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the Socialist

Issue 1205

1-7 December 2022

formerly **Militant**

BACK THE NURSES



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Issue 1205 1-7 December 2022

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OUR NEWSPAPER TEAM Editor of the Socialist Sarah Sachs-Eldridge socialistparty.org.uk Judy Beishon Circulation manager Chris Newby

Editorial staff Scott Jones Ian Pattison Josh Asker Paula Mitchell

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

RCN announces strike dates Stand with the nurses to save our NHS!

MICHELLE JARRETT-RUECROFT NURSE PRACTITIONER AND RCN STEWARD

A bittersweet moment for nurses arrived when the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) announced our first strike dates. On 15 and 20 December, RCN members will be withdrawing our labour from selected NHS trusts nationwide.

The first question on everyone's lips, including nurses', is often: "What about patient safety?"

We have to point out that the crisis in the NHS - huge staff shortages, bed shortages, delays, thousands on waiting lists, the consequent worsening of people's health and sometimes unnecessary deaths - is the fault of the Tory government, not of nurses finally reaching the point of going on strike.

The RCN has rules whereby some workers will be 'derogated' into patient safety-critical areas, for example accident and emergency and intensive care. Some wards will be asked to run on staff numbers equal to a night shift or a bank holiday service.

Over the last decade, the numbers of nurses, doctors, physiotherapists, etc, within the NHS have fallen dramatically, due to the failure of the

Tory government to recruit and retain. As a result, many departments run day-to-day on lower staffing levels than required.

Not only does this already risk the safety of patients, but it leads to staff burnout, anxiety, depression and ultimately time off on sickness leave. This costs the NHS more money, paying sickness pay and for private agency staff. Outgoings for agency staff are reported to be £3 billion per year!

Without a significant pay rise for workers, the NHS will not be able to attract the required number of personnel to carry on and could achieve the Tories' ambition of being broken beyond repair, leaving the healthcare sector wide open to American-style private healthcare funding.

As nurses, we must help the public understand the rotten truth that this has been the Tory plan all along. They don't care that they have undermined and demoralised the workforce. They don't care that they have put people's lives in danger day-in, day-out, by understaffing the wards and departments. They only care about profits for their big business mates.

On 15 and 20 December we must shout: Solidarity to NHS workers!



'Nurses' vote gives all NHS workers confidence'

HOLLY JOHNSTON SHEFFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY AND GMB REP IN NHS

Hundreds of thousands of nurses, members of the Royal College of Nursing (RCN), have voted to strike across 176 health trusts. The first national industrial action ballot in the RCN's 106-year history, the vote is significant both in size and as a reflection of the growing anger among health workers.

The result has given NHS workers in other unions confidence that our own Tory-imposed turnout thresholds can be met, and has encouraged even more members to vote. This week we will see the results of the biggest health union Unison, and the ballots will close for GMB and Unite members too.

When RCN nurses walk out on 15 and 20 December, all other health workers will be right behind them. Striking for us is absolutely about pay, but it's also about patient safety, privatisation and the future of our NHS.

We have had enough of not being able to give the level of care that we went into our jobs to deliver. Staff are realising that if we don't strike, things will just keep getting worse.

Meanwhile, Rishi Sunak has appointed private healthcare lobbyist Bill Morgan as a health policy adviser. Morgan's brief is to drive through NHS 'efficiencies', the opposite of the mammoth investment that is needed to save a publicly owned universally free healthcare system. It makes clear that the government's priority for the NHS is profit rather than patients or staff.

Hundreds of thousands of people marched in Madrid at the start of November to defend the public element of their healthcare system, and to defend its staff. We need to see the same sort of mass mobilisation to protect our NHS. The nurses' strikes, and strikes of other NHS workers, can spearhead the fight-back against the destruction of our NHS. We know the support from the public is there!



WHAT THE SOCIALIST PARTY STANDS FOR This Socialist Party manifesto sums up our main demands on the different issues that face the working class. It outlines what is necessary to begin the process of achieving a socialist society in Britain and internationally, able to meet the needs humanity and to protect the planet. INTRODUCTION TO MARXISM The basic concepts Marxist ideas can help gain clarity on events and processes, and use lessons of past struggles to build independent workers' organisations that are capable of leading the working class to power.

Unite the action - Prepare for a 24-hour general strike

Socialist Party WHAT WE THINK

The 'Winter of Discontent 2022' is on. Forty-four years after millions of workers went on strike in the one of the biggest periods of struggle since the 1926 General Strike, the phrase has continued to haunt the bosses and the capitalist establishment. Like then, the current strike wave, building by the week, has been driven by spiralling inflation and a brutal cost-of-living squeeze.

Autumn officially ended on 30 November, another day of joint strikes, when 115,000 postal workers in the Communication Workers Union (CWU) were joined by 70,000 University and College Union (UCU) members in higher education, striking along with Unison members in a number of universities and National Education Union (NEU) sixth-form college teachers.

As seems to be the case every day, there were also workers taking action in localised disputes, such as Unite and GMB members at Fawley oil refinery.

Strikes building December will see the strike temperature hit a new level. For the first time in their history in England and Wales, members of the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) will be taking industrial action, seeking to win a pay rise that keeps pace with RPI inflation of over 14%, and trying to wrest back at least some of the 20% that nurses have lost in wages since 2010.

On the first day of their action on 15 December, RCN members will be joined by postal workers. Either side of that day will be two 48-hour strikes by 40,000 RMT members in their national rail dispute.

At the same time, teaching unions NEU and NASUWT, along with the Fire Brigades Union, will be in the middle of national strike ballots. The British Medical Association has announced it will ballot junior doctors on whether to strike in a vote opening 9 January. Scottish education union EIS shut down every state school on 24 November and has announced 16 more strike dates in the new year.

There is a real prospect of public sector action approaching the scale of what took place on 30 November 2011, now known in the movement as 'N30'. Then, two million workers took action together in what was effectively a public sector general strike, to defend their pensions against the austerity offensive of the Tory-Lib Dem coalition.

But unions shouldn't wait until everyone gets over the line with their ballot result. The 30 November 2011 strike wasn't the first joint action. Four unions went on strike together in June that year, providing a vital step towards the mass N30 action.

One of those four, the PCS civil service union, already has a mandate to call out over 100,000 of its members. However, the initial small-scale



Workers in UCU and CWU both took strike action on 25 November, they will be joined by NEU members in sixth-form colleges on 30 November IAIN DALTON

targeted action called by the union's leadership is a mistake. It should deliver on promises that it made to coordinate with other unions. Surely this would pose bringing out all these members who have secured the necessary ballot thresholds with the RCN and others on 15 or 20 December?

Those nurses' strikes are taking on a significance wider than NHS pay, as vitally important as that is, with health workers reporting food banks being set up for hospital staff. Increasingly, they are seen as a struggle to defend the NHS itself from Tory cuts and privatisation.

Therefore, the strike days have to be turned into mass solidarity rallies and demonstrations, bringing together all other workers in dispute with working-class communities determined to save the health service.

But, as well as the NHS, Royal Mail and the rail industry are on the line. If the bosses see through their plans, Royal Mail as we know it will cease to exist. The fingerprints of the Tories can be detected as talks in both sectors have ground to a halt. Both sets of bosses seem determined to want to inflict a decisive defeat on the unions.

In response, the CWU and the RMT have escalated their action, the latter after its members smashed the undemocratic Tory anti-union ballot thresholds in the rebalot. Both the posties and railworkers can sense the size of the stakes. The reported

suspension of 60 CWU union reps shows the vengeful spite of Royal Mail bosses. Postal workers are determined to fight to defend their reps, knowing full well this is a vital part of maintaining the CWU in Royal Mail.

Take on the government So as with NHS workers, the CWU and the rail unions cannot be left to fight alone. These are battles with the employers, but also with the government, and the trade union movement needs to prepare to take them on.

This divided Tory government is the employer of millions of public sector workers, and the political backer of the privatised Royal Mail and rail companies.

Workers have no option but to fight, and are showing their determination to struggle. But on every picket line, from posties to university staff, from bus drivers to rail workers, and more, striking workers are saying: "We should be striking together."

Coordinated action, particularly on the scale of a 24-hour general strike, bringing together workers from all sectors, would be a huge moment in raising workers' sights and confidence. It could put massive pressure on the Tories, posing the prospect of finally pushing them out of office.

