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the Socialist

Issue 1191

18-31 August 2022

formerly **Militant**

ALL STRIKE TOGETHER

WE NEED A REAL PAY RISE!



Join the NSSN lobby of the TUC - 11 Sept, 1pm, Holiday Inn Hotel, Brighton

ROB WILLIAMS
SOCIALIST PARTY WORKPLACE AND TRADE UNION ORGANISER

The summer strikes are hotting up as workers hit back against the cost-of-living squeeze.

Alongside the growing number of localised disputes, transport workers in the RMT, Aslef, TSSA and Unite are stepping up their national struggle in a week of strike action. The CWU is organising national strike action by its members across Royal Mail, BT and the Post Office over six days. On 31 August, 155,000 CWU members will walk out together in Royal Mail and BT.

Disputes are blowing up on a weekly basis, many of them resulting in significant gains. Nearly 2,000 dockers at Felixstowe are about to strike - the port through which almost half of the UK's containers are transported. On 10 August, thousands of construction workers under the NAECI agreement, working as contractors at sites such as oil refineries and power stations, walked out taking unofficial action to demand the pay rise they need and deserve.

On top of these, public sector unions are preparing for national strike ballots in the autumn.

All of this represents a step change in the level of action. The unions are becoming a pole of attraction to working-class people, desperate to keep a roof over their heads, worried how they'll keep the lights and heating on in the winter. With the abject role of Keir Starmer and his New Labour Party, this is even more the case.

No wonder that thousands of non-unionised Amazon workers joined the strike wave and walked off the job when one of the biggest companies in the world 'offered' them the insult of a pay rise between 35p and 50p per hour! This predominately young workforce of up to 75,000 are learning the reality that workers are more powerful if they are organised in the trade union movement, taking action together.

And that is the case for all workers, particularly the six and a half million already in the unions. On picket line after picket line, workers agree with the idea of striking together. They know that the Tories are in crisis and on the ropes, but the knockout punch has to be delivered.

That's why the National Shop Stewards Network rally and lobby of TUC Congress on 11 September in Brighton is so important.

Join the lobby - send the message to the union leaders: coordinate the action.

Get your union branch or trades council to back the lobby

The NSSN is supported by the following unions: Unite the Union, RMT, CWU, FBU, Napo, BFAWU, POA and NUM.

In addition, the rally and lobby is supported by: Brighton Trades Council, Cardiff Trades Council, Coventry Trades Council, Swansea Trades Council, Barts Health Unite, Cardiff Unite, Coventry Unite Tom Mann branch, Doctors in Unite, GMP London Print Unite branch, Housing Workers Unite branch, South Birmingham Unite, Waltham Forest Council Unite, and branches of Unison have supported the plan to lobby the TUC.

• To find out about transport to the lobby, to add your support, and to make a donation to the NSSN, go to shopstewards.net



**SUMMER STRIKE WAVE:
RMT p4, CWU p5, ASLEF p6, CONSTRUCTION WORKERS p6, AMAZON p7, BUSES p10-11**

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

Refuse to be cold and poor any more

How we can fight against inflation poverty



SARAH SACHS-ELDRIDGE
SOCIALIST PARTY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

There is nothing inevitable about the dire predictions for rising poverty coming to pass. The mass inability to pay energy bills that's on the cards, with the illness, suffering and even deaths that will bring, must be resisted. Mass workers' action can change the course of events in the interests of the working class.

What is threatened is horrendous. Over half the UK population is expected to be in fuel poverty by Christmas. Millions of parents are sick with worry at the prospect of sending their kids to school under-fed, only to have them come back to cold homes in the evening. Pensioners, disabled people and others hit hard by Tory inflation austerity are forced to be fearful of the future.

With 62% of households already struggling to pay their bills, it's predicted that average energy costs will rise in January to £3,615 a year, a 283% rise in just nine months. The energy regulator now plans to raise the cap four times a year, rather than twice.

Meanwhile, the energy companies are making money hand over fist. BP announced quarterly profits of £6.9 billion, its highest figure for 14 years. Worldwide, oil and gas corporations have made \$3 billion in profit a day, every day for the last 50 years.

These obscene profits are pushing anger up even faster than the bills are rising. The search is on for ways to resist inflation poverty.

This zombie government is in paralysis, incapable of action. That won't change much when the 150,000 Tory members select the new prime minister who will also preside over a government of crisis. The leadership contest itself has pushed the crisis and divisions within the Tory party to new levels - spokespeople from the different wings of the party openly disagree in public.

But doing nothing is not an easy option for the Tories. Truss was forced to deny she ruled out help with bills as panic set in among Tory MPs at the prospect of taking that position to a general election. Sri Lanka won't be the only country where prime ministers and presidents are removed from office by mass movements triggered by the cost-of-living crisis.

As chancellor, Sunak was forced to U-turn on help for bills almost immediately after he presented his spring budget. The two factors in this retreat were polls predicting massive Tory election losses and a growing mood for strike action. The trade union and socialist movement needs to build on this to develop a programme of workers' defence against poverty.

Since then, those strike ballots have been realised in a growing strike wave with widespread support. The pay strikes show a way forward in the fight against poverty. In the last year, for example, 63,000 Unite members have gone into disputes winning over £50 million in pay increases. The price cap rise only makes it clearer that everyone needs to fight for a pay rise.

The action is growing: four days of strikes by 115,000 postal workers in the CWU have been announced as well as further rail strike dates, and plans for teachers, civil servants and more to join in taking action in the autumn. The Amazon workers' collective actions (see pages 6-7), including demanding a £15-an-hour minimum wage, shows how as yet unorganised workers will be drawn into action. The protests by construction workers at oil refineries (see also pages 6-7) point to the power of organised workers in the energy sector.

All the potential is there to build a mass movement that can force the government back. The trade union leaders are increasingly looked to for a line of resistance against the Tories. They must now build on that to offer the leadership necessary to turn that potential into the building of a millions-strong movement that fights inflation poverty.

That means fighting for a strategy to unite workers and young people in action around a programme that includes: inflation-proofed pay rises, pensions and benefits; a £15-an-hour minimum wage, with no exemptions; rent caps, a programme of council house building and of home insulation; nationalisation of energy, water, rail, mail and a socialist alternative to capitalist exploitation and poverty.

This battle must be waged in every field - in the workplaces, in the communities and at the ballot box.

Pro-capitalist non-solutions

Already some of the defenders of capitalism can see the writing on the wall and are seeking ways to avoid a confrontation with the working class. They will not be successful. But the measures they are considering indicate the pressure already being exerted by the strikes.

Lib Dem leader Ed Davies has called for the October rise in the

energy cap to be scrapped and the cost covered by a windfall tax on oil and gas companies. Sunak and his wing of the Tory party are looking at cancelling VAT on bills. Former Labour leader Gordon Brown has called for an emergency budget, including temporary nationalisation of the energy companies.

On the back foot, one advantage the defenders of capitalism have is that the working class, stepping up the fight in the workplaces, does not yet have a political voice to represent its interests in parliament and the councils. Keir Starmer's Labour has refused to back the strikes and has dropped Corbyn's call for nationalisation.

Asked on BBC Radio 4's Today programme whether Labour supports public ownership of rail, water and energy, shadow chancellor Rachel Reeves pointed to the fact that Starmer had scrapped the 2019 manifesto, and suggested its cost would conflict with her determination to balance the books. But that's why nationalisation would need to be implemented without compensation being paid to fat-cat shareholders, only to those who could prove their need.

The other argument put forward against nationalisation, is that it would take too long. But 51 years ago, a Tory government was forced to step in and nationalise Rolls Royce within 24 hours. This Tory government is even weaker and less able to defend the rotten capitalist system as its crisis grows. Nationalising the energy industry would mean that the bosses' hoarded cash could be put to use investing in green alternatives, for example.

Unlike Brown's version - modelled on Labour's bailing out of the banks - socialist nationalisation, under democratic workers' control as part of a socialist plan of production, could end fuel poverty immediately. It could massively cut energy bills, with costs absorbed into government spending.

With a general election looming, building a new workers' party that stands firm in the interests of the working class is an urgent part of the fight against inflation poverty. The trade union leaders are well-placed to take decisive steps towards building such a party. So is Jeremy Corbyn who, if he wants to stand in the next general election, will be forced to do so outside of Starmer's Labour Party.

A new workers' party would also provide a forum for the debate and discussion needed to develop the tactics for the movement. One pressing question which must be discussed is tactics for defeating the price cap and keeping families warm and fed.

There is a growing mood for direct action - including from the tens of thousands who have signed up to pledge to cancel their energy direct debits on 1 October. How could it be otherwise? Bill non-payment is on the cards because millions face inability to pay.



This battle must be waged in every field - in the workplaces, in the communities and at the ballot box



The summer strike wave shows what can be achieved by workers standing together and striking DAVE REID

The victory of the mass campaign of non-payment of the poll tax is being taken up as a reference point. The most significant aspect of the poll tax struggle was the tactic of mass organised non-payment of the bills. But it was also one of many tactics that were needed in the course of the years-long campaign, including mass coordinated court attendance, organised bailiff busting, and battles in workplaces against wage deductions, among others.

Working-class organisation was the essential foundation on which the development and implementation of non-payment and all the other tasks of the campaign could be built. Anti-poll tax organisations were built first locally and then connected regionally and nationally in the All-Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation. The leadership at every level was elected and accountable.

While there are many lessons of the poll tax that can be absorbed for building mass movements today, non-payment of the poll tax is not directly comparable to non-payment of energy bills.

For example, between the announcement of the price cap hike and its implementation in October there are only a matter of weeks. The poll tax victory was the result of a four-year campaign. Furthermore, not paying the poll tax did not carry the danger of being unable to heat your home or cook.

However, the difference between the backdrops to these two campaigns is the most significant one, pointing to how the price hikes can be defeated. Thatcher had secured victories against the working class and was seen as the 'Iron Lady'. In the end, this turned out not to be the case. The anti-poll tax movement led by Militant, the predecessor of the Socialist Party, reduced her to iron filings. But there is nothing iron-like about today's Tories. Today, working class-organised mass struggle is in the ascendancy - which was not the case in the late 1980s.

