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the Socialist

Issue 1194

15-21 September 2022

formerly **Militant**

Handouts at the top, but our bills still double

The fight goes on

UNITE THE STRIKES FOR A PAY RISE NATIONALISE ENERGY

JOSH ASKER

Life goes on. Bills keep rising, profits do too, and a Tory prime minister hands out billions to big business.

Before Liz Truss' announcement of an up to £150 billion package that still doubles our energy bills, she had spent weeks saying she was opposed to 'handouts'. Now we can see what kind of handouts she is in favour of.

There is no prospect of her solving our other problems either: NHS waiting lists grow to their longest ever, as do the food bank queues, and schools are forced to choose between teaching assistants or heating.

People have come to the conclusion that we can't go on like this. And even a new king can't hold back the tide.

Strikes are sweeping Britain already, and millions of ballot papers for strike action will land on the doorsteps of public sector workers throughout the autumn.

Strike back

When trade union leaders representing seven million members meet at the reconvened Trades Union Congress, the mood for coordinating the strikes will have grown further. But it doesn't have to wait. Already Royal Mail and BT workers have taken action on the same day. Railway and London transport workers in different unions have too.

Britain's biggest 350 companies have profit margins 73% higher now than in 2019, according to research by Unite the Union. We know where our higher prices are going!

The antidote to profiteering is nationalisation and public ownership - so that energy, Royal Mail, BT, and railways can be run democratically to meet needs not for profit, and workers in those industries can be ensured a secure job with decent pay. But Sir Keir Starmer has ruled that out under a Labour government.

The trade unions are leading the fightback, demonstrating workers' power by hitting the bosses' profits at source and striking. That fightback would be strengthened by a new mass workers' party - backed by the trade unions, bringing striking workers together with all those fighting against the rising cost of living, and that stands clearly for a socialist programme of public ownership.

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

Thousands march after police kill unarmed black man in London

JULIA RUSEVICA
LAMBETH AND SOUTH WEST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

People gathered at Parliament Square on 10 September to demand justice for Chris Kaba, who was shot and killed by the Metropolitan Police on Monday 5 September in South London.

Chris Kaba was a 24-year-old black rapper, soon to be a father, and he died after a single shot fired by a police officer.

Police were trying to stop the vehicle he was driving; an automatic number plate recognition camera indicated that this car was linked to a firearm incident in previous days. The car wasn't registered to Chris, who was unarmed.

The police executed this man on the streets of London. It is a tragedy, and there seemed to be no proper immediate response from the Met and the state.

Soon, all the news platforms were mourning Queen Elizabeth II. We heard little about the police killing of a black man.

The protest was organised in less than 24 hours. Family and friends of Chris, and thousands of other people, marched to New Scotland Yard to show that we will not stand aside and let police sweep the murder they've committed under a rug. The family says: "We are devastated; we need answers, and we need accountability;

we are worried that if Chris had not been black, he would have been arrested on Monday and not had his life cut short."

During the protest, three main demands were raised: confirmation that the officer has been suspended; a time frame for the Independent Office for Police Conduct investigation; the release of bodycam footage to the family.

On Monday 12 September, Met Police suspended the officer who shot Chris. But the fight is far from over, and we must keep pushing. This is not one 'accidental death'; it is a result of the power of a systematically racist and violent police force. Since 1990 there have been 1,883 deaths in police custody or following police contact, and there have been almost no prosecutions of the officers who have committed these murders.

This system cannot deliver us justice. It protects its murderers and people know it. More and more people see that police are not there to protect us, but instead to oppress us. We need radical change now!

Once again, we see that police brutality is not just an 'American problem' and the Black Lives Matter movement didn't stop in 2020. The fight against brutality, prejudice and racism is everywhere, in Britain too. We are not safe until everyone is safe! There is no justice until there is justice for everyone!



Vigil for Chris Kaba PAUL MATTSOON

Socialist Party fights for:

- Independent workers' and community inquiries into police violence
- End police brutality. Demilitarisation of the police – stop the use of horses, tear gas and rubber bullets. Abolish the Territorial Support Group (TSG) and all similar paramilitary units
- Democratic control of policing by trade unions and communities, including with powers to fire and hire officers
- Build a mass movement to smash racism. Build a socialist alternative to inequality and division

Its cuts, not Covid, at the root of NHS crisis

KELLY O'GARA
BOURNEMOUTH SOCIALIST PARTY

Our NHS is being failed. One in eight of us is currently on a waiting list, amounting to 6.84 million people. It's a hefty rise from the pre-pandemic figure of 4.2 million.

At the peak of the Covid pandemic, 30% of patients waited longer than four hours to be seen in A&E and over 430,000 were on a waiting list for over a year. There has been a massive 25-fold increase in the number of those awaiting diagnostic tests for over 13 weeks. And during March 2022, one in ten people waited at least two-and-a-quarter hours for an ambulance.

This list of issues arising in our NHS is by no means exhaustive. The pandemic placed a huge strain on NHS services and staff. And shirking responsibility for years of cuts and privatisation, politicians are happy to blame Covid-19 as the sole cause of the current catastrophe.

However, a report from Quality Watch has found that the current issues are the consequence of a failing NHS meeting head on with a pandemic: "While the waiting list is now growing at a significantly faster rate than pre-pandemic, Covid-19 has only accelerated a long-term trajectory of declining NHS performance". 4.4 million were on the treatment



GARETH BROMHALL

waiting list pre-pandemic, and had trends continued without a pandemic, lists would still have grown to 5.3 million. "This is reflective of a demand, staffing and resources mismatch that has been in play for a long time. Pre-existing backlogs for routine care, increasing waits in A&E departments, longer ambulance response times and waits for cancer treatment have only been accelerated throughout the pandemic", according to a Nuffield Trust researcher.

The anxiety caused to those frantically seeking treatment has caused many to turn to private, 'self-funded' health care. Even during the cost-of-living crisis, demand for private health care is soaring. Self-pay admissions rose by 39% in two years from 2021. Desperate individuals are being forced to choose financial hardship in order to get treated.

As the newly appointed health secretary Therèse Coffey takes office, Liz Truss has vaguely assured us that she will put the NHS on a "firm footing" with a forthcoming plan for the NHS to be unveiled soon. But both supported the cuts and privatisation of the last decade, and that is likely to be their chosen medicine again.

Our NHS is at breaking point, as are the staff trying to keep the underfunded service afloat. Privatisation and cuts are sucking the NHS dry. We need all of the NHS back in public hands, and fully funded to ensure high-quality care, full staffing and decent pay for its workers.

Tory 'solution' to energy crisis: We pay record bills - £150 billion bailout for energy companies

NICK HART
WEST MIDLANDS SOCIALIST PARTY

Two days in the job, and Liz Truss was already making her first U-turn! Having just a month ago rejected the idea of further 'handouts' to deal with the out-of-control cost of living, she has now announced that, rather than going up to £3,500 per year, the energy price cap will now 'only' increase to a maximum of £2,500.

In reality, the only ones this represents a handout for is the energy firms. Energy retailers will pocket up to £150 billion to hold prices down, and subsidise the billions to be handed over to energy producers for record, high-priced wholesale energy.

With the average household bill still set to nearly double from its level a year ago at the start of next month, this will do little to change the feeling that many working-class people have of literally not knowing how they'll be able to keep the lights on this winter.

Many of those struggling to pay the bills will look at the £200 billion paid to shareholders by energy companies in the last 12 years and ask: where did this money go? Energy industry bosses will point to the rise in wholesale gas prices across Europe during the war in Ukraine. But this overlooks the fact that producers of renewable energy have opportunistically hiked

wholesale prices by as much as £40 billion to match the price being paid for natural gas.

Truss is now proposing to reward this price gouging by offering energy producers long-term contracts at inflated prices. But though electricity is now costing households twice as much as it did this time last year, is it taking twice as much work to keep power stations turning? The answer is no!

Despite Truss' pledge to "end the UK's short-termist approach to energy security and supply once and for all", these measures will not stop profiteering and price fluctuations in future years in a capitalist world increasingly dominated by conflict, extreme weather and political instability.

The only long-term solution to the energy crisis is taking control of necessities of life such as electricity out of the hands of the private energy companies and bringing them back under public ownership. This would allow democratic control of energy production and supply for the benefit of the working-class majority, not a small number of speculators and spivs.

The fact that Starmer's Labour has ruled this out only underlines the need for a new mass workers' party which can advance the socialist policies needed to ensure that ordinary people don't pay the price for capitalists chasing profits.



JAN-RUNE SMENES/REUTE/CC



Energy retailers will pocket up to £150 billion to hold prices down, and subsidise the billions to be handed over to energy producers for record, high-priced wholesale energy

Tories' rotten climate record will continue with Truss' fossil fuel spree

DAVE CARR
EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Having bunged mega-profitable energy supply companies £150 billion, newly anointed prime minister Liz Truss also intends to approve more gas and oil extraction contracts, including lifting the moratorium on environmentally toxic 'fracking'. This is part of the Tory government's 'future energy security' strategy being overseen by business secretary and fossil fuel fan, Jacob Rees-Mogg.

Cutting demand

Recently, on Radio 4, a former Ofgem spokesperson (the supposed energy industry regulator) said: "The public should use less energy". As if we are the cause of the cost-of-living crisis!

In fact, gas usage in the UK has actually fallen. Between 2001-2010, the UK consumed 96 billion cubic feet of gas per year. Since 2011, this figure has been 78 billion.

An effective way to massively reduce household and workplace energy consumption would be through a national insulation and energy efficiency programme. However, under the Tories, home insulation has declined by a staggering 85% in the

last decade. While axing insulation subsidies, they gave tax breaks to highly profitable oil and gas extraction companies.

