members in Hackney and Coventry striking against Labour councils PHOTO: LONDON SP

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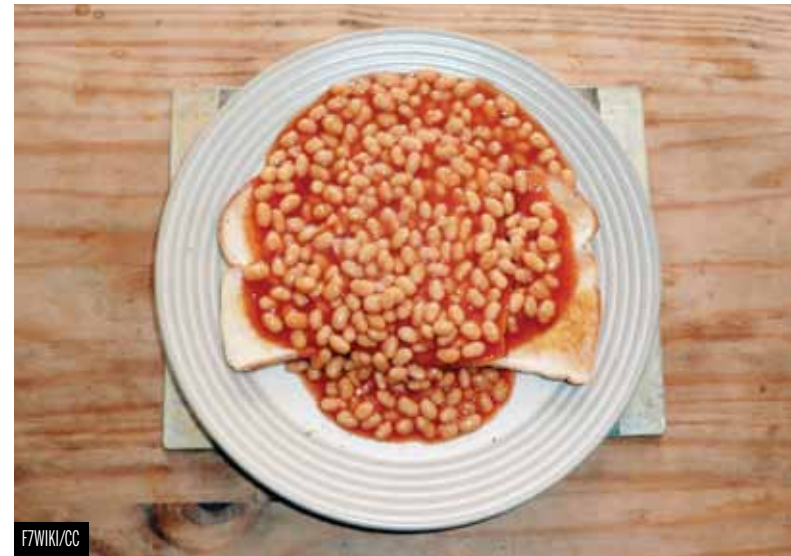
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"The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it."
Karl Marx



Big-business food companies face off, while workers can't afford to eat

IAIN DALTON
LEEDS SOCIALIST PARTY

Security tags on butter and cheese, or on kids' multivitamins, are becoming increasingly common. As prices rise and people can't afford to pay for food, so do reported rates of shoplifting, according to the managing director of Iceland.

Chances are you will have noticed food prices going up and up month after month, or even week after week. According to data analysts Kantar, inflation in supermarkets was at an annualised 8.3% in June, the highest rate in 13 years, adding £380 to annual shopping bills. This figure is £100 more for the year than they had as recently as April!

In the midst of this, a spat between Tesco and several of its suppliers over price increases has sparked off. Products such as baked beans, soups and pet food have seen 20-40% price rises at other retailers, as big brands like Heinz and Mars have raised their wholesale prices.

Tesco bosses, motivated by maintaining their profit margin, have refused to stock the goods. Not because of a concern for their customers' financial wellbeing, but as a consequence of the big supermarkets' price war. Rival retailers battle to offer the lowest possible prices to draw in consumers.

By refusing to pay the wholesale prices for beans and pet food, Tesco hopes to be able use its market share to strong-arm the likes of Heinz and Mars into lowering prices. In turn, Heinz and Mars - big businesses also protecting their own bottom line - are refusing to budge. It's a face-off.

Those that suffer are those at the bottom of the food chain: the smaller producers, small farmers, logistic workers and so on, who all face the bosses' squeeze. And customers - who miss out on the much-lauded

'consumer choice' that the profit system is supposed to offer. Not that there is much choice when the determining factor is what you can afford.

44% of adults surveyed by the Office for National Statistics are buying less food, up from 18% at the beginning of the year. The volume of food sales is also down 1.6%, while shoppers are switching to cheaper own brand products, sales of which are up 12%. Asda boss Stuart Rose has talked in the press about some shoppers setting £30 budgets, after which they don't put further items through the checkout.

But workers can't rely on the likes of Tesco bosses to keep food prices in check. They will always put their own profits first. This is also why Tesco keeps most of its own workforce on poverty pay which, at £10.10 an hour, is just 60p an hour above the minimum wage. Meanwhile, Tesco made £2.56 billion operating profits in 2021.

Instead, we need to open the books of the big supermarkets and food manufacturers, to show us where the money is really going. On that basis, democratically elected committees representing workers in those industries, but also the wider working class, could determine a price reflective of the real costs of production, including ensuring workers throughout the supply chain get paid a decent wage.

Any companies refusing to comply with such decisions should be seized and brought into public ownership, under democratic workers' control and management, with compensation for small shareholders only on the basis of proven need.

Publicly owned and democratically controlled, the food industry could be run not to line the pockets of the super-rich, but to provide the goods we all need to survive at a price we can afford.

Prices, profits and civil unrest

While the government is in meltdown, millions of working-class people in Britain struggle for survival. Money saving expert Martin Lewis has gone from giving advice to consumers on how to reduce bills, to issuing regular statements on £3,000 energy bills and predicting "civil unrest".

Sainsbury's sell less food but keep up profits



People can't afford the basics. The evidence is there. Britain's second biggest supermarket, Sainsbury's, has seen sales fall 4% in the 16 weeks to June, compared to the year before. Its boss says the company are doing "everything we can to keep prices low".

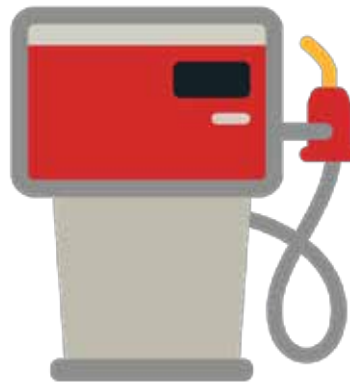
The supermarket also wants to reassure investors that it is on course to meet its profit target of over £630 million in the year to March 2023. Clearly not doing "everything" then! How about lowering prices by lowering profits?

Petrol prices

Another checkout that brings about a cold sweat is at the fuel pump. The price of a litre of petrol rose by 16.59p in June. Petrol now costs 191.27p per litre and diesel 198.84p.

Oil bosses will tell you that the cost of crude oil is increasing, that the war in Ukraine is solely to blame. But the Competition and Markets Authority has found that the price gap between crude oil and the final refined product has tripled, from 10p per litre last year to 35p now.

More of the cost of your tank is going to the big oil corporations, and a substantial amount in fuel duty to the Treasury too. No wonder protests, including motorway 'go-slows', have begun to develop.



What choice?

The choices for workers: go without, into debt, or simply don't pay. The number of households missing a bill payment has topped 2 million every month of 2022, and prices keep rising. Meanwhile, demand for debt services has jumped 30% among Lloyds Bank customers in 2022.

Of course, the better option is to join the growing number of workers getting organised at work, joining trade unions and taking action for a real pay rise. And linked to this, fighting to help build a new workers' party to act in our interests.



Tories revoke NHS Covid sickness policy



HOLLY JOHNSTON
NHS NURSE, SHEFFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

As of 7 July, Covid sick pay has been taken away from NHS staff. At the end of June it was estimated by the Office for National Statistics that 1 in 30 people had Covid and hospital admissions are on the rise, but NHS staff who are absent due to Covid will now face the usual 'sickness management policies'.

The government has used the pretence that we are getting 'back to normal'. But hospitals have been told to brace themselves for a fifth wave with the BA.5 variant.

The Omicron wave, from December 2021 to April 2022, added 600,000 Long-Covid sufferers to an already estimated two million. One-in-six middle-aged Covid patients get Long

Covid, and one-in-five are unable to work; just under half need reduced work schedules.

Unsurprisingly, healthcare workers report higher levels of Long Covid than the rest of the population - not helped by the fact that many of us were forced to work without adequate protection due to government failures.

Forcing NHS staff with Covid, and Long Covid, back onto basic sick pay will force staff back to work before they are well enough. NHS workers will be expected to look after patients while still experiencing intense fatigue, pain, brain fog and dizziness amongst other symptoms. Staff under financial pressure will be more likely to come into work Covid positive, increasing transmission further.

The decision further underlines the absolute contempt the government

has towards health workers. As does the refusal to give a decent pay rise, and the three-month, and counting, delay in announcing the government's recommendation for our pay this year.

The lowest-paid NHS staff have been given advances just so that the government does not break the law by paying below the minimum wage!

We need to see a joint trade union campaign, to demand decent sick pay and policies in the NHS, social care and all workplaces, including financial support for those unable to work due to Long Covid, and for an inflation-proof pay rise.

