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the Socialist

Issue 1193 - TUC special

7-14 September 2022

formerly **Militant**

This cost-of-living crisis must end

ALL STRIKE TOGETHER TO

WIN A REAL PAY RISE

BRING DOWN THE TORIES

But Starmer's Labour doesn't fight for us We need a new working-class party

PAUL MATSSON

THIS WEAK TRUSS GOVERNMENT CAN BE FORCED OUT -
BUILD A NEW MASS WORKERS' PARTY >>> p2

TUC MUST ORGANISE NOW FOR MASS COORDINATED
STRIKE ACTION >>> p3

This weak Truss government can be forced out

Build a new mass workers' party

Socialist Party
WHAT WE THINK

Never before has a prime minister taken office with as little support as Liz Truss. Her only achievement is being less unpopular than Rishi Sunak with the tiny electorate of the Tory Party membership. For most of the population, the question of which of the gruesome twosome won the Tory leadership is a second-rate issue, far behind how to pay the electricity bill or make the pay packet last until the end of the month. After all, whoever is at the helm, the Tory government will continue to try and make working-class people pay the price for the crisis of British capitalism.

For the majority of the capitalist class, however, Truss as prime minister is an alarming prospect. She has

managed to claw her way to the top of the rapidly crumbling Tory Party by claiming loyalty to her predecessor while continuing his legacy of right-wing 'populist' policies aimed only at the Daily Mail-reading Tory Party membership.

But the 81,326 members of the Tory Party who voted for her is virtually the sum total of her support. She is the first Tory prime minister ever to have been elected without the support of the majority of Tory MPs; less than a third backed her in the final round of the parliamentary ballot. Even among Tory voters her popularity has plummeted. Among those who voted Tory in 2019 just 5% now believe that Truss 'gets things done', with minus 4% considering her a 'strong leader'. Seeing these statistics, growing numbers of Johnson-supporting MPs are suffering 'buyer's remorse', fearing that they have ditched him only to end up with an even more unpopular leader.

Wild promises vs reality

All serious representatives of British capitalism are in despair at the prospect of her prime ministership. The more heavyweight right-wing press - including the Times, Sunday Times, and Financial Times - having campaigned to stop her winning, are now reduced to pleading with her to change course once elected and, as the Sunday Times put it, "swap wild promises for reality".

Meanwhile, senior Tories are reportedly piling on the pressure for her to include figures from all sides of the warring Tory Party in her cabinet. She, on the other hand, is rumoured to be planning to pack the cabinet with figures from the most right-wing section of the parliamentary Tory Party, such as Iain Duncan Smith, John Redwood and Jacob Rees-Mogg.

Whatever the make-up of the cabinet, it will be facing multiple acute problems. As inflation soars real incomes are set to suffer the deepest fall since 1955. This will be the case even if measures are taken to stop energy bills rising even further than their already astronomical levels; without which it would be much worse. The economy is heading towards a recession, with manufacturing already there. Public sector net debt, at £2.4 trillion, is already more than 95% of GDP, and the cost of servicing much of that debt is rising in tandem with interest rates.

Meanwhile, the value of sterling is falling, further increasing the cost of both imported goods and government debt. And, as the growing strike wave shows, workers are not willing to take any more misery, but are starting to fight back. Any Tory government would be plunged into crisis by Truss's in-tray, which "has everything in it except Armageddon", as one Tory grandee put it.

It is not coincidence, however, that it is Truss that has ended up temporarily at the helm, considered highly unreliable by the capitalist elite. It reflects the fundamental and deep-rooted degeneration of the Tory party, which in turn - like Trumpism in the US Republican Party - flows from the crisis of the capitalist system it defends.

In the case of the Tory party, that is added to by the long, inglorious decline of British capitalism. The Tories were once arguably the most successful party on the planet, able to mediate the interests of different sections of the capitalist elite - largely behind closed doors - and to plan decades ahead how best to defend those interests. Today they are publicly tearing each other apart, unable to see even five days ahead.

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If Truss and the Tories are forced out of office, it will raise the confidence of the whole working class

Over the coming months, their gradual crumbling could be replaced by a complete implosion. Sunak, in an unprecedented attack on a rival in a Tory leadership contest, has responded to the markets beginning to beat against UK government debt by fanning the flames, accusing Truss of being "complacent and irresponsible" for ignoring the risk of markets losing confidence in the British economy.