The construction industry says homes, workplaces and public buildings could be insulated at an estimated cost of £5 billion over four years, cutting energy bills and creating 100,000 jobs. Other measures could include a rolling programme to replace gas boilers with heat pumps.

But according to climate action group Possible, under current Tory plans it would take 700 years to refurbish homes in Britain for low-carbon heating!

£1.3bn

Centrica, parent company of British Gas, reported operating profits of £1.3 billion in the first six months of 2022, and handed £59 million to shareholders

'Energy security'

As to 'energy security', the bulk of imported gas currently comes from North Sea fields in UK and Norwegian waters. Less than 5% comes via Russia.

However, since British Gas was privatised by the Thatcher government in 1986, giant energy companies have exported gas supplies to the rest of Europe for profit. For instance, in 2021, these exports amounted to 31,975 gigawatt hours' worth of gas (1 gigawatt hour is enough to power one million UK homes for an hour).

North Sea gas yields are declining, but building a new onshore wind farm is nine times cheaper than running an existing gas-fired power station.

However, in 2015, then Tory PM David Cameron banned new onshore wind farms.

Nuclear nonsense

Ex-PM Johnson's parting gift to the nation was to commit billions of pounds of public funds to build new nuclear power stations (see 'Nuclear power: Government invests in

privatised power plant' at socialistparty.org.uk).

Going nuclear for future energy needs is the worst possible option. It takes decades to plan, design and build a new nuclear reactor, and then its operational lifespan is a mere ten years, assuming it works.

In contrast, onshore wind farms can be up and running in just 12 months. Moreover, the cost of electricity from nuclear is more than double that of onshore wind power.

Nationalise energy for green investment

The best alternative to fossil fuels is not expensive and toxic nuclear power, but massive investment in green renewables such as wind, solar and wave power - along with a nationwide programme of home and workplace insulation and other energy efficiency measures.

Such a green energy programme will not voluntarily happen under profit-driven capitalism. Instead, it requires public ownership of 'big energy', as part of a democratic plan of production - a democratic socialist system.

£170bn

Leaked Treasury documents show that UK gas producers and electricity generators will pocket £170 billion in 'windfall' profits over the next two years

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Schools in crisis: Union action vital for pay and proper school funding



Teachers and support staff at Valentine School in Southampton took strike action in 2019, winning council funding to balance its needs-based budget and avert cuts. SOUTHAMPTON SOCIALIST PARTY

MIKE WHALE
NATIONAL EDUCATION UNION AND HULL SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBER

Schools are facing a catastrophic funding crisis. With spiralling inflation and unfunded pay awards, many head teachers have torn up existing budgets and are now struggling to balance the books. Crazy debates and discussions are starting to take place in schools among school leaderships and governing bodies:

"If we lower the heating levels by a few degrees in the winter, will we be able to keep all of the staff and would we be breaking the law?"

"If we don't implement the pay rises, will that mean we won't have to sack a teaching assistant?"

"Can we do a staffing restructure and lose some staff that will save us some money?"

It is ridiculous that in the UK, one of the richest countries in the world, these sorts of discussions are taking place. With Covid infections likely to rise in the autumn and winter, good ventilation is key to the safety of pupils and staff. It's imperative that schools have the funding to heat

ventilation. Schools shouldn't be scrambling around looking for savings, they should be focusing on providing the best education possible for our young people!



Spending per pupil in 2024 will still be 3% lower than in 2010

The Tories will claim that they are increasing spending on education, but as the Institute of Fiscal Studies points out, spending per pupil in 2024 will still be 3% lower than in 2010. Liz Truss' cabinet of public school-educated toffs care nothing for schools in poor working-class areas. Their 'aid' package on energy bills will be like a piece of cheap sticking plaster for many schools.

Ten years of austerity has driven down teacher pay. And the miserable 5% 'awarded' to teachers is a further pay cut in real terms. No wonder education staff are looking for better paid jobs elsewhere. This is particularly the case for low-paid

support staff who are the 'Cinderellas' of education. When teaching assistants leave a school, more work falls on teachers. Greater workload further lowers morale. Low morale leads to teachers quitting and students miss out.

Education workers are currently performing mini miracles. The general problems facing society don't stop at the school door. Staff are increasingly providing emotional support as well as food, heating and a safe environment on top of education itself to school students and their families.

It can't go on like this. The power to force change lies with the education unions. A well-organised campaign including strike action can not only win a much-needed pay increase for all education workers but it can also force the Tories to properly fund schools and colleges.

The money is there, but it is in the pockets of the super-rich. The debate should not be: "Can we afford to heat the school?" But: "Can we afford the rich and their rotten capitalist system!"

● The NEU indicative strike ballot over pay opens on 24 September, NASUWT are set to ballot in November



ALEX FOLKES & FISHER/CC

The hidden costs of schooling: fight to make education genuinely free

RHYS DAVIES
CARDIFF SOCIALIST PARTY

The Welsh government is considering whether to scrap school logos on uniforms to ease the financial burden on families. But this is not enough, and is of little comfort to parents suffering right now.

The estimated average annual cost for a high school uniform is £337 per pupil, and I have three daughters in high school!

Demand for free school uniforms has rocketed as the cost-of-living crisis continues to bite. Cardiff charity 'A Better Fit' reports that second-hand clothes they're donated leave their warehouse as soon as they arrive. Parents are now taking matters into their own hands, setting up their own swap shops for uniforms.

But it's not just uniforms. A Welsh government study has found how one-in-ten parents had not sent their child on a school day trip because of the cost, and one-in-five had not sent their child on a residential trip. The likelihood of this increased among the lower-income households.

Add to that contributions to cookery lessons, design and technology equipment, art materials, charitable donations, contributions to school fetes and raffles, and cake stalls.

Over half of parents said that they purchased a school photo of their child during the last year; in the large majority of cases this cost was more than £10. Over two-fifths of the sample also paid for additional activities for their child such as a school disco, school play costs or other hobbies.

I've recently paid £600 for bus passes for my daughters to cover just

the first term. It will add up to £1,500 for the school year for a bus they use only three days a week. The private bus firm, Adventure Travel is owned by a Singapore-based company which made a net profit of over £100 million in the first half of 2022!

Laura Doel, Director of the National Association of Headteachers Cymru, said schools have reported parents not sending their children in because they cannot afford to. Parents in Wales are now keeping their children off school because they can't afford the uniforms, meals and transport.

More than a quarter of children in Wales are eligible for free school meals with a 1% rise in the last year. The eligibility criteria is extremely low. To qualify, working families on Child Tax Credit must have an income less than £16,190, or if on Universal Credit have net household earning less than £7,400 a year. Millions of children and families already facing soaring energy bills and using food banks or skipping meals, miss out.

The Welsh government, led by Labour and backed up by Plaid Cymru in a 'cooperation agreement', has agreed to roll out free school meals for primary school children by 2024. But why not immediately? Why not for all school children? And why not include free school transport and uniforms too?

Prepared to use all its financial powers of borrowing and reserves, any council in Wales or England could choose to fund these steps immediately and demand that the government pays to make education truly free for all.

Bus fares temporarily capped, bus profits subsidised

Demand free, public and extended transport networks

TIMEA KUN
NORTHAMPTON SOCIALIST PARTY

With the cost-of-living crisis squeezing us harder and harder, the government has finally stepped up with a pitiful attempt to soften the brutal financial blows looming.

This coming winter, the government will hand over up to £60 million to bus operators to 'help' them cap bus fares across the country at £2 for a single. But not all year round, for a measly three months!

Currently, single bus tickets in some cities can cost you as much as £6. Here in Northampton, £2 will buy you a five-minute journey. And that's if you can catch the infrequent and unreliable bus.

Bus cuts

For many in more rural areas that option doesn't even apply, as less profitable routes have been cut and replaced with expensive, and even more infrequent, minibus services.

The limited government subsidy, to apply from January to March next year, shows us that the money is there. But the measure is not enough to offset soaring bills, there is no guarantee of maintaining or improving services.

Bus services across England are run by private companies like Stagecoach that, from May to October last year, saw its year-on-year profits double to £32.9 million.

Though the use of public transport hasn't increased significantly, profits have - evidence of price increases, and route and job cuts. The government's announcement that it is "helping bus operators"



is laughable given their recorded profits.

Rather than subsidise bus company profits while they cut services and charge rip-off fares, we demand nationalised public transport, under working-class control

and management. Then services can be provided for free and democratically planned to meet our needs, incentivising public use and helping to address climate change and poor air quality in our towns and cities.

Reader's opinion: 'Free public transport's time has come'

In Germany a three-month experiment has provided unlimited travel on buses, trams, metros and regional trains for just €9 (£7.80) a month.

The experiment is meant to help tackle the cost-of-living crisis and to cut car emissions.

More than 50 million tickets have

already been bought. Sure enough, it has relieved citizens financially and it will have a positive effect on the environment. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz says it is "our best idea yet."

Spain is going to offer free tickets on all local and medium distance intercity routes until the end of the year.

Austria has a 'Klimaticket' or climate ticket which covers nationwide travel for €91 a month, while Luxembourg made bus and rail travel free back in 2020.

Surely this all shows that free or heavily subsidised public transport is an idea whose time has come.
ALAN STEWART WAKEFIELD

Operation London Bridge: The hidden cost of mourning

ADAM HARMSWORTH
COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

'Operation London Bridge' - the immediate state plan for funeral, coronation, and other arrangements when the monarch dies - includes cancelling virtually every public event until the funeral.

Thousands of people will have been depending on these events for income, as direct employees taking on extra hours, agency or zero-hour

staff, self-employed workers, or small business owners counting on annual events that may have been cancelled since 2020.

The TUC Congress in Brighton was suspended. That alone is a venue's hosting cancelled, coaches cancelled, hotel bookings cancelled, rooms of material wasted and any incomplete orders also cancelled. Each event like that wasting tens or hundreds of thousands of pounds.