Given the weakness of the Tories, and the growing strikes, the price cap rise can be cancelled and more. If a lead for such a campaign is given by the trade union leaders, or even by Corbyn, linked to coordinating the strikes, the calling of a mass national week-day demo, and the building of a working-class electoral challenge, not only the October price cap rise but the whole cost-of-living crisis could start to be turned around.

Without doubt, the poll tax remains relevant in many ways. The imposition of energy meters could become a flashpoint for which the poll tax's 'bailiff busting' holds valuable lessons. Those who are unable to pay their bills are likely to be threatened with pre-payment meters - already in place in over four million households - which are more expensive, and can be used by energy companies to recoup losses. This means forcing people, in effect, to cut their own energy off. Smart meters can be converted into pre-payment meters remotely with a court order.

Recently, eviction resistance and resistance against immigration raids have shown how the anti-poll tax movement's tactic of community mobilisation and picketing is still relevant. Preparation can begin now - including building up contact lists of people who are willing to both attend resistance events and to mobilise members of their unions, neighbours, and respective organisations, etc. There is no shortcut to building an effective, democratic movement. This preparation will be valuable no matter what tactics are required in the course of the struggle against Tory inflation poverty.

That's because energy bills aren't the only thing grinding down our living standards: falling real-terms pay is compounded by rising rents, interest rate hikes making mortgages and debt more expensive, spiralling food prices, 'fire and re-hire', petrol prices, benefit cuts, cuts to public services. Non-payment is already a daily challenge. But there is also nothing inevitable about anyone being left to suffer.

Councils could also step in - if there are councillors prepared to fight. A number of councils are already offering libraries and other public buildings to "give people the opportunity to stay warm where required". But councils could also top up Rishi Sunak's miserly increase to the Household Support Fund to meet real local needs and prevent anyone facing disconnection.

Local authorities are responsible for over one-fifth of all public spending. Labour-led councils, 125 of them, control budgets of at least £82 billion. With the Tories split and in paralysis, why not use those significant council resources and powers to introduce measures that protect families? That could be transformative for the 29 million people living in those areas.

Local anti-poverty solidarity networks of trade unions and campaigners could combine their strikes, protests and bailiff resistance with proposing emergency council 'people's budgets', which could include expanding school meal provision, breakfast clubs, opening up municipal buildings to youth clubs to relieve pressure to heat homes, making warm-home grants available to prevent arrears, programmes of home insulation, etc. If Labour councillors oppose such budgets, the necessity of workers and campaigners standing as election candidates is obvious.

This debate on how families can be protected against the ravages of for-profit energy provision poses the question of how society is run. With profits rising alongside poverty, the question of provision of energy for need, not profit, is posed.

The fight against fuel and inflation poverty is the fight for a socialist world, in Britain starting with the nationalisation of the 150 major corporations that dominate the economy, which would give the working class the basis on which to start to plan how everyone can have a decent life.

Join the fightback
JOIN THE SOCIALISTS
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● or text your name and postcode to 07761 818 206
to find out more about joining us today!

Summer strike waves spreads!

Support the national RMT strikes

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN THE RMT

Around 50,000 RMT members will take further strike action this month in our disputes over jobs, pay, pensions and conditions.

On the mainline, members working for 14 Train Operating Companies (TOCs) and Network Rail (NR) are striking over pay offers for 2022 of 2% on the TOCs and less than 4% on NR.

These pay offers are insults, way below the rate of inflation and conditional on RMT accepting the smashing up of the rail industry. In return for these real-terms pay cuts, we are expected to agree to get rid of a third of all maintenance jobs across the mainline railways, to regrade jobs with lower salaries for new staff, and to cut our pensions.

The only response is to continue the strikes, with the next action on 18 and 20 August on NR and the TOCs.

On London Underground (LU) the jobs, pensions and conditions of tube workers are being negotiated in secret by the London mayor, Transport for London (TfL) management and Grant Shapps in the Department for Transport. The only way for tube workers to force our voice into these negotiations is to strike. The next action will take place on 19 August.

In reality, rail workers on LU, the TOCs and NR are fighting a government plan to impose £4 billion of cuts



These pay offers are insults, way below the rate of inflation and conditional on RMT accepting the smashing up of the rail industry. In return for these real-terms pay cuts, we are expected to agree to get rid of a third of all maintenance jobs across the mainline railways, to regrade jobs with lower salaries for new staff, and to cut our pensions

across the rail industry. The aim is to slash pay and pensions and reduce job numbers, while forcing flexible working onto those left in the job.

The government hopes that a show of force against RMT will discipline the trade union movement and allow the bosses, their government and the billionaire class they represent to impose more austerity onto workers so that profits can be boosted as the economy slides into recession.

It is up to the movement to ensure that cannot happen. The public debate has shifted as a result of RMT's nationally coordinated strike campaign that started in March. When Kirsty Wark, on Newsnight, is raising the possibility of a general strike with Mick Lynch, RMT general secretary, you know things are changing!

RMT action has now been joined by action by drivers' union Aslef, albeit it on different days. RMT members on London Overground will strike alongside London Underground workers, and Unite are calling out 1,600 London bus drivers on 19 August. This is a massive step forward for building unity between TfL workers.

Aslef members need to demand their union takes action alongside RMT and Unite members on LU against the imposition of the managed decline of London's transport services, and also the managed decline of the jobs, pensions and conditions of transport workers.

Outside the rail sector, postal workers and BT workers organised in the Communications Workers Union (CWU) are now in dispute, and ballots loom in Unison (NHS and local government workers) and the National Education Union of teachers and support staff.

In addition to dates over the August bank holiday, the CWU has called action on 8 and 9 September. This Royal Mail strike will greet the new Tory Prime Minister during their first week in the job. It will also come immediately preceding the Trades Union Congress, which starts on 11 September.

The RMT has a resolution on the TUC agenda calling for the TUC to: "Where possible, plan and encourage coordinated strike action". Unions with live ballots should seek to take action on 8 and 9 September, in furtherance of their own disputes, to demonstrate coordination in action.

The lead being taken by RMT and the CWU, in promoting a coordinated defence of pay, jobs and conditions, must be applauded. It is important that the whole membership of each union are involved in discussing and agreeing tactics going forward. This means mass members' meetings, and also meetings where reps can engage with detailed discussion on what is needed and feed that back to the unions' executives.

RMT general secretary Mick Lynch and assistant general secretary Eddie Dempsey have joined the CWU leadership in taking the initiative of launching a campaign under the banner of Enough is Enough.

Any attempt by trade unions to unite with broader working-class

communities to address the cost-of-living crisis is welcome, but it must address the issue also of who can politically represent the working class in the struggle.

If a campaign like Enough is Enough is to mobilise across the working class it must be prepared to break with a Labour Party now irrefutably under the grip of Blairite New Labour politics, and stand candidates against it.

This is graphically illustrated in London. How can tube workers vote for Labour mayor Sadiq Khan? He is our boss. He is in secret negotiations to attack our pensions, jobs and conditions. He refuses to even meet with RMT. He refuses to tell us what he is even talking to the Department for Transport about.

Massive progress has been made in recent months in building a militant fighting movement to protect workers during the cost-of-living crisis and inevitable recession that looms over us. Real wages have been falling in Britain since the banks bankrupted the economy in 2008. RMT managed to protect rail workers, in the main, during that time and this has given our members the confidence to fight now. A generalised struggle of unions across sectors could defeat the bosses and their government and push the Tories out of power.

But what would replace them? A Starmer government would only pursue the same pro-business agenda under a different colour banner. Part of the generalised movement of trade unions and workers now must be to build a new party of the unions and working class with socialist policies.



ISAIA PRIVA



Reading NEIL ADAMS

Historic action by Royal Mail, BT and Post Office workers

150,000 members of the Communication Workers Union (CWU) – working for Royal Mail, BT and the Post Office – are striking together in August and September.

Royal Mail national strike: "A fight to the finish"

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN CWU

Royal Mail workers are taking their first national strike action since 2009, in what is looking like being an extremely bitter dispute.

The dates are Friday 26 and Wednesday 31 August, followed by Thursday 8 and Friday 9 September. The result of a second ballot on terms and conditions will be announced on Wednesday 17 August.

On the evening of Wednesday 10 August, the Communication Workers Union (CWU) national negotiators suspended talks with Royal Mail, due to the way the CWU was being treated with complete contempt – not just in the negotiations but all over the country. The CEO has not even been attending national negotiations, but spends his time on social media attacking the CWU. At the same time, the Royal Mail negotiation team has made no concessions.

At a time when Royal Mail claims to be losing money at a rate of £1 million a day, it has hired a strike-breaking fleet of vans, and 2,400 agency staff. It is using the Tory government's latest anti-union law allowing the use of agency staff during strike action.

All Unite members in managerial grades have been instructed by Royal Mail that they must carry out CWU-grade work, performing the work of

other trade unionists out on strike. This must be met by the strongest action by Unite.

Royal Mail bosses have no intention of attempting to open most delivery offices on strike days, but only open what they are calling their new 'parcel hub units' and tell all scabs to report to there. They aim to remove all packets above shoebox size from all delivery offices and put them into the delivery hubs – work that would never return to the delivery units. This will have a huge impact on all units across the country.

It is clearly a serious turn, and looks like Royal Mail plans to try to break the CWU. It is preparing for a fight to the finish.

But the CWU has an angry membership which is also preparing for a long battle and, if required, will be prepared to escalate the strike. Mass picketing of the hubs where the agency workers will be used to strike-break may be needed. We should be calling on the whole union movement to come to our side.

A postal worker preparing to strike spoke to Mansfield Socialist Party member Tom Hunt: "We've worked right through this pandemic, and they expect us to live in poverty while our bosses sit in their ivory tower! It has to stop... The bosses really don't care about us, they even expect us to work the 4-6pm shift today in this heat... The worst thing they did was

to privatise Royal Mail."

A young postal worker spoke to London Socialist Party member Berkay Kartav:

"I am supporting my union and going on strike to demand a more sufficient pay rise. The cost-of-living crisis has hit us all hard and I'm not claiming to be the only one hit, or the hardest hit. I do feel, however, underdervalued by the organisation I am working for.