Sterling slide

In fact, the risk of the markets betting against British capitalism, leading to a more dramatic slide in sterling and a major crisis, would have also been present had Sunak won the leadership. Out of two woeful candidates, he became the preferred candidate of much of the capitalist class, not because he attempted to appear more 'responsible' while also putting a more emollient gloss on the savage attacks to come on working and middle-class living standards. But just like Truss, a weak, divided Sunak-led government would have faced massive working-class opposition to his policies, and he would have been just as incapable of gluing the Tory Party back together.

Nonetheless, there is no doubt that much of the capitalist class are concerned that Truss, because of her strident 'ideological' defence of inequality and other running sores of the system, could seriously endanger the interests of British capitalism. Never mind publicly attacking her, as Sunak and others have done, Tory MPs could soon be voting against her policies if they consider it is in the interests of their class to do so.

In the midst of the Brexit crisis the likes of Michael Heseltine voted



New prime minister, Liz Truss NUMBER10/CC

Liberal Democrat. That was when Corbyn led Labour. More recently, Starmer has made clear that Tory MPs are welcome in his New Labour Party, and the rumours of a block of six Tory MPs switching to Labour have been widespread. Under Truss's leadership there could be far more than six Tories crossing the benches, reflecting sections of British capitalism seeing Starmer's Labour as a more reliable representative of their interests than a Tory Party in meltdown.

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This also poses the urgent need for the workers' movement to start to build its own political party

What conclusions should the workers' movement draw from all of this? Firstly, that this is a weak government that can be defeated and forced out of office. That does not mean victory for the working class is certain, however. The one thing that every wing of the Tory party is united on is the need to make the working class pay for the crisis in their system. A determined coordinated struggle is needed to defeat Truss and her cronies (see opposite).

If Truss and the Tories are forced out of office, it will raise the

confidence of the whole working class. However, there is unfortunately no prospect of a government led by Sir Keir Starmer acting in the interests of the majority. On the contrary, Starmer's New Labour will be like Blair's version - another government of the elite. This time, however, New Labour would be coming to power not in a period of relative economic stability, but during a deep crisis of British capitalism. Starmer's capitalist backers will demand much more savage attacks on the working class than in the 1990s.

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

Even an initially small bloc of MPs from a workers' party that fought for socialist policies - starting with nationalisation, under democratic workers' control, of energy, rail, mail and telecoms; mass council house building and a £15-an-hour minimum wage - would enormously increase the fighting strength of the workers' movement in the struggles ahead, and could quickly gain mass support. The ruling class and its political representatives are in complete disarray. The workers' movement needs to seize the moment.

TUC must organise now for mass coordinated strike action

Socialist Party
WHAT WE THINK

Not for decades has the Trades Union Congress (TUC) met at such a critical time for the trade union movement.

Eleven years ago, Congress took place as the Tory/Lib-dem coalition government unleashed its austerity offensive, with public sector pensions in its sights. 29 public sector unions came together during that week to coordinate strike ballots, leading directly to the two million-strong 'N30' strike of November 2011. That struggle has huge lessons for trade union reps and activists, in what steps need to be taken now, and how the fight needs to be waged.

The struggle today is even sharper than in 2011. Undoubtedly, the attack on workers' living standards is even more generalised, as the cost-of-living crisis hits. RPI inflation is over 12%, and is estimated to be in excess of 20% next year. Energy prices had already increased by over 100% for many workers before the latest announcement that the energy cap will rise by a further 80%.

Workers increasingly have no choice but to fight. The strike wave that has been steadily building over the last year is accelerating. Most of the action has been localised, with Unite reporting that over 70,000 of its members have been involved in over 300 disputes. Bus workers have been to the fore as well as bin workers, in which the GMB have also been prominent.

Nationwide action

But what has been a game changer is the national strike action on the railways, in BT and now Royal Mail during this 'hot summer', taken by members of RMT, Aslef, TSSA, Unite and CWU. The high points of the struggles have been: 21 June, when 50,000 RMT members walked out together on Network Rail, the Train Operating Companies and London Underground; 31 August, when 155,000 CWU members went on strike across Royal Mail and BT. The Unite dock strike at Felixstowe, which handles about half of the UK's imported shipping containers, is also of huge significance.