The government has again made it clear, it does not value NHS staff. We need to organise and mobilise ourselves in our unions for action, including strikes, to get the change our NHS and our patients need.

'Strike together while Tories implode'

Holly spoke from the stage at the Durham Miners' Gala on 9 July, as a GMB union rep and member of the 'NHS workers say No' campaign:

We have a Tory government in meltdown. That should give us confidence to fight, and confidence that we can win.

The Tories are imploding, they are not to be afraid of! There has never been a more important time to be in a union.

With the Tories in collapse, workers and the unions have never had a better chance of getting rid of the Tories and win gains, for better pay and conditions across all sectors.

If more workers take action together across the public sector, in the NHS and across all sectors, then we can defeat them. I believe we should all be striking together and using our collective power to force change.

11 years ago we saw 29 public sector unions come together to strike over pensions, and we can do it again!

Our movement is built on the idea of solidarity, and that's why many workers are disappointed that some Labour politicians have not been standing with working people trying to keep their heads above water.

Healthcare workers will be glad to see the back of Boris Johnson and we need the opposition to call for an integrated, fully publicly owned health and care system with a restorative pay rise for NHS staff to ensure the future of the NHS.



Holly on the stage at the Durham Miners' Gala PHOTO: TOMMY MURPHY

Johnson gone: Teacher and student outrage

SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHER, NORTH LONDON

I was with a number of 14 to 15-year-olds on a school rewards trip on the day Boris resigned as Tory party leader. We were in a bowling alley, and suddenly a huge shout went up. Teachers ran around assuming a fight had broken out. But it was actually the students responding to seeing Boris Johnson on the big screens, stood outside Downing Street and resigning!

The expectation of my students, including the older A-level students, is that there will be a new government next week, or a general election next month. When we explain to them that if the Tory party has its way, they will decide the next prime minister behind closed doors, there is real outrage and

anger. The unfairness really bites for them.

Meanwhile, every teacher is talking about Michelle Donelan's severance package. Serving as Secretary of State for Education for 36 hours between 5-7 July 2022, she is entitled to a payout of over £16,000 - more than most support staff get in a year!

At the same time, teachers are waiting for the 'Pay Review Body' to make its recommendation on our pay. Teaching unions are demanding that a pay deal keeps up with inflation. It is possible to exploit the government's weakness, but only if we apply the pressure. That's why Socialist Party members have been campaigning for the National Education Union to prepare now for a national strike vote if we don't get a decent pay rise.



PHOTO: PAUL MATTSSON

Education workers determined to fight

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN UCU

Last month's congress of the University and College Union (UCU) - which took place online from 1-3 June - backed ongoing action across the sector to defend jobs and win better pay and conditions.

The first day of congress included two motions which criticised, to different extents, the role of the general secretary, Jo Grady. The motion which was carried held the general secretary responsible for undermining the current disputes, and instructed her to respect and implement the decisions made by democratic bodies of the union. A motion which sought also to censure the general secretary fell, but by a narrow margin.

Despite being elected on the back of her role in the 'no capitulation' moment of the 2018 USS pensions disputes, Jo Grady has consistently attempted to bypass decisions of sector conferences in pursuit of her so-called 'pause and reflect' strategy.

The vote therefore signified the ongoing commitment of delegates to fight. But these motions, on their own, will not resolve the issue of holding the general secretary to account. We need the election of all union officials, and the right to recall, as a starting point.

The second day of congress was dedicated to the sector conferences, discussing motions of specific relevance to either further or higher education. Delegates at the higher education sector conference discussed future strategy in the

ongoing pay and pension disputes. Significantly, delegates voted to return to aggregated ballots, meaning every branch can strike together if the 50% turnout threshold is met.

Two separate motions were carried calling for an aggregated ballot at different time periods: one in early summer for action in September, and the other in October for action into the spring. Subsequently, the union officials, under direction from Jo Grady, oversaw further branch consultation on ballot timings, delaying enacting either motion.



It was clear from congress that there remains a determined mood to fight over pay, together with all the associated issues of insecure contracts, pay inequality and workload. Since congress, inflation has continued to rise

Ultimately, the decision has now been taken by the higher education committee, which has resolved to call an aggregated ballot in the early autumn, if the employers do not

meet the demands in this year's pay claim.

The important task now will be to build the biggest possible turnout in that aggregated ballot, paving the way for a strong strike should the employers fail to meet the union's demands, and seeking to link up any action with other campus trade unions, including Unite and Unison.

Meanwhile, at the further education (FE) sector conference, delegates endorsed the current strategy of the FE negotiators, including the ballot of 33 FE branches as part of the 2022-23 pay claim. The conference also voted in favour of supporting branches to pursue national priorities through local collective agreements, and to improve how campaigns include teaching and learning support members. The key task remains winning national pay bargaining for FE. Attempts to coordinate branches in action is a positive step towards this goal.

It was clear from congress that there remains a determined mood to fight over pay, together with all the associated issues of insecure contracts, pay inequality and workload.

Since congress took place, inflation has continued to rise. Members have seen the RMT nationwide rail strike, CWU members beating the undemocratic 50% voting threshold in the BT strike ballot, and even barristers striking. All this can give confidence to UCU members in the prospect of securing a big 'yes' vote to join other unions taking action for the pay rise we all need.



PAUL MATTHEWSON

Massive 'yes' vote expected as Royal Mail workers vote in pay strike ballot

GARY CLARK
CWU SCOTLAND NO.2 BRANCH SECRETARY
(PERSONAL CAPACITY)

On 19 July, Communication Workers Union (CWU) Royal Mail reps will be meeting in York as the national strike ballot result is announced. There is likely to be a massive 'yes' vote that will smash the anti-union threshold for industrial action over pay. We believe that the CWU will also serve notice on Royal Mail for a second industrial action ballot over terms and conditions, because management not only want to impose a 2% pay rise, which is a huge real-terms wage cut, but also smash our hard-won terms and conditions.

This comes on the back of our British Telecom members recently voting for strike action, our Post Office counters members, who have already been taking industrial action over the last couple of months, and soon Royal Mail cleaners and engineers, who will be joining the dispute and will also be balloted. Royal Mail managers in Unite are voting to take strike action too.

There has never been such an angry mood among Royal Mail workers, and that includes when we had such hardline CEOs as Rico Back, Adam Crozier and Alan Leighton.

Members feel they have been treated with total contempt by the CEO and the board. The national reps meeting takes place as Royal Mail shareholders will be holding their annual general meeting, also in York. A clear message must be sent to the shareholders that, unless there is a rapid change in their offer, we are going to see a major period of industrial action and the first national dispute since 2009.

We must have an RPI inflation-proof deal with no strings attached,

as it was the efforts of postal workers who, despite Covid, turned a predicted £500 million loss into over £740 million profit. While there has been a £1.2 billion turnaround, Royal Mail management has imposed a 2% pay award by executive action with the threat of more executive action on terms and conditions. At the same time, we have seen £400 million given to shareholders, and huge bonuses to directors.

It's clear that the membership wants action called right away, and there must be a serious strategy to send a message to the shareholders and the board.

As prices keep spiralling, there is a clear mood now in the country supporting trade union industrial action, with the RMT and the rail unions leading the way, soon to be joined by 115,000 angry postal workers.

The CWU should take the lead in approaching other fighting unions such as the RMT and Unite to see if we can coordinate action among all the unions over the private and public sectors.

We should take confidence from seeing Boris Johnston forced to resign. We now have a weak Tory government which can be swept aside by a strike wave. The Tories may be divided as they fight over who is going to be the next prime minister, but they united over more anti-union measures such as the 'scabs charter' of using agency labour against strikes.

With Starmer not supporting strikes, workers are looking for an industrial and political lead as the cost of living crisis bites. It's therefore essential that we continue to call for the renationalisation of Royal Mail, British Telecom, the railways and the energy companies.

Birmingham girls' school walkout

Teachers and staff are striking over five days at a Birmingham girls' school. The walkout at Lordswold Girls School and Sixth Form Centre in Harborne started on 12 July over a row that centred on the "forced transfer of employment of our teacher and support staff members to the King Edward VI Academy Trust", among other grievances.