"A lot of my fellow workers are forced to haggle for overtime. I've seen many postal workers around me exhausted from the amount they have to work to sustain financial stability.

"And who are these people? These are the people who during the Covid pandemic, risked their lives coming in to work every day to keep the country connected when we were forced to separate in isolation. Delivering important documentation, doctors' letters, exam results and so on.

"When a large number of businesses were forced to move online, who was delivering their packages? The postal workers.

"And these are the people who were making money for the business. The share price tripled from the beginning of the pandemic to peak.

"I've seen this company spend £11 million on agency staff. Is it too much for us hardworking and reliable staff to ask for a respectable pay rise? No."



BT worker on strike in Sheffield ALAISTAIR TICE

BT strike again

Post Office out too

CLIVE WALDER
CWU MIDLAND NO1 BRANCH (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

The Communication Workers Union (CWU) has called two more days of strike action of their BT Group and Openreach members on 30 and 31 August in pursuit of a decent pay rise. Despite the previous two days of strike action being solid, the employers have refused to enter into negotiations to settle the dispute.

The barefaced cheek of a company that gave its CEO a 32% pay rise this year, and announced a £400 million first-quarter profit just days before the last strike, in addition to £1.3 billion profits the previous year while paying £750 million in shareholder dividends.

The key to winning this dispute lies in consistent disruption to the employer's operations. The previous action caused considerable disruption to the company.

It's welcome that in this latest strike, different workers in the CWU are coordinating together. That is a significant step up in the action.

The members have shown that, given a lead, they will fight for decent pay and working conditions. The union now needs to urgently draw up plans and prepare the members for the possibility of more concerted and longer-lasting industrial action.

The CWU has announced that Royal Mail and BT strikers will be joined by more action by their members in the Post Office. CWU says that Post Office management still refuses to move away from its pay freeze position for 2021-22.



Who's striking when?

- Royal Mail – 26 and 31 August, 8 and 9 September
- BT – 30 and 31 August
- Crown Post Office – 26 and 27 August
- Crown Post Office admin and supply chain – 26 and 30 August

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Workers meet and vote for action at Mount Pleasant, London ROB WILLIAMS

Aslef train drivers strike – growing mood for coordination

ELAINE BRUNSKILL
SOUTH TYNE & WEAR SOCIALIST PARTY

Train drivers in the Aslef union were on strike at nine companies on 13 August over a pay offer that failed to “keep pace with the increase in the cost of living”. In Newcastle, the strike was rock solid.

We observed a growing mood for strike action to be coordinated. One of the strikers said a trick had been missed, that Aslef should have been on strike the same days as the RMT, or added to it by being out immediately after them.

This mood for coordinated action is being further fuelled by the hostile stance of Grant Shapps, Tory transport secretary, who is threatening to impose new legislation requiring a minimum number of trains to be run when future strikes go ahead.

Rail workers understand that Shapps wants to crush the rail unions. But rank-and-file Aslef strikers we spoke to are more than prepared to fight back.

They were underwhelmed by Labour leader Keir Starmer. And were taken by the comment in our Socialist paper, where an Aslef train driver had said: “We have a new word for scabs here – we call them Starmers”.

Adding to this, strikers said on their next picket line they should all wear Starmer masks, with placards saying: “Missing in action”.

Strikers we spoke to were clearly considering whether their vote should continue to go to Labour, now the party was clearly under the control of the right wing. The need for a new mass workers’ party is crystallising in the minds of workers in struggle.

The Socialist Party says stop giving public money to shareholders and greedy bosses, instead nationalise the rail companies and deliver a safe, excellent service delivered by people on inflation-busting wages.

● See socialistparty.org.uk for more on the Aslef strike around the country



Northampton strikers HARRISON CAIRNS

Construction workers walk out over pay

On Wednesday 10 August, workers on a number of construction sites at oil refineries and power plants walked off the job. This was the first of what are intended as fortnightly walk-outs over pay.

The unofficial action was called by Unite and GMB members in the shop stewards forum. Both unions are reported to be looking to hold official ballots at all NAECI sites, where workers are employed under the National Agreement for Engineering Construction Industry. A two-year deal was previously made of 2.5% a year over 2022-23, now way below inflation.

Socialist Party members visited a number of sites round the country.

IAIN DALTON, LEEDS SOCIALIST PARTY, REPORTS FROM DRAX POWER STATION, NEAR SELBY IN YORKSHIRE

What started as a handful on the picket in the early morning, grew to hundreds as workers parked up and joined the picket. Their numbers were increased further due to the hostile attitude of security, who attempted to stop workers speaking to drivers coming into the site. In response, workers who had been given dispensation to fix a broken boiler walked out to join the protest.

Many work in very dangerous conditions, some for very low basic pay. I spoke to industrial cleaners who work in very hot conditions removing slag from pipe-work, and clicker and ash from hoppers, for just £10.58 an hour.

NICK CHAFFEY, SOUTHERN REGION SOCIALIST PARTY, VISITED THE FAWLEY OIL REFINERY IN HAMPSHIRE

Hundreds protested at both gates at Fawley, angry at a job that has seen pay cut by half in a decade, and is dangerous. As one summed it up, now fuel prices have rocketed: “This job’s not worth it!”

At the biggest oil refinery in the country, where Exxon are making gargantuan profits, it is estimated that pay now just makes up 4% of turnover.

Many workers here work away from home, have local digs, and travel back at weekends. Costs are up and workers are angry that they have not had a response from the employers.

Both gates had hundreds out protesting. They had support from GMB reps from Hinkley B.

Fawley has seen its fair share of battles over NAECI in recent years. Contractors have flouted pay rates but have been forced to cough up when unofficial strikes have shown workers are not prepared to retreat.

It’s a common view among a layer of older workers that this is a fight for their kids and the future workforce as much as it is for today. A recent strike of outside contractors at Fawley forced up an initial offer from 2% to 9%.

Reps were pleased to have the support of the National Shop Stewards Network and local activists. Everyone agreed with the call for coordinated action on pay.



Grangemouth in Scotland PHILIP STOTT



Fawley NICK CHAFFEY

Liverpool: Outsourced admin workers in PCS strike for a real pay rise

STEVE ION
SOCIALIST PARTY MERSEYSIDE

Workers at the Disclosure and Barring Service, which carries out necessary criminal and other checks for organisations working with vulnerable people or children, started their initial six-day strike over pay and conditions on 15 August.

Eighty members of civil service union PCS, who work in the contact centre and run back-office functions, are involved. The workers are employed in Liverpool to deliver a contract outsourced to Indian-headquartered Hinduja Global Solutions (HGS).

HGS is a hugely profitable firm, its owner tops the Sunday Times rich list with a personal wealth of £28.5 billion.

100% of workers who voted rejected HGS’s 3.25% pay offer, deeming it unacceptable at a time when inflation is running well above 10%. The bosses are also refusing to improve on other terms and conditions including sick pay and annual leave entitlement.

Members on the picket line say the strike is solid. They’ve had enough and argue they should be brought back into the public sector.

Messages of support can be sent to branch secretary Mick Pullen: michael-pullen@live.co.uk



STEVE ION

Dramatic wildcat action

“Amazon workers have had enough!”

A worker at the Amazon Bristol Fulfilment Centre explains how the action happened

● Thursday 4 August

My GMB union organiser phoned me with news that workers in the Amazon ‘Fulfilment Centre’ (FC) in Tilbury, Essex, had walked out!

This was unheard of at Amazon in the UK. I switched on my laptop. Sure enough, after putting up with endless rule changes recently - undoing the Covid changes, including losing ten minutes a day off our breaks, then no Christmas bonus - the straw that broke the camel’s back was the derisory 35p-an-hour pay increases announced on Wednesday 3 August for workers at many Amazon locations in the south of the UK.

Walkouts start on the Wednesday at Tilbury, then by Thursday walkouts are happening at Rugeley, Coventry, Coalville and my FC, Bristol.

● Friday 5 August

Private Facebook and Telegram groups have sprung up across the country linking thousands of Amazon workers across dozens of sites.

The mainstream media are also picking up the story. At Tilbury, management said they would talk to Seattle (Amazon HQ) and come back

with an answer by Wednesday 10 August.

Workers at Mansfield report that management had allegedly staged a fire alarm to stop the sit-in happening! GMB also report protests at Dartford, Belvedere, Hemel Hempstead and Chesterfield.

● Sunday 7 August

Another walkout and sit-in held at Coventry.

● Monday 8 August

During a sit-in at Swindon, a senior operations manager is caught on video saying to workers: “Trying to talk with you is like talking with animals.” At Coventry, GMB submit a 15% pay claim to management. The letter is shared widely and liked by hundreds of workers on Facebook.

● Tuesday 9 August

Amazon protests feature on BBC Breakfast. Reports in several places of workers planning more action this week if Amazon don’t move on the pay increase. During the day, reports

come in of briefings where management say that they are sticking to the original pay rises of 35p, or 50p for lower-paid workers.