This has all raised the prospect of national coordinated strike action across all sectors against the cost-of-living squeeze and the crisis-ridden Tory government. As we go into autumn, public sector unions are moving towards national strike ballots. It is indicative of the mood of anger, and the layers being radicalised, that the first NHS union to ballot is the Royal College of Nursing, traditionally opposed to striking. Similarly,

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If the national strikes on the railways, Royal Mail and BT were coordinated with the localised disputes, up to a quarter of a million workers could be involved



The TUC organised a mass demo in 2011 ahead of growing strikes and a public sector-wide strike in November SEMAN

barristers in the Criminal Bar Association have voted by 80% to escalate their dispute, with their action going indefinite on 5 September - the same day the winner of the Tory leadership contest is announced.

The unions are becoming a pole of attraction for all those facing the crunch, even more so in the absence of a fighting political alternative, given Keir Starmer's moving of Labour further and further to the right. This isn't an argument for the unions to turn away from politics, whether that be in Westminster or the local town hall. The reports that the cost-of-living campaign group 'Enough is Enough' has signed up 500,000 supporters in weeks, shows the huge potential if the unions were to launch a political vehicle that stands with workers and fights on a socialist, anti-austerity programme, including the renationalisation of the energy companies (supported by nearly

half of Tory voters), utilities, railway and transport companies, as well as the likes of Royal Mail and BT. Such a party would lift the confidence of workers and strengthen the struggle.

Growing anger against the Tories could mean Starmer's New Labour winning the next general election. But Starmer has made it clear that he doesn't act in the interests of the working class. In such a situation, the existence of a new workers' party - even with a handful of MPs - would be a vital political weapon in the hands of workers.

Those attracted by the fighting capacity of unions include workers not organised at this stage. Over the last few years, unions have been plugging away trying to organise among Amazon workers. But when their anger exploded at the insulting 'pay offer' of between 35p and 50p per hour, following the example of rail workers, they walked off the job. The prospect

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Escalating action, up to and including a 24-hour general strike, is posed in the next weeks and months. It is the fighting unions and growing number of rank-and-file union activists that must act as the lever to make it happen

of building fighting union organisation among Amazon's 75,000-strong UK workforce is now within reach. The same goes for other non-union employers.

On picket line after picket line, the idea of workers striking together is met with total agreement. Workers understand that coordinated action would maximise their power and strength, particularly in the national disputes. A number of unions will be moving motions at the TUC calling for it to organise coordinated action. But a concrete plan is needed.

Determined escalating action

The Tory government is weak and divided, and can be defeated. But that doesn't mean victory is certain. The one thing that Britain's capitalist class is united on is the need to make the working class pay for this crisis. To win, the workers' movement needs determined action. That could mean escalating strikes in specific disputes, especially those of a national character. Therefore, the TUC should launch an appeal to build a massive strike fund to assist those unions on the front line, such as the CWU and the RMT. It also means a plan to coordinate.

The National Shop Stewards Network has again called a lobby of Congress, as it opens on Sunday 11 September, on the theme of: 'Striking together: Co-ordinate the action'. It calls on the unions to do what they did in 2011, draw up plans to bring together ballots and action. But this time, to continue the fight to the end.

This would mean each union, in the public and private sectors, setting out its proposed ballots and strike action. Given the stage of most public sector unions' disputes, this poses action towards the end of autumn on an even greater scale than the N30 strike. But days of significant coordinated action can be called that build towards that. In 2011, there were escalating strike days called throughout the year, incorporating a growing number of unions, building the action.

If the national strikes on the railways, Royal Mail and BT were coordinated with the localised disputes, up to a quarter of a million workers could be involved. This would have a huge effect on the confidence of public sector workers getting ready to vote in national strike ballots.

Make 19 October count

Moreover, the TUC has called a lobby of parliament on Wednesday 19 October against the cost-of-living crisis. Finally it has begun to publicise its intention to build for a mass lobby. Organised and built for properly, this should be a day when the streets of London are flooded with workers, especially those in dispute, taking action together.

It would be seen as a vital step in upping the ante against the Tories and the employers, and a platform to fight for mass coordinated strike action. It should also issue a promise to the new Tory leader that any further anti-union measures would result in a 24-hour general strike.