That prospect poses the political programme and vehicle needed by workers. There is already huge suspicion of Starmer and his 'new New

Labour'. His refusal to support strikes is not lost on workers. Nor is the recent disgraceful expulsion from Labour of Unison's national president Andrea Egan. It's clear whose side he is on - and it's not ours!

Starmer could lever massive pressure on Sunak and Royal Mail management right now if he promised that, in office, Labour would deliver on the policy passed at its recent conference to renationalise Royal Mail.

But his silence on this is deafening. He was loud enough, however, at the Trades Union Congress (TUC) conference, when he told the unions that his government would be one of "sound money" and "difficult choices." He has already accepted the pro-austerity spending limits of Sunak and Hunt.

But Starmer should be aware, the original winter of discontent wasn't against a Tory government but a Labour one, choosing to make workers pay for a crisis not of their making. This escalating strike wave has the potential to drive out the Tories. But it is also a warning that any incoming New Labour government will be put under immediate pressure by workers.

But this needs to be both industrial and political, raising the urgency of establishing the basis, at least, of a political party that represents the interests of workers, their families and communities.

CWU: Fighting the bosses who want to smash Royal Mail

Royal Mail workers in the Communication Workers Union (CWU) have been on strike over Black Friday and Cyber Monday in their ongoing national campaign. Bosses are digging in on pay, job cuts, compulsory redundancies and the destruction of the service. CWU has called a national demonstration at Royal Mail HQ on its next strike day, 9 December.



There's a feeling of "We have to win this or we are fucked". Bosses have really upped the stakes. A union organiser is about to be sacked on trumped-up charges, and a member died at work in his Royal Mail van. He was 56. He had told management that he wasn't feeling well, but they said either you're off sick or you do your job.

Posties were talking about not being allowed to deviate from their routes, so they are scared to go to the toilet while they are out on their rounds.

The need for a well-organised strike fund went down well. 'Starm-er' is a dirty word. Pickets queried why the union was giving the Labour Party money.

HEATHER RAWLING
LEICESTER

A CWU rep and Socialist Party members convinced young agency staff to not cross the picket line. We discussed their situation, and that what Royal Mail proposes would be no different to what they are experiencing now in other agency jobs. They turned around and drove off. We returned to the picket lines to cheers, hugs and pats on the back.

PAUL TOOLEY-OKONKO
MANSFIELD

Strikers at Quinton in the West Midlands said: "We're moving to

a two-tier system. If things carry on like this, the working class is done. We need a party that stands for us, not those at the top."

"The capitalist way of running things isn't working."

There was lively discussion on the progress of the strike at Birmingham mail centre.

"£567 million went to the shareholders sat at home, while we were out grafting during Covid. This CEO doesn't understand the strength and solidarity of our picket lines. He's failed everywhere, and now he's come to break this business. This isn't his business to break. It's our business, our livelihoods. He's never come across a union like ours."

"Why do we need CEOs? This guy's going to get a £3 million pay-off if he goes, while we're trying to hang on to what we've got."

NICK HART
BIRMINGHAM

Posties were standing firm. Always a great welcome from these guys! Our strike wave bulletin 18 went down well, with conversations centring around coordinated action, which should be assisted by the TUC. The strike-breaking use of agency workers was another concern. Time for coordinated action for all those fighting the cost-of-living crisis!

TOM BLAIR
NEWCASTLE

One London rep said:

"We know this is serious now. Royal Mail is really upping the ante. We've had two reps suspended. I've worked in Royal Mail for 28 years and this looks like it'll be the first time I've seen a Christmas strike.

"This is about pay, but it's about much more than that. They want to smash the union so they can make off with millions. They want to turn us into owner-drivers. We won't know when our days will finish, we'll just get a stack of parcels to deliver and that's the job.

"And forget the letter delivery service. They're trying to reduce it bit by bit so the public get used to the idea that they don't get an everyday letter delivery service anymore.

"This could be an amazing public service. There's nothing else like it. We go to every house, every day. We know everybody, we look in on neighbours, we see births and deaths. We're a central part of the community.

Our job and our offices could be used for all sorts. But to do that, we can't stay in private hands. They just suck out all the money and chuck out the bits of the service they can't make a profit from."

CWU members in BT to vote on offer

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN CWU

The Communication Workers Union (CWU) has negotiated a provisional agreement with BT, Openreach and EE, which the union's leadership and telecoms executive believe is sufficient to end the long-running pay dispute.

The pay offer provides for a £1,500 flat-rate increase payable from 1 January 2023, in addition to the £1,500 already paid to members without agreement in April. Both of these sums are consolidated for pensions and allowances.

This will give the lowest grades rises of between just under 10% and 15% over a 17-month period. Next year's pay rise will not take effect until September, to allow for negotiations to be concluded around unresolved pay and grading issues. Pay revisions will revert to April from 2024.

There will be varying views on the offer, although there is anger that it is not backdated to the April anniversary date.

Many members will see this as an offer which could be accepted, and also a vindication of the industrial action taken so far.

However, some of the longest-serving members who are on old BT contracts, with higher rates of pay, will see a pay rise notably under the current rate of RPI inflation, and may well feel that the offer should be rejected.

This is the danger with a flat-rate pay increase, and why there should have been a common percentage rise.

Socialist Party members in the CWU opposed the moves to a

'two-tier' workforce. This was because lower-paid 'new entrant' contracts have the potential to cause dangerous divisions among members, which management can exploit, as shown by the different responses to this pay offer.

However, the industrial action has brought all workers together in a united struggle, and should be the platform to mount a serious campaign to bring workers together onto the higher tier of pay, terms and conditions.

Also, the union must continue to campaign for BT to be renationalised. BT workers need to take stock of what the dispute has achieved to date. It has forced the employer to make a consolidated pay offer that it said was unaffordable, and to offer far more money than originally intended. It has also blooded a new generation of CWU activists in industrial action which will bode well for the union in the future.

If the offer is rejected, Socialist Party members will be offering full support for a continued struggle. There would have to be a serious escalation of the dispute, including coordination with CWU members in Royal Mail and the Post Office, and the wider union movement.

CWU members will now vote on the offer, although there is concern that there should have been more time allowed for members to properly discuss and consider it.

Despite genuine issues, this pay offer, wrung from BT, should give encouragement to the CWU's postal members that, despite what Royal Mail CEO Simon Thompson says, strike action is effective.

Post Office staff strike again

Crown Post Office and admin members of CWU will strike on 12 and 13 December. Supply chain members will carry out an overtime ban from 12 December to Christmas Eve.

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University strikes: "The working class is back and we refuse to be poor"

All around the country, in the biggest university strikes ever, there were big, bright picket lines, rallies and marches on 24, 25 and 30 November. Lecturers and postgraduate teaching staff in the University and College Union (UCU) were joined by professional services staff in Unison in the universities where they were also on strike, and by big numbers of students, including Socialist Students groups.

As this issue of the Socialist went to press, workers and students were preparing to travel to London for a big demonstration on 30 November.

Mood high

At the University of Birmingham, everyone was buoyant. The pickets on Thursday broke the branch record of attendance.

Our branch has been putting a lot of effort into linking with other unions, and we had CWU, RMT and NEU speakers coming to the rally. There was talk of how great a general strike would be, and how management must be feeling the pressure.

The mood to fight is high, a clear reversal of the recent mood of despair. But to keep it we need a clear strategy, to give members confidence that the union leadership will deliver a well-thought-out plan to force back the employers.

LLUIS BERTOLIN
UCU MEMBER

Fighting casualisation

On 25 November, the UCU held a demonstration in Newcastle. One speaker described the Tories' imposed austerity as 'privatising profit and nationalising debt', which ensures cuts to working-class jobs and conditions.

A PhD lecturer spoke about the mass casualisation of contracts that is causing many to leave the field and discontinue their emerging research. This is having a damaging impact on our education system.

Solidarity between workers was clear. The UCU mentioned support for striking nurses and transport workers as key to a united struggle. As said by a UCU speaker: 'The working class is back, and we refuse to be poor.'

PIPPA ROUS
NEWCASTLE SOCIALIST PARTY

Clear demands

The University of Plymouth UCU had a robust showing, as more than 70 lecturers and research assistants joined the picket line. Pickets belted "We are striking" to the tune of Rod Stewart's "We are sailing".

The demands of UCU members are clear: an inflation-proof pay rise, close pay gaps based on discrimination, end excessive workloads and unpaid work, and end casualisation. Short-term contracts, dependent on grant funding, mean that those on a teaching or research path cannot buy a home and many feel they cannot raise a family.