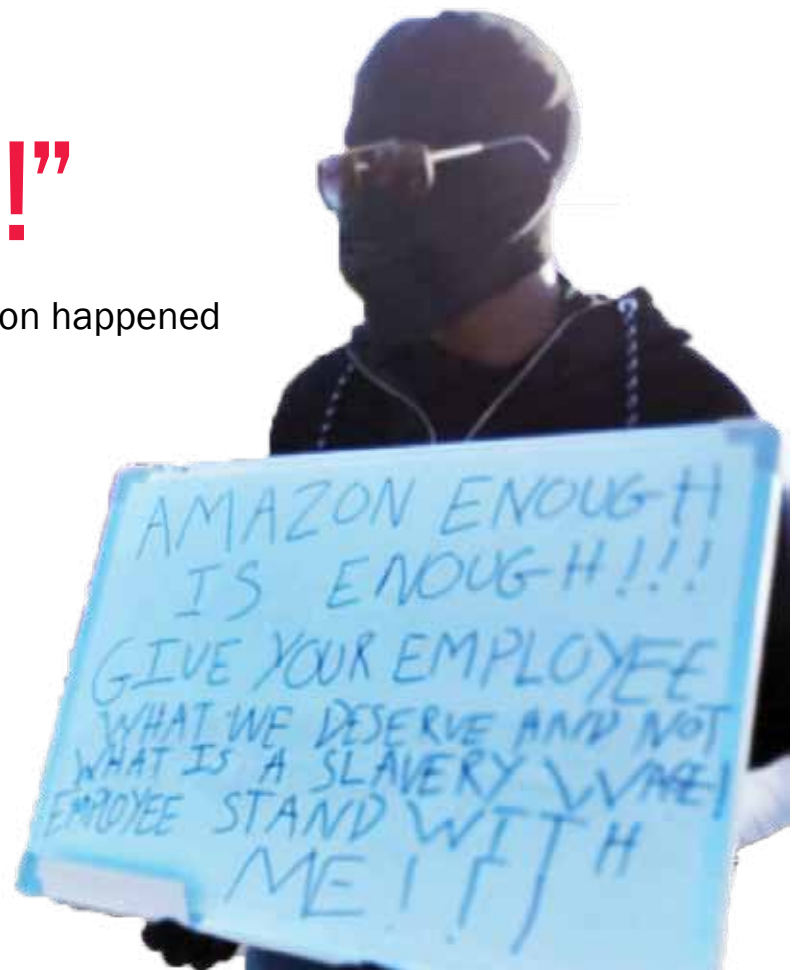
● Wednesday 10 August

GMB and Bristol Trades Council hand out over 300 leaflets to workers at Amazon in Bristol. GMB also hold a gate meeting of workers in Swindon. GMB submits a 15% pay claim for Amazon workers nationally. Some further protests, but also frustration at Amazon’s intransigence, and some fear after threats from management.

● Thursday 11 August

In the early hours of the morning, Bristol nightshift workers have another sit-in in the canteen. This time management send hapless members of the ‘Associate Forum’ to push the management propaganda!

GMB officials and activists are back at Bristol later in the morning. Amazon has now built a fence round the car park with 24-hour security to keep union activists away from the building! GMB still gets a good response from workers in their cars.



‘John Doe’ was joined by Socialist Party members at Tilbury, 5 August DAVE MURRAY

‘Let’s get organised!’

The anger that Amazon workers feel about the way we are treated generally, and the totally insufficient pay rise we are offered, is still at boiling point. Workers are learning fast that it is going to take more organisation and coordination across the country, and the help of established trade unions, for us to exert the required pressure on Amazon for us to win. All across Facebook and Telegram the call is going out: Join a union and let’s get organised!

Socialist Party members visited Amazon warehouses around the country

Tilbury

We stood with ‘John Doe’ outside the Amazon ‘Fulfilment Centre’ in Tilbury, Essex, the day after the first dramatic work stoppage. According to John, the company promised to come back to answer concerns in a week’s time. Of course the major concern is very simple: the staff have demanded £2 an hour increase.

DAVE MURRAY, EASTERN REGION SOCIALIST PARTY

Rugeley

The morning after Amazon’s Rugeley FC was hit by the national wave of walkouts, Socialist Party members were at the gate speaking to workers. They told us about how Amazon’s notorious performance targets are being ramped up to the extent that even longstanding employees are being placed under warning for taking the same number of breaks they have for years!

NICK HART, BIRMINGHAM SOCIALIST PARTY

Bromley-by-Bow

There was one student arriving for her 9am shift who said: “I don’t blame them”. She told us she had taken up a fixed-term contract with Amazon to make ends meet



while studying at college. We also spoke to a newly qualified teacher in the NEU who was likewise working at Amazon during the summer holidays to make ends meet.

A manager came out and told us he would “have a stern word” with the warehouse workers and inform them that they didn’t have to speak to us if they didn’t want to. But a number of workers stopped to chat, with many telling us they want to strike too. We asked the security guards how they were managing with the cost-of-living crisis. One replied: “Struggling, like everyone else”.

ADAM POWELL-DAVIES, EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Brimmsdown, north London

One driver explained that he had to initially pay £250 a week for the van he uses for Amazon deliveries. He also complained about the absence of toilet facilities for drivers. Another helps his friend everyday with deliveries - it’s impossible to meet Amazon’s targets otherwise. Another driver summed up the anger. He told us that when his manager offered him a ‘generous’ £1,000-a-year pay rise, he responded by saying: “That’s £20 a week. Stick it up your arse”.

IAN PATTISON, ENFIELD AND LEA VALLEY SOCIALIST PARTY

SIX MONTHS OF UKRAINE WAR: DEVASTATION IN WHOSE INTERESTS?

JUDY BEISHON

CWI INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT

Thousands of civilians and tens of thousands of troops killed, a vast number injured, and nearly 13 million people displaced from their homes - this is the terrible outcome of the first six months of war in Ukraine.

Scenes of shocking devastation have emerged on an almost daily basis, with towns and cities pounded into rubble and many atrocities reported.

In recent months, Russia's military forces have focused on expanding Russian-controlled territory in the Donbas region in the east of Ukraine. They now control all the cities in the eastern province of Donbas, Luhansk, and are incrementally advancing across the western province, Donetsk. Luhansk and Donetsk were recognised by Russia as breakaway "people's republics" in February.

When Putin's regime in Russia began its invasion six months ago, it clearly didn't expect the ferocious Ukrainian resistance it has faced, as

illustrated by its forced withdrawal in April from an assault on the capital Kyiv. However, the Ukrainian fighters have been paying a heavy price, losing an estimated 100 to 200 troops a day.

The map on the ground shifts, with Ukrainian forces recently retaking some Russian-held areas near Kherson in the south. A significant incident on 9 August was the destruction of aircraft at Russia's Saky airbase in Crimea. But while Russia started out in February controlling 9% of Ukraine, a result of the lower-level war between Russian-backed militias and Ukrainian forces since 2014, it presently controls about 20%.

Socialists demand an immediate end to the war and the withdrawal of all Russian military forces from Ukraine. Ukraine's peoples have the right to determine their own government and future. Along with defending that right, socialists must defend the right of minorities in Ukraine - ethnic Russians, Hungarians, etc - to have their own democratic rights, including the right to self-determination if they so desire, and not to have to suffer restrictions like those that

have been imposed on their languages by the Ukrainian government.

Putin hypocritically leaned on the grievances among the Russian minority to justify the invasion. Their rights were not his real motivation though; the Russian Federation which he presides over encompasses many discriminated-against minorities. In fact, a side-effect of the invasion for Russia's ruling elite is to serve as a warning to those minorities of its dominance, resting on the ethnic Russian majority. More pressing for Putin, however, is his ambition to expand Russia's influence in neighbouring countries, or at least to safeguard its economic interests in them - including its oil and gas exports across Ukraine and naval base in Crimea.

Part of Putin's propaganda has been claiming that Russian troops are fighting 'fascism' in Ukraine. The Ukrainian state has given funding to a number of far-right-led militias which, among other deeds, have played a role over years in helping it to fight Ukrainian Russian militias in the east. Of course, Putin doesn't speak about the existence of far-right elements among those latter combatants and Russian assistance for them. However, Ukraine's president Zelensky and his governing political party are not on the far right, and none of the far-right groups managed to get elected to Ukraine's parliament in the 2019 election.

In any case, it is the task of Ukraine's working class to counter and defeat the far-right groups, certainly not that of a foreign invader, and one that only uses that issue as subterfuge.

What attitude should socialists take to Zelensky's government? Support for it in Ukraine was falling before the war, but inevitably increased when it mobilised the Ukrainian military against the brutal foreign aggression. The war, however, doesn't change the fact that it is a government which defends capitalist interests. Ukraine, like all capitalist countries, is a class-based society. Before the war, Zelensky's government had started to introduce anti-worker and anti-trade union legislation. Last month it removed legal protections for over 90% of workers in the country and legalised zero-hour contracts.

Even under the war-crisis conditions, Ukraine's workers can place no trust in their pro-capitalist government. They instead need to take steps towards organising independently and democratically, both for their own defence in the war and to promote working-class interests in all aspects of their lives.

Neither can workers and socialists in the Ukraine-backing capitalist powers internationally support the actions of their own governments regarding the war. The weapons and funds sent by those governments, and the sanctions inflicted on Russia, aren't with the aim of defending Ukraine's people. What did US imperialism and its allies care about the people in Iraq and Afghanistan



Even under the war crisis conditions, Ukraine's workers can place no trust in their pro-capitalist government

when it bombarded those countries? Or about Yemenis slaughtered by Saudi Arabian shelling? Or the plight of Kurds in Turkey and Syria suffering atrocities committed by Nato member Turkey? Or Gazans bombarded recently by the Israeli military (see page 15)?

Rather, their goal is to defend western capitalist interests and Nato's presence in eastern Europe, and to keep the territorial ambitions of Russian capitalism in check. So, to a significant extent, the Ukraine war is a proxy war between western imperialism and Putin's regime. The western powers also want their intervention to be a warning to China against developing its rising global influence further - and its goal of annexing Taiwan.

However, the Ukraine-supporting governments are engaged in a constant balancing act, to aid Ukraine's forces without intervening directly with western military force and therefore risking escalation of the war beyond Ukraine's borders, or increased Russian retaliation on food and energy flows. On the one hand, the European Union's pro-Ukraine measures in June included an insurance ban on Russian oil shipments and giving Ukraine EU membership candidate status. On the other hand, the Financial Times has reported that imports of Russian diesel into Europe increased by more than a fifth in July.

The western powers are also grappling with their own budget constraints and difficulties with finding enough - and manufacturing more - of the ammunition and other supplies Zelensky has requested. The EU has given Ukraine only €1 billion of €9 billion pledged in April.

International division

While initially attempting a show of unity, they are much divided on their approach to the war. Some governments, like the UK, argue for a victory for Ukraine that restores all its territory, including Crimea. While France and Germany are among those that want the war to end as early as possible, and so have referred to the prospects for concessions and territorial losses.

This is clearly related to national political or economic interests. As is

well known, German industry and households are heavily dependent on Russian gas, for instance. The question of when and how reliance on Russian fuel exports can be ended in the countries that depend on them has been itself a source of division.

Tensions between ruling elites worldwide were already rising before the Ukraine war, with the background of the Covid pandemic and deteriorating economies. But the war marks a further, new stage of divisions and tensions. The global economic repercussions of the war are impacting on energy and food supplies and prices in particular - which lead all the capitalist classes to look to protect their own interests, making regional and wider blocs very unstable.