This is the programme of action that needs to be set out by Congress. Escalating action, up to and including a 24-hour general strike, is posed in the next weeks and months. It is the fighting unions and growing number of rank-and-file union activists that must act as the lever to make it happen.

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formerly **Militant**
Issue 1193
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Friday before publication, or Monday morning for urgent news, unless otherwise agreed with the editors.

The Socialist goes to press on a Tuesday night. We publish online on Wednesday and in print on Thursday.

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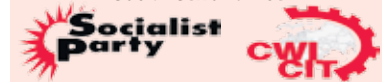
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The Socialist is the weekly newspaper of the Socialist Party, the England and Wales section of the Committee for a Workers' International socialistparty.org.uk socialistworld.net



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ISSN 1366-9621

Published by Socialist Publications, PO Box 1398, Enfield EN1 9GT
Registered as a newspaper at the Post Office
Printed by trade union labour at Reach Printing Services

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

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

Royal Mail and BT workers walk out together in continuation of pay strikes

Communication Workers Union (CWU) members in Royal Mail and BT took coordinated strike action on 31 August as they continued their respective disputes with the bosses over pay. See 'Historic action by Royal Mail, BT and Post Office workers' at socialistparty.org.uk for more and reports below. CWU in Royal Mail are taking further action on 8-9 September.

North East England

We visited five CWU picket lines across Newcastle and Gateshead. The main point being made by strikers was the need to step up action to coordinated action or a general strike.

One of the pickets told us he had waited in anticipation when the TUC tweeted they were going to make an important announcement - surely they were going to announce a general strike? In the event, the TUC launched a campaign and petition. The striker commented: "It's hardly storming the palace!"

Another said the TUC and unions have missed a trick, they should have organised coordinated action on the day the Tory leader is announced which would have been a shot across the bows.

The strikers are clearly receiving overwhelming public support. People have taken trays of sandwiches and bags of pastries to give to them. At one of the Gateshead picket lines we visited, alongside cars, taxis and buses tooting in support, even the police were tooting and flashing their blue lights in support as they passed!

ELAINE BRUNSKILL



Pickets read the Socialist in Blackwood, Wales PHOTO: MARIAM KAMISH

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University workers: vote yes for strike action on pay, conditions and pensions

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN UCU

The University and College Union (UCU) has launched strike ballots in two disputes: one over pay and working conditions, and the second over pension cuts. All 150 university branches are being balloted on an aggregated basis under the campaign slogan '#UCURising'. If an overall turnout of 50% or above is achieved, alongside a majority 'yes' vote, then every university can be called out for the first time in these disputes, marking a significant escalation of action compared with recent years.

In the pensions dispute, UCU is demanding the scrapping of proposed cuts, and restoring benefits to 2021 levels. In the pay dispute, demands include a pay uplift of 12%, action to eliminate insecure work practices like

the use or zero-hour contracts, and action to address dangerously high workloads dominant in the sector.

These conditions, together with the soaring cost of living, mean there is huge potential for a strong 'yes' vote.

Workers will have confidence from seeing the nationwide strikes on the railways, in Royal Mail and BT, as well as ballots taking place in other education unions at the same time.

However, meeting the threshold is not automatic. The UCU leadership must equip branches with the resources needed to mobilise the turnout and provide a lead from the top, instilling confidence in university workers that their action will be backed all the way.

The ballot closes on 21 October and strike action will be taken before Christmas if successful.



PHOTO: DAVE MOODY

Plymouth

The current situation was summed up succinctly by one Parcelforce worker: "Look at the utilities, we sold them off and look at the state they're in now. Same with rail, we sold it all off and now they're all out on strike and here we have Royal Mail, it's been privatised and what do you know? It's all about making money for the shareholders."

RYAN ALDRED

Bristol

One worker told us: "Keir Starmer is like another Blair. Labour would be better than the Tories but then getting punched in the face once is better than getting punched in the face twice."

TOM BALDWIN

Blackwood, Wales

The Blackwood Royal Mail picket line is right on the main road and was met with constant beeps of support. A young picket told me: "I don't like capitalism. The people who create the coin, we need to look after them. Half the people can't afford their house. I can't see my son getting on the ladder."

MARIAM KAMISH

Waltham Cross, Herts

Just two agency workers crossed the 26 August picket line. After five minutes, one of them came back out again and left. On the 31 August picket line, we found out he'd gone inside to ask the managers what was going on. When they explained that a strike was on, he told them that he didn't want to be a part of their scabbing operation.