Coventry Motofest was due just

this weekend, intended as the 'biggest ever' following a scaled-down 2021 and no event the year before. A good portion of Coventry's city centre workers will see their hours cut. Small cafes around town may have been relying on a weekend boom in customers to stave off cuts to hours, pay, and jobs, or outright closure. Repeat that for every major event in or near a town or city.

The state may have declared a period of 'mourning', but for the rest

Scottish government temporary rent freeze

Now fight for democratic rent control, in England and Wales too!



ROGER KIDD/CC

NICK AUVACHE
CAMDEN AND HARINGEY SOCIALIST PARTY

The Scottish parliament has announced a freeze on rents for both social and private-rented sectors, and a moratorium on evictions too.

These measures will be welcomed by many who were already wondering where the money would come from to pay the rent. But the measures by themselves are inadequate to meet the requirements of workers who have seen their wages and benefits dramatically eroded by inflation.

Scottish housing association tenants have responded to the lateness and limitations of Sturgeon's statement, saying: "A rent freeze that only lasts from now until March 2023 doesn't help housing association tenants whose rent went up in April and I expect will then go up again after the freeze ends, 15 years of the

pressure should be put on the Welsh Labour government and Labour-run local councils to act. To not just freeze rents at unaffordable levels, but bring in democratic rent controls, and fund a programme of mass council house building too.

Scottish National Party in power and they've let private and social landlords run riot".

Scottish first minister Nicola Sturgeon has made this announcement under pressure. Like in England and Wales, workers have been on strike demanding a pay rise and measures to deal with the cost of living.

Tenants in England and Wales facing the same squeeze need action too. Average rents are up almost 10% across the whole United Kingdom. Since the Westminster government lifted the Covid eviction ban in August 2021, homelessness is rising too - up 11% in the first three months of this year.

Housing campaigners in England demand freezes

Housing campaign groups in England are making a similar demand to freeze social rents for council and housing association tenants. The groups also want a freeze on service charges and shared owner rents as the latter fall outside the social rent directive.

Government subsidy is being proposed for councils, and for housing associations based on proven need. The pressure has already succeeded in moving government to reduce the cap from expected 10+% to a maximum of 7% - a significant achievement given the absence of a functioning government over the last few weeks!

The fight continues and the demand is being backed up by a rent and service charge strike threat if increases go ahead. Find out more about the campaign at shaction.org/pledge-page

SUZANNE MUNA
SOCIAL HOUSING ACTION CAMPAIGN

bits and pieces. The cashier started to chat with me, not about the monarchy, but about work. He tells me, quite bitterly, that he has a masters degree but "here I am".

WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?
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of us, lives carry on as normal. Or they would have if our lives hadn't been made more desperate at short notice!

On a quick trip to a corner shop in Charterhouse estate, Coventry, I see nothing different; bins being hurriedly collected; parents in a hurry to drop off kids at school through the traffic, all to get to work on time.

In the shop it's no less busy than usual; shelves need stacking and those not working 9-5 are grabbing

NHS workers getting ready for action

Following the pay offer of £1,400 for NHS staff, working out as an average 4% pay 'rise', health unions are balloting their members in England and Wales in indicative and industrial action ballots.

Consultations are taking place in the GMB and Unite, as well as the Royal College of Physiotherapy and the Society of Radiographers.

The Royal College of Midwives reports that in its consultation, 66% of members voted and 75% responded that they would vote for industrial action. Members in Scotland are due to

start an industrial action ballot at the end of September.

Unison, the biggest health union, is planning an industrial action ballot starting on 27 October.

As reported in the Socialist last week, the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) was due to start an industrial action ballot over pay on 15 September. That date is now delayed due to the Queen's death. If members vote yes, it will be the first time in RCN history that their members in England and Wales go on strike.

Scottish health unions moving to ballot

SEAN ROBERTSON

AN NHS WORKER AND GMB REP IN SCOTLAND

In August, all the NHS unions held a consultative ballot on whether to accept the Scottish government's 'final' pay offer of 5% backdated to April.

This pay offer represents a real-terms pay cut of at least 8% as inflation measured by the Retail Price Index (RPI) stands at over 12% and rising. Added to this is the 20% cut in the value of wages endured over the last decade.

All the NHS unions rejected the offer, by between 89% and 97%.

Four weeks on and health secretary Humza Yousef and the Scottish Government are still silent.

The contempt with which the employers hold us in will only be remedied by decisive action. Because of this, all unions are now balloting for strike action.



LINCOLN SP

Standing shoulder to shoulder – Arriva bus drivers in south of England holding strong



Watford Junction EASTERN SP

HELEN KERR

STEVENAGE SOCIALIST PARTY

On 5 and 6 September, Arriva bus drivers took strike action across the three counties of Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire, for the first time in decades. Eight depots took part in the action: Luton, Aylesbury, High Wycombe, Milton Keynes, Ware, Stevenage, Watford and Hemel Hempstead. Over 900 Unite members participated in the strike.

I visited Stevenage and Ware depots to talk to the strikers. Spirits were high and everyone was very friendly. It was a brilliant turnout, the drivers were all in touch with each other from different depots, phones frequently pinged with a photo of a different picket line, or an update as to what management may have said or done, if they bothered to talk to them. Strong communication amongst the strikers has played a key role in maintaining a united front.

The strikers at Stevenage explained that while they want a pay increase, this is more about parity of pay, terms and conditions.

Arriva has historically negotiated with

individual depots across the region. This has led to a pay differential between depots of 22 pence an hour; so a driver leaving Stevenage to take passengers to Luton is paid £13.45 an hour whereas, a driver from Luton doing the same route in reverse is on £13.67!

All the members have agreed that a pay rise should be across the board, with the drivers in the Bedfordshire depots being as resolute as those in Herts that this disparity needs to be squashed.

Arriva has been using divide and conquer tactics. It offered an increase which still left a 16p disparity, hoping the larger depots would accept, leaving the others weakened. But the drivers are standing shoulder to shoulder on this.

In fact, the Unite regional officer and negotiating team have put forward a counter proposal, which will actually cost Arriva less than its own, and will see all depots on the same rate of pay. Arriva has dismissed this; it does not want a united workforce.

So the strikes will continue with further days being announced.

Dock workers strike back

PAULA MITCHELL

Nearly 2,000 dock workers at Felixstowe have already flexed their muscles in an eight-day strike in August, over a pay offer from their super-rich bosses which is in reality a pay cut. Now, the management of Felixstowe Dock and Railway Company has announced that it will impose 7% on the workers. With RPI inflation over 12%, this is a pay cut of more than 5%.

In a survey of Unite members, 82% voted to reject this insult. Another eight-day strike has been announced, from 27 September to 5 October.

Sharon Graham, Unite general secretary, describes the owners of the dock as "eye-wateringly wealthy". The company is owned by the multinational port operator CK Hutchison, which is registered in the Cayman Islands. The dock company made record profits of £79 million in 2021.

The August strike brought 48% of UK freight imports to a standstill – starkly demonstrating that it is workers who make the bosses these riches.

Over 560 Liverpool dock workers are due to strike for two weeks against billionaire port operator MDHC, over another 7% pay offer.

New Tory prime minister Liz Truss is a fan of 'freeports' – where money-grubbing bosses can more easily increase their wealth through lower regulation. Freeports are planned for Felixstowe/Harwich, Tilbury, Liverpool, Tees-side, Humberside, Solent and Plymouth. The Felixstowe dock strikes are demonstrating the potential power of organised workers in the ports and the best way to fight for decent jobs, pay and safety.

The ports should be nationalised, as part of a publicly owned, sustainable, integrated transport system, under workers' control and management.

PCS security guards strike

We need workers' control of health and safety

DUNCAN MOORE

PLYMOUTH SOCIALIST PARTY

On 5 September, security staff at Devonport dockyard struck against changes to their working practices imposed by the Ministry of Defence (MoD).

Since the first outbreak of Covid in March 2020, security guards have not been required to touch visitors' security passes when they leave or enter the site. These workers normally handle thousands of security passes every day, without breaking to sanitise hands, potentially super-spreading the virus.

MoD bosses are now imposing the return of 'touch pass control,' without consulting workers or their union. This is despite no security breaches in the two years since the practice was ended.

PCS industrial officer Justin Thomas told the Socialist: "We don't want our workers put at risk unnecessarily. Covid has not gone away. Our members are striking for the health and safety of everyone in their place of work".

Security workers vented their anger at the MoD bosses imposing these changes, having never set foot in the workplace during the height of the pandemic, while the security staff were on the front line.

This dispute is yet another example of how workplace health and safety can't be left to clueless bosses but should be decided by the workers.

Firefighters prepare for a ballot

Firefighters and firefighter control staff are preparing for a ballot for strike action, following consultation in Fire Brigades Union (FBU) branches.

While RPI inflation runs over 12%, firefighters have been offered a 2% pay 'rise' - in reality a huge pay cut.

The FBU reported that they aim for the ballot to be held in October.

Biggest set of strikes ever in further education

The University and College Union (UCU) has announced an unprecedented ten days of strike action in further education colleges.

Staff at 26 colleges in England will take ten days of strike action over pay, starting on 26 September, unless employers make a significant offer.

89.9% of UCU members voted to strike, in a ballot with an overall turnout of 57.9%.

UCU says that since 2009, pay in further education has fallen behind inflation by 35% and the pay gap between school and college teachers stands at around £9,000.

The dates of strike action are:

- Week 1: Monday 26, Tuesday 27 and Wednesday 28 September
- Week 2: Thursday 6 and Friday 7 October
- Week 3: Monday 10 and Tuesday 11 October
- Week 4: Tuesday 18 Wednesday, 19 and Thursday 20 October

Criminal barristers' escalation

Criminal barristers have begun an indefinite strike, following weeks of intermittent action, in their campaign for a 25% increase in legal aid fees. Legal aid rates have been cut by nearly 40% in the last fifteen years and many junior barristers are struggling. Socialist Party members supported protests around the country.