DAN FEMLEE
UCU MEMBER

Political voice

The UCU strikes in Oxford had a great turnout, with nine picket lines taking place across different universities and colleges.

Many of the strikers that we spoke to were pleased to be taking action, but wanted to make sure it is done as effectively as possible. One was worried that occasional strike action by members could be ignored by the university management.

Socialist Party members spoke at a UCU rally alongside the strikers. As well as calling for mass coordinated action, we raised the need for a political side to the struggle, to give striking workers a real voice. We hope that many UCU members, along with those from other unions, will seriously consider standing as anti-austerity candidates in the next elections, and work within their unions to build the idea of a new mass workers' party.

CALLUM JOYCE
OXFORD SOCIALIST PARTY

In Brighton, UCU members marched to the CWU picket line. Nurses and firefighters supported the UCU at Sheffield Hallam University. A big joint UCU and Unison rally took place in the pouring rain at Bristol University, where Socialist Party member Roger Thomas brought greetings from the trades council. Socialist Party member Heather Rawling was invited to speak at the UCU rally in Leicester.

These scenes were replicated the length and breadth of the country, from Kings College London to Northumbria University, from York St John to Swansea.



Swansea, Sheffield, York St John, Liverpool, Leicester, Bristol
SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS



"Solidarity to our striking teachers!"

Socialist Students members in many universities have been building support among students for the strikes, with campaign stalls, meetings, petitions and banner-making sessions.

At UAL I've seen more student support for the UCU strikes this time than for any of their previous strikes. The cost-of-living crisis that we as students are acutely affected by, along with the wave of strikes that we've all seen this summer, have given many of us some perspective when it comes to our academic staff's decision to take industrial action.

As members of UAL Socialist Students, we made sure we were present on the picket line. There was a strong student presence, with a number of my fellow classmates joining us to give out Socialist Students leaflets and talk about the strike with our lecturers and tutors.

This experience on the picket line was a moving moment for me, as it really demonstrated the effect of small acts of solidarity. The staff expressed to us time and again just how moved and encouraged they were that we made the effort to join them. Conversations with my tutors gave me an insight into their experiences, and the picket line became an open space for the expression of difficulties we face as students and staff at our university.

What became clear was that our challenges are inter-linked. For example, one of my tutors expressed how the university admits too many students for the number of staff, forcing him to teach much larger tutor groups, increasing his workload to a level that is impossible to sustain. This means that we as students have much less one-to-one time with our tutors, very little studio space, and less opportunity to build relationships with our tutors.

In my four years as a student at UAL, there has never been a space for this kind of honest dialogue between student and tutor. I became far more aware of how their strike action is not just to improve their material conditions, but an effort to improve our student experience and the quality of our education. As one of the banners said, "It gets better for us if it gets better for them!"

Solidarity to our striking teachers! We support you!

GEORGIA GERMANI
UAL SOCIALIST STUDENTS

At the Universities of Liverpool and Edge Hill we have visited picket lines to show support to UCU staff. I organised a student walkout from a seminar, where students had felt forced to cross the picket line due to non-flexible assessed work. 12 out of 18 students walked out. Many others sacrificed part of their module grade as they refused to cross the picket line.

DEAN YOUNG
LIVERPOOL SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Aslef strike: Joining together with other strikers

Train drivers in Aslef took national strike action as part of their pay campaign on Saturday 26 November. Socialist Party members again visited picket lines to give support and discuss the way forward.

ELAINE BRUNSKILL REPORTS FROM
NEWCASTLE CENTRAL STATION

One of the strikers had recently been speaking to a young nurse who was

worried their NHS strike wouldn't get public support. The Aslef member reassured them that they would receive overwhelming public support. Furthermore, that both Aslef and RMT members would definitely get along to the hospital picket lines to support them.

We were told by another striker that all three of his household will have been on strike by Christmas. Alongside himself as an Aslef

member, one member of his household had been on strike as a CWU member in BT, and another, a nurse who will be on the RCN strike!

The mood to get rid of the Tories was palpable, but there was no enthusiasm for Starm-er's Labour Party. Our message about the need for a new workers' party was well-received, as was the idea of trade unionists standing as TUSC candidates in the next general election.

Join the student fightback
JOIN socialist students
socialiststudents.org.uk/join

NEU: Vote 'yes' to strike - we can win with a bold programme of action!

SHEILA CAFFREY

NEU NATIONAL EXECUTIVE (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

Following a massive positive response by members of the National Education Union (NEU) in the online consultation, a formal industrial ballot – which is postal – is now under way, extended to 14 January to enable maximum returns of ballot papers while there are postal strikes. Members and reps should strive to get as many ballot papers back as possible before the Christmas break.

It is vital that everyone votes and votes 'yes', to get over the anti-democratic Tory thresholds and to send a strong message to the government. Bold national action has huge potential power. School staff can join with nurses, university staff, postal and rail workers, and the many more workers striking. The massive EIS teachers' strike in Scotland and the NEU strike in sixth forms are a taste of the potential power of determined action.

The NEU executive met on 25 November to discuss our campaign.

Socialist Party members have spent a year campaigning on the executive for serious national action. We then had the explosive summer of strikes of rail, postal and BT workers, showing that winning national ballots is possible and unions can fight, which raised confidence.

The NEU leadership then put out clear material on why we should

fight and education workers were enthused. Successive cuts to pay over a decade; funding slashed in schools; inflation at 12% (now over 14%); energy and food bills making education workers question if they would heat or eat this winter. Join with the other unions on the picket lines in national action and we can win!

The long ballot period means we have to keep up a lively campaign of meetings, rallies, strong material and detailed campaigning, contacting all members. Education workers, like all workers, work long hours and are tired; in a long ballot period they can become worried by the right-wing media's bile and about the next pay cheque. We have to campaign to re-win the arguments, to explain that if we don't fight, the government will come back for more savage cuts, and encourage education staff that they too have the power that they see on other unions' picket lines.

Part of building the vote is putting forward a bold programme of action that members can have confidence in.

What was agreed at the executive was a plan for one day of national action; then, a fortnight later, three weeks of regional action (while there are varying half-term holidays); then, another fortnight later, a two-day strike.

Socialist Party members put forward an alternative plan of two days of national strike action at the start,

then another two days of national strike action a week later, three weeks of regional action over the half-terms, then escalating to three days. This would show the government, and our members, that we're serious. And it would give members the support and solidarity of being on picket lines with hundreds of thousands of other education workers.

It is vital that we strive to coordinate with other unions. EIS, RMT, Aslef, UCU, CWU and the RCN all have live national ballots. But that doesn't mean that we can only take national action alongside others. If the NEU puts out a fighting, rallying cry, it will have a bigger effect on other education unions.

The union leadership should also launch a mass appeal for donations to strike funds, to help give confidence to members who are worried about losing money.

We need a strong, socialist leadership in our union that will build the strength of the membership below, while leading and motivating from the top. In the elections two years ago, five Socialist Party members were elected to the executive as members wanted a strong, fighting voice. We will continue to lay out a plan that could win against this government, and continue to build the NEU as a fighting force to win for educators and education.

Vote 'yes' in the strike ballot and let's build the strongest fightback possible!



NEU members on strike PHOTO: JAMES IVENS

Unison in local government: Turn words into action - fight council cuts!

MARK EVANS

UNISON LOCAL GOVERNMENT SERVICE GROUP EXECUTIVE (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

At the 24 November meeting of Unison's local government service group executive (LGSGE), Socialist Party members proposed a motion on fighting cuts.

It is already the policy of the LGSGE to call on councils to implement no-cuts budgets – as a result of motions argued for by Socialist Party members in previous years. But, in practice, only a few local government branches are calling on their councils to do this.

The motion, proposed by myself, seconded by Angie Waller, and supported by Hugo Pierre, called on the LGSGE to step up its anti-cuts campaigning and to support branches in developing alternative strategies to cuts.

As well as publicising the important work council workers do and the vital services they provide, as Unison already does, the LGSGE and Unison as a whole has to fight cuts on a national basis. It should not be left to branches to fight cuts on their own.

The consequence of runaway inflation is significantly increased costs for councils, coming on top of



PHOTO: PAUL MATSSON

the pandemic and savage cuts imposed since 2010. This has dire consequences for councils. Increasing numbers of councils are threatened with technical bankruptcy, such as happened at Croydon twice.