IAN PATTISON

Enfield BT

"Some companies are asset strippers, but BT asset strip themselves", striking workers told us. One thing that's been sold off is the in-house mechanic. On the 31 August picket line, workers there had had their vans in the private mechanics for between nine weeks and three months. Outsourcing clearly doesn't work.

IAN PATTISON

Labour's Khan signs up to Tory London transport cuts

Unite the strikes, reject the cuts, fight for funding

Sadiq Khan, London's Labour mayor and chair of Transport for London (TfL), has signed off on fare rises and service cuts for passengers as well as attacks on transport workers' pensions and job security.

In return for a £1.2 billion bailout, Khan has agreed to up to £1 billion of 'savings' on top of the already agreed £730 million of cuts. This announcement will only add fuel to the anger of workers already taking strike action - on the Underground, Overground and the buses.

Khan said: "We have had no choice but to accept in order to get the deal over the line to avoid TfL becoming bankrupt". But this is not the case - as **Onay Kasab**, national bus lead officer for Unite explained, addressing the RMT-organised 'Save London's Public Transport' rally on 31 August.

We print an edited version of his speech:

"I want to talk about the solutions. Because workers, all of our members, have the answers. The answers are provided by strikers like Unite London bus workers at Abelio who are about to start a ballot. Not just on pay, not just on scheduling, but against cuts to bus routes as well...

"Workers at RATP... have been taking strike action against a company that has made £174 million in profits in 2021. So don't let them tell us, and

I don't think we would believe them anyway, that there is no money. The problem is, there is lots of money, the wrong people have it, and they've got too much of it.

"Our members in north London at Arriva are about to finish a ballot, our members at Metroline, Stagecoach and Go Ahead are about to start industrial action ballots. Wouldn't it be wonderful to see all those campaigns, all those strikes, coordinated across London?"

"The answer was provided by people at Unite policy conference, who voted to agree to call on local authorities to agree balanced, needs-based, no-cuts budgets. If it is appropriate for local authorities, then it is appropriate for the GLA [Greater London Assembly] and it's appropriate for TfL as well.

"No secret negotiations to return a cuts agenda. Get the government to fill the funding gap. Our policy is to fight. Don't lobby the government, don't lobby the Tories. Do what trade unionists are doing and fight back against the bastards!"

"The answer... is nationalisation.

Arriva bus workers strike



900 bus workers at Arriva buses in Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire walked out for 48 hours on 5 September over a 'pay cut dressed up as a rise'. Arriva is offering drivers, admin staff, engineers, cleaners and shunters pay rises of between 4% and 6%, but this is a real-terms pay cut given the current rate of inflation. Meanwhile, Arriva has paid £560 million from its UK operations to owner Deutsche Bahn since 2012 PHOTO STEVENAGE PICKET LINE: MARK KERR



Bus drivers on strike in West London in August 2022 PHOTO: LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Insource public transport - run for need, not for profit - a responsibility to workers and communities, not shareholders.

"But not a bosses' nationalisation. Not compensation to shareholders; not a socialism for the rich; not nationalising the debt and then privatising the profit, nationalising in bad times and privatising again in the good times. We want proper insourcing and nationalisation!"

"We celebrated when our members

on the Woolwich ferry were insourced. But that celebration was short-lived when we saw the way that TfL were treating our members. As a result, our members on the Woolwich ferry are yet again balloting for industrial action.

"Here's a radical thought: yes to nationalisation, but how about insourcing the public transport system and giving workers, trade unions, communities, democratic control over how its run!"

CabAuto car interior workers strike against abysmal pay and bullying

RICHARD GINGELL
BLACK COUNTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

Near Oldbury in the Black Country, workers at CabAuto are in their second round of strikes against abysmal pay and conditions. With the cost of living soaring, these skilled workers manufacturing interiors for luxury car companies including BMW and Bentley, are barely above the minimum wage, even with parent company Adler Pelzer making over £100 million profits in 2020.

This means that Unite is paying out more in strike pay than their employer would in wages, a fact not lost on the workers present, with one of them realising that they can "basically strike indefinitely". Pay isn't the

only issue though once again we hear the same old story of bullying from management.