CLIVE WALDER

BIRMINGHAM SOUTH SOCIALIST PARTY

There was another well-attended protest by criminal barristers at Birmingham Crown Court on 6 September. They are now on all-out strike and believe that their action is becoming effective.

Chloe gave a graphic description of a broken legal system caused by chronic underfunding, and pointed to the lack of barristers to hear criminal cases, meaning that neither defendants nor victims get justice. 40% of junior barristers have left the profession in the last five years. They believe that their vocation is being cruelly exploited.

Another barrister thinking of leaving the profession wondered whether there will be a profession to actually resign from.

Our call for coordination of all the different strikes was well-received.

Get all the latest union news



with the NSSN bulletin
shopstewards.net



Quinton, Birmingham BIRMINGHAM SP

On the CWU picket lines

Postal workers in Royal Mail took their third day of national strike action on Thursday 8 September.

Grimsby

Thursday was day three of industrial action. A loss of two days' pay, which, given the current climate of the cost-of-living and energy prices, is a big challenge for many. But despite this and the heavy rain here, Grimsby remains defiant. Strong support from CWU members and indeed the public remains high - something that Simon Thompson [Royal Mail boss] and his cohorts don't want to see.

The letter we all received this week spoke the usual rhetoric that we have come to expect from a board of directors that sees fit to reward themselves bonuses and shares whilst blaming us for the loss in revenue.

Grimsby members remain strong and steadfast, and so do the public, in our fight for not only a realistic pay rise but decent working conditions too.

ROY CRAMPTON, CWU PICKET SUPERVISOR

Hockley, Birmingham

One striker told us: "This has been going on far too long, it's time people stood up for themselves. How can businesses increase their profits by 73% last year and then tell us they can't afford a decent pay increase?" And another: "Labour has done nothing for us. Where's Starmer? It's like he just wants to hide on the Tory backbenches."

NICK HART

Mansfield

At the Mansfield picket line, two agency HGVs arrived and had keys to let themselves in. Strikers and Socialist Party members appealed to the drivers for solidarity, and we gave them copies of our leaflet. We asked that they turn around and support the CWU strike, and listened to their description of being work-weary.

The agency worker decided not to cross the picket line, and asked where we were from and did we have a business card! The agency worker left to solidarity salutes from the strikers and a round of "The workers united will never be defeated."

PAUL TOOLEY-OKONKWO

A worker on the Mansfield picket line spoke to **Denise Tooley-Okonkwo:**

"We are not getting paid for two days. When we are back at work we put everything into four days rather than six. We are working harder for less money. There were more people that

voted to strike than voted Liz Truss in."

Plymouth

At West Park Delivery Office, one postie said: "They can't find money to nationalise the energy companies, but they're quick enough to find money for MPs' pay rises"

RYAN ALDRED

Bristol

There were twice as many pickets as last time at Patchway mail centre, which itself was bigger than the time before. They're in really high spirits and the beeping of horns is nearly constant.

TOM BALDWIN

Pocklington, East Yorkshire

There was a good turnout from CWU members at the picket line on a small office in Pocklington this morning. They are resolute to see this through to the end. The rep said: "We simply can't afford such a massive pay cut, and all management are offering is a smaller pay cut and a huge change to our working conditions."

STEVE SCOTT

York

A Birch Park rep bought The Socialist and told us he thought TUSC might be the way forward.

At Leeman Road, the picket is on the main road, so there is lots of solidarity from passing traffic. They even had a fire engine stop by to offer support and drop off some food. Two posties from Hull on holiday in York stopped by to support the picket line.

IAIN DALTON

Hengoed, Caerphilly

Jeff Williams, CWU rep, spoke to **Mariam Kamish:** "I think we're well overdue for a general strike. We have so many workers out now. The appetite for it is there. It just needs organising."

Brighton

Strikers told **Nick Chaffey:** "We've had solid support here for the strike. What's on offer is a joke when inflation is where it is. 2% is an extra £7 a week which doesn't cover the extra cost of fuel getting to work. We need one bloody big strike with everyone out!"

Waltham Cross, Herts

Some pickets went to the bus station next door, where Arriva bus drivers had been on strike three days before. Every driver who passed loudly sounded their horn in solidarity.

CHRIS THOMAS

Royal Mail strikes step up the fight!

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBER IN CWU

Communication Workers Union (CWU) members across the Royal Mail group have taken three days of strike action - a fourth day was halted due to the Queen's death.

We saw the strongest picket lines anyone can remember. Many areas which, in the past, were viewed as weaker for strike action, reported solid support this time. We even saw thousands of vans, hired for agency staff to strikebreak, remaining parked up.

Managers, who are mainly Unite members, barely made a dent in the backlog of mail after the first two strike days. These managers are on a £1,500 'attendance bonus' if they work through to 31 October.

So Royal Mail has found millions of pounds to try and break the strike, but it has clearly failed.

On the eve of the 8 September strike, Royal Mail paid out another £137 million to the shareholders.

Pay outs for bosses

Alongside this, over a million shares were given to four directors, worth over £2.5 million.

Postal workers saw this as a provocation, which only hardened the mood.

The CWU leadership has accused Royal Mail of being involved in takeover talks with the Luxembourg-based Vesa Equity company, owned by Czech billionaire Daniel Kretinsky, which already owns close to 25% of Royal Mail.

It appears that the bosses' aim in this dispute is to break the CWU so they can push up the price of the sale.

Then the current shareholders can make billions and allow Vesa to come in and asset-strip what was

once a publicly owned institution with a 500-year-old history.

More strike dates

The CWU has named further 48-hour strike dates on 30 September and 1 October. These are on the second ballot over terms and conditions, which saw a historic 98.7% yes vote for strike action. This leaves three weeks for talks. But a breakthrough at present seems unlikely, as Royal Mail management are pushing ahead.

If there is no movement then the CWU should call demonstrations and rallies across the country on Saturday 1 October and make a call to the wider trade union movement for solidarity.

We must step up the fight to clear out these privateers and to nationalise the industry under democratic workers' control and management.



Turning back agency workers in Mansfield PHOTO: MANSFIELD SP



National Shop Stewards Network rally and lobby of the TUC

No retreat in the battle against the cost-of-living crisis

The National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) made the following statement when the Trades Union Congress (TUC) postponed its September congress.

"The TUC has postponed the TUC Congress following the Queen passing away. It appears that the Congress will now be held in October or November, still in Brighton.

Therefore, the NSSN has had to

postpone our rally and lobby that were due to take place this coming Sunday [11 September]. We will organise it when the TUC Congress is reconvened.

The issues that have seen the wave of strikes develop, above all the cost-of-living crisis, continue to face workers. Therefore we still need to campaign for the unions to strike together.

We will keep you informed of the new date for the NSSN TUC Congress rally and lobby."

● **As we go to press, the TUC general council has announced new dates for the congress: 18 - 20 October, in Brighton. The NSSN will now be making plans for a rally and lobby.**

After the Queen's death:

NO BASIS FOR 'NATIONAL UNITY': FIGHT AGAINST COST-OF-LIVING SQUEEZE CONTINUES

HANNAH SELL

SOCIALIST PARTY GENERAL SECRETARY

The death of Queen Elizabeth has momentarily pushed aside all other issues in the national media. For the majority of the population the pressing problems of how to pay the bills cannot be pushed aside, regardless of how they feel about the Queen's death. Nonetheless, she reigned for 70 years, so only elderly people can remember a time when she was not on the throne. Therefore her death, while obviously not a surprise at 96, has sent a certain shockwave through society, adding to the widespread feeling that we are living through turbulent times.

While there are different views in society about the Queen and the monarchy as a whole, she was consistently the most popular member of the royal family. For example, a YouGov poll in May of this year showed 82% of people believing she did a fairly or very good job. She was seen by many as being 'above' politics and assiduously doing 'her duty' – even the irksome duty of meeting Boris Johnson and Liz Truss just two days before her death. During lockdown, the contrast was widely noted between her social distancing by sitting alone at her husband's funeral and Johnson's endless Downing Street parties.

Institutional preservation

Britain's ruling class, however, is not encouraging the nation to mourn just because she was a relatively popular figure, but because they are anxious to ensure that the institution of the monarchy is preserved. The two-week long programme of official ceremonies running up to her funeral, the wall-to-wall media coverage, the procession of capitalist politicians paying tribute to her and her eldest son, now King Charles III: all this is designed to bolster the monarchy in the hope that Charles can now play the same role that she has done for 70 years.



While the monarchy is usually seen as a harmless leftover of a previous age, it is in fact still part of the capitalist state machine, ultimately in place to defend the interests of capitalism

While the monarchy is usually seen as a harmless leftover of a previous age, it is in fact still part of the capitalist state machine, ultimately in place to defend the interests of capitalism. Actually, in contrast to the popular perception that the Queen was above

politics, the current pomp and ceremony is revealing just how many 'reserve' powers the monarchy has. The Queen met weekly with the prime minister and the head of the foreign office. All members of the government had to be approved by her, as did legislation. She had powers to dissolve governments, call elections and even declare martial law. It was the Queen's power of 'prorogation' that Johnson turned to in 2019 to suspend parliament.

One of the clearest examples of the Queen's reserve powers being used was in Australia in November 1975. The governor-general, the Queen's representative, removed the elected Labour prime minister Gough Whitlam. Whitlam had been pushed by pressure from the working class and social movements to carry out substantial reforms, including free higher education, universal health care, and equal pay for women. But as economic crisis developed, the capitalists demanded cuts. Fearing the power of a mass movement pushing him to go further, they also demanded the removal of Whitlam. The governor-general, acting on the Queen's behalf, obliged.