Many councils in England, Scotland and Wales have increased their budget shortfall predictions. For example, Glasgow City Council's predicted funding gap has gone from £25 million for 2023-24 to £119 million! Given the calamity facing local government it cannot be 'business as usual' for Labour councillors or the trade unions.

Councils already have been, or are considering, using the significant reserves they have accumulated to plug the gap in finances. But our motion called for the LGSGE to explore with councillors how lawful balanced no-cuts budgets could be implemented, and to build a mass campaign, with community support,

to demand additional funding from central government.

We also called on the LGSGE to explore how to unite members in a UK-wide campaign, including industrial action.

The motion was passed unanimously, but that is the easy part. We need to keep the pressure on to turn words into action.

Socialist Party members have put forward a strategy that, if put into action, could defeat Tory cuts. We need to fight for maximum unity with other local government unions to take on the Tories. Unite already has official policy to campaign for no-cuts budgets.

After decades of rule by the right wing, Unison now has a left-led national executive, with a majority for the Time For Real Change group, alongside four Socialist Party members. It is vital that the NEC puts this fighting approach into action.

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Abellio bus workers' picket line BERKAY KARTAV

Labour's Khan forced back on London bus cuts

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ANDY BEADLE
SOUTH EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY, RETIRED
LONDON BUS DRIVER

Widespread anger at proposed cuts to London bus services has forced a partial retreat by the Labour Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, and Transport for London (TfL).

The General Secretary of Unite the Union, Sharon Graham, explained the partial U-turn was forced by campaigns led by bus workers and local communities. But, she said: "This is ultimately a disappointing decision. The fact that TfL is going ahead with 22% of cuts [indicated in June] still means a reduction in jobs and will mean that passengers will have to contend with services that are less frequent, slower and more expensive."

The climbdown will be funded by taking an extra £25 million every year from "unallocated reserves". So why not use the reserves to stop all the bus cuts?

Ominously, Khan echoed Tory ministers saying the choice will mean "tough decisions" in the future, and suggested the reserves might otherwise have been earmarked for projects like youth services. But "tough decisions" must not mean redirecting cuts at other Londoners.

As Onay Kasab, Unite's national lead bus officer, said at the August rally in defence of London's public transport: "The problem is, there is lots of money, the wrong people have it, and they've got too much of it."



Khan should have helped organise a mass campaign to return the looted subsidy

He outlined Unite's policy: "No-cuts budgets, plug immediate gaps with borrowing while the Labour-led GLA [Greater London Authority] joins with the trade unions and the communities to fight for the necessary funding."

The Tory government first announced withdrawal of all subsidy to TfL seven years ago, making it the only capital city transport system in the world without state aid. Outgoing London mayor Boris Johnson was happy to pass on this inheritance to his successor.

The Covid-19 pandemic saw a drastic decline in passenger numbers and diminishing TfL revenues.

The government was obliged to step in to relieve many public services. But the then prime minister Boris Johnson used the bailout to demand further cuts to TfL, which Khan meekly accepted.

Khan should have publicly fought this Tory negligence from the outset and helped organise a mass campaign to return the looted subsidy. Rather than build a campaign alongside the trade unions to fight for the necessary funding, he has chosen to take the axe to TfL jobs, pay, terms and conditions, and now faces strikes on the buses, Underground, Overground and Woolwich Ferry.

Like Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer, Khan is not on the side of workers and the trade unions, the only difference being that Khan is currently in office. The actions of the Labour-run GLA give a flavour of what to expect from a possible future Labour government – more austerity.

Workers need politicians prepared to fight alongside the trade unions for the funding our services need. That's why Socialist Party members stood in the last GLA elections as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, alongside trade union activists in Unite, RMT and others, making a stand in preparation for the development of a new mass working-class party to fight in our interests.

London bus drivers strike for pay rises

SOUTH EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Bus drivers in south and west London took the first of ten days of strike action on 22 November after Abellio's failure to offer workers a pay increase. Hundreds of bus drivers have been picketing outside Walworth, Battersea, Twickenham, Beddington, Hayes and Southall bus depots.

Metroline drivers in north and west London, also in Unite, will strike too, starting on 1 December. With RPI inflation at 14.2%, drivers have rejected the company's latest 10% pay offer.

A bus driver we spoke to on the Walworth picket line said he had to work 60 hours a week just to get by. He wasn't the only one who had to work overtime.

The cost-of-living crisis has hit all sections of the working class. Another driver spoke about how the prices of all goods have gone up sharply this year, but that in previous years drivers pay has been eroded bit by bit.

Trade union action is vital to secure an inflation-proof pay rise. In a recent press statement, Unite announced that the number of bus strikes has increased 827%, many winning important victories. These victories have certainly boosted the confidence of drivers, and this was reflected in the determined mood on the picket lines.

Further strike dates at Abellio will take place on 1,2,3,9,10,16 and 17 December. Metroline drivers will

strike on 1,2,3,8,9,15 and 16 December. Further coordination of London bus drivers strikes could emerge in the new year if the bosses of the different companies don't back down. Striking together would be a step in the direction of winning a London-wide agreement for drivers.

Socialist Party members also spoke to pickets at Battersea. One of the many drivers frustrated with London's Labour mayor Sadiq Khan said he expects Khan to set a London-wide minimum wage for all bus drivers before giving out contracts to private bus companies. We would add that, if bus companies are unwilling to sign up, then Khan should remove their contracts with no compensation.

Rather than fighting the Tories and standing up for bus drivers, Khan has been complicit in attacks on pay, terms and conditions. These private bus companies have been driving down the real wages of drivers while at the same time raking in huge profits.

These services should be immediately brought back in-house, under the democratic control of workers and service users, as part of a fully funded transport system.

● Abellio strike fund - Account Details: Unity Trust Bank, Acc No: 20210456, Sort Code: 608301, Branch Name: TGWU1/768, Hayes Branch LE/768. Contact onay.kasab@unitetheunion.org

Usdaw's leaders should pay their staff and fight for their members

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN USDAW

Clerical and ancillary staff in the GMB union, working for the retail union Usdaw, took their fifth and sixth days of strike action on 21 and 22 November.

The action is due to a below-inflation 3.5% pay offer from Usdaw's leadership, and the continued refusal to engage in negotiations about hybrid working – despite encouraging staff not involved in the strike to work from home on the strike days!

On two previous strike days, the strikes finished at midday, but disgracefully Usdaw's leadership locked them out for the rest of the day.

Gradually more members are becoming aware of the issues. Questions have now been raised at a number of union events, and several members of Usdaw's Broad Left, including former Usdaw president Amy Murphy, have joined GMB picket lines.

Further strike action is planned for 12 and 13 December, with a demonstration on the Tuesday.

Socialist Party member Scott Jones won nominations to stand for Usdaw general secretary from several branches who want a democratic, fighting leadership. The union should pay its staff decent wages and build for serious action to win substantial pay rises for its low-paid members.

Get all the latest union news...
nationalshop
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with the NSSN bulletin shopstewards.net

SUPREME COURT RULING ON SCOTTISH INDEPENDENCE

BUILD MASS WORKING-CLASS STRUGGLE FOR INDYREF2

SOCIALIST PARTY SCOTLAND STATEMENT

The UK Supreme Court has ruled that the Scottish parliament does not have the right to organise an independence referendum. The ruling will surprise virtually no one. However, it will cause anger and defiance across Scotland, and will do nothing but spur on demands for a referendum among many tens of thousands of pro-independence campaigners.

Socialist Party Scotland stands full square in defence of the right to indyref2 and for self-determination. It's not up to the unelected judges of the Supreme Court or the Westminster capitalist parties, it's the people of Scotland who should decide.

The Scottish government had already announced plans for a referendum on 19 October 2023, and sought a ruling that this would be legal. The undemocratic ruling by the Supreme Court should be met with demonstrations, protests and a serious preparation for the building of a mass campaign of struggle to win the right to have a referendum, which is currently blocked by the Westminster government.

Demands for the Scottish parliament to organise a referendum regardless of the ruling can also grow. Socialist Party Scotland continues to demand that the Scottish government call indyref2, and so should the rest of the independence movement.

In Catalonia, in 2017, it was a mass movement that forced the pro-capitalist nationalist parties into calling the independence referendum. The lessons for us in Scotland are that mass struggle can force politicians to act, but also that we must build our own independent organisations of struggle, including a new mass working-class party.