This bullying has continued throughout the waves of strikes, convincing more and more workers to join the picket as time went on. Despite being in the crosshairs, management's inability to treat workers with respect shines through with an offer below the demands of the workers, who are determined to see this dispute through to the end.

Socialist Party members have been in regular attendance at the pickets over the last two months to offer our support. One worker told us: "We're not fighting for greed, we're fighting to survive. We've had enough - they'll be sorry they ever took us on!"

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Rail service update: More strikes!

More national rail strikes have been called as 40,000 RMT members at Network Rail and 14 Train-Operating Companies strike again on 15 and 17 September. The workers are in dispute over an insulting pay offer, job cuts and working conditions. This will be the third round of action. The first date is coordinated with another Aslef train drivers' strike that will mean virtually no trains running. The TSSA union is also striking on 26 September.

The strike dates in full:

- Thursday 15 September: Aslef and RMT unions both on strike. Virtually no trains will run on most lines, particularly those where drivers are on strike: Avanti West Coast, Chiltern, CrossCountry, Greater Anglia, Great Western Railway, Hull Trains, LNER, London Overground, Northern, Southeastern, TransPennine and West Midlands Trains. Some disruption is likely to persist on the morning of 16 September.
- Saturday 17 September: RMT strike - likely to see a limited service on main lines, broadly about 20% of normal schedule between 7am and 7pm. After-effects will result in continued disruption on morning of 18 September.
- Monday 26 September: TSSA strike for 24 hours from midday by some members at Network Rail and nine train companies.

Nurses ballot for strike action

Members of the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) union in the NHS in England and Wales will start balloting for strike action over pay on 15 September.

The union is recommending workers vote 'yes', which if they do, would be the first time in RCN history that members in England and Wales go on strike. The RCN has increased its strike fund to £50 million in preparation for the struggle.

The ballot is in response to the latest NHS pay offer of £1,400 for all NHS pay bands, which leaves many nurses worse off, and is far below the 15% nurses have been calling for.

NHS workers in other unions are also preparing to ballot for action. These ballots and strikes should be coordinated in the NHS and also with other public sector workers who are set to strike over pay this autumn.

Strike at Amazon

Amazon workers in Coventry have voted to indicate they are ready to take strike action over pay.

More than 300 workers voted in the consultative ballot at the fulfilment centre in the West Midlands, with 97% saying they were ready to walk out.

Amazon workers across the UK have staged protests and walkouts against a pay offer of just 35p an hour from the company.

The GMB union will now meet with members at Amazon Coventry to discuss next steps, including a potential formal strike ballot.

Mikhail Gorbachev: "The gateman for the capitalist counterrevolution in the former Soviet Union"

CLARE DOYLE EYEWITNESS WORKING ON BEHALF OF THE COMMITTEE FOR A WORKERS' INTERNATIONAL DURING THE COLLAPSE OF THE SOVIET UNION

Mikhail Gorbachev, who has died at the age of 91, was the last president of the Soviet Union from 1985 until 1991, and was also general secretary of the 20 million-strong ruling Communist Party. Extensive obituaries in the capitalist press have extolled the 1990 Nobel Peace Prize winner's advocacy of democracy, world peace, and an end to communism.

But, as Socialist Party political secretary Peter Taaffe explained, when reviewing a biography of Gorbachev, that he became "the gateman for the capitalist counterrevolution in the former Soviet Union". As Gorbachev put it in his autobiography, he was both "a product of the nomenklatura (the party elite) and at the same time its gravedigger".

After decades of bureaucratic mismanagement, the so-called Soviet system, in which there was no workers' management and control, was grinding to a halt when Gorbachev became leader. But he was utopian in imagining that new life could be breathed into the state-owned planned economy without a political revolution from below which would throw off the parasitic bureaucracy.

In his search for a way to overcome the sclerosis that had set in, Gorbachev experimented with policies of 'openness' (Glasnost) and 'restructuring' (Perestroika) but without success. He alternately lifted the lid of the pressure cooker and closed it again.

Workers and bureaucrats

At the beginning of the 1990s the economy of the USSR was in free fall. Near-empty shops were encircled by massive queues of people holding coupons for sugar, eggs, sausage. Toilet paper was a luxury. The value of the rouble was plummeting. Young pro-capitalist economists began to push for a rapid 'transition to the market' and 'shock therapy'.