When Jeremy Corbyn was elected leader of the Labour Party in Britain, the response of senior military figures was significant. General Sir Nicholas Houghton, then chief of the defence staff, said he would "worry" if Corbyn's views were translated into power, while Michael Clarke of the Royal United Services Institute think tank argued that "the armed forces don't belong to the government, they belong to the monarch."

Unelected accession council

Now all of the powers previously held by the Queen have been passed to Charles. This was done via the entirely unelected 'accession council' made up of an assortment of 718 current and retired politicians, civil servants, judges, members of the clergy, and royalty.

However, ultimately, the monarchy's ability to play its role as a reserve weapon to defend the capitalist system is dependent on the social support for the royal family. The capitalist class are seriously worried that Charles will not have the same popularity as the Queen retained. The monarchy has been periodically damaged, most recently by the Harry and Meghan episode and the scandal around Prince Andrew, but many people, particularly from the older generation, have exonerated the Queen from responsibility for the other royals' actions.

While public trust in other capitalist institutions – including politicians, the media, and the police – has fallen steeply, the monarchy has been less damaged. As the Financial Times put it in her obituary, at the end of her reign the monarchy was "one of the few institutions in public life still capable of commanding mass appeal." The



perception that she was above politics was carefully cultivated; her intervention urging voters in the 2014 Scottish referendum "to think very carefully" before voting was one of the few occasions she was seen to comment publicly on current political events. At the time, British capitalism was desperate to avoid the breakup of the British state and, as then prime minister Cameron has since revealed, she was asked to indicate her views. Her single remark undoubtedly played a role in the referendum.

Authority undermined

The capitalist class has no confidence in Charles to be so effective in their interests in the future. It is clear the Queen's death will accelerate the process of 'dominion' countries removing the British monarch as their head of state, rightly seeing it as a legacy of colonial and imperialist exploitation. In June this year 55% of Jamaicans said they wanted their country to become a republic.

But in Britain as well, the authority

of the monarchy is now under threat. As the Guardian columnist Martin Kettle put it, the Queen was an "extremely effective unifying force in a nation that is visibly pulling itself apart. Her passing will remove that force, which her heirs cannot assume they will be able to replicate."

Earlier this year just 32% of people in Britain believed Charles would make a good king, while an equal number were sure that he would not. What is taking place now is a concerted campaign to build support for his reign, and create a mood of 'national unity' behind the new king.

Momentarily, some people will be enthusiastic about the 'pomp and ceremony' of the next two weeks, partly because they are a brief distraction from all the problems of the cost-of-living crisis. There is no chance whatsoever, however, of any prolonged mood of national unity. It is too obvious to most people that the interests of the majority, who are suffering the steepest fall in living standards since the start of the Queen's reign, are not

the same of those of the tiny super-rich elite at the top. That elite includes, of course, the royal family. The succession means that King Charles is now overseeing the Crown Estate's property portfolio worth £15.6 billion, while his eldest son, William, has inherited the £1.05 billion assets of the Duchy of Cornwall.

Desperate for whatever help she can get, however, the new prime minister Liz Truss, elected by just 81,000 Tories and with the support of less than a third of her party's MPs, is trying to gain a little popularity by joining the new king on his tour of the country. Any positive effect will be exceedingly limited and brief, and it could even backfire if it is seen as a cynical manoeuvre. Nor is Truss's announcement of a £2,500 energy price cap, quickly overshadowed by the Queen's death, going to give her any sustained poll bounce. One Tory grandee was reported as saying it would save her until Christmas – hardly a ringing endorsement!

The price cap constitutes state intervention on a bigger scale than any

single pandemic furlough measure. It was a gigantic U-turn by Truss; a sign of how she will be buffeted by events. Of course, there will be relief that bills are not going to spiral much higher, but the current astronomical price is still going to result in 1.3 million more people being pushed below the poverty line. At the same time, even 74% of Tory voters support a windfall tax on the energy companies. And yet she is refusing to take a penny of the predicted £170 billion extra profits they will make from the current high prices.

The most serious sections of the capitalist class fear that Truss's strident defence of inequality and support for tax cuts that primarily help the richest risk dramatically further fuelling the growing strike wave. They also fear that it could worsen Britain's deepening economic crisis, as the markets start betting against British capitalism. Last week sterling hit its lowest level in 37 years. No longer having the Queen on the throne will only increase their problems.

The capitalist class has, however, one advantage in weathering these storms. They face no political opposition in parliament. Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer has led the charge to national unity, using his speech in memory of the Queen to declare that the whole country and all politicians must "pull together" and that the country is best when we "rise above the petty, the trivial, the day to day, when we focus on the things that unite us rather than those that divide us."

What does that mean? There are no common interests between the Amazon workers organising sit-ins after being offered a 35p an hour wage 'rise' and Bezos, the Amazon CEO, the fourth wealthiest man on the planet. Nor should there be any common interests between a Labour politician, leading a party founded by the trade unions to stand up for the interests of the working class, and an ultra-right wing Tory prime minister. There is nothing petty about the urgent need of Britain's workers for a pay rise, in order to be able to continue to carry out day to day 'trivialities' like feeding your family and heating your home.

Starmer's unity

Starmer's call for national unity is a confirmation, if one were needed, that under his leadership Labour is not standing up for the interests of the working class but, like under Blair before him, is reliably acting for the capitalist elite. This again poses the need for the workers' movement to begin to build its own party, on a socialist programme. The Socialist Party argues that such a party should call for the abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords, in order to remove undemocratic institutions that would be used by the capitalist class to try and sabotage a socialist government.

The first steps towards building such a party are urgent and will increasingly be discussed, particularly among the hundreds of thousands of workers taking strike action with no support at all from the Labour leadership. The most immediate task of all, however, is to fight to ensure that the industrial struggle against the cost-of-living squeeze continues to be built, including with coordinated action. There must be no retreat into a false idea of national unity by the trade unions, as took place at the start of the pandemic.

When the news of the Queen's death was announced, the leadership of the RMT and CWU immediately called off the strike action planned to take place in the following days. Deciding to reschedule a day's strike action rather than unnecessarily offend a section of union members and potentially weaken the strike is legitimate. However, as long as none of the issues that forced RMT and CWU members to strike have been resolved, it is urgent that the next dates for strike action are set and built for. The CWU in Royal Mail currently has planned action for 30 September and 1 October.

In addition, however, the leadership of the trade union movement took the decision to delay the TUC Congress, which should have been a council of war, bringing together delegates from across the workers' movement to discuss how to escalate the fightback. Pressure from below ensured that there are six motions on the agenda of the Congress – now postponed until October or November – calling to coordinate the strikes.



The most immediate task of all, however, is to fight to ensure that the industrial struggle against the cost-of-living squeeze continues to be built, including with coordinated action

Another issue that would have featured at the congress was the call to launch an appeal to build a massive strike fund to assist those unions on the front line, such as the RMT and the CWU. There is no doubt that the right wing of the TUC leadership would be relieved if the Queen's death meant they were able to avoid ever debating how to turn those resolutions into meaningful action.

Unite strikes

The left leaders, however, should insist that the congress is reconvened as soon as possible, but they should not wait for it. Unions with existing live ballots should start building coordinated action now, in a 'coalition of the willing'. If this was accompanied by a public call for a massive midweek workers' march on parliament, that would give a powerful warning to Truss.

Such a demonstration should be organised around a programme of demands that could appeal to broad sections of workers and young people. Central would be opposition to the anti-trade union laws, but also including inflation-protected pay rises for all, a £15-an-hour minimum wage, nationalisation of the energy companies, and living pensions and benefits. Without question, such an approach would help to draw into active participation the millions who are currently looking towards the trade unions, and be an important step in the working class demonstrating its strength and determination to fight back in the new Carolean era of capitalist crisis.

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



Fund the campaign to renationalise the energy companies



ISAI MARIJERLA

ISAI MARIJERLA
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL TREASURER

£170 billion! That is what UK energy companies are estimated to make in the next two years, on top of the profits they have already made.

British Gas profits quintupled in the first six months of 2022. BT supposedly can't afford a decent pay rise for its workers, even though its profits are more than trebled.

These companies are making such embarrassingly large amounts of money that British Gas is now saying that it will voluntarily cap its profits. But according to new Tory prime minister Liz Truss, the way out of the crisis is to make sure that they get more tax relief and guard their profit. She is against a windfall tax, and has made clear whose side she is on.

Liz Truss and her friends, CEOs and shareholders of top companies, are not worried about us - working-class and young people facing a rising cost of living. We need our own political representation, and a mass party to fight for our needs. The Socialist Party is fighting for a new mass workers' party as an alternative to blue and red Tories.

We have also been out across the country campaigning for renationalising these energy companies, with compensation only given if need is proven, not to the fat cats. Instead, use their vast profits to lower our bills and end the cost-of-living squeeze.

We have printed new posters and leaflets, and have been distributing them. Many that have seen us in action agree with our demand, and have made donations to help the campaign.

The Socialist Party has a proud tradition of raising funds on the streets, in community campaigns, among students and in the trade union movement. Every quarter we set a target - £25,000 this quarter - to ensure that we have the resources to fund the struggle for socialism.

Inflation and increasing costs have hit the Socialist Party. The energy bill at our national office has doubled. So it's even more important we hit our fighting fund target to ensure we are well equipped. We are on 51% of our target, and the current quarter ends on Monday 3 October.

Socialist Party branches are planning extra campaign activity, and are organising many fundraising events in the next two weeks, like socials, picnics, clothes parties, etc.

If you are Socialist Party member, we appeal to you to help your branch to raise more funds. Whether you are a member or not, can you make a donation today towards our target?