The National Education Union

(NEU) claims there has been a "lack of meaningful consultation" between school bosses and teachers over changes that will come into force on 1 September 2022. The strike action is also a result of what are seen as unacceptable management practices at the school that have resulted in a high turnover of staff.

On the first day of the strike, around fifty people, including members of Birmingham Socialist Party, turned up on the picket line to show their support. Strike action continues on the 13, 14, 19 and 20 July.

WILLIAM DOWNS
BIRMINGHAM CENTRAL SOCIALIST PARTY



NICK HART

Train drivers vote overwhelmingly to join strike wave on the railways

TRAIN DRIVER AND ASLEF MEMBER

11 July marked a new turning point in the recent rail disputes and the wider industrial action during this Tory-driven 'summer of discontent'. Train drivers in Aslef across eight different train operating companies (TOCs) have voted overwhelmingly in favour of strike action to secure a pay rise. The 'yes' votes combined came in at an average of 90%, reaching heights of 98.9%, smashing the anti-trade union thresholds and obstacles put in place by the Tories.

The government wants a race to the bottom with workers blaming each other and fighting among ourselves about who has got better pay and conditions. But we should be

blaming those who really deserve it - the bosses! We shouldn't try to drag each other down to fight over the crumbs but fight back collectively to

raise all workers' pay in this country. This includes sending solidarity to all RMT members in their disputes, hoping they come out victorious and, where possible, organising a united fightback with Aslef against common employers and political opponents.

Rail bosses and Tory ministers are desperate to drive a wedge between workers to both weaken our collective power in the workplace, and to try and distract working-class communities from all the crises gripping their party.

The TOCs and the Tory government say there is no money for a pay deal. But when you follow the money you know this is simply not true.

Before the pandemic, operators were paying out dividends of £262 million. Even in the year of Covid they paid out £38 million. Now passenger numbers are almost back to

pre-pandemic levels, bumper payouts are back on the companies' agendas too.

This dispute is about getting an equitable pay deal for train drivers that not too long ago, the government and TOCs were calling 'key workers' and heroes, helping transport goods and workers across the country throughout the entire pandemic. But they are now being slandered by those same people for having the audacity to try and keep up with inflation.

Aslef members have the mandate and morale to fight, but as the old saying goes, 'you can't control what you don't own'. Trade unions also need to fight for the public renationalisation of the railways, under democratic ownership and management of workers and service users, alongside a new workers' party working in the interest of the millions not millionaires.



Heathrow check-in workers force improved offer

AN AIRPORT WORKER

British Airways management has returned to the negotiating table with an improved offer for check-in staff at Heathrow Airport. This was brought about by the magnificent campaign conducted by the GMB and Unite unions, which resulted in an 80% turnout and a 95% 'yes' vote for industrial action to be conducted throughout July and potentially August.

The offer is significant, and will recoup the Covid wage cuts, and is good enough to suspend the proposed industrial action.

Talks will now begin again mainly

to discuss how much is backdated, and whether this is to be tied to a 2023 offer.

It is clear that getting organised and securing support for industrial action is the only way to get a serious pay offer from management.



No luxury pay for luxury car workers

NICK HART
WEST MIDLANDS SOCIALIST PARTY

Workers at CabAuto in Tipton took their first-ever days of strike action in the company's history on 28 and 30 June, followed by a four-day stoppage in the week of 4 July.

The skilled workforce, members of Unite the Union, make luxury car interiors for the likes of Aston Martin, McLaren and Bentley. But there's nothing luxurious about the

pitiful 3% pay increase being offered to workers on £9.90 an hour.

Meanwhile, parent company Adler Pelzer made profits of £118 million in 2020.

In spite of management intimidation, including threats of sackings, dozens showed up on the gates, day after day, to show they won't stand for low pay and a bullying culture.

As one worker put it: "We've had enough. They'll be sorry they ever took us on!"

nationalshopstewardsnetwork

NSSN RALLY & LOBBY OF TUC CONGRESS

STRIKE together

co-ordinate the action

Sunday 11th September
1pm
Holiday Inn Hotel,
Brighton

New offer to be put to Coventry HGV bin drivers



DAVE GRIFFITHS
COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

Coventry council's HGV drivers have now entered the 27th week of strike action in pursuance of a just pay deal.

The council has spent in excess of £5 million trying to break the strike and the Unite trade union in the workforce. This is money that could have restored services, cut during years of Tory government and Labour council austerity.

As the people of Coventry learn about the £5 million wasted in not paying a decent wage, there will be disgust.

The dispute has been bitter, as drivers were outrageously accused of earning £52,000 a year, and as the council organised a strike-breaking alternative refuse service.

But drivers have shown great resolve in not being intimidated, and have won an improved offer.

They have also been a major part of Unite the Union's many strikes, which are part of the working-class fightback against the greed of the wealthy, while the living standards of workers are constantly pushed down.

SRI LANKAN MASSES STORM CAPITAL FORCING OUT PRESIDENT

TU SENAN
COMMITTEE FOR A WORKERS' INTERNATIONAL

A historic day was marked on 9 July in Sri Lanka, when the masses decisively entered the pages of history. People from all around the country descended on the capital city Colombo to register their voices loud and clear. People came and came, and they kept coming.

9 July was chosen by protest leaders as a day to get rid of the infamous president Gotabaya Rajapaksa (nicknamed Gota). The mass movement that erupted following the cost-of-living crisis came to its head on 9 May - the day when prime minister Mahinda Rajapaksa was forced to resign. He organised an attack on the protesters before he left office.

This whip of counterrevolution had sparked the first eruption of anger - over 100 houses of members of parliament were burned down. The establishment reacted to this and co-opted former prime minister Ranil Wickremesinghe the right-wing United National Party (UNP) leader, to fill the palace of Mahinda.

This led to some fracturing in the movement. However, the 'Gota Go Gama' occupation continued its protest. This continuation, though at a low level, forced out another Rajapaksa on 9 June, the infamous Basil Rajapaksa, who was undemocratically appointed as finance minister.

But the Rajapaksa family continued to pretend that it had done nothing wrong, and refused to give up the crucial executive presidency position. Basil has declared that he will return soon. All parliamentarians have completely underestimated the enormous anger and hatred that has developed across the country. Despite many obstacles, there was a unanimous feeling that 9 July should be the end of Gotabaya and

the Rajapaksa family as a whole.

The Rajapaksa family has done everything in its power to continue its rule. It added additional security to key places including the president's official residence, the presidential secretariat, and Temple Trees (the prime minister's official residence). State intelligence services, together with the police, had started arresting key activists. Various repressive measures were put in place. State-sponsored propaganda was also unleashed in the pro-government media.

Once again it looked like Gota was back in control of the parliament. The majority of the parliamentarians feared the movement and fell in line behind Gota. 9 July came it appeared that Gota had managed to survive the pressure. As a last stand, indirect threats were issued and a curfew was declared the night before the protest day. But following widespread condemnation and determination shown by those who supported the protest on 9 July, the curfew was lifted in the morning.

A transport workers' strike was also called off to run enough services to allow the protesters to travel to Colombo. For those who could not afford to travel, others paid. Small businesses also sponsored tickets in some places. Eventually, train and bus loads of people descended on the capital. There was only one thing in the minds of all - get rid of Gota.

Tens of thousands marched towards the president's house and Temple Trees with this in mind, and faced several barricades that were set up by the police, special task forces, and the army. Not just one but many layers. The masses pushed through them. The army fired live bullets at the protesters. A couple of protesters were shot outside the president's house and later pronounced dead. Protesters faced violent and vicious attacks by the special task forces and police.

Protesters defied live bullets and violent attacks by special forces and police



UNITED SOCIALIST PARTY (CWI SRI LANKA)
STATEMENT

A tremendous mass movement that the country has not seen before has now made the corrupt capitalist parliament invalid. The promise of resignation of the president and parliament is not enough. Many have instinctively understood that the president is trying to buy time to recover or even regroup. Hence the movement correctly decided to continue the occupation of Temple Trees until the president resigns and leaves.