Some regimes seek to play off the rival blocs or manoeuvre between different alliances. In the case of Turkey, mediating between the US, Russia and Ukraine - refusing to join in with sanctions against Russia but at the same time selling arms to Ukraine.

Another feature globally is the escalating resources being poured into military apparatuses. In the last six months, EU member states have announced that their defence budgets will increase by around €200 billion. This militarisation includes Germany's move to re-arm, so that the German ruling class can back up its economic interests with military strength of its own, independently of other western powers.

A protracted war?

As with most wars, the war in Ukraine is likely to continue until the leaders of the opposing sides think they have mainly exhausted the possibility of useful gains or re-gains for the time being - whether due to military drain or rising opposition at home. At present, both sides are engaging in largescale troop recruitment drives, which indicate that point is still some way off.

No one can accurately predict where the ceasefire lines will end up, not least because the two sides have different strengths and weaknesses. For example, Ukraine's forces, aided by training and arms from Nato member countries, have the stronger motivation as they are defending their country. The Russian regime has the supplementary economic levers of being able to block ports or reduce fuel supplies - as it has done with the main pipeline to Germany. Also, how much Ukraine will receive of the

funds and arms it has requested from around the world depends on many factors.

Eventually, as part of a truce of some sort, Putin's representatives will inevitably demand recognition of Russia's territorial gains. Unsurprisingly, that prospect is widely rejected at present by most Ukrainians. And even after a 'peace' deal is concluded, it is very unlikely to stop ongoing friction and violent incidents over the control of the most disputed areas.

Earlier in the war, the question of whether Putin could resort in desperation to the use of tactical nuclear weapons was raised by commentators. Fears on this receded as the war developed, but re-emerged recently in a Sunday Times article by a retired British army officer, General Richard Barrons, who fatalistically raised the possibility of: "Catastrophic success for Ukraine: if Russia is thrown back to the extent that Putin senses strategic defeat, he is likely to employ tactical nuclear weapons".

Nuclear atrocities in the battlefield arena can't be discounted and would be an unprecedented, horrendous departure. But Putin no doubt knows that it would unleash a massive backlash of outrage in Russia and worldwide which would alter the nature of any 'victory' he could claim, and would accelerate the end of his time in power.

His propaganda machine whipped up support for the war in Russia - downplaying it as a 'special military operation'. Anti-war protests have been largely marginalised, aided by heavy repression. It's also the case that, while the sanctions imposed on Russia by many capitalist powers are damaging parts of Russia's economy and affecting the population, Russia is able to sell oil and gas to its allies and is presently receiving a higher total income from it than it did before the war.

But Putin and those around him know they will face increasing problems in sustaining support for the war, as the death toll and economic consequences grow. One indication of them treading carefully regarding domestic support is that they haven't felt confident enough to instruct former members of the armed forces to serve in Ukraine.

When capitalist wars break out, a rise of nationalism is usual. But material, class-based issues eventually return to the fore as the destructive repercussions of the war are increasingly brought home to people, and the real motives of the ruling elite in pursuing it become more exposed.

Class-based analysis

Left organisations can play an important role in helping to expose those motives, as long as their understanding of the situation is sound. However, the analysis of many is hopelessly flawed. Some lean towards support for the Russian regime, because of Nato's provocations, the crimes of western imperialism in Iraq and elsewhere, the far-right groups in Ukraine, and Russia's history of bringing in a workers' state in 1917, and the subsequent decades of a planned economy under Stalinist degeneration before

capitalism was restored there in the 1990s.

Others echo the capitalist governments which support the Ukrainian pro-capitalist leaders, the prospect of Ukraine joining the EU, and so on. Sometimes they justify this by arguing that 'national unity' between Ukraine's workers and capitalists is necessary to achieve national liberation.

However, Russia is in the hands of a gangster-capitalist elite - in no way a workers' state. Arms being sent to Ukraine by the capitalist powers would not be sent if their use was under the democratic control and decision-making of Ukraine's working class. Socialists must support the building of independent workers' organisations in Ukraine - for military defence and political representation, and international workers' action to aid those organisations.

The Ukrainian people have been forced to defend themselves, but in whose interests? Their own, or those of the Ukrainian oligarchs? The answer has to be: their own. The capitalist elite that came into being and enriched itself enormously after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and their varied representatives in the presidency and parliament over the years, have presided over corruption at the top, exploitation, widespread poverty and a dire economic situation.

The ongoing war is a horrific nightmare for a great number of Ukrainians and, when it ends, capitalism has no decent future to offer them. Only one of massive debt levels and lack of investment in public services, jobs and the rebuilding of cities - and a future potential for the renewal of war. The building of socialist ideas in Ukraine, Russia and internationally has never been more vital.



When capitalist wars break out, a rise of nationalism is usual. But material, class-based issues eventually return to the fore as the destructive repercussions of the war are increasingly brought home to people



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.

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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

- 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.

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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.

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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.

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Protesters invade TfL offices LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

London bus protests spread

ANDY BEADLE
RETIRED UNITE REP ON LONDON BUSES

Opposition to trenchant cuts in bus services in London is building. Recent weeks have seen some noisy and colourful demonstrations organised by Unite bus workers where important routes face closure. Strikes loom as pay talks falter at several London bus companies.

Bus workers made a long march (five miles!) between Enfield and Tottenham depots on Saturday 23 July. The demonstration was addressed by Unite national officer, Onay Kasab and NSSN chair, Rob Williams, among others.

On Wednesday 27 July, a hundred rallied at Putney Heath before taking up shoppers along Putney High Street. Local bus users and pensioners, who feared the loss of routes, joined drivers.

The following Wednesday, 3 August, drivers assembled at

Millennium Green, near Waterloo Station to listen to speakers. Then we marched to Transport for London's (TfL) Palestra offices. On arrival, we continued straight inside to greet them with a noisy rally in the big reception area, demanding "No Bus Cuts!" A further protest took place on Saturday 13 August, this time at Finsbury Park in North London.

During the pandemic, TfL inevitably faced drastic falls in revenue as passenger volumes declined. The government not only offered inadequate subsidy, but it added harsh conditions to the cash it did supply.

Sadiq Khan, as mayor of London, also heads TfL. Instead of meekly accepting this "deal" at the time, he should have alerted Londoners and transport unions to these measures and led a serious resistance to attacks on our public transport. Sadly but unsurprisingly, he capitulated to the Tories.

Go North East strike threat wins concessions

Following the decision by bus company Go North East to close the Chester-le-Street bus depot, with most if not all posts being made redundant, workers voted for indefinite strike action.

But before the strike action even began, the bosses were forced back to the negotiating table with a revised offer which workers have voted to accept.

In the words of a Unite regional coordinating officer: "The staff at the Chester-le-Street depot have

accepted a beneficial severance package for those workers who want to leave their employment and a compensatory scheme for those moving to other workplaces."

This shows that sometimes even the threat of strike action is enough to send bosses running, especially when backed up by a fighting union like Unite that fully supported its members' decision to strike.

SAM MORDEN
SOUTH TYNE AND WEAR SOCIALIST PARTY



Arriva Yorkshire picket line IAIN DALTON

Bus strikes continue, and win

UNITE MEMBER

Unite members employed in the bus sector have been taking action and winning. This is now set to escalate. Over the last few months, 25% of all Unite bus members have been in dispute with the employers. That's nearly 20,000 workers.

The bus combine, which brings together lay reps from the industry, has been meeting to mobilise and plan for the coming months. Pay is the common issue linking the strike ballots, but the combine has also taken up the issue of temperatures in buses, including making clear the full support of the union for members who refuse to drive buses where it is unsafe due to the heat. In Durham, members at Go North East are fighting the closure of Chester-Le-Street depot (see opposite).

The combine is in the best position to coordinate campaigns across regions and has agreed that a key campaign must be to win a national rate for the job. The wins that have taken place, together with upcoming action, are vital stepping stones in reaching that target.

Wins so far include a 21.5% pay increase at First Bus Glasgow, 15.8% at Stagecoach Worthing, 13.3% at Leicester Citybus and significant increases at Arriva Yorkshire and Stagecoach Merseyside. Currently, Unite members at Arriva North West are on continuous strike, which began on 20 July.

Unite has produced a report which

proves that it is not wage increases that fuel inflation, instead it is profiteering. Arriva is a prime example. Over a period of ten years, it has siphoned off more than half a billion pounds to its shareholders at parent company Deutsche Bahn.

Unite members are responding in the best possible way. Members at Arriva London North are currently being balloted after the company failed to make an offer, as are Arriva members in Herts/Beds and Kent/Essex.

Coordinating action

Over 1,600 bus drivers will take action coinciding with rail strikes on 19 August as Unite members at RATP/London United have issued notice for strike action. This company recorded a profit of £174 million for 2021.

Also taking action on the same day will be Unite members at Transport for London employed on London Underground, Croydon Trams, Dial-a-ride, river services, Victoria coach station and the network management control centre. This shows that coordinated action is possible, despite anti-trade union laws.

Unite members at Abellio in West London are preparing for action. And following the employer's failures to make acceptable offers, Metroline members in London also look to be taking the road of strike action.

Unite bus workers, through the combine structures, have the potential to drive up pay and conditions, win a safe workplace and unite to win the rate for the job.



At the request of strikers, Socialist Party members campaign in support of Arriva bus strikes WAKEFIELD AND DISTRICT SOCIALIST PARTY

London's transport fightback: Workers at war with Tories, TfL and Labour's Sadiq Khan



Unite organised protest to defend bus routes at Finsbury park, north London LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

HELEN PATTISON
SOCIALIST PARTY LONDON REGIONAL SECRETARY

Across London, with train and tube strikes, and protests against bus cuts, a fightback to defend public transport in the capital has started. But it will have to be a campaign waged against the Tories, Transport for London (TfL) and Sadiq Khan, who have all been complicit in passing on cuts.

Around 80 bus routes are under threat. This represents about 12% of the bus routes in London. It's a huge attack, with the only aim of cutting costs.