In Catalonia, the Spanish ruling class acted to try to crush the movement. Therefore we need to draw the conclusion that, not only are we fighting for the right to self-determination, we are also fighting the system of capitalism that is denying our democratic rights. That's why we need to build a mass movement and link up with the working class in other parts of Britain to overthrow the Tories and the system they represent.

A fighting socialist majority in the Scottish parliament linked to the building of mass working-class organisations of struggle outside of parliament are essential to challenge the capitalist wall of opposition to democratic rights.

The undemocratic legislation that formed the basis of the devolution settlement and the creation of the Scottish parliament in the late 1990s was carefully drawn up to ensure that a referendum could not be held without Westminster agreeing to the temporary transfer of the powers to Holyrood.

And as the multitude of Tory prime ministers since the 2014 independence referendum have made clear, as has Keir Starmer's Labour Party, such an agreement – a section 30 order – will not be forthcoming.

As Socialist Party Scotland has consistently argued, this reflects the

entrenched and overwhelming opposition of British capitalism and its political representatives to the possible break up of the UK.

Moreover, the Supreme Court is part of the same capitalist establishment. It is stuffed full of unelected judges – Law Lords – who are in place precisely to, in the last analysis, defend the interests of capitalism.

Indeed, the President of the Supreme Court, who announced the ruling, was Baron Reed of Allermuir – a member of the House of Lords. Reed went to a private school in Edinburgh and also Oxford University. Like the overwhelming majority of the UK's top judges, Reed reflects the political outlook and class background of the capitalist establishment, including in Scotland.

Judges regularly rule against trade unions when employers seek court interventions to prevent strikes under the anti-union laws, for example.

SNP passivity

Nicola Sturgeon and the Scottish National Party (SNP) leadership have made clear they have no criticisms of the judges who made the decision. Such silence and passivity on their behalf is also no surprise. It reflects the pro-business outlook of the SNP, which has no intention of doing anything other than maintain the rule of capitalism and all its undemocratic institutions, including the monarchy and the judiciary, in a future independent Scotland.

Alongside the refusal of the main parties at Westminster to allow for a 'legal' referendum, this ruling makes it clear that only a mass movement on the streets, workplaces and communities of Scotland will deliver self-determination.

Sturgeon's proposal is that the next UK general election should be a referendum on the right to indyref2. But the SNP won in 2015, 2017, 2019 and 2021, most of these with a manifesto commitment for another referendum. What difference would an SNP majority in Scotland actually make in the next election? A general election is not a referendum. And the SNP's role in making cuts and denying workers' pay rises to match inflation are making them increasingly unpopular.

For the capitalist establishment there is too much at stake to simply accept formal democracy. They have profits, international prestige, seats on international institutions like the UN, and the impact of Scottish independence would have in Wales and Northern Ireland to consider. The break up of the UK would be a huge blow for the capitalist class and they will fight tooth and nail to try to avoid it.

The very last thing on the mind of the SNP leaders is to build mass extra-parliamentary struggle to win democratic rights in Scotland.

In contrast, the strike wave that we have seen over the last few months



Protests in the wake of the ruling MATT DOBSON



Socialist Party Scotland members at the protests SP SCOTLAND



The ruling by the UK Supreme Court underlines the need to build mass working-class struggle for the right to indyref2. It means building a movement for independence with socialist policies at its core

points to the type of methods of struggle that the independence movement in Scotland should turn to. Strike action in support of demands for wage increases by workers have won significant concessions. Tens of thousands of workers, from council workers, teachers, NHS staff and rail workers have won more pay by taking or threatening strike action.

Almost all these strikes have seen workers up against SNP politicians in one form or another. Mass coordination of strikes has the power to win major gains for the working class on pay, but they can also force governments to retreat and alter course. They can even force governments out of office. The mass non-payment poll tax campaign of 1989-91 is a case in point. It not only melted the Iron Lady Thatcher, and removed her from power, it also ended the poll tax itself. And it was a movement not organised by the SNP or Labour leadership, but by socialists and Marxists in the shape of Militant – the forerunner of the Socialist Party in Scotland, England and Wales.

Many trade unions, and the Scottish Trades Union Congress, have policies in support of indyref2. It's clear that the workers' movement has a critical

and powerful role to play in building a mass movement for the right to a referendum.

This points to a reality that Socialist Party Scotland has emphasised again and again: that the SNP's pro-business policies are an obstacle to winning a majority in Scotland for independence. As the latest offering from the Scottish government on its economic plans post-independence make clear, austerity and wage restraint would continue in a capitalist Scotland under their rule. "We would set fiscal rules designed to put public finances on a sustainable path. The rules would ensure that day-to-day spending was kept within fiscally sustainable limits." What else is this other than an acceptance of further cuts? Look at what the SNP and Scottish Green Party government have just done by axing £1.2 billion of the parliament budget.

Nor is there any commitment to nationalisation or public ownership under independence. With hundreds of thousands being thrown into fuel poverty and facing falling incomes, how can these policies inspire workers or young people to vote for or campaign for independence?

A mass movement for independence could be built if it offered an end to poverty and inequality. A £15-an-hour minimum wage for all; massive investment in public housing, the NHS and free education; public ownership of energy, transport, the supermarkets, the banks etc, under working-class control and management.

Instead of these policies, the SNP can only offer the same failing system of the rule of the 1% – the capitalist elite – while the working-class majority pay the price. For all these reasons, the ruling by the UK Supreme Court underlines the need to build mass working-class struggle for the right to indyref2. It means building a movement for independence with socialist policies at its core.

It means mobilising the 600,000 strong trade union movement in Scotland that has begun to show its power. It also means the unions founding a new working-class party to fight for these policies now. It means linking up with workers in the rest of Britain fighting the cost-of-living crisis and for the removal of this rotten Tory government.

Huge response to EIS strike sees schools closed across Scotland

SOCIALIST PARTY SCOTLAND REPORTERS

Scottish teachers in the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS) union staged a massive, successful strike on 24 November. Every single primary and secondary school across Scotland was closed, with the exception of a handful of primary schools on Orkney and Shetland. Significant numbers of council-run nurseries were also shut.

There were hundreds of EIS picket lines across the country and major strike rallies in six cities.

As Socialist Party Scotland member and EIS West Dumbartonshire local association secretary Jim Halfpenny commented: "Today saw the biggest strike by teachers in 40 years because we have had enough. Our demand for a 10% wage increase has been treated with disdain by [Scottish local government authority] Cosla, and the Scottish government.

"The latest offer from the employers is an insult. We worked through the pandemic to maintain education. Workload remains excessive while more and more is demanded, with fewer and fewer resources. In response, teachers are offered a derisory pay increase which is nothing short of a substantial pay cut. This cannot be allowed to continue."

Pamela Manley, an EIS rep from Angus, told us: "Why are we on strike? It's simple; our working conditions are children's learning conditions." The size of the education shutdown reflected the huge wave of anger among teachers. Indeed, this is the first national strike among teachers over pay since the mid-1980s.

The EIS organises 80% of Scottish teachers, a large majority are women, and the scale of

the mobilisation reflected the determination of tens of thousands of members to hit back on deteriorating pay, workload and anger at the employers.

The Scottish government rubbed salt in the wounds just two days before the strike by effectively offering the same 5% rise that had been rejected by all teaching unions in September.

Shirley-Anne Sommerville, the SNP education secretary, blurted out the real views of the government when she said: "This is now the fourth offer that has been made. In the same time EIS have not changed their request for a 10% pay increase – even for those on the highest incomes."

In truth the four offers were 2%, 3.5%, 5% and, on the eve of the strike, a paltry offer for the lowest but 5% for the vast majority. Why should the EIS change their request for 10% with RPI inflation at 14% and rising?

As they have with NHS workers, the SNP sought to blame the unions for cuts in budgets. "The financial situation for the Scottish Government is challenging and additional money for teacher pay means reduced public services elsewhere."

In truth, the Scottish government has passed on every penny of Tory austerity to public services in Scotland. And it is that reality, of continual acceptance of cuts, which has brought the Scottish government into head-on collision with the trade union movement.

Further EIS strikes have been announced for 10-11 January and more dates will be announced. The SSTA, a smaller teachers' union, has also announced strike action for early December.