Help fund the fightback
DONATE
socialistparty.org.uk/donate

AREA	£ RECEIVED	£ TARGET	Q3: JULY-SEPTEMBER 2022	DEADLINE: 3 OCTOBER 2022
South West	2,032	1,800		113%
East Midlands	1,303	1,850	70%	
Wales	1,570	2,300	68%	
West Midlands	1,742	2,600	67%	
Northern	385	750	51%	
Yorkshire	1,184	2,550	46%	
Southern & SE	1,072	2,350	46%	
North West	504	1,150	44%	
London	2,015	4,600		
Eastern	130	3,850	11%	
Other	917	1,200	24%	
TOTAL	12,853	25,000	51%	

Cardiff community anger over Tesco price hike

JOHN WILLIAMS
CARDIFF WEST SOCIALIST PARTY

Gathering outside the new Tesco Express in Canton on 10 September, protesters called out the disgraceful decision by Tesco to convert the previous Tesco Metro, and push up prices for staff and the community.

A much-used Tesco, people could buy relatively cheap goods, even more important with the cost of living and inflation hitting the roof. One of the organisers, Ann Marie Zogina, now can't afford to shop at her most local shop.

Tesco, like many supermarkets, is incredibly profitable. Tesco has tripled its profits in the past year. Pure greed and profiteering is pushing low-income households into hunger and poverty. Tesco has removed 100 lines of value items over the last three years.

And, in the past year, Tesco has changed almost 100 stores from Tesco Metro to Express - hiking up prices, restricting a range of goods, and phasing out 'Tesco value' and low-cost ranges to increase already huge profits.

But this is not just unique to Tesco. Profits of the UK's biggest listed companies were 73% higher in 2021 than pre-pandemic levels. This was despite sales being down! A Unite the Union report says that corporate



JOHN WILLIAMS

greed is causing 60% of current inflation levels.

The Socialist Party says that, in order to stop corporate greed and to reduce prices, these big corporations need to be nationalised, and taken away from the big fat cats. Instead, they should be democratically controlled by workers and consumers,

deciding which goods they should sell and at what price.

Wages of supermarket workers should be increased to a minimum of £15 an hour, and automatically increased with inflation. Communities then wouldn't be priced out of their local stores, and would be able to afford good quality food.

Wakefield Labour suspends councillor for backing taxi drivers' dispute

For months in Wakefield there have been short worker stoppages so taxi and private hire drivers could lobby the council and its licensing sub-committee meetings. But in that time, there has only been limited movement from the council to seek resolution of the key issues.

Drivers are angry about a new 'suitability and convictions' policy that gives power to council officers to remove licenses, often on flimsy grounds. Like all workers, drivers' incomes are being squeezed, and ultimately lost if licenses are unfairly removed.

On 5 September, the Wakefield Labour group of councillors met to discuss disciplinary action against

Labour councillor Nadiah Sharp for supporting the drivers' case. Nadiah was particularly singled out for having the audacity to speak in support of the drivers' lobby of the council.

The disciplinary hearing decision was made by a secret ballot. Nadiah has had the Labour whip removed and is being suspended from Labour for two months.

A protest organised by Wakefield Drivers Association outside the hearing expressed their anger and dismay. Many agreed with the view that there is a pressing need to build a new political party to represent the interests of workers in struggle.

On 5 September, the Wakefield Labour group of councillors met to discuss disciplinary action against

Come to a Socialist Party meeting near you

The Socialist Party has regular meetings in towns and cities across the country.

- If you would like to participate:
- Go to socialistparty.org.uk
- Or text 07761 818206 with your name and postcode.

Sad to report that Alan Barrow from Sheffield died on 19 August after suffering from multiple health issues. Alan was a leading member of Militant (now the Socialist Party) in Sheffield in the 1980s.

He built a Militant branch on his estate, the Manor, where the first anti-poll tax union in the city was set up. From there, Alan was elected as secretary of Sheffield Against the Poll Tax, which organised 20 coaches to the huge demonstration in London in 1990.

He recruited to Militant, and was mentor to, Ken Douglas, who went on to become the Socialist Party national treasurer. Ken tragically died in 2020 (see socialistparty.org.uk).

While, in his own words, Alan felt "burned out" after the poll tax battle,

he continued to be a supporter, but largely due to health issues not in an active way.

The last time I saw Alan was in April when he signed my nomination paper to be a candidate for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC). And he put a 'Vote TUSC' poster up in his window. He made a £20 donation to the Socialist Party fighting fund and, in typical blunt Alan fashion, told me: "Don't be mythering me".

Alan was hugely respected on the left for being a straight-talking working-class fighter. He will be greatly missed by his family - wife Iris, children Saffron and Effran, and five grandchildren.

ALISTAIR TICE
SHEFFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

Enough is Enough! But what do we do at the ballot box?

The September meeting of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) All-Britain steering committee has agreed to a series of public discussion meetings to be held over the autumn months under the heading, 'Enough is Enough! But what do we do at the ballot box?'

The aim is to provide forums on as wide a scale as possible to discuss how a working-class alternative can be put in place for the next general election.

In her first speech as prime minister, Liz Truss said she would go to the polls in 2024: with December that year being the last date the general election could be called. But facing the economic, political and social storms ahead, with a 'mandate' from just 81,326 Tory party members - less than half the number of workers on strike against the cost-of-living crisis only days before her elevation - it could well be a lot earlier than that.

One thing is clear about the next general election, the steering committee agreed: whichever establishment party or combination of parties wins, they will continue with policies that favour the rich - and not make the fundamental system change needed to end the cost-of-living and other crises facing the rest of us.

Back to Blairism

This includes Sir Keir Starmer's revived Tony Blair-style New Labour party. Renationalisation of the energy companies, for example, was a core part of Labour's manifesto under Jeremy Corbyn in 2019. Taking them back into public ownership to lower energy bills is supported by one opinion poll after another. But not by the honourable Sir Keir! Instead he says that he has "put the last manifesto to one side. The slate is wiped clean".

And it's not just renationalising energy. Pledges to take back Royal

Mail, the water companies and public transport, or to introduce an NHS-equivalent free National Care Service, are being 'wiped clean' too.

And what about abolishing university tuition fees and restoring student maintenance grants? The 2019 pledges for a green industrial revolution? Or abolishing the anti-trade union laws that restrict our rights to fight back?



Whichever establishment party wins the next general election, they will continue with policies that favour the rich

Everything possible is being done by Starmer and his shadow cabinet to reassure the establishment that their free market, profit-before-people system - capitalism by its proper name - will be safe in New Labour's hands.

A workers' alternative is possible

But wouldn't a Starmer Labour government at least be more susceptible to our concerns than the Tories? Actually, they would only think to 'look over their left shoulder' if they felt challenged there. Including at the ballot box.

And that is eminently possible in these times. If even a couple of trade unions, like the RMT, CWU or Unite, organised an independent working-class coalition for the next general election, it could realistically expect to get at least a bloc of MPs elected

to stand up to the establishment politicians. That could include Jeremy Corbyn, who won't be able to stand again for Labour, and any other left-wing Labour MP forced out by Starmer.

But even if such an electoral alternative is not organised by the union leaders, there should be the biggest possible trade union, socialist, environmentalist and anti-austerity election challenge mounted anyway to keep the pressure on.

Which is why TUSC is hosting an autumn tour of public discussion meetings to debate what needs to be done. Because another thing is clear: if we don't fight for change, nothing will change.

Organising an election challenge

But different groups and individuals accepting the need for an election challenge is only the first step, the TUSC steering committee agreed. For a start there are election laws to follow.

An election campaign cannot appear on the ballot paper under any name it likes. It has to register as a political party or coalition with the Electoral Commission and can only do so with a name, and a logo, not the same as or similar to one already registered.

If individuals stand outside of a registered group they can describe themselves as 'Independent'. But this makes it hard for voters to distinguish them from other 'independents', some of whom are well-meaning but many of whom are ex-Tories or former UKippers hiding their policies.

And legally the media only has to give 'fair coverage', including a party election broadcast, to a registered party or coalition. And then only to those standing candidates under their registered names in 15% of the seats - 98 in a general election. To get



Coventry bin workers, after winning their strike, join the BT workers' picket line ADAM HARMSWORTH

98 candidates onto the ballot paper costs a minimum of £48,000, to pay the £500 election deposit for each.

Many groups and individuals will want to take on the establishment parties. Good, the steering committee agreed. But then we need to be serious about organising a coordinated election challenge to beat these hurdles and make the maximum impact possible.

What can TUSC offer?

TUSC was set up in 2010 to enable trade unionists, community campaigners and socialists of any party or none to stand candidates against the pro-austerity establishment parties under a common umbrella. It was co-founded by the then general secretary of the RMT transport workers' union, the late Bob Crow.

TUSC is a federal coalition of

equals, with no one group able to dominate over others. It operates on a consensus basis - nothing is agreed in the name of the coalition unless everyone agrees, which creates a momentum to reach mutually acceptable positions.

This also means that every participant has full freedom to pursue their own political activities in their own name. In elections, groups and individuals have autonomy to run their own campaigns. The only qualification is that, to use the TUSC name and logo, candidates are expected to endorse the TUSC minimum core policy platforms for the general election and local council elections.

The steering committee is currently preparing the policy platform for the next general election and is inviting trade union organisations, socialist groups, expelled Labour Party members, social movement campaigns and others to join in the process - including taking part in the autumn discussion meetings.

With the inclusive approach that has characterised the coalition, hundreds of candidates have felt comfortable to stand in elections under the TUSC name, polling over 450,000 votes in total since it was formed. TUSC did not contest the 2017 and 2019 general elections, with Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader, but in 2015 stood 135 candidates. Coming from a variety of different organisations and none, it showed what TUSC can offer this time too: an 'umbrella coalition' that works.