Mikhail Gorbachev YURY ABRAMOCHKIN/CC

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

socialistworld.net

Without access to information about the real situation in the capitalist countries, and looking for a better life, some Russian workers even admired British prime minister Margaret Thatcher. Compared with the vacillator Gorbachev, she appeared to get on with the job, whatever it was! They were unaware how hated she was in Britain for her callous treatment of striking miners and the Liverpool councillors, as well as her attempt to impose an iniquitous poll tax on millions of working people.

Workers, as they turned against the ruling bureaucracy, including taking strike action in major workplaces, turned against Gorbachev. Abroad he was seen as the great reformer; at home he was seen as weak and indecisive.

On 21 August that year, it was Yeltsin who appeared as the saviour of democracy when an attempted coup against Gorbachev's rule was defeated, and the president himself was 'rescued' from his holiday home in Crimea.

The death knell of the USSR was tolled. The republics of the USSR began to peel away declaring their 'sovereignty' or independence. First was Ukraine on 23 August; last was Kazakhstan on 16 December. The Baltic states had already left the USSR after violent clashes earlier in the year in which troops had killed peaceful protesters both in Vilnius and in Riga.

The end

Just days after the failed coup in Moscow, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was outlawed in the Russian Federation. Gorbachev spent the rest of 1991 trying to shore up the formation of a Commonwealth of Independent States. A CIS was established in name but meant little in practice.

By the end of 1991 the Soviet Union was no more. Mikhail Gorbachev announced on 25 December in a sombre television broadcast the official dissolution of the USSR and was unceremoniously evicted from the Kremlin just two days later. (See '30 years since the end of the USSR' at socialistworld.net)

Capitalism restored

The reestablishment of capitalism across the former USSR was violent. It involved vicious battles, even shootouts on the streets. Representatives of the old bureaucracy used their positions to grab the banks and enterprises. The oligarchs of today owe their wealth and privileges to the gangsters of yesterday, not least today's president Vladimir Putin, who surrounded himself with KGB faithfuls.

Putin has lent faint praise to Mikhail Gorbachev. Elsewhere, however, Gorbachev continues to be seen as a great 'peacemaker'.

From the time he became party chairman in 1985, Gorbachev had been planning the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan where thousands of soldiers were perishing. This was done in 1989.

By 1989 Gorbachev was making clear that he would not intervene against the

movements against the Stalinist regimes of Eastern Europe and, later, for German reunification. Since 1991 Gorbachev remained in Russia with little media attention on him. His relationship with Putin has always been strained, not least since Putin blames Gorbachev for the breakup of the Soviet Union. While the capitalist press misuses the word empire to describe the vast voluntary federation of workers' states established in 1922, Putin appears to be aiming to reestablish Russia's power throughout the region.

As his illness worsened, Gorbachev saw in Ukraine all his efforts to end the 'cold war' and eliminate the possibility of a nuclear confrontation trampled on by Putin. Gorbachev's wife, Larissa, who died in 1999, was from a Ukrainian family.

One of his own grandparents was from the country and he himself had strong ties with its culture and literature. He, like the majority of Russians, welcomed the return of Crimea in 2014 but has stayed publicly silent on the tragic events of the last six months.

Gorbachev had no clear idea of how to prevent the collapse of the vast federation of republics, still known as the Soviet Union. The sclerosis that had set in could only be remedied, as Leon Trotsky had explained, by a political revolution carried through by the working class. A party was needed to lead such a movement. Under the stifling grip of Stalin's regime and successive governments, no such movement was able to develop.

All the lessons of the history of the USSR need to be drawn out for a new generation of youth and class fighters. The death of its last president can be a trigger for renewed interest within its former borders in the lessons to be learned from its history of the Soviet Union as opposition to oligarchic capitalism and to war inevitably grow.

Beyond its borders, the alarming world situation that confronts a new generation of workers and young people demands a thoroughgoing Marxist analysis and a determination to build genuine socialist organisations internationally.

• See also 'Gorbachev: An accidental architect of world change' at socialistworld.net

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CLASS
STRIKING
BACK

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SUPPORT OUR
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WHAT WE STAND FOR

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

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

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

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

WORK, PENSIONS AND BENEFITS

• A £15-an-hour minimum wage for all, without exemptions. For the minimum wage to automatically increase linked to average earnings or inflation, whichever is higher.