Socialist Party Scotland says

- Defy the Tories and the capitalist judges! Demand the Scottish government organise indyref2
- Build a mass working-class movement for the right to indyref2, including committees of struggle involving workers and young people, communities and workplaces
- For a new mass working-class party to fight for self-determination and for socialist change
- For an independent socialist Scotland and a voluntary, democratic socialist confederation with England, Wales and Ireland, as part of the struggle for socialism internationally
- End the capitalist crisis. Renationalise all the privatised utilities under workers' control. Bring into public ownership the banks, the profiteering energy companies and the major monopolies that dominate the economy, under workers' control and management
- Unite the strikes for pay rises that fully match inflation and the rising cost of living. For a £15-an-hour minimum wage with no age exemptions
- Fight for a socialist plan of production to replace capitalism and the profiteering billionaires that are destroying the lives of the working class globally



EIS picket line SOCIALIST PARTY SCOTLAND

150 vice-chancellors make £50 million

CASSIDY METCALF
SWANSEA SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Our vice-chancellor, Paul Boyle, is one of the highest-paid public sector workers in Wales, earning a hefty £300,000 a year. When he's not busy lining shareholders' pockets, he flies down to Swansea, from his home in Scotland, just often enough to keep people from wondering why we even have a vice-chancellor.

This month, the university ran a campaign asking alumni to give money to the university's 'Greatest Need' fund to cover projects to help students and local community. The goal of £70,000 donations over the five years, £14,000 a year, is less than 5% of Paul Boyle's salary.

He could donate this without

experiencing any changes in his living standards. The money isn't coming from the university's reserves either. Instead, it's left to students and alumni, most of whom are struggling to get by, to make sure people are fed.

Students and staff are being failed by a higher education system run like a business. When 150 vice-chancellors are making nearly £50 million collectively, while staff have had 20% pay cuts, it's time to say that enough is enough.

Universities must release funds from their reserves to reverse the damage done to pensions, and bring in above-inflation pay raises for a start. Socialist Students is proud to stand with staff at the University and College Union (UCU) picket lines.

Edge Hill Socialist Students is out campaigning

Edge Hill Socialist Students held a campaign stall in the town.

Our main theme was to discuss the incinerator that is planned to be built in Simonswood, and the impact it would have on Ormskirk.

We got a great response from people.

Residents discussed with us about alternatives to Labour, and what the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is. A few students signed our petition to support the anti-incinerator campaign and the University and College Union (UCU) strikes.

We have contacted our university's UCU branch, and informed them that we fully support them. They have invited us to their picket lines.

We are very excited and optimistic about our future events, and organising on campus.

ANNANYA
EDGE HILL SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Liverpool students back strikes

There's great reason to be optimistic about a socialist future.

This optimism is driven by new members of Socialist Students - future trade unionists. We have shown solidarity to the University and College Union (UCU), and also striking dockers and Jacobs workers.

More and more people are interested in joining Liverpool Socialist Students. These new members have quickly got involved, joining us on picket lines to show their support for the unions.

More new members are speaking in meetings. And some are organising other students to get as much support as we can to workers in dispute.

We're putting forward socialist ideas to those who see our campaign stalls and demonstrations, and are interested in joining us in the fight for a socialist future.

OWEN CROFT
LIVERPOOL SOCIALIST STUDENTS

socialiststudents.org.uk



ISAI MARIJERLA

Student solidarity with struggle in Sri Lanka

SOCIALIST STUDENTS STATEMENT

Socialist Students stands in solidarity with protesters, including students, who have been arrested and detained by the Sri Lankan regime. The issues which blight the lives of youth and students in Britain - rising prices and falling living standards, all driven by

the profit-first capitalism system - are the same issues the movement in Sri Lanka is fighting back against.

Recognising this common struggle, Socialist Students has launched our 'Solidarity with the struggle in Sri Lanka' campaign. We will help build international solidarity and put forward socialist ideas for workers and

young people in Sri Lanka struggling against brutal repression and economic crisis.

You can find resources to help with your campaigning on campus at socialiststudents.org.uk/sri-lanka-solidarity-campaign. And Socialist Students is also holding a series of public meetings on Sri Lanka.

Public meetings: Where next for the revolutionary struggle in Sri Lanka?

● Bristol

- Thursday 8 December, 7pm
- Bristol University, venue TBC
- For more info call/text Nick C at 07944 782496

● Coventry

- Thursday 1 December, 6pm
- The Castle Grounds, 7 Little Park Street, Coventry CV1 2UR
- For more info call/text Mila at 07401 022007 or email coventrysocialiststudents@gmail.com

● Leeds

- Wednesday 7 December, 5.30 pm
- Upstairs at The Fenton Pub, Woodhouse Lane, Leeds LS2 3ED
- For more info call/text Iain at

● Sheffield

- Tuesday 6 December, 5pm

● Leicester

- Monday 5 December, 6pm
- Upstairs at Madison's, 128 London Road, Leicester LE2 1EB
- For more info call/text Seamus at 07565 054498

● Nottingham

- Thursday 1 December, 7pm
- YMCA International Community Centre, Room 2
- 61B Mansfield Road, Nottingham NG1 3FN
- For more info call/text Seamus at 07565 054498

● Swansea

- Tuesday 6 December, 5pm

- The University Arms, 197 Brook Hill, Broomhall, Sheffield S3 7HG
- For more info call/text Noah at 07309 116583

● Wales

- Wednesday 7 December, 7pm
- Swansea University, venue TBC
- For more info call/text Ginny at 07974 908961

Can't find a meeting nearby? If you would like to hold a public meeting on your campus, please message socialiststudents@gmail.com, so that we can get in touch about arranging a date, time, and speaker for your meeting.

socialiststudents.org.uk

Hackney Labour council must stop library cuts

Workers prepare to strike



ROB THOMAS
HACKNEY SOCIALIST PARTY

The fight against Hackney Council's planned cuts to libraries continued on 23 November, with a second demonstration outside the town hall. The proposed restructure will see fewer staff expected to work longer hours to maintain the same level of service.

This demonstration saw an increased turnout from the one held in October. Local branches of public sector union Unison from Barnet and Camden attended, in solidarity with Hackney library workers.

Unison president Andrea Egan, recently expelled from the Labour Party, Unison vice-president Amerit Rait, and Labour MP Diane Abbot spoke at the rally.

All were critical of Labour councils continuing to impose Tory cuts, epitomised by Hackney Council's plan to cut a vital service to many

lower-income residents. They also criticised the weak response from Labour politicians to the current strike wave.

Labour's Diane Abbott pledged to stand on the picket lines alongside striking workers. Whether she joins the library workers on the picket lines against her own Labour council in Hackney remains to be seen.

Fightback

The Socialist Party's Rob Williams and Hugo Pierre spoke from the National Shop Stewards and Unison national executive, respectively.

Socialist Party member Brian Debus also spoke. Brian, the chair of Hackney Unison, is organising the fightback against the library cuts.

He called on the council to fight back against Tory austerity, build a movement alongside other Labour councils by refusing to impose Tory cuts, and use some of the £163 million useable reserves in Hackney alone.

Striking workers have sparked something

Selling the Socialist

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

● Swansea

16 Socialist Party members out on two campaign stalls. A 'socialist change not climate change' stall at the local climate demo, covered mainly by our youth members. And a 'pay the nurses, defend our NHS' at the Socialist Party's usual city centre location.

Several college students met up with us later in the week for further discussion about Socialist Students and the Socialist Party.

The following week, ten Socialist Party members were out on the early morning Aslef train driver picket line. Bulletins were snapped up by pickets, and they bought the Socialist newspaper too.

After a well-deserved Weatherpoons breakfast, we continued onto another city centre Socialist Party stall. The result? A huge response to our petition to defend our NHS, and pay the nurses and other strikers.