Already people are sharing pictures from the back of crowded buses on routes which are about to be closed. Fewer buses will mean even more packed buses, and drivers expected to rush to make up time on their routes.

Across the city, many bus drivers are part of Unite, and in the past have brought London to a standstill during regional strikes. In the 2015 buses strike, only about 10% of services ran. There was gridlock, displaying the huge importance of the bus network.

Back in 2014, the RMT, TSSA and Unite all took strike action on the same day against TfL's plans. This year, on 19 August, bus drivers employed by London United, a

subsidiary of RATP, will take action on the same day as underground workers in the RMT.

The last time bus drivers took action across the network, they won a London-wide starter rate. It should have prevented drivers being put on pittance starting rates, but the agreed starting wage is so low it doesn't really act to protect drivers' pay.

Privatisation

There are about 20 bus companies contracted to TfL, extracting profits. Nationally the bus companies make anything between £340 million and £506 million in profits every year - money which could be reinvested into the service instead of lining the pockets of private business. Go-Ahead reported profits of 9% in London for 2019, and 12% on its other regional contracts.

Drivers have seen first hand the impact of privatisation over the last 25 or so years. Companies bid in a race to the bottom for contracts, resulting in attacks on safety, terms and conditions.

While Boris Johnson was mayor of London, he set out the disastrous plan, continued by Labour's Sadiq Khan, for transport in London to be funded by ticket revenue alone. It is now the only city in Europe where this is the case. Workers and

transport users have suffered. The various companies have maintained their profits in this time.

When Khan took over, he said he would be a mayor who stood up for transport workers. Instead, he has vocally opposed transport workers' strikes, implemented Tory austerity, and attacked transport workers' pay and jobs - the inevitable consequences of TfL's privatised franchising.

Reestablishment of public subsidies for TfL services could be used to save routes, reduce fares and give transport workers decent pay and conditions. The Labour mayor, as chair of TfL could fight for this, using the body's borrowing and reserves and demanding the money from the government.

But, as it stands, to simply increase subsidies to outsourced bus companies would see whole chunks of public money siphoned off as profit. A fully public system, democratically owned and run by workers in our city could run things in our interests.

Clearly, we need a political vehicle which will support workers in struggle and fight for public ownership of affordable transport, in London's City Hall, council chambers around the country, and in parliament. Labour is not it, that's why we need a new working-class political party.

Bosses "smoke and mirrors" at VFS strike



NICK CHAFFEY
SOUTHAMPTON SOCIALIST PARTY

Unite members at VFS auto-builders in Eastleigh, Hampshire, have completed their seventh day of strike action, after rejecting a miserly 1.5% improved pay offer from management. The strike has been solidly supported, with solidarity from other workers, ensuring nothing

enters or leaves the factory on strike days.

Confidence has grown through the strike, as workers have had to respond to management tactics of divide and rule, trying to set other workers against the strikers. Attempts to keep production going with office staff and inexperienced agency workers have not gone well. These workers have clearly had

enough. VFS is part of the Ford chain, producing tipper-trucks and other versions of the Ford Transit chassis. This is a highly profitable market and workers, many who have worked here for over twenty years, are expecting a fair share of the profits.

But the message from management is anything but clear. A new offer was made last week, but as one striker said: "It's all smoke and mirrors, and the figure in the bottom right-hand corner hasn't changed." Management have said the strike is risking the future of the plant, but are also saying order books are full and that everyone will share in the benefits.

The problem is this promise has become a worn-out record, repeated every quarter in recent times, but failing to make a difference in pay. In a sign that management are not happy with the impact of the strike, free tea, coffee and biscuits have been withdrawn!

Unite members are now preparing for further strike action if a significantly improved offer is not made.

Taxi and private hire drivers protest

IAIN DALTON
LEEDS SOCIALIST PARTY

Over a hundred taxi and private hire drivers joined a lobby organised by the Leeds Private Hire Drivers Organisation (LPHDO) of Leeds City Council's licensing committee over its Suitability and Convictions policy. This is one of a series of protests in recent months around West Yorkshire over this and other issues facing drivers.

Drivers are particularly frustrated with the way the council leadership had promised to consult with them about the policy, but have refused to do so. Drivers feel that the council is now trying to rush the policy through over the summer when many drivers are on holiday.

While a couple of Labour councillors did come out and engage with the drivers, trust in the Labour council is at rock bottom. Some of the drivers had placards demanding the council leader, James Lewis, resign.



IAIN DALTON

Drivers are also campaigning over restrictive policies over vehicle specifications.

Drivers in Wakefield recently forced the council there to move on some of these issues, which, while not resolving most of the drivers' issues, shows the protests are having an effect.

As one driver told us: "The council seems to think that the drivers are uneducated and will accept whatever they dictate to us. But we are reading the documents from the council, the Department for Transport, and elsewhere so we can answer their arguments, and we will continue to protest and strike until we get a fair outcome."



Surrey bin workers have won PAUL COUCHMAN

Port workers prepare to strike over pay

Unite the Union has announced that over 1,900 workers at the port of Felixstowe, Suffolk, will take strike action from 21-28 August in a dispute over pay. And 500 port operatives on Liverpool docks have voted to strike – on an 88% turnout, 99% voted for action.

Both companies offered 7%, well below inflation. The Felixstowe Dock and Railway Company made pre-tax profits of £61 million in 2020, and paid out £99 million in dividends to shareholders.

On Felixstowe, Unite general secretary Sharon Graham said that the "docks and its parent company CK



IAN PATTISON

UCU wins landmark victory against casualisation

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

University and College Union (UCU) members in the Open University (OU) have secured permanent contracts for 4,800 teaching staff, the biggest decasualisation victory ever to take place in higher education.

These staff will now benefit from enhanced job security, a pay uplift of between 10-15%, additional annual leave, and staff development allowances.

Casualisation is now rife across the tertiary education sector, with 46% of universities and 60% of colleges using zero-hour contracts to deliver teaching, and 68% of research staff on short-term contracts, with many more reliant on short-term funding for their projects.

University bosses use fixed-term contracts to stretch their staff to breaking point, exploiting the

competition for the preciously small number of permanent positions by piling on extra teaching and marking responsibilities.

The result is a toxic environment for staff, with one in five working up to 16 hours a week over their contracted hours, and most early-career academics having to reapply for their jobs and relocate to other institutions year after year. Little wonder that over half report signs of depression, a report by Education Support found last year.

This win for OU tutors comes after years of hard negotiations and struggle with the university bosses, with the branch membership growing in size and militancy since the strikes against regional centre closures in 2016.

Branches across the country can take confidence from this victory to push for the highest possible turnout in the national ballot over pay and conditions, which was launched on 10 August.

AREA	£ RECEIVED	£ TARGET	Q3: JULY-SEPTEMBER 2022	DEADLINE: 30 SEPTEMBER 2022
South West	1,657	1,800		92%
West Midlands	1,305	2,600		50%
Wales	1,147	2,300		50%
Southern & SE	801	2,350		34%
North West	390	1,150		34%
Northern	243	750		32%
East Midlands	588	1,850		32%
London	1,287	4,600		28%
Yorkshire	628	2,550		25%
Eastern	78	1,200		7%
Other	865	3,850		22%
TOTAL	8,988	25,000		36%

Hutchison Holding Ltd are both massively profitable and incredibly wealthy. They are fully able to pay the workforce a fair day's pay."

Surrey bin workers win

GMB members working for Amey, an outsourced bin collection service in Surrey Heath and Elmbridge councils, have been on strike over pay. They provide a vital service and are proud of what they do.

Most were offered £11.13 an hour, and were battling to be paid enough to support themselves and their families against a backdrop of rapidly rising prices, while Amey made tens of millions of pounds in profits last year. I visited their Camberley picket line on 10 August and offered

solidarity from my Unison branch, from the National Shop Stewards Network and from the Socialist Party.

The strike has now won, after members accepted an improved offer.

PAUL COUCHMAN
STAINES SOCIALIST PARTY

Wigan caravan strike

On 10 August, a strike began of GMB union members at Pemberton Park caravan firm in Wigan.

Since 2020, the company's gross profit has doubled, and shareholders have received dividends of £3.4 million, but the workers have been offered only single-figure pay rises. They are determined to fight for the 10% pay claim submitted by their union.

ROGER BANNISTER



Oxford

Young socialists demand £15 an hour – now

● Seven Sisters, north London

Young workers – members of the Socialist Party and Youth Fight for Jobs activists from across the country – gathered on 13 August to campaign against the bleak prospects facing young people under the Tory government.

The Youth Fight for Jobs campaign calls for a £15-an-hour minimum wage across the board, and pay rises in line with inflation, as well as an end to insecure working, the right to full-time work and a ban on zero-hour contracts.

The mood on the streets was very positive. Nine people left their details to find out more about joining the Socialist Party. And young people we talked to said they would definitely look into joining a union after talking with us.

But one young person, who worked for a delivery app, said: "I didn't think I could join a union in my job". This drives home the importance of discussing with young people and workers how they can get organised in the struggle for better pay and working conditions.

Young people are not politically represented in any mainstream party. It is clear a new mass workers' party is needed to achieve socialist policies.

OSCAR PARRY

● Brixton

Lots of people were doing a long curve around our campaign stall until they heard one of us say: "£15-an-hour minimum wage". Then, most would take the flyer and look curiously at the stall.

Between "we need this", and "I support that", we managed to reach out to many passers-by. One young worker with a bag from a giant delivery company on his back was very open and grateful for receiving the leaflet. He asked: "Is this for jobs? At £15? Where do I apply?" – a raw demonstration of the workers' needs, demands, and despair.

One person said that higher wages would never be possible. He refused to take the leaflet. But later he came back. Our ideas had been planted, that another socialist world is possible.

BEATRIZ FREITAS

● Newcastle

I attended my first socialist stall. We were campaigning for a £15-an-hour minimum wage, youth job security, and calling to end the systematic exploitation of young workers.

My conversations with young people on the streets showed a sense of collective struggle and frustration, as well as a need for change. 17-year-olds shared their struggles with being unable to afford groceries on a youth minimum wage of £4.81, and lack of job security.