All sections of the old regime and ruling class must be rejected. Already the West, India and other imperialist powers are working with their local allies to push for some sort of all-party representation to maintain the fundamentals of the system and thereby their grip on power. They are trying to reinvent 'old corrupted' politicians as 'new'.

None of them have any idea of how to address the current crisis from the view of the struggling masses. Up until 9 July, the majority of them were huddled together with both Gotabaya and Ranil, and have accepted that there is no other way than to be hard on the workers, youth and poor. They are all working together to sell the country's land and resources to vulture capitalists to further fill their pockets.

What has changed now? In what way did they change? Do they put forward anything different now? They are enemies of the people. For that reason they are now stripped off their power by the masses. Why give them back power to re-vice them? But it is not just a question of just removing the old leaders. There are 'new' politicians who are

just waiting for their 'turn' to get their hands on power.

Sri Lanka needs a new future. The proposal of an interim government with the aim of giving back power to these enemies of people - or even sharing power - can only help them to recover. The members of the elite who have not yet run away now talk of 'unity' and an 'all-party' government. Yes, we want unity, the unity of the working masses, poor and exploited to win a better future, but not 'unity' with the exploiters and oppressors! There is an alternative: the masses have shown power, and this power can be coordinated and organised outside the walls of parliament and Temple Trees.

Let us continue to build committees in workplaces, in towns and every village, and strengthen them. Immediately they should organise the democratic distribution of supplies to the population. These bodies can send their representatives to a national body. Let's form a National Assembly of these bodies. This interim body can also take control of state affairs - while preparing for the democratic election of a revolutionary constituent assembly. It will truly reflect the aspirations of all sections of society.

An interim government doesn't have to have elements of the old regime within it. It also doesn't need to include corrupt capitalist politicians. It can be formed immediately by democratically elected representatives of unions, leaders of the protest movement, leaders of peasants and those socialist activists who are in struggle together with the masses, and then be accountable to a National Assembly of committees.

It is this body that will implement the demands of the protest movement and develop further from that. If

We must not enter any deal that uses a 'unity' government to maintain the capitalist system

any interim governance includes old elements, their main aim will not be to meet the demands of the masses, but instead at kicking the can down the road, and buying time to allow the representatives of the ruling class to regroup and reinvent themselves - eventually defeating the core demands of the masses.

They may agree to give some concessions at this stage after witnessing what the masses can do. But it will not be in their interest to deliver the full demands. Let's not breathe life back into the corrupted corpses by bringing them back into the interim body.

We must demand immediate cancellation of all debt - repayment of macro debt must stop immediately. The capitalists taking their wealth and running away secretly should also be stopped. We must immediately confiscate looted wealth and implement stricter capital controls than what are in place now. These actions alone will give enough money and resources to deal with the immediate shortages of food, fuel and other essential items. Emergency planning committees should be set up immediately to implement an emergency economic plan.

We appeal to all those in struggle to reject the all-party coalition body being created from the existing parliament and other pro-capitalist forces. Even if they try to include representatives of the protest movement in the interim government, we must ask what power will be given to us? What role do we play? Is the parliament fully agreeing to the demands that we have advanced? We must not enter any deal on a compromised basis that uses a 'unity' government as a cover for an attempt to maintain the capitalist system, which has failed the people of Sri Lanka, and billions around the world.

GLOBAL CRISIS
WHAT'S THE SOCIALIST WAY OUT?

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But even this was not enough to stop them.

At that point, it was also clear that soldiers were not prepared to risk committing mass killings just to protect the president. Given what had happened on 9 May, everyone feared the mass movement and the repercussions if they decided to take them on.

When, finally, the masses forced themselves into the president's residence, it was empty. Gotabaya had secretly fled in advance and, as we write, his whereabouts are still not known. Many members of his family are reported to have now left the country secretly. There were some videos circulated on social media which showed some Gotabaya supporters running towards a ship. Many immigration officers at the airport also announced that they will block any attempt by the Rajapaksa family to leave through the airport. Through their local links in the army and navy, the Rajapaksa family managed to find some secret rescue.

The immediate resignation demanded by the protesters was ignored by the president, who dismissed them as "extremists". He and

the prime minister stated that they would "consider resigning". Eventually, Gota was forced to accept resignation - but even then he delayed this until 13 July. Prime minister Ranil Wickremesinghe on the other hand maintained that he would not resign until a new government is formed. He also clashed with journalists and protesters. Soon after, one of his private residences was set on fire.

It should be noted that the main protest was peaceful. Though many have stormed Temple Trees, and other residences, no damage was done to these properties. There was no reported looting. Protesters also found nearly around 18 million Sri Lankan rupees (over £40,000) in cash inside the president's residence. To avoid any accusation of looting, the protesters counted the money and handed it over to the government.

Protesters have now defied the bogus resignation of Gotabaya and continued their occupation of the Temple Trees. They have declared that the occupation will continue until the president resigns and is gone for good. Temple Trees has now become a museum. Tens of thousands of people are constantly visiting this palace,

touring through the high life these officials had while they were asked to starve. These places - supposed to be public offices - are kept secret behind big gates and heavily protected to keep ordinary people away. This is the first time the impoverished people have been able to have a look. Some even released house tour videos on social media.

Following this crisis, Western governments and India urged a quick solution - filling the vacated positions with other parliamentarians, and forming an all-party national unity government. Of course, this is categorically rejected by the mass movement that demands the whole government steps down.

Some who support the movement and have so far taken part have asked for an interim government to be set up. The United Socialist Party (USP), the Sri Lankan section of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), argues that the interim government, even on a very short-term basis, will not deliver on behalf of the struggling masses. Right, is the statement that the USP released.



The Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) is the international socialist organisation which the Socialist Party is affiliated to. The CWI is organised in many countries around the world. We work to unite the working class and oppressed peoples against capitalism, and to fight for a socialist world.
socialistworld.net



In solidarity with the mass movement in Sri Lanka, a protest was also organised in London by Tamil Solidarity. Nearly 100 Tamils, Sinhala, and Muslims took part in the protest held outside the Sri Lankan embassy on 9 July - at the same time as the Sri Lankan protest PHOTO: TAMIL SOLIDARITY

RMT delegates buoyed by strike action response

TED WOODLEY
AGM DELEGATE

The RMT transport union's annual general meeting (AGM) gathered last week at a time when it is leading a high-profile fightback against austerity, low pay and insecure jobs in Britain.

Two weeks before the AGM started, the RMT put on three days of strike action involving 53,000 members on the rail network, which has inspired millions of workers who are glad that there is a fightback taking place in this country. Delegates were buoyed by the fighting spirit displayed, and the AGM got off to a great start.

The meeting was held in Birmingham and, as it was the fiftieth anniversary year of the battle of Saltley Gate, the conference opened with a fighting speech from former miners' leader Arthur Scargill.

Most delegates understood the significance of having the leader of the 1984-85 miners' strike addressing our meeting. Arthur spelt out what was at stake in our dispute and the lengths the establishment will go to in order to break our strike, and our union, if they are allowed to.

Later in the week, conference was addressed by Dave Ward of the Communication Workers Union (CWU), bringing solidarity greetings from thousands of BT members who have themselves just voted massively for strike action.

Rotten Labour councils

Later, striking Coventry City Council refuse worker Pete Randle gave a barnstorming speech to delegates, explaining the rotten role of the Labour council employing agency workers, at great cost, in an attempt to break their strike. He received a standing ovation, and the AGM agreed to make a donation of £1,000 to the Coventry strikers' dispute fund. An additional £560 was raised in donations from individual delegates.

Other highlights included the announcement of a successful rebalot of our members on Govia Thameslink Railway, which delivered a solid mandate for strike action in spite of the highly restrictive Tory anti-trade union laws. And, as the week progressed, news filtered through that Boris Johnson had resigned, resulting in an almighty cheer from delegates!

Rightly so, as our action in giving a lead to workers to fight back was undoubtedly a factor in speeding up the crisis in the Tory party, puncturing the myth that Johnson's policies had popular support.

But it is clear that, particularly given the scale of the industrial battles, we require a concrete political strategy to address the current absence of working-class political representation. Keir Starmer banned the Labour front bench from standing on RMT picket lines, and Blairite Labour MP David Lammy publicly attacked striking Heathrow Airport workers.