ALEC THRAVES
SWANSEA SOCIALIST PARTY

● Coventry

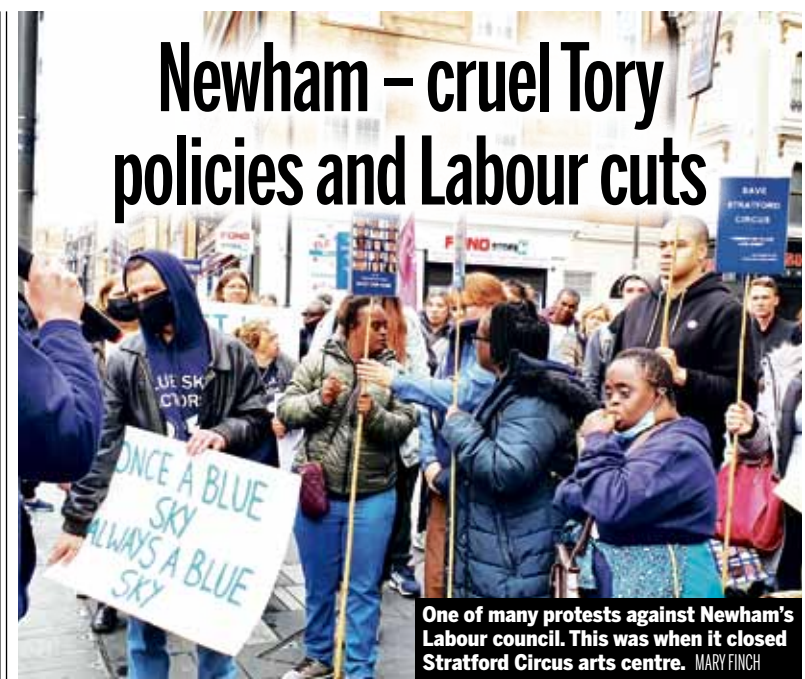
The Socialist Party was back in town campaigning on the cost of living and the rip-off hospital parking charges. A lot of people were discussing the strike wave, especially the upcoming

The Hackney Council chief executive has already used £200,000 of these reserves to fund two new posts to give him more support. At the same time, the libraries are set to suffer from £300,000 of cuts. Hackney Socialist Party believes it is only fair that reserves be used to maintain all services at their current levels, rather than increase the pay of council managers.

If Hackney council demanded more funding from central government, along with other councils, it would be virtually impossible for this government to do anything about it.

Library workers are due to take part in a formal ballot on strike action in the near future, after a consultative ballot saw 72% vote in favour of strikes, on an 80% turnout.

Hackney Socialist Party will stand shoulder to shoulder with workers to prevent massive cuts to library jobs and services.



NIALL MULHOLLAND
EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Cruel Tory policies are causing a cost-of-living crisis in Newham, east London, one of the poorest boroughs in the country. And the Labour council is passing on those attacks.

Over 50 attended an Enough is Enough meeting in East Ham on 24 November. The meeting was supported by Newham Trades Council and Newham Resists. The latter are anti-cuts campaigners, including the local Socialist Party branch.

Labour

Carel Buxton chaired the meeting. She's from Newham Socialist Labour, many of whom were perfunctorily expelled from the outrageously suspended Constituency Labour Party.

Carel lambasted the Tories, but she also correctly laid the blame with the Labour council, which has carried out years of cuts and disastrous 'regeneration' policies.

Socialist Party member Louise Cuffaro, secretary of Newham National Education Union (NEU), spoke in a personal capacity. Louise described the endless financial stress and pressure of workplace conditions on school staff in the borough.

We agreed to come back in the New Year to plan more concrete action.

Yet victories are possible. Striking NEU members from Calverton primary school recently won a dispute against bullying senior management (see 'Victory for Calverton school strike: "We won everything. Striking works!"').

The meeting also heard from local activists, food bank campaigners, a young classroom assistant, the Save Queens Market campaign, and Ferdy Lyons, a Unite union hospitality rep and Socialist Party member.

Picket lines

I brought greetings from the trades council. We're busy attending the many local picket lines of striking workers. The trades council supports a needs-based council budget, as does Newham Resists, which would see mass resistance to central government-imposed cuts.

Socialist Party member Lois Austin has stood for mayor as a Trade Union and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidate. Lois welcomed the meeting and Enough is Enough action points. She added, to applause, that "Enough is Enough, is not enough... we also need a political alternative to the Tories and right-wing Labour".

We agreed to come back in the New Year to plan more concrete action.

Donations to Socialist Party reflect support for strike wave

ISAI MARIJERLA
SOCIALIST PARTY TREASURER

Socialism 2022 was a brilliant event (see 'Socialism 2022: vital preparation for the new era of class struggle' at socialistparty.org.uk). It brought together hundreds of socialists, activists and campaigners to discuss and debate socialist ideas that are needed to end crisis-driven capitalism.

One highlight was the marvellous financial appeal at the main

Saturday rally. £36,689 was pledged on the night, smashing our £25,000 target.

Since then we have had more. £39,921 is currently the total pledged for the appeal. And £26,131 of that has already been paid in. Pledges are due to be paid by the end of December.

The Socialist financial appeal, along with donations we receive out campaigning and through fundraising, mean that this quarter we have already raised £32,781. And it's not the end of the quarter yet.

The Socialist Party and our members are out every week, in all weathers, raising socialist ideas (see opposite). The conversations and

donations we receive on this campaign activity show the huge support for workers striking for a pay rise, and defending their terms and conditions.

We thank everyone for your donations to take the class struggle forward, and to fight for socialism. Donations will be used to produce leaflets, posters and petitions for the growing strike wave.

The Socialist Party is part of an international socialist organisation. A third of the appeal will be used to support the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI).

There isn't a single country across the globe that's immune to the crisis of capitalism. Workers, youth and the

AREA	£ RECEIVED	£ TARGET	Q4: OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2022	DEADLINE: 3 JANUARY 2023
Southern & SE	7,053	2,350		300%
Eastern	2,466	1,200		206%
South West	3,683	1,800		205%
Wales	2,932	2,300		127%
London	5,564	4,600		121%
Yorkshire	2,715	2,550		106%
East Midlands	1,817	1,850		98%
West Midlands	2,473	2,600		95%
North West	1,030	1,150		90%
Northern	487	750	67%	
Other	2,561	3,850	65%	
TOTAL	32,781	25,000		131%

poor masses are facing an increase in the cost of living. We see mass movements in several

countries. Now, more than ever, socialism is needed. The Socialist Party and CWI will fight for those ideas.

Help fund the fightback

DONATE

socialistparty.org.uk/donate

taken part in the walkout at Hemel Hempstead in the summer.

JOSH ASKER
ENFIELD AND LEA VALLEY SOCIALIST PARTY

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.

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socialistparty.org.uk/subscribe

Massive Ealing strike meeting

170 people attended a public meeting, called by Ealing Trades Union Council, addressed by the RMT's Mick Lynch, and Sarah Woolley, Bakers union. This was followed by a collection of over £520 for local strikes. Socialist Party members initiated the call for the meeting and, with lots of people from the trades council, played a significant part in its success.

BILL REED
WEST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

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stewardsnetwork

with the NSSN bulletin
shopstewards.net

NHS menopause guidance: Pay, services and trade union organisation key

JANE NELLIST
COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

From being one of the last taboo subjects of women's health, the menopause is now recognised and talked about openly. Women are demanding more support in the workplace, and recognition of what can be debilitating symptoms during the menopause transition.

Trade unions have been fighting for more support for women in the workplace on many issues for years, including domestic violence and childcare. Socialist Party members in the National Union of Teachers, now the National Education Union, spearheaded the campaign for schools to have policies which recognise and support those going through the menopause. This has been taken up by the Trades Union Congress and many unions. But funding for services is critical in making this a reality.

NHS England has published new guidance, 'Supporting our NHS people through menopause.' This is a crucial tool for trade unions in the NHS and it is to be welcomed. In a workforce of over 1.3 million people, 1 million of these are women, which equates to over 75% of the entire workforce. Women between the ages of 45 and 54 alone make up a fifth of all NHS employees, and could be experiencing menopausal symptoms. We need to retain as many health-care



staff as we can, but guidance alone will not solve the problem.

Unfortunately, there is still a trend of targeting women as they go through the menopause with sickness absence procedures and capability proceedings. Women are being forced out of their jobs, to the detriment of their health and wellbeing, living standards, and future pension.

The support that is outlined in the guidance is crucial to retain staff, but will only be effective if trade unions ensure it is enacted and staff feel confident that they will be supported. And, importantly, the services are there to support those suffering.

For those seeking to manage menopause symptoms with medication, they first have to try to get an appointment with a GP, and then afford the cost of the prescription. A healthy diet is ruled out too for low-paid NHS workers having to resort to food banks or cut back on food in increasing numbers.

Flexible working is flagged up in the guidance as an option. For some, a temporary change in working patterns may be appropriate. But for many, a reduction in wages just adds even more pressures when you still have to pay your rent.