As dates for the autumn tour are finalised they will be listed on the TUSC website at tusc.org.uk/events. Check it out for a meeting near you - or, if there isn't one nearby but you'd be prepared to get a meeting going yourself, contact the TUSC steering committee for any support we can offer at info@tusc.org.uk



Election campaigning in Lewisham, south east London BERKAY KARTAV

New Chilean constitution rejected

PATRICIO GUZMAN
SOCIALISMO REVOLUCIONARIO, CWI CHILE

Social movement and political left activists in Chile have suffered an undeniable defeat in the referendum on the new constitution with 62% voting against. The result has been like a bucket of cold water, with activists overall feeling a general sense of bewilderment and frustration. Fear won over hope.

The capitalist class played their cards very well, appealing to backward emotions of xenophobia and racism, as well as fear of losing your house, of unemployment and chaos, in an unprecedented mass media campaign.

At the same time, the vote to approve the new constitution became for many a vote for or against the government of Gabriel Boric, which is already unpopular, with only 30% support. This is mainly because it has not met the high expectations which existed when Boric and his coalition were elected in March 2022. Boric's government is weak and has been more concerned to show its 'maturity' to the ruling class than to rapidly confront the problems of the mass of the population.



One of the Convention's biggest failings was not to approve taking back into public ownership copper and other natural resources. This allowed the right wing to sow confusion and doubt about how reforms would be financed

Only towards the end of the campaign did the government end the very poorest being made to pay for their own healthcare and introduce a 40-hour working week. But it is still opposing the right of people to withdraw more money from their pension funds.

But although the new constitution has been rejected, bad healthcare, bad pensions, bad public education and massive obstacles to securing a home will continue, along with the destruction of the environment.

The result of the referendum is reminiscent of when Sebastian Pinerá was re-elected for his second presidential mandate in 2018 by a wide margin. Little by little protests developed and became more generalised until, in October 2019, a mass social uprising took place.

In the last three decades Chile has gone through a cultural and social transformation, and the vote in the referendum will not change that. This will boomerang on the ruling capitalist class and the decomposition of the political caste. The country has

But a new social revolt is brewing

2019 uprising kickstarted what is happening now CARLOS FIGUEROA



changed and some things will not march backwards.

The political and social crisis that was opened by the mass revolt in October 2019 has not ended. The demands of the people in this uprising have not been met. The uprising was brutally repressed with systematic abuses of human rights, killings, mutilation of eyes, violence and sexual abuse. Participants in the revolt are still in prison, and there is immunity for crimes committed by state forces.

The demands of millions - especially of youth, women and workers in the streets - compelled the political caste to reach an agreement and open a process of constitutional change, albeit limited - preventing discussion on certain questions and requiring a two-thirds majority, which the Chilean Socialist Party and Frente Amplio blocs refused to change.

The mass revolt of 2019 was never defeated despite facing brutal



We should not have expected a 'clean game' from a ruling class that has not hesitated to carry out military coups and massacres to defend its interests

repression. It entered a downturn following the congressional pact agreed on the 15 November, and then the Covid pandemic arrived.

The biggest problem is that a political alternative has not been built, with strong roots in the working-class neighbourhoods, workplaces and education facilities, with activists able to argue and counter the falsehoods of the ruling class and develop anti-system socialist opinions and programmes. This is the challenge we face.

The campaign to discredit the Constitutional Convention began before it was installed. Fake news, distortions and lies were constantly propagated in the media. However, we should not have expected a 'clean game' from a ruling class that has not hesitated to carry out military coups and massacres to defend its interests. On the other hand, the Convention was very weak in making its proposals and advances known. The

vote was compulsory, which was a change from previous elections and referenda. The total number of votes was higher than in all previous elections. The votes of those not normally participating was decisive.

For 30 years the right-wing parties opposed replacing the constitution of the dictatorship and any changes which altered the neoliberal character of the state. Yet in their 'no' campaign in this referendum they did not defend the 1980 constitution. They called instead for a new 'Magna Carta' which satisfied everyone. The most conservative layers of the right did not, therefore, win everything they wanted.

Lost all legitimacy

The vote was to reject the new constitution and maintain the 1980 constitution of the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. This is the legal situation, but it is not politically viable. The Pinochet constitution has completely lost its legitimacy. Even the majority of the right-wing forces and the ex-coalition Concertación, which supported a 'no' vote, agree that the constituent process needs to be reinitiated. This could trigger things to move forward again.

It is unclear exactly how they will reinitiate the constituent process. This time the political caste, will undoubtedly try to ensure that it blocs the expression of the popular feeling of the masses. For the working class, the struggle for a new constitution should be at the centre of a struggle to end the constitutional defence of neoliberal capitalism and to open the way towards a socialist programme rooted in the masses.

One of the biggest failings of the Convention was not to approve taking back into public ownership copper and other natural resources. This allowed the right wing to sow confusion and doubt about how reforms such as social rights would be financed. Public ownership of these natural resources, which the right opposed, would not only have provided the resources to pay for reforms and implement a new model of social development, it would have unmasked the false 'patriotism' of the conservative forces linked with the multinational corporations.

A new social revolt, including many people who voted to reject the new constitution, is very likely at some stage in the near future. There is a global economic and social crisis unfolding. In this context the elite is not capable of satisfying the main needs, demands, and aspirations of the population. Boric and his government is on the back foot now. It will look to save itself by taking in the rest of the Concertación coalition: that is to say, turn further to the right.

Within the 'no' vote there were elements of racism, xenophobia and misogyny, and a fear of the future and change. In the difficult situation which is unfolding, of instability, falling employment and an increase in precarious work, the ingredients for a growth in right-wing populism, as we have seen in Brazil with Bolsonaro and in the USA with Trump, are there. Discontent can translate into a growth of the far right in the short term. This is facilitated by the weakness of Boric and his government.

The only way to prevent this danger is the building of an alternative of the left with a strong base in the working class and clear socialist programme.

SINDH WORKERS' ALLIANCE REPORTERS

The devastating floods that have hit Pakistan have had catastrophic consequences for people in Sindh province. The floods have resulted in most people becoming homeless and their houses have collapsed. Most of the members of the Sindh Workers' Alliance (SWA) are now homeless. They have been moved to safe places but they are suffering many difficulties where they are now living out in the open. They don't even have shelter and basic things like food, medicines or clean drinking water. Sindh is now suffering terribly from floods with the loss of human life, damage to property, destruction of crops, loss of livestock, and the non-functioning of infrastructure.

The devastating rainfall

In the month of June, the rainy monsoon season started. In the beginning, the biggest province of Pakistan, Baluchistan, suffered heavy rainfall. This resulted in a loss of life and property. All the roads in Baluchistan were destroyed and communication with the world was cut off. The government controlled the media and prevented them from reporting on the situation.

A social worker, Zafar, from the JDC disaster organisation in Karachi, reported the situation in Baluchistan: "When we reached there, people were sitting on the top of the mountains like flies. All those people were lacking everything, as everything was left in the house. Only life was left and there was no one to help, and there was a lot of need for food boxes".

In July and August, there was a series of rainfalls in Sindh and the water from Baluchistan flooded into Sindh. It entered from southern areas like Sukkur, Larkana, Dadu, Shikarpur and Jacobabad. It destroyed remote areas and about 70% of homes were destroyed. People moved towards the roads and mountains. According to the media, most of the dead bodies are found in Sukkur due to heavy rain. Sindh is facing many problems due to the monsoon rains and also due to a damaged dam in Baluchistan. There is a lot of destruction in Sindh. Jacobabad, Shahdadkot, Dadu and Jamshoro have been severely affected. Sindh is now facing more difficulties as the water comes in from Afghanistan, with about 500,000 gallons flooding down. Now Sindh is under about 900,000 gallons and some big cities of Sindh are under flood water.

Role of government

In the 2010 floods, Sindh was affected in the western areas and in 2011 the areas of eastern Sindh were also hit. Now the situation in Sindh is far worse than during the 2010 and 2011 floods. The government has no positive response anywhere. Millions of rupees are lost through corruption. Rather than allow a natural flow of water to take place, the feudal ownership of land is causing more destruction by preventing a natural place for the water to flow. As a result, whole villages are under the water.

The media reports that the government has implemented a full relief programme. In reality, there is no aid arriving in the flood-hit areas. According to a BBC report, at least 1,136 people have died since the monsoon season began in June. An estimated

Pakistan flooding disaster

Urgent appeal from the Sindh Workers' Alliance



PHOTO: RABDUL MAJIED GORAYA/IRIN/CC

33.3 million people are affected and 700,000 homes have been destroyed.

According to our survey, this figure is not accurate because no one can meet with the people who are surrounded by the flood waters, which cover a huge area. It is impossible to calculate the correct figures. Pakistan's Foreign Minister, Bilal Bhutto Zardari, gave an interview to the BBC and said that we need some domestic help for things such as shelter and medical support for children.

However, the people did not get these necessities or any kind of support from anyone. So they are suffering from lacking these basic needs, and most of the cities are flooded, their populations moving towards safer places. This included farmers and labourers. Yet still, there is

no one who will help them. They live in critical conditions and lack shelter and basic things such as food, medicines and milk. Most of the people are now jobless and the workers who worked for daily wages are all shattered by this flood.

Government bans activities of relief organisations

When Osama bin Laden was identified hiding at Pakistan's biggest military training centre, Abbottabad American forces attacked and killed him. The then government of Pakistan banned international

relief organisations. Imran Khan (the ex-prime minister) introduced a law which prohibited taking funds from international organisations. Any international help is only permitted through government accounts. Now the government has decided to take relief from international countries. They take a lot of relief but the state is riddled with corruption on a large scale. The money does not get to the families who need it. Relief camps are only allowed to be set up by official parties. No independent, progressive or nationalist organisation is allowed to establish a relief camp. If they do, the police will take action against them. In other words, without government permission, no one can help the people.