Another had been searching

Water runs out as bosses rinse utilities for profit

JOHN DOLAN
ENFIELD AND LEA VALLEY SOCIALIST PARTY

In August, a burst water main in Islington, North London led to flooding up to four feet in depth. At the same time, Thames Water announced that it would soon be introducing a London hosepipe ban to preserve water supplies.

This gives a brief illustration of how this and other inefficient, private, profit-motivated water providers are failing to provide an adequate service to the public. Although the water companies can't be blamed for the current drought weather conditions, they are responsible for maintaining the infrastructure and having adequate back-up reserves.

It is estimated that Thames Water loses the equivalent of 179 litres of water per property per day. Nationally, leaks lost equate to the requirements of one-quarter of the population!

Since 1990, there have been reservoir sell-offs with no replacements. This is one of the reasons why water company-imposed restrictions like hosepipe bans could have been avoided.

Why don't Thames Water and the other private water providers in England and Wales ensure that the pipe

infrastructure, some dating back to Victorian times, is secure? Because it would eat into the profits of their bosses and shareholders!

In 2020, Thames Water's CEO received a salary of £750,000, with a maximum bonus of 120% of salary and a long-term incentive plan with an annual award up to a maximum of 200% of salary.

The water industry was privatised in England and Wales by Margaret Thatcher's Tory government in 1989. Since then, water companies have paid out an average £2 billion a year in dividends.

The 1997-2010 Labour government didn't renationalise it, and Keir Starmer's Labour Party has now ruled out renationalising any of the public utilities in the future.

What is needed is a water industry run in the interest and needs of society, under democratic workers' control and management. The current state-owned water providers in Scotland and Northern Ireland don't operate like that, they mirror capitalist-run companies.

A democratically run nationalised water service would give an adequate, clean supply of water suitable to meet the needs of all under conditions of climate change, which private water companies are incapable of providing.



"Blood on their hands": South London gas explosion shows privatised utilities can't be trusted

REECE WILSON

Four-year-old Sahara Salman died in a gas explosion in Thornton Heath, South London on 8 August. Two others were hospitalised and other houses in the neighbourhood had to be evacuated.

At a community meeting on 12 August, residents confronted Martin Holloway, the executive operations director for SGN – the gas company responsible for gas supply in South London. Holloway claimed he was "shocked and saddened" about Sahara's death. He was shouted down and forced to stop speaking. Two residents walked out saying that the investigation will be a whitewash, another pointing out: "Houses don't just blow up".

According to residents, at least 18 calls were made to the company about the smell of gas in the weeks leading up to the explosion.

This is another damning case of the danger we are in with utilities in private ownership. Profit-seeking SGN did not take action to keep infrastructure in a safe enough condition to prevent the tragedy. The same is happening across the board, with private water companies dumping sewage into bodies of water and train companies trying to make safety critical guards work longer hours, and remove ticket offices.

Utility companies need to be nationalised not just because they are profiteering while the rest of us suffer from real pay cuts, but because it can be a matter of life and death.

CALLUM JOYCE

Capitalist supermarket automation: Driving down wages, cutting jobs, boosting profits



SCOTT JONES
SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBER IN SHOPWORKERS' UNION USDAW

Opening day on 4 March 2021 of the first automated, no-checkout Amazon Fresh store in Europe, in Ealing Broadway, West London
PHOTO: ROGER GREEN/CC

Automation is on the rise and the use of new technology means that an estimated 90% of UK employees will need to retrain by 2030, resulting in massive changes for workers, and everybody in retail, as shops change.

Retail analysts predict that not only could staffed checkouts disappear from supermarkets, but checkouts themselves.

The march towards 100% self-service checkouts is already underway. I walked into my local supermarket recently to discover that a few banks of

staffed checkouts had been taken out to accommodate more self-scan machines, and completely self-serviced Amazon stores are popping up on high streets.

But 'just walk out' technology, that allows companies to get rid of all tills, is also on its way. Supermarkets like Sainsbury's already offer 'Smart-Shop', which allows shoppers to scan as they shop and pay at the till. This technology could go even further, meaning customers would only have to have a phone app on entering the store. Cameras and sensors would then identify products they take from shelves, with the bill settled electronically. No physical checkout is needed, and the customer can 'just walk out'.

Tesco and Aldi are trialling such technology, Aldi in a checkout-free supermarket in south London, and Tesco at its HQ in Welwyn Garden City, in a store used by staff.

Such revolutions in shopping are not new. 'Self-service' supermarkets like we have today, and their growth in Britain during the 1950s and 1960s, completely changed shopping from how it was done before, bringing everything together under one roof in large stores and allowing shoppers to pick items themselves before taking them to a checkout. Before, shoppers had to give their order to a member of staff who picked goods from behind a counter.

Analysts claim that the new revolution could only be a few years away, and one has said the cashier is "ripe for automation." But there is opposition. Many, especially older people, refuse to use self-scan checkouts

“We can't trust the bosses, companies and their capitalist system to use new technology to its full potential”



and prefer a staffed one, let alone the prospect of having to use a phone app with no checkout at all. Having to be able to use and afford a smart phone is one issue; another is the decline in the use of cash, accelerated by the pandemic, and the worry for some that it is also on its way out.

Another, is simply wanting to be served by a person. Supermarkets have long been social as well as shopping spaces, and that applies to staff too. For many elderly, vulnerable or lonely people, a cashier could be the only person they get to talk to. In the Tesco store I worked in, we were on first name terms with many customers, and staff were part of the community. The mass closures of counters in many companies has also impacted on this.

Of course, even in a checkout-less store staff would remain on the shop-floor, but why shouldn't shoppers be able to be served by someone if they want to? Also, the instinct of many workers who refuse to use self-scan machines is that they are 'job-killers'. And this is how the bosses use new technology, to get rid of hours and workers meaning fewer staff in store and more work for the remaining few. Getting rid of workers will not result in lower food prices either, just more profit for the bosses.

At the 2022 conference of Usdaw, the shop and distribution workers' union, shop stewards spoke during the debate on automation, staffing levels and new technology. One said: "One shopworker is expected to keep an eye on eight or more self-service tills." "It's our colleagues who suffer the consequences," said another.

Checkouts are also just the most visible form of supermarket automation, the tip of an iceberg that stretches into warehouses and supply chains, particularly in terms of stock control and ordering. In Japan, shelf-stacking drones are even being piloted.

The pandemic showed the vital role shop workers play in running society, putting their health and lives on the line to keep the country fed. The short-term nature of the supermarket industry's 'just-in-time' supply chain was also exposed during the pandemic, as an increase in demand followed the order for people to stay at home.

The goods people wanted and needed were sitting in warehouses, but companies carried on using the same algorithm. During the first lockdown, Easter eggs were being delivered to stores instead! The same companies are in control of implementing checkout automation. The same bosses will use new technology to sack workers and increase profits, with little regard to the wishes and needs of shoppers. There are also

issues of how management are using new technology to have greater control over work and hours.

Trade unions must oppose any job losses as a result of automation. Usdaw issued a national executive council statement on technology and automation at its conference. It calls for job security and training for workers to move to different roles as the industry and society change and implement new technology.

This is correct, but should be much firmer. Job security should mean no job losses, and job changes should only be with the agreement of workers. An Usdaw survey in 2021 found that 90% of workers reported that their employer had failed to consult them on the implementation of new technology.

We can't trust the bosses, companies and their capitalist system to use this new technology to its full potential.

Instead of just benefitting the shareholders with generous dividend payments and increased profits, new technology should be used to make the job of a shop worker as easy as it can be, and to introduce a shorter working week, without loss of pay.

A well-organised trade union, prepared to lead members in taking on the bosses, can win some of these demands. But decisions about how to implement automation in privately owned supermarkets ultimately remain with profiteering shareholders.

Democratic public ownership of supermarkets, would put these decisions into the hands of workers themselves. New technology could be used to make the shopping experience as easy and enjoyable as possible, with self-service checkouts or none at all for those that want it, while still having staffed tills for those that do.

The democratically decided application of technology could just be one part of a transformation if there was public ownership and democratic planning of supermarkets and agribusiness. If the food processing and retail industries were under workers' control, the input of everyone all along the chain would be possible including small farmers and small shopkeepers.

To fight for socialist change, with big business and the banks nationalised and run under democratic workers' control as part of a socialist plan of production, we need to get organised and fight for it. We need to join and build unions that fight for workers' interests on the automation battlefield and, linked to this, a new political alternative, a new workers' party that will fight the corner of the working class against capitalism and its representatives.

AMNON COHEN
COMMITTEE FOR A WORKERS' INTERNATIONAL

In a calculated provocation, on the opening day of the most recent Gaza bombings on 7 August, thousands of ultra-right wingers in Israel ascended Haram al-Sharif (the site of the Temple Mount) escorted by Israeli police (the minister of police is a Labour Party member, Omer Bar-Lev). The Haram al-Sharif contains the al-Aqsa mosque - the third holiest site in Islam. A section of ultra-right-wing Jewish fanatics advocates the destruction of the al-Aqsa mosque and the rebuilding of the Jewish temple on the site.

US president Joe Biden has condemned Russian leader Vladimir Putin's attacks on civilian targets in Ukraine, but he supported similar Israeli Defence Force attacks: "The United States fully supports Israel's right to defend itself against terrorist groups that have taken the lives of innocent civilians in Israel."

In Britain, Tory party leadership candidate Liz Truss issued a statement: "The UK stands by Israel and its right to defend itself. We condemn terrorist groups firing at civilians, and violence which has resulted in casualties on both sides."

Israeli journalist, Amira Hass, described the Gaza strip as a "huge concentration camp." The strip is home to two million Palestinians. All movement of people and goods into this tiny 25-mile long and 7-mile wide enclave is controlled by the Israeli and Egyptian regimes. Very few people are allowed to enter or leave.

Israeli restrictions on the import of cement mean that the ruins of the 2,200 homes reduced to rubble by Israeli bombs in the May 2022 war have still not been repaired. The population is effectively trapped in a war zone, with two out of three teenagers suffering from PTSD.

95% of Gazans lack access to clean water. 80% are dependent on humanitarian relief for survival. Half the population do not have enough food, with 60% of children suffering from anaemia, and many suffering from stunted growth due to malnutrition.