• Share out the work. A maximum 32-hour working week with no loss of pay or worsening of conditions. The right to flexible working, under the control of workers not employers. An end to insecure working, for the right to full-time work for all who want it; ban zero-hour contracts.

• All workers to have trade union rates of pay, employment protection, and sickness, parental and holiday rights from day one of employment. End bosses using bogus 'self-employment' as a means to avoid giving workers rights.

• No to austerity through inflation. For all wage rates to be automatically increased at least in line with price rises.

• Open the books of all companies cutting jobs or claiming they can't afford to pay a real living wage. State subsidies, where genuinely needed, for socially-useful small businesses.

• For trade unions independent of the capitalist state, with members having democratic control over their own policies, constitutions and democratic procedures. For all trade union officials to be regularly elected, subject to recall by their members and paid a worker's wage.

• Reduce the state retirement and pension age to 55. For decent living pensions.

• Replace universal credit and the punitive benefit system with living benefits for all who need them.

PUBLIC SERVICES

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

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

• For local councillors who are committed to opposing austerity and all cuts to local services, jobs, pay and conditions.

• For a socialist NHS to provide for everyone's health needs, including dental and eye care - free at the point of use and under democratic control. Kick out the private companies! Nationalise the pharmaceutical industry under democratic workers' control and management.

• Renationalise privatised utilities - including rail, mail, water, telecoms and power - under democratic workers' control and management.

• Free, publicly funded and democratically run, good-quality education, available to all at any age. Abolish university tuition fees and write off student debt, end marketisation, and introduce a living grant. No to academisation. For all schools to be under the genuine democratic control of local education authorities, school staff, parents and student organisations.

• The right to a safe secure home for all. For the mass building of genuinely affordable, high-quality, carbon-neutral council housing. For rent controls that cap the level of rent. Fair rent decisions should be made by elected bodies of tenants, housing workers and representatives of trade unions. For cheap low-interest mortgages for home buyers. Nationalise the privately owned large building companies, land banks and estates.

• 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

• 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.

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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the Socialist

Issue 1193

7-14 September 2022

formerly **Militant**

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NATIONALISE ENERGY

USE THEIR PROFITS TO SLASH OUR BILLS



JOSH ASKER

Hurling towards catastrophe with a new driver at the wheel - a driver selected by just 0.25% of the population. There can be no confidence whatsoever in new prime minister Liz Truss averting cost-of-living misery for most of us.

Months in the cold, going hungry, and anxiously checking the overdraft is the hard reality facing millions this winter. Meanwhile, £170 billion of excess profits awaits the big energy producers over the next two years. There really is no choice but to fight.

And as much as she doesn't want to, Truss has no choice but to act. As the Socialist goes to press, she has issued the vague promise: "I will deliver on the energy crisis". The most likely delivery is some form of bailout, to enable some level of price freeze and to avert an industry collapse.

We can't afford to pay our bills now, and we refuse to foot the bill for a bailout in the future - as we had to with the banks after 2008. A windfall tax on super-profits would be a start, but only temporary, and

leaving the same greedy bosses in place to resume parasitic profiteering again in the future.

Leaving the means to heat our homes and cook our meals in the private hands of a few has proven to be a recipe for disaster.

Half measures that leave the fatcats in control are not the answer. We need to seize their profits by nationalising now, with no compensation to the rich shareholders. Publicly owned, the energy industry could be put under the democratic control of the working class, with elected committees of workers, trade union representatives and communities deciding investment and prices.

This crisis shows that the capitalist market has failed.

Like energy, all the necessities of life - food, water, housing, health care - are made unaffordable to us by the capitalists' ruthless pursuit of profit. We need a socialist plan, where all the major businesses and banks are publicly owned, and democratically controlled - run to meet the needs of people and the environment.

Join us to fight for it.

Join the fightback

JOIN THE SOCIALISTS

- Visit socialistparty.org.uk/join or call **020 8988 8777**
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to find out more about joining us today!



This issue of the Socialist is only eight pages because it was produced a day early in order to be sent to subscribers before the postal strike on 8 and 9 September. We will be returning to our normal 16-page paper with issue 1194. Solidarity with the postal strikes!

WHAT WE STAND FOR: THE SOCIALIST PARTY'S MAIN DEMANDS >>> see column on p7



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ISSN 1366-9621