Furious public reaction

Now, when the rulers go to the common people empty-handed, without assistance, they are facing public outcry. Some members of the assembly have been beaten up, the windows of some cars have been broken and the paths of some rulers have been blocked by angry protesters and they have not been allowed to go further.

The Sindh Chief Minister, Murad Ali Shah, has faced a public outcry in many places. The speaker of the Sindh Assembly and acting governor, Siraj Durrani, was blocked and forced to do an about turn when confronted by an angry crowd. The assembly member of Mehar (Dadu) Constituency, Fayaz Butt, was hit with shoes thrown by the public and the windows of his car were smashed.

Similarly, in many places, the officials of the district and taluka (administrative district) have been humiliated and attacked by people. In some places, the people have broken the locks of the storehouses of the political parties' rations and tents and taken away the goods. The rulers are facing a public outcry and they are very scared. It has become difficult for them to go anywhere without a large police protective force. People everywhere are drawing on the lessons of the Sri Lankan rulers when they were forced to flee during mass protests.

The Sindh Workers' Alliance

In the district of Dadu and Mirpur Khas, workers are badly affected. In this situation, the SWA's stranded female workers have been rescued by comrades who are members of the rescue committee that the SWA has formed. They are in contact with workers in flood-hit areas, who were moved to safer places. Other SWA members in Mirpur Khas district helped the affected families and our male workers. A committee has also been formed in Dadu district. In the current situation in Dadu, Mirpur Khas and Digri our women workers are affected and homeless. More than 50 members of the Sindh Workers Alliance are affected.

We, therefore, appeal for international workers' financial solidarity to help us in this struggle.

• Readers are urged to make a solidarity donation to help with this urgent work. Please go to the 'donate' section at socialistworld.net, and mark the donation with 'Sindh Workers' Alliance Flood Appeal'





WHAT WE STAND FOR

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

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

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

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

WORK, PENSIONS AND BENEFITS

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

PUBLIC SERVICES

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

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

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

ENVIRONMENT

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

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

DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

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

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

- No to imperialist wars and occupations!
- Take the wealth off the super-rich! For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and the banking system that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working-class control and management. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need, not to the fat cats.
- A democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, and in a way that safeguards the environment.
- No the EU bosses' club. Organise a campaign with European socialists and workers' organisations to use the talks on post-Brexit relations to tear up the EU pro-capitalist rules. For a real collaboration of the peoples of Europe on a socialist basis as a step towards a socialist world.

Do you agree? Join the fightback!

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- Can capitalism solve the climate crisis?
- How can we build united struggles against discrimination and exploitation?
- Why was Marx right?
- How can we change the world? What are the tasks for revolution in the 21st century?

30 years since Black Wednesday

The economic crisis that shattered the Tories credibility

DAVE MURRAY
ESSEX SOCIALIST PARTY

On 9 April 1992 the Conservative Party won a general election with a record-breaking 14 million votes. On 2 May 1997 it lost the next general election, with its standing shattered by the events that were dubbed 'Black Wednesday' by the media.

On that day, 16 September 1992, the government announced increases in interest rates; first from 10% to 12% and then to 15% in an attempt to maintain the value of the pound within the Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) of the European Union. If implemented, these measures would have turned a persistent recession into a devastating depression.

As the day wore on, millions of mortgage holders contemplated ruin as they faced ballooning repayments. Even though the rises were not implemented, and the government was forced to abandon the ERM, the damage was done, and the Tories' electoral support slumped, its reputation for economic competence shredded, pulped and flushed down the toilet.

Deeply divided Tories

Although it was the mass revolt against the poll tax which delivered the fatal wound to the leadership of Margaret Thatcher in 1990, the Conservative party was already deeply divided in the late 80s. The divide centred on the EU.

John Major, Thatcher's successor, represented the majority of the establishment which saw British capitalism served best by 'ever closer union' with the EU.

They thought it would give them a place in the world as part of a powerful trading bloc, under a set of rules which enshrined neoliberalism as the unbreakable framework for a European entity: frictionless borders for capital, goods and labour; strict limits on government deficits and intervention in the economy; pressures to privatise public services and state enterprises; and, ultimately, a single currency - 'Economic and Monetary Union' (EMU).

EMU also had the support of the then Neil Kinnock-led Labour Party, the Bank of England and the main employers' bodies.

Fixing the value

Although she had advocated the UK's membership of the EU, Thatcher came to be the figurehead for a rag-bag collection of anti-EU elements within her party.

With her out of the way, the pro-EU wing of the Tories was in control, and they were determined to keep the pound within a narrow range of the EU's dominant currency, the German deutschmark, in preparation for entry into a new European currency.

There were two main ways that the government tried to fix the value of



PM John Major, under whose leadership the Tories' reputation for economic competence was shredded

“
If you are a soulless predator, capitalism is a beautiful system

sterling - both involved playing with supply and demand.

Firstly, they bought and sold sterling on the foreign exchange markets; secondly, they made the currency more or less attractive by raising or lowering interest rates through their control of the Bank of England.

Sharks

By 1992, two years into a recession, the deutschmark's value was riding high and the pound was overvalued, supported both by high interest rates and the buying of sterling. For the sharks of the international money markets, this was the equivalent of blood in the water.

If you are a soulless predator with good lines of credit, capitalism is a beautiful system. You can make money by buying low and selling high. But if you're rich enough to get a seat in the game, you can also do the opposite - kind of.

'Short selling' involves borrowing something that is at a high price, and selling it, in the hope that the price will go down and you can use the proceeds to buy the stuff back in time to return it to its owner, leaving a little (or a lot) left over to put on your pile. Of course if the price goes up you still

have to buy the stuff back and return it, and you lose your shorts.

Seeing that the UK government was committed to buying its own currency at an inflated price, the big players in the money markets began shorting the pound on a scale so vast that, on 16 September the Bank of England was effectively unable to buy all the currency that was being offered for sale.

By the end of the day the government was forced to let sterling fall, and the sharks got to pocket much of the public money the government had spent trying to hold the line.

The most famous of the sharks, George Soros, made over £1 billion by shorting the pound - £2.3 billion at today's prices. Not bad for a day's work.

Today

Even though today sterling is not in a monetary union, the lesson of 1992 is that within capitalism, a government isn't totally free to determine the value of its own currency, or the prevailing rates of interest.

With inflation now in double figures, the economy entering a recession, and the pound at historically weak levels, today's options for the British government are all bad.

In theory, if sterling is weak, UK

goods are cheaper on the world market, leading to higher sales, more investment etc. In reality, a weak currency means pricier imported goods and UK exporters jacking up prices to take a quick profit. The dominant finance sector prefers a strong, or at least stable, currency.

Trussworld

The Truss government's plan to borrow £150 billion to subsidise energy prices is based on wishful thinking. In Trussworld, rates will not rise as a result of her actions, and the currency will continue to be strong and stable.

According to the Financial Times, that is questionable. Will the markets buy £150 billion of dodgy debt? Will interest rate rises sink the economy? Get ready for 'Told you so Tuesday' or 'Fuckup Friday'. Labour may benefit from a Tory shipwreck, but its policy is to leave us in the water with the sharks.

Only a socialist programme can meet the challenges of our times - by renationalising the energy sector, along with the big financial institutions, and the 'commanding heights' of the economy, to start planning our economy to meet the needs of the people rather than the predatory drives of the market makers.



Fight for a socialist programme PAUL MATTSSON

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Labour may benefit from a Tory shipwreck, but its policy is to leave us in the water with the sharks

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the Socialist

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formerly **Militant**

OISIN DUNCAN
LEEDS SOCIALIST PARTY

Young workers are expected to constantly accept the bare minimum on offer. Youth Fight for Jobs is organising to change that. Our primary fight is for a £15-an-hour minimum wage now.

This was the main demand we brought to the national trade union demo on 18 June. And we have been involved in campaigns for £15 an hour, like the McStrikes.

Strikes by McDonald's workers showed that young people in precarious jobs deserve better wages. As a bar worker myself, I have first-hand experience of the cost-of-living crisis. Running around a large venue, carrying barrels up and down stairs, and dealing with drunk, potentially abusive customers is difficult enough, especially so when you can barely cover the rent and energy bill.

The Trades Union Congress (TUC) has recently announced its 'Fight for £15 campaign'. The TUC says this is a "path" to a £15-an-hour minimum wage by 2030 or "as soon as possible".

We welcome the TUC's campaign, but we can't afford to wait. The cost-of-living crisis is now. We need £15 an hour now.

And we have other questions. What is the TUC doing to build this campaign beyond petitions?

Strike wave

This summer has shown that coordinated strike action is possible. The Communication Workers Union (CWU) brought 170,000 Royal Mail and BT workers out of work on the same day, a historic occasion.

The ongoing strike wave has shown the power of trade unions to a new generation. Mass coordinated action hits the bosses where it hurts most, their profits, and can force the Tories to concede reforms to workers and youth.

For these reasons, we say that the TUC should take the lead in coordinating strike action, to back up the demand for £15 an hour. Mass coordinated action could also raise other demands, like abolishing youth rates.

For our part, young workers can put pressure on the TUC by getting active in our unions, as well as joining the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) lobby when the TUC Congress reconvenes later in the autumn.

On top of winning wage increases, a combative union movement could also defeat the anti-trade union proposals that Liz Truss referred to in her election campaign. If Truss tries to attack the unions, she must meet the full force of the workers' movement fighting for a better deal for the working class. Youth Fight for Jobs will back that fight to the hilt.

WE CAN'T AFFORD OUR RENT AND BILLS



PAUL MATTSSON

WE NEED £15 AN HOUR NOW

WHAT WE STAND FOR: THE SOCIALIST PARTY'S MAIN DEMANDS >>> see column on p3



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