Israeli Prime Minister, Yair Lapid, claimed that the bombings were a "pre-emptive strike" to prevent Palestinian group Islamic Jihad's plans to fire rockets at Israel. But he faces elections on 1 November - the fifth Israeli election in four years. And Israeli governments often use military adventures against Palestinians to prove their toughness in the run-up to elections.

Lapid became prime minister only five weeks ago, when his coalition lost its majority after the Palestinian MP Ghaida Rinawie Zoabi resigned from the coalition in protest at the murder of Palestinian journalist, Shireen Abu Akleh, and at the brutal attacks on her funeral by the Israeli police.

The government was set up just one year ago - a wall-to-wall coalition including far-right settler parties; Yair Lapid's 'There is a Future' party; the remnants of the Israeli Labour Party; the supposedly liberal anti-occupation Meretz Party and the Islamist United Arab List. The government was held together by opposition to the right-populist, Trump-like Netanyahu who was prime minister during the previous 12 years.

The Israeli capitalist class had become increasingly irritated by

Israeli state renews attacks on the Gaza strip



PHOTO: OSPS7/CC

Netanyahu's method of bolstering his support by stirring up the conflict with the Palestinians, which added to the instability of the region, and threatened to undermine their profits. But they lacked a reliable party which could represent their interests. In the past this role was played by the Israeli Labour Party, which was the permanent party of government until 1977, with over 40 seats in the Knesset (parliament). But Labour's neoliberal policies, its discrimination against the predominantly working-class Mizrahi Jews, and its later championing of neoliberal attacks against the working class, led to its demise (Labour now has only seven seats in the Knesset, and sits in the current government with one of its MPs, Omer Bar-Lev, serving as minister of police).

Israeli capitalists have repeatedly attempted to set up new political vehicles - various 'centre' parties often headed by 'white-knight' generals parachuted into politics (like Benny Ganz's Blue White Party), or by media personalities (like Yair Lapid's, 'Yesh Atid' party).

2020 and 2021 saw massive weekly demonstrations against Netanyahu over his corruption scandals. These protests were backed by sections of the ruling class. Large sections of Israeli youth who had been pauperised

by the Covid lockdowns defied demonstration bans and police repression in order to demonstrate. This movement had a single demand "Lechi!" (meaning "Go") - that Netanyahu should go, and be replaced by an "anybody but Netanyahu".

However, Netanyahu was not the source of the crisis in Israeli society, but its product. Netanyahu and his supporters failed to win a majority in the 2021 elections and then launched eleven days of deadly bombardment in Gaza, killing 280 Palestinians, including 60 children, which split over into inter-communal civil war between Jewish and Palestinian neighbours in some of Israel's mixed cities.

Netanyahu did this in order to ratchet up the national conflict and prevent the setting up of a government including Arabs and 'lefts'. But this failed to prevent the government of the 'Coalition of Change' - a coalition of anti-Netanyahu parties, initially headed by millionaire settler leader, Naftali Bennet. Yet without anything to offer Israeli workers, the new coalition government found it had no other way of building a base of support other than continuing Netanyahu's pandering to Israeli nationalism and right-winger settlers.

Members of the coalition, including the remnants of the Israeli Labour Party, Meretz party, and Monsur Abas's Islamist United Arab List, failed to issue even verbal criticism of the most recent atrocities in Gaza. The leader of the Labour Party, Merav Michaeli, issued a Tweet which turned reality on its head: "The residents of Israel deserve to live in security. No sovereign state would accept a siege on its residents by a terror organisation."

Meretz leader Nizan Horowitz has been silent on the "operation", though Meretz leadership candidate Zahava Galon has condemned it.

Israeli military atrocities in Gaza have become a regular fixture of Israeli election campaigns, allowing the incumbent prime minister to demonstrate anti-Palestinian toughness and rally the voters as a wartime leader. It remains to be seen whether this will be sufficient to prevent the return of Netanyahu in the 1 November elections.

But it is clear that these elections will not solve the chronic instability of Israeli society - which stems from the inability of capitalism to provide Israelis and Palestinians with peace, security and a decent life.

All the main Israeli parties accept the slaughter of children and innocent civilians in Gaza as a small price to pay for demonstrating their ability to "stand up to terror". The capitalist powers internationally, and the United Nations, have once again not raised a finger to stop the slaughter. And neither Hamas, nor the Islamic Jihad - both right-wing organisations - have any viable strategy to defend the Palestinians.

Both in Israel and in the Palestinian territories, the situation is crying out for workers' parties: in Israel one which unites Israeli and Palestinian workers and fights for their common interests, and in the territories, one which can unite Palestinian workers across the West Bank and Gaza - with both offering a socialist alternative to the horrors of capitalism.



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the Socialist

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NATIONALISE ENERGY!

SCOTT JONES
EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

'Renationalise energy! Does Blairite former prime minister Gordon Brown now agree with the Socialist Party?

The energy price cap could be as high as £4,200 a year by January, and the profits of the energy companies in the billions - doubling and even quintupling in some cases. Even the representatives of capitalism recognise that something needs to be done.

People are on the bones of their arses already from inflation and little to no real-terms pay increases for years. The ever-increasing energy bills will leave many destitute, living without electricity and heating.

But behind the headlines, Gordon Brown is saying that only energy companies that cannot offer lower bills should be brought into public ownership, and only temporarily. Like what his government did with the banks after the 2007-08 financial crash, his proposal would leave their profits alone in a bid to temporarily act as a sticking plaster during the crisis. And Starmer's Labour won't even go that far, ruling out renationalisation full stop!

Meanwhile, the Tories are fighting each other on another planet - a million miles from

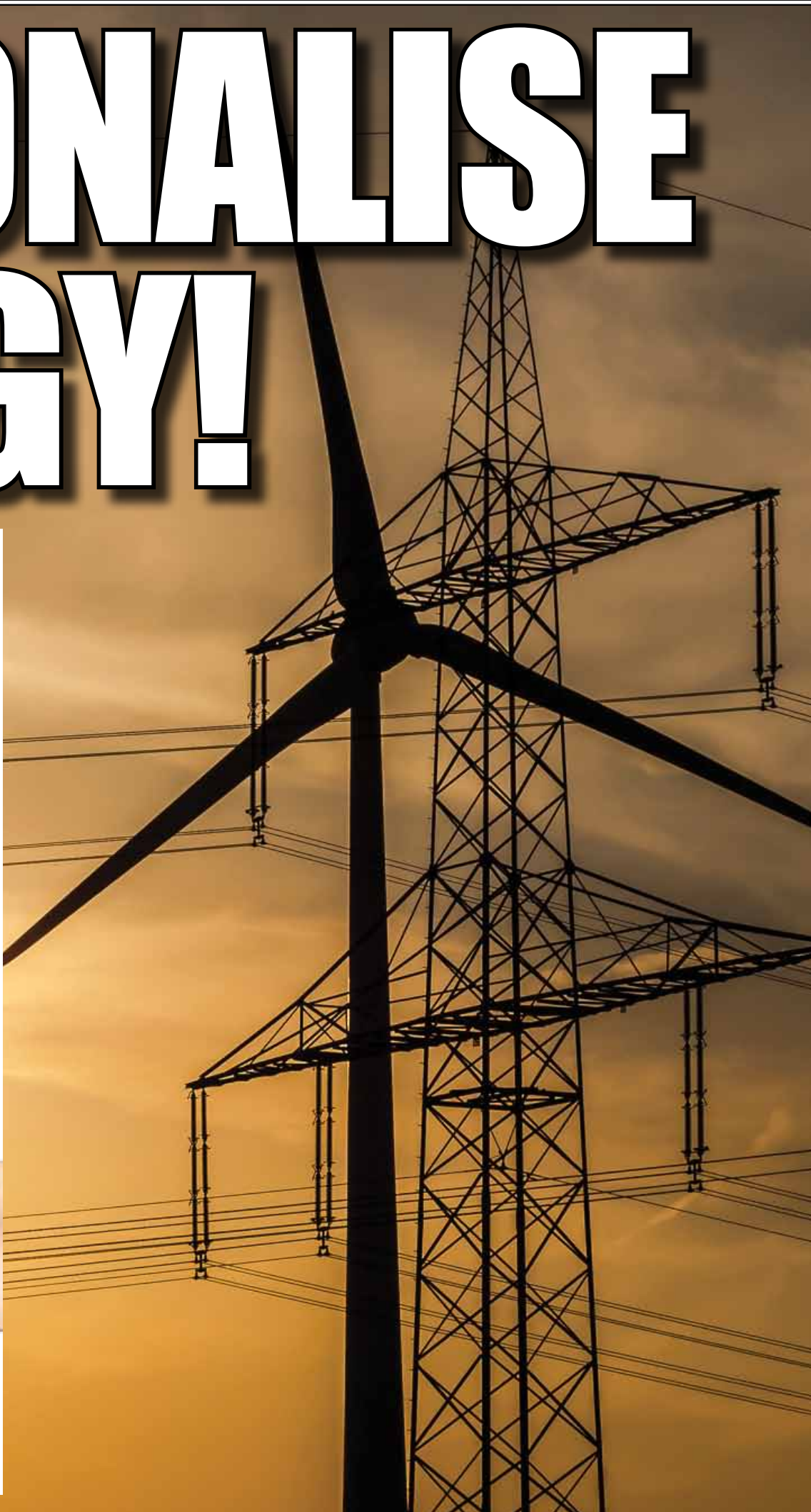
the real world of struggling working and poor people.

The energy bosses don't want to cut into their massive profits, and none of the big parties or their leaders want to force them to. And you can't control what you don't own. The energy industry should be renationalised, but all of it, permanently, and under democratic workers' control and management, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need.

That way the energy industry can be properly planned to meet our needs, lower bills and stop fuel poverty, as well as rapidly switching to green energy to combat climate change and carry out a massive programme of home insulation.

We need a political voice, a new workers' party that will fight for this on a mass scale, and use the money in society that is currently lining the pockets of the super-rich, to beat the cost-of-living crisis and fight for socialist policies.

• See 'Refuse to be cold and poor any more: How to fight against inflation poverty' on pages 2-3



WHAT WE STAND FOR: THE SOCIALIST PARTY'S MAIN DEMANDS >>> see column on page 10

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