Hainault MARTIN REYNOLDS

While our leadership and AGM delegates were often highly critical of Starmer and Labour's failure to offer an attractive alternative to the Tories, it was disappointing that a resolution calling on the union to facilitate talks with other unions to attempt to address the lack of working-class political representation was defeated.

Later, a resolution for the RMT to withdraw from the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) if TUSC wants to continue to stand candidates in elections was carried.

During these debates, and in discussions throughout the week, the only policy on offer was simply to wait and hope that Labour changes for the better. General secretary Mick Lynch argued that RMT should not be affiliated to any political party at all.

Branches would still be able to support TUSC candidates, subject to

authorisation by the NEC, which is welcome. But the main beneficiary of the AGM's decisions on political strategy will undoubtedly be Labour right-wing Blairite candidates, who will potentially have no challenge from a socialist, pro-trade union candidate at the ballot box.

The question of working-class political representation and the creation of a new mass workers' party is not going to go away, and unions such as RMT, along with the bakers' union BFAWU, Unite and others will play a vital role in driving that agenda forward.

However, we do need to have a proper debate in the RMT over this issue, particularly as London's Labour mayor Sadiq Khan continues to attack our Transport for London members' jobs, and pensions.

Socialists in the RMT will be campaigning for this debate to happen as a matter of urgency.

WHAT WE THINK

As news broke of the Johnson government's implosion, delegates at the annual general meeting (AGM - the annual conference) of the RMT transport workers' union were discussing what political strategy the union should adopt to meet the tests ahead.

A reshaping of capitalist political representation is under way in Britain, the outcome of which is far from predictable. As the various Tory factions battle to seize control of the Conservative Party 'brand', there is no certainty that the losers will accept the writ of the eventual winners.

New parliamentary blocs and parties could result. The short-lived Change UK party formed in 2019, and fronted by 'liberal Tories', is a faint augury of more substantial splits possible three years on. And now that the party is no longer the threat to capitalist interests that it potentially was under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership, more defections to Labour are also on the agenda, following that of the Bury South MP Christian Wakefield earlier this year. A new period of political flux is opening.

Starmer's Labour

But one thing in all this is absolutely clear: with Sir Keir Starmer's triumphant restoration of New Labour-style pro-capitalist politics within the party after the defeat of Corbynism, the working class is now once again effectively disenfranchised. A new vehicle to represent workers' interests at the ballot box has to be found. This is why the decisions on political strategy made by the RMT AGM were an opportunity missed, if not worse, in the fight for the new workers' politics needed for these times.

Just when trade unions have gained authority for being seen as leading the defence of working-class, and middle-class people too, above all because of the RMT strikes, a majority group in the union's leadership around the misnamed 'Broad Left' is adopting a fundamentally passive political stance.

This is a retreat from the position the union has held since 2004, when Bob Crow was general secretary and when the RMT, one of the few unions to have kept a commitment to socialism in its constitution, was expelled from the Labour Party, then led by Tony Blair.

The AGM debated a resolution from the Coventry No.1 branch noting the disaffiliation of the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union (BFAWU) from Labour since the last AGM - after a 119-year association - and the continued suspension of Jeremy Corbyn from the parliamentary party, which will bar him from standing again as a Labour candidate in the next general election.

"We must now recognise that the brief window of opportunity that the election of Jeremy Corbyn provided us with to transform the Labour Party... is well and truly over", it argued. The call was made to support Corbyn standing independently in the general election; to back "pro-trade union,



Nuneaton PAUL REILLY



London Waterloo JAMES IVENS

anti-austerity candidates in local and general elections" - which could, of course, include left-wing Labour candidates; and, lastly, to approach the BFAWU and Unite to organise a conference to discuss the possibility of a new union-based party to meet "the historic crisis of political representation facing the working class".

What arguments could be made against such proposals which were not an implicit (or explicit) support for Starmer's Labour? If Jeremy Corbyn stands independently in Islington North, which candidate should trade unionists support? Were the BFAWU wrong to disaffiliate last September? If not, why shouldn't there be executive-level talks with them to discuss a way forward politically for militant trade unions and the working class as a whole in these testing times?

Missed opportunity in the fight for workers' politics ... but the debate will continue

An RMT predecessor union, the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants (ASRS), was one of the principal founding organisations of the precursor of the Labour Party, the Labour Representation Committee (LRC), in 1900. The new party would be different from the Liberals and Tories not because there would be individual 'friends of labour' in its ranks, as there were in both capitalist parties. Instead, the aim was to have political representatives under the collective control of workers - for MPs and councillors to actually implement union policies - even as there was a constant tension between the Labour parliamentarians bowing to the pressure of capitalist interests and the party's working-class base.

The LRC was formed in February 1900, and in the first general election it contested, in October that year, polled 63,304 votes, a 1.8% share. But the process of creating a party of the working class was under way.

In this new period of political volatility and the enhanced prestige of trade unions, achieving a bloc of workers' MPs in the next general election would be entirely possible if an independent union-based election coalition was prepared now.

But that requires a fighting lead from the RMT, politically as well as industrially, the goal of the Coventry resolution. The debate will go on.

RMT and TUSC

That the RMT Broad Left group in the union leadership do not have anything other than, at best, a wait-and-see political strategy, was shown in the only political 'action point' they brought to the AGM. This was the resolution from Paddington No.1 branch calling for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) to cease its electoral activity "for now" or, if there continued to be TUSC candidates, for the RMT to withdraw its official participation in the coalition. This was presented to delegates for the first time at the opening of conference, submitted as an emergency resolution because of TUSC's allegedly 'extremely poor votes at the May 2022 local elections.' (See box)

It was not until 2012 that the RMT AGM agreed that the union should be officially represented on the TUSC all-Britain steering committee. For the first two and a half years Bob Crow and others from the RMT sat on the committee in a personal capacity, while support for TUSC and the wider fight for working-class political representation was built in the union. The need to do so today is even more urgent.

After its expulsion from the Labour Party, the RMT continued to fight for a political voice for workers including at the ballot box. In backing the 'No2EU: Yes to Democracy' coalition at the 2009 European elections, the RMT became the first trade union to support a national electoral challenge to Labour since the party's formation.

Although No2EU, standing in all nine English regions and in Scotland and Wales, polled just 1%, with Bob Crow heading the list in London, it was still important to have a workers' voice speaking against the EU bosses' club's neoliberal agenda, distinct from right-wing nationalist Tories, UKIP and the far-right British National Party.

Working-class political representation

In 2010, following the No2EU experience, Bob, with the Socialist Party and others, co-founded TUSC to take the fight for independent working-class political representation into the trade union movement. This included providing an opportunity for trade unionists, community campaigners and socialists from different parties or none to appear on the ballot paper other than as 'Independent' - the only non-registered name allowed under Britain's election laws - on a common platform of minimum anti-austerity and socialist core policies.

It might have been correct to suspend TUSC's electoral activity, as it was for general elections under Jeremy Corbyn's Labour leadership, if a wider coalition than TUSC currently is was in place for the next general election. But in its absence what does the RMT gain by TUSC not standing candidates?

Arguments were raised at the AGM about union resources. The RMT political fund collects around £240,000 from the £18 million or so members pay each year in union subscriptions; so around £2.6 million in total since TUSC's formation in 2010. In those twelve years just £21,500 (less than 1%) has been donated to TUSC from the national political fund.

But the majority group in the leadership were intent on sending a signal. What can the union do politically after the AGM decisions that it couldn't do before? Nothing. Branches can still support TUSC candidates 'under rule', as now. But it will reinforce the arguments of those in other unions that there is no alternative but to support Keir Starmer's Labour.

It was not until 2012 that the RMT AGM agreed that the union should be officially represented on the TUSC all-Britain steering committee. For the first two and a half years Bob Crow and others from the RMT sat on the committee in a personal capacity, while support for TUSC and the wider fight for working-class political representation was built in the union. The need to do so today is even more urgent.

But the Coventry motion was defeated, with the RMT general secretary, Mick Lynch, speaking against.

Workers' reps or 'friends of labour'?

In his speech, Mick Lynch said that he no longer supported the union re-affiliating to Labour, which he had done in 2018 when a special general meeting had been held on the issue.

(The vote then was 31 to 25 against re-affiliation.) Instead, he reportedly argued the RMT should not be currently affiliated to any party, and that candidates seeking support should come to the union, not the union go to them.

This could mean that Mick would support the RMT backing Jeremy Corbyn, if he chooses to stand, in the same way the union has funded the

Green Party MP Caroline Lucas or individual Labour candidates. But that is still at bottom a passive wait-and-see approach, not actively seeking to build independent working-class political representation. Workers don't wait for others to choose or not to act in their interests in the workplace, but organise to have their own accountable representatives. Why shouldn't that be so politically too?

The TUSC votes

The AGM resolution calling for the RMT to withdraw from TUSC if it continued to contest elections was submitted as an emergency motion on the grounds that "at the May 2022 local

elections TUSC received 0.2% of the vote".

This figure is worked out from the fact that over 10.5 million people voted in May and that TUSC polled 29,169 votes. But this is misleading as there were only 268 TUSC local council candidates in May, out of the 6,848

seats up for election. In 40 wards the TUSC candidate polled over 5%, including eight in the north east London borough of Waltham Forest, where TUSC outpolled the Tories - the party of government remember - in six.

The TUSC results have undoubtedly been modest, including when

achieving a third-place finish ahead of the Liberal Democrats, Greens, Reform UK (formerly Nigel Farage's Brexit Party) and six other candidates in the Birmingham Erdington by-election in March. While over 450,000 votes have been cast for TUSC candidates since its formation, only a few

second or third-tier council seats have been won.

But, ultimately, the important question is: how does it help the struggle for workers' interests if the only choice on the ballot paper is between different shades of austerity politicians, left completely unchanged?

Socialist Party campaigning to get all Tories out



Sheffield ALISTAIR TICE

Sheffield – support, sun and socialism

Boris Johnson's resignation left us expectant of the public's reaction as we set up our Socialist Party campaign stall on 9 July. And we weren't disappointed. "Johnson's a gonna, now get all the Tories out," put a smile on people's faces as they walked past or stopped to sign our petitions. Everyone was glad to see the back of Boris and are

enjoying the Tories tearing themselves apart. Nobody disagreed when we said: "Keir Starmer is rubbish too, we need somebody to stand up for working-class people" – which is why "support the rail strikes, we all need a pay rise" drew more solidarity responses as well. Everyone is in the same boat – prices through the roof, no wage rise and can't afford to live. The RMT strikes have transformed the mood. The Tory crisis shows we can win.

A guy in a James Connolly t-shirt bought a Socialist paper, as did a Swedish women's football fan whose father is a railworker, a group of young lads, a couple of young women and an ex-shop steward. 25 people bought the Socialist in two hours, our best Socialist Party stall for weeks. And we collected £50 in Fighting Fund donations. A young midwifery student described how staff shortages were damaging the NHS, and filled in a card to join the Socialist Party. As did two other young people. Support, sun and socialism put smiles on our faces too.

ALISTAIR TICE

Leeds: "Has he actually gone?"

On our Socialist Party campaign stall, we found lots of anger. People want a pay rise. People came over to talk about strikes, and how workers can fight back. One of our first was a friend of striking Arriva bus workers. They wanted to say how effective strike action had been. No one was sad to see Boris Johnson go. But people asked: "Has anything changed?" The replacements will be just as bad, and wouldn't help with the cost-of-living crisis. People told us that Boris Johnson is not unique. "Too many MPs are the same, only there for what they can get, we need to make them accountable to their constituents". Another said that workers should be able to get rid of MPs if they're not representing them, and that Labour is just as bad and doesn't have any solutions. Lots of suspicion about Johnson leaving, with several people asking: "Has he actually gone?" Others could only express their feelings about Johnson by swearing. People donated over £40 to help our campaigns to get all the Tories out.

MICHAEL JOHNSON



MARY FINCH

Abortion rights protesters cheered through London

OSCAR PARRY
ENFIELD AND LEA VALLEY SOCIALIST PARTY

More than 2,000 people gathered in Trafalgar Square on 9 July to protest for the right to an abortion, following the US Supreme Court ruling that overturned Roe v Wade. We set off towards the American Embassy, with widespread support from passing cars, buses and taxis honking their horns and passers-by cheering on the protesters. A large segment of the crowd were Americans. The general consensus among them was that the Democrats bear a lot of responsibility for this state of affairs; they had the opportunity to make abortion rights protected by law and did not do so. Many felt that the idea of

'pro-choice' extended beyond codifying the right to an abortion in law. The right to maternity and paternity leave, a minimum wage of at least £15 an hour, and decent public housing are all key elements in being able to raise children, without fear of not being able to afford to do so. Many protesters voiced concern that even when abortion was legal in the US, working-class people, and other oppressed groups without health insurance, could not afford to access clinics. There can be no confidence in the pro-big business Democratic Party to defend abortion rights. In Britain and the US, we need a new mass workers' party, with a socialist programme that will champion affordable abortion and a real right to choose.



Crowds at the Durham Miners' Gala PAUL MATTHEWSON



The Socialist Party team at the Gala TOMMY MURPHY

150,000 descend for Durham Miners' Gala

NEIL DUNNE
LIVERPOOL SOCIALIST PARTY

The annual Gala has been a feature in Durham almost every year since 1871 – a chance to witness union organisations march for a celebration of workers' pride. Labour leader Keir Starmer didn't speak. A lot of boos were heard when his name was mentioned. Out of the union leaders, Unite general secretary Sharon Graham was the standout speaker, and the message was clear: she wants to stop the working class paying for an economic crisis it didn't create, and it will take collective action to achieve this. Attendees wanted to hear what Mick Lynch, RMT union general secretary had to say following his TV appearances during the rail strikes. Mick had stern words for Starmer and the Tory government: "We refuse to be meek, we refuse to be poor any more". To those in attendance, he said: "You need to find your message, you need to find your voice, and it's got

to be the voice of the working people in struggle, or you've no place in our movement." NHS nurse Holly Johnston – a Socialist Party member in GMB union – also took to the podium. She said: "Every worker in this country is in the same position, and we need to fight together. The whole of the UK needs a pay rise, and don't be fooled, the money is there." "NHS workers have had enough... which is why we are organising like never before". She was one of the few speakers to mention socialism. "For many of us [the NHS] embodies the socialist ideal... we need more socialism, not less socialism." There were lots of stalls. However, it was only the Socialist Party that was calling for a new mass workers' party on a socialist platform. People left the Gala with the hope that the workers' movement will find its courage and belief and take the fight to the bosses and a hostile-to-workers government. Let's hope that the next 12 months means the next Gala is revelling in workers' victories.

Read more of Holly's speech on pages 4-5

What will be the legacy of Birmingham Commonwealth Games?



2018 Commonwealth Games KGB0

CLIVE WALDER
BIRMINGHAM SOUTH SOCIALIST PARTY

The Commonwealth Games opens in Birmingham on 28 July. Not surprisingly, thousands of local people are excited at the prospect of seeing some of the planet's most talented sportspeople in action. With adult tickets starting from £15, ordinary people will be able to see some live events. The council has wanted Birmingham to stage a major tournament for decades, and is hoping that this will kickstart an increase in sporting participation of local people. The council's past record of carrying out Tory cuts will undermine this ambition. The charity established by the Games' organisers aims to provide money to finance swimming lessons for school pupils that were cut during the pandemic, and to create accessible playgrounds for disabled children. Unfortunately, this sets a dangerous precedent. Charities are an unreliable source of permanent income for core services. The Games' organisers want the facilities to be well used by the community afterwards. This will only happen if they are publicly owned, with a free or minimal admission charge, and the community is involved in their management. There is no evidence of a long-term legacy for the host cities of similar events, and there is no reason to assume that these Games will provide one. They temporarily boost the status of local politicians, but better economic and social outcomes generally flow from improvements in core public services and investment in people. The Games have been a catalyst for investment in a deprived area of Birmingham, and the community will see improved public transport and housing. Unfortunately, only

council spends reserves to protect services on a regular basis, while fighting the government for the return of money stolen from the city by the Tory government. All major international sporting events promise to leave a positive legacy. But instead of years of cuts, that money could have sustained grassroots sporting activity and provided a lasting solution to the social problems the Games aims to tackle. Only a massive increase in council spending can achieve this. The council has spent £222 million on the Games, including £25 million to make up for a shortfall in funding from external partners. This alone shows the shortcomings of a market-based business model to finance major sporting events. The council has used £35.7 million of reserves to balance the Games' finances. The council has always told anti-cut campaigners that it is illegal to spend reserves to defend services, but apparently it is legal to use them to shore up the finances of a vanity project! Socialist Party and other anti-cuts campaigners will demand that the

312 of the 968 homes in the athletes' village are designated as 'affordable'. The Socialist Party demands that all housing built on this site should be either genuinely affordable, as decided democratically by a body of housing workers, councillors and trade unionists. Real problems The council's superficial approach to solving people's problems is typified by some of the trite road names in the redevelopment area: Diversity Grove, Equality Road and Destiny Road. The people who live near the main stadium have real problems, which have been made worse by the council's refusal to fight Tory cuts. Local people will enjoy visiting the Games. But they will also be aware that afterwards their problems will remain until fighting councillors and MPs are elected, who will campaign for the return of Birmingham's stolen millions to enable local services to be rebuilt and to give people a future.

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Thousands march on Britain's biggest ever trans rights protest

JULIA RUSEVICA
SOUTH WEST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

10,000 people marched at London's Trans Pride protest on 9 July. There's anger that the situation for trans, non-binary and gender non-conforming people is not improving. We face constant attacks from the Tory government and capitalist media. Britain's first Trans Pride was organised in 2019. Unfortunately, London Pride is now full of giant corporations milking rainbow capitalism in a pathetic attempt to show that they care about LGBTQ+ people. During Pride Month, London was covered in rainbow colours. But the moment June is over, reality speaks for itself. It's extremely difficult to get gender-affirming surgery. Conversion therapy is still not banned for trans people. There are constant attacks on trans women in professional sport, and problems accessing public toilets. Transgender people suffer violence, abuse and harassment. People can see that the current

government is unwilling to support trans, non-binary and gender non-conforming people. Both Tory and Labour parties have failed them time and time again. This is why people are looking for a political alternative. We need a movement which will actually represent trans people's interests and stand up for their safety - a movement that will put our rights above the capitalist profit system. Bristol Pride There was a huge turnout for the march, despite the main festivities taking place on a closed site two miles away. People clearly see the need to continue campaigning, including signing the Socialist Party petition calling for trans people not to be excluded from government plans to ban 'conversion therapy'. A lot of people took our leaflet that called for linking up LGBTQ+ campaigns with the growing fightback of workers.

Bristol Pride

TOM BALDWIN

Obituary – Owen Ryan is sorely missed

ROY FARRAR
LIVERPOOL SOCIALIST PARTY

We are sad to announce the recent death of Owen Ryan, a longstanding active member of the Socialist Party. He passed away after a period of ill health in his later years. Owen left Labour when Tony Blair became leader. He told everyone that Tony Blair's leadership of the party, and then a Labour government, would bring no benefit to working people. Seeing that socialist change was no longer possible via Labour, Owen joined the Socialist Party. From the first he was an enthusiastic campaigner and a stalwart at campaign stalls, demonstrations, canvassing for Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidates, and so on into his 70s. He is sorely missed by all members of our party. We convey our condolences to his sister Elizabeth and to his wider family.



At Bournemouth Pride, we met another eleven people that want to join the 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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Paul (right) campaigning with Iain (left) in Leeds LEEDS SP

Why I joined the Socialist Party

'To root out the real cause of corruption: capitalism'

PAUL THOMAS
LEEDS SOCIALIST PARTY

There is an abundance of wealth in the world. The likes of Musk, Bezos, Gates and others get richer, yet across the planet people are starving and living in slums. What has become even more obvious, is that this is not just in the developing nations, but in the world's richest countries too, including Britain.

I got to thinking, why? Why, in a world of such plenty with mountains of food thrown away every day, do we still have so many starving? In the UK, hundreds of thousands of people use food banks. The answer I saw as simple: corruption.

Meritocracy lie

The idea of a meritocracy is utterly false. At first, I saw politicians as the only ones to blame for corruption. But, while clearly easily corrupted, they are not the only source. At root, the source of that corruption: those with money. The capitalists, bending and changing rules to suit themselves.

I started to look for the alternative. But the well-known political options, Tories, Labour and the rest, basically have the same set of policies: 'Keep the financial system working and businesses profitable, this will make everything else work.' It clearly doesn't.

I want a system that puts people first, not just an elite few. Socialism does exactly that, by bringing the vast wealth and resources hoarded by the



I'm proud to be part of the Socialist Party, engaging in the class fight now under way, on the side of the working class. You should join us too

rich into democratic public ownership, so that society can be run with a truly democratic ethos, not for profit but to provide what is needed for all.

I started to search the internet for a group that aligned with the socialist spirit growing within me. I left my contact information on the Socialist Party website, and was swiftly contacted by Yorkshire organiser Iain Dalton.

I was invited along to a few meetings to meet and chat with members from across West Yorkshire branches. Now I have joined the Leeds branch. I have settled in to the weekly meetings and actively join in discussions. While a little unsure at first, with the support of more experienced members, I have started helping on the city centre campaign stalls, and attending picket lines to extend solidarity to workers in struggle.

I'm proud to be part of the Socialist Party, engaging in the class fight now under way, on the side of the working class. You should join us too.

In the latest in a series on Marxist classics, **Ryan Aldred** reviews Lenin's 'State and Revolution'

Lenin's State and Revolution was written during the revolutionary upheavals that were taking place in Russia in 1917. By necessity it had to be cut short, as Lenin explains at the end of the book, because of the developing revolution that would go on to see the Bolsheviks propelled to power in October of that same year on the promise of peace, land and bread.

It remains a vital work for socialists, rich in political lessons that still stand true today.

The state as an oppressive force

A great deal of time is spent explaining that the institutions that make up the state are not there as an independent arbiter to reconcile the opposing interests of the bosses and the working class. Instead, the role of the state and its institutions, such as the police and armed forces, is ultimately to enforce the interests of the ruling class, which in a capitalist society means enforcing the interests of the bosses.

The Covid outbreak has helped to underline this issue as legislation brought in under the auspices of protecting the public during the pandemic has been used to break up strike actions and limit protests and demonstrations. The police have even used the threat of fines of up to £10,000 to clamp down on, for instance, NHS staff and student rent strike protests, in a poorly veiled attempt to curtail protest rather than protect public safety.

Counterpose this to the fact that the police came under immense pressure before taking any action over the 'Partygate' scandal, and even then only issued a single fine to the prime minister, among fines to others, despite there being an established pattern and culture of parties and snubbing of the rules the government set themselves.

This is an indication that the institutions that make up the state are not arm's-length arbiters that exist outside of class antagonisms, but are inherently bound up in them, protecting the interests of the capitalist class first and foremost.

With the cost-of-living crisis pushing workers to take industrial action, as well as an upswing in struggle on social issues, such as Black Lives Matter and marches against violence against women, it is not coincidental that the Tories have been beefing up the powers of the state to clamp down on protests and strikes by introducing new measures such as the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act, and the Nationality and Borders Act.

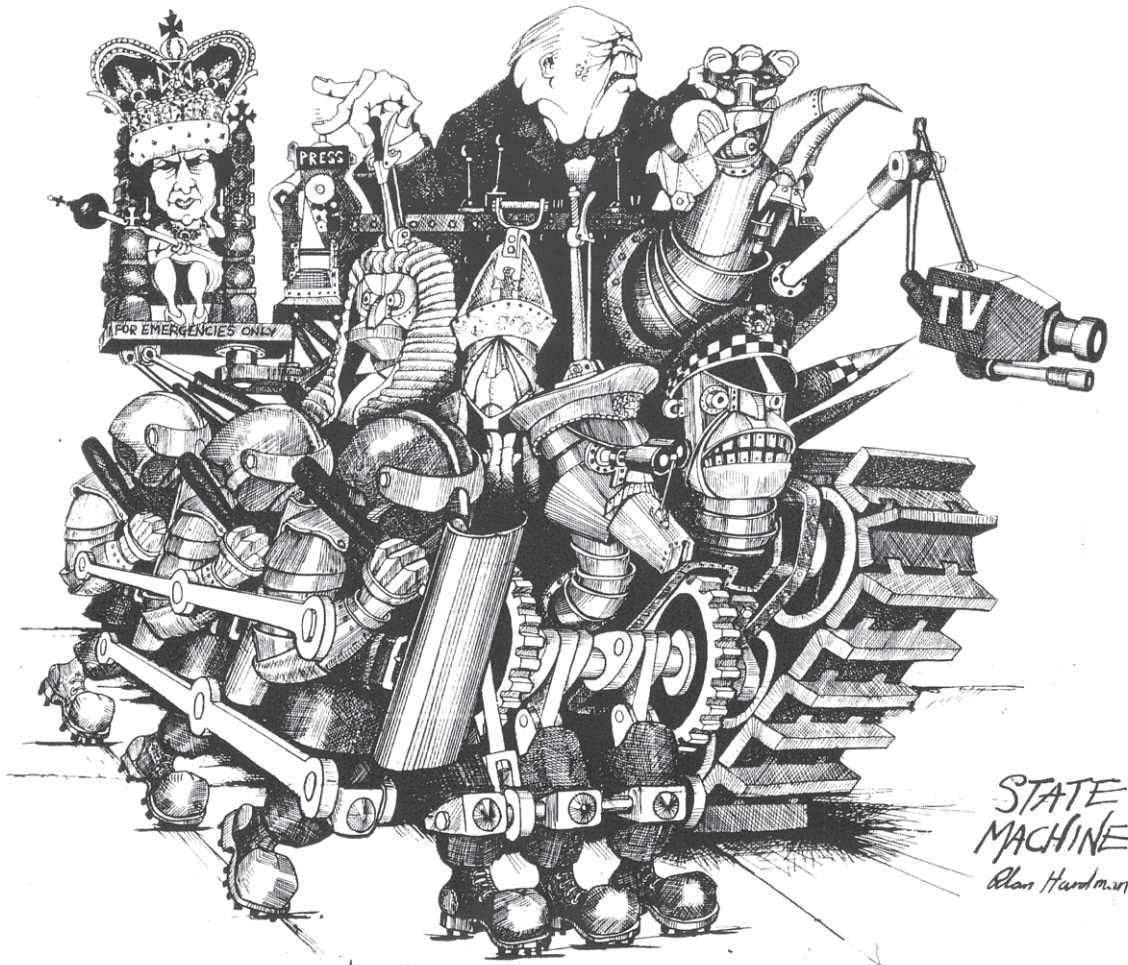
Such moves, along with talk by the government of further limiting the right to strike, despite draconian anti-trade union laws already in place, are a calculated move to prepare for the class battles which loom ahead.

Socialism or anarchism?

Lenin points out the need for workers to take power so that society can be shaped anew, without the immense exploitation and poverty caused by the overwhelming inequality inherently built into the capitalist system. However, he also takes up the somewhat utopian idea anarchists

STATE AND REVOLUTION

Lenin on class society and the state



put forward of dismantling the state within 24 hours. Lenin points out that while workers taking power is a step on the road to a socialist society, it is not the finished article, and there is a danger of the capitalists doing all they can to sabotage a workers' government. It is because of these reasons that there is a need for a workers' state apparatus for a period of time.

We saw the lengths the capitalists were prepared to go simply to thwart a Corbyn-led government, with threats of capital strikes, a run on the pound, and even less-than-veiled threats of a 'mutiny' from an army general. If a workers' government was prepared to go much further, nationalising large sections of industry, bringing the banks into public ownership and introducing a democratically planned economy, it would face a barrage of attacks from capitalists both at home and internationally.

There would still be a need for a state but it would be fundamentally different in character, as it would be a means for workers to counter those attacks, to seize the assets of the super-rich, and to reorganise society, rather than a tool of oppression to keep the bosses in control. Similarly,

a workers' state would be a means of blocking the flight of capital as the bosses would undoubtedly try to smuggle out their ill-gotten gains to safe havens abroad.

Against gradual reform: a workers' state

While Lenin highlights that the state cannot be dismantled within 24 hours along anarchist lines, he similarly argues against his social democrat contemporaries on the issue of gradualism.

Socialists certainly aren't opposed to winning reforms; in fact our determination to fight for a socialist world can assist in winning the most concessions.

However, it would be practically impossible to roll out socialist policies piecemeal when the international capitalist community would be doing all it could to sabotage a government trying to implement those policies.

For instance, a workers' government would need to introduce immediate measures which would fundamentally change the character of the state along socialist lines. These measures would include requiring elected representatives to

only take the average workers' wage and introducing the right of recall. Such measures would deter careerists, interested only in representing their narrow self-interest by maintaining the status quo.

It would also provide an important check and balance to ensure that representatives can be held to account and, if need be, removed from post if they no longer represent the interests of those they have been elected to represent. Likewise, measures would need to be taken to democratise the judiciary and the armed forces which would again ensure that they are accountable, and transformed to serve working-class interests.

Another danger of gradually trying to implement socialist measures is that a workers' government would be doing so against the backdrop of a hostile international capitalist classes internationally doing all they could to undermine and sabotage a transition to socialism. Stopping the flight of capital abroad, introducing a state monopoly of foreign trade, gaining control of the banks through their nationalisation, bringing the commanding heights of the economy under workers' control and management - these are among the actions that would be needed to begin the process of democratically planning an economy.

These are measures which cannot be gradually introduced, because to do so would give the capitalist class ample opportunity to prepare to counter or undermine them. Such measures would need to be implemented to counter the capitalists internationally to being able to inflict severe economic damage in an attempt to strangle a workers' state at birth, until the time that they are prevented from doing so by the working class in their own countries, who would be keen to follow the example of socialist transformation. State and Revolution provides many important political lessons which will be invaluable as we enter a period of heightened class struggle. With such a turbulent period ahead, if this book is not on your reading list already, be sure to add it to prepare for the mighty class battles to come.



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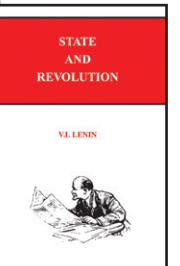
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FIGHT FOR OUR FUTURE

£15-an-hour minimum wage

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CALLUM JOYCE
OXFORD SOCIALIST PARTY

The future on offer to young people is dire. It includes unemployment, low-paid, unstable work and being saddled with thousands of pounds of student debt that will take decades to pay off.

Rents are increasing to satisfy the greed of landlords, and the idea of owning your own home is a far-off dream.

None of this will be news to those entering the world of work for the first time. As the cost-of-living crisis worsens, the prospects for young workers get worse too.

But there is a way out of the crisis. One that doesn't leave us worrying where the next meal will come from. Young people need to get organised,

join the trade union movement and help lead the struggle against the bosses and capitalist politicians who support them.

The recent RMT strikes have shown the potential power of working-class people when they act together. The spirit of these strikes must be carried all over the country, and throughout all industries, if young people are going to have a shot at winning back our futures.

Engaging in struggle is no longer a choice - it is fast becoming a necessity. Now more than ever, it is vital that the trade union leaders set a fighting example, to inspire the new generation of workers with the confidence that when we fight, we can win.

At the same time, young workers are taking up the fight in our own

workplaces and communities, fighting for pay rises, rent controls and public services.

But trade union struggle on its own is not enough. We need a mass political force that actually supports picket lines, stands up for workers, and demands a minimum wage of £15 an hour and an end to zero-hour contracts.

But to end the system of economic exploitation that forces workers into struggle in the first place, a new workers' party needs to also fight for socialism - a system where the productive forces are publicly owned, under democratic working-class control, and used to provide for the needs of all.

We say to all workers and young people: join the fightback, get organised in a trade union, and join the Socialist Party!



PAUL MATTSSON

WHAT WE STAND FOR: THE SOCIALIST PARTY'S MAIN DEMANDS >>> see column on p14

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