Years of underfunding and privatisation have left the NHS in no fit state to adequately deal with the demands that it faces. A massive injection of money is urgently needed to not only provide the services that all of us need, but also support those who work in the NHS with better pay, reduced hours of work without loss of pay, properly staffed services and workplace rights with strong trade unions that cannot be undermined.

● Jane is a former National Union of Teachers executive committee member and is President of Coventry Trades Union Council

FIFA can't stop World Cup politics seeping through



ADAM POWELL-DAVIES
EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Well before a ball was kicked, the 2022 World Cup in Qatar was mired in controversy – especially around corruption, and the Qatari regime's treatment of workers, women and LGBTQ+ people.

Unsurprisingly, new research from Opinium shows that three-quarters of UK football fans think that World Cup hosting rights should never have been awarded to Qatar.

The decision of who hosts the World Cup should be made under the democratic oversight of football fans and professionals, organised into supporters' associations and trade unions. This should come as part of a wider movement to 'reclaim the game', to transfer control and ownership of football from the billionaires to the working class.

Nonetheless, the 2022 World Cup has gone ahead. While some fans have boycotted this year's tournament from an understandable mood to oppose the Qatari regime, viewing figures from the first two rounds of fixtures suggest that more people are watching than ever before. In 2018, 3.6 billion people around the world tuned in to the World Cup final in Russia. It could be even higher this year.

In front of such a mass audience, this World Cup has become a stage for fans, players and pundits alike to highlight the various inequalities and prejudices fostered by capitalism.

Some have focused their criticism on the Qatari regime. Ahead of England's opening match against Iran, BBC pundit and former England stalwart Alex Scott wore the 'OneLove' armband in the face of Qatar's anti-LGBTQ+ laws. Scott's gesture was also an act of protest against international governing body FIFA, who threatened the captains of seven national teams with yellow cards and a one-game ban for wearing the armbands.

Others have taken the opportunity to highlight issues abroad. The Iranian team refused to sing the national anthem during their match with England, in an act of protest against the Iranian state. Images of two Iran fans in shirts carrying the name of Mahsa Amini, whose death triggered the massive protests across that country, have been transmitted across the world.

Appearing live on ITV, former Ireland captain Roy Keane said: "The corruption, the way [Qatar] treats migrant workers, gay people...I think it's great it's been brought up". In

the same discussion, fellow pundit Graeme Souness commented: "Can I just say: we're not perfect as well in our history...You know the British haven't been perfect in many parts of the world, and including in Roy's country".

The comments of Souness, together with the actions of the Iranian national team and others, have highlighted how repression and discrimination are by no means unique to Qatar.

The World Cup and other major international events can lead workers around the world to draw conclusions about the global nature of their suffering, and the global system that causes it, capitalism.

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She Said – Breaking the sexual harassment story that helped ignite a movement

As the film 'She Said' hits cinemas around the country, we reprint a review - which first appeared in the Socialist in October 2019 - by Christine Thomas of the book on which the film is based.

On 5 October 2017, the #MeToo movement exploded - first on social media, then spreading to protests on the streets and in workplaces - becoming a global phenomenon.

The catalyst for millions of women sharing their experiences of sexual harassment online was the publication of a meticulously researched article in the New York Times exposing decades of allegations of sexual abuse against the Hollywood film producer Harvey Weinstein.

'She Said' is written by Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey, the two investigative journalists behind the article which 'broke the dam wall' and gave confidence to so many women around the world to tell their stories.

This is not a book about the #MeToo phenomenon. Nor is it just a book about Harvey Weinstein. And it doesn't merely repeat the already widely available information about the abuse which more than 80 women accused the media mogul of committing, dating back as far as the 1970s.

Instead, the book recounts in quite a gripping way how the journalists pieced together all the evidence - the first-hand accounts by the women, as well as financial and legal documents, and other material.

Power and money

She Said is about power and money, and the abuse of both. It reveals a pattern of behaviour, reported by actresses and employees, of how Weinstein used his position of authority and control to sexually coerce and harass.

It also reveals the lengths to which he was prepared to go to use his vast wealth to smear and silence his accusers, and to convince others in his companies, as well as lawyers (some claiming to be feminists) and security firms, to enable and cover up the numerous allegations of sexual assault.

Weinstein was eventually fired from his position and his corporation went bankrupt. In February 2020 he was found guilty of sexual assault and rape and sentenced to 23 years in prison.

Donald Trump, on the other hand, remained in office, despite the many allegations of sexual misconduct against him (which Twohey helped expose) and the release of the 'Pussygate' tapes, one year before the New York Times exposé of Weinstein, in which the president boasted of using his fame to grope women.

And almost exactly 12 months after the Kantor and Twohey investigation was published, US politicians dismissed compelling testimony by



She Said the film and (inset), the book PHOTOS: UNIVERSAL AND BLOOMSBURY

Christine Blasey Ford about an alleged high school sexual attack on her by Supreme Court judge nominee Brett Kavanaugh, who was subsequently confirmed in office. Two chapters in the book are turned over to how these events unfolded. However, they are less riveting because the two journalists were not directly involved in the same way as they had been with the Weinstein revelations.

Organising to fight harassment

#MeToo lifted the lid on the extent of sexual harassment throughout society. High-profile abusers included rich and famous celebrities in the world of entertainment, but also politicians, businessmen and academics. As more women opened up publicly about their experiences, others gained the confidence to speak out about what had happened to them.

Kantor and Twohey explain how #BelieveWomen became a widely tweeted and diffuse slogan. But they also stress the necessity of journalism

that scrutinises, verifies, checks and questions facts. This is an important point. While women who speak out against sexual abuse should always be listened to sympathetically, alleged abusers should not be tried by social media alone.

If due process is not seen to be carried out, that only serves to fuel the backlash, unleashed by the likes of Trump, with talks of a 'witch-hunt' against men and things 'going too far'. This is extremely divisive and can cut across the united movement that needs to be built in the workplaces to combat sexual harassment.

While Hollywood actors such as Ashley Judd, Rose McGowan and Gwyneth Paltrow clearly feature prominently in She Said, we do also hear from junior employees in Weinstein's companies, as well as McDonald's worker Kim Lawson. As Kantor and Twohey point out, after their article was published women from all walks of life posted #MeToo stories on social media.

Jodi Kantor also wrote articles in

the New York Times about the experiences of low-paid women workers: "They had watched the actors speak up and felt connected to the experiences of those distant celebrity figures. But they felt unclear about whether they had any avenue for addressing the problem".

That avenue became clearer when, in September 2018, workers at McDonald's walked out for one day across ten states in the US because complaints of sexual harassment had not been seriously dealt with. Following their lead, 20,000 Google workers staged a global walkout to protest that nothing had been done about company executives accused of sexual misconduct. The workers' demands related to sexual harassment were also linked to pay discrimination and inequality.

Working-class women cannot rely on newspaper exposés or expensive lawyers to fight harassment in the workplace. Instead, they need to build collective strength together with working-class men, as both the McDonald's and Google workers did. This is necessary in order to fight for adequate harassment procedures to be put in place, as well as to fashion the tools (trade unions in the workplace, students' unions on campus) to ensure that those procedures are actually adhered to.

One weakness of the book is its failure to look beyond the internal corporate structures of the Weinstein companies. Corporations do not exist in a bubble, but are connected to structures and ideology in wider society. The power disparity in the workplace underlying sexual abuse reflects the gender and class inequalities of capitalism more generally.

Centuries-old ideas about gender dominance and subordination, power and control - at the root of sexual abuse and violence against women - are, in turn, perpetuated by those inequalities. These have to be eradicated at source in order to end sexual harassment and abuse in the workplaces and in society more generally.

In terms of how it is written, some reviewers have called She Said the feminist equivalent of All the President's Men. This was the book in which Washington Post reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein revealed how they uncovered the Watergate political scandal in the early 1970s.

In fact, the similarities go beyond style. Watergate was the catalyst that led to the resignation of US President Richard Nixon in 1974. But it has to be seen against the backdrop of a huge ferment in society, particularly around the war in Vietnam and the civil rights movement.

Kantor and Twohey's article triggered a global phenomenon, connecting with the accumulated rage of millions of women against sexual abuse, gender violence, sexism and gender inequality. And that explosion of anger is also the product of the economic, political and social turmoil unleashed by the most serious global economic crisis of capitalism since the Great Depression. As such, it is the precursor of future mass struggles that will call into question the capitalist system itself and the inequality and oppression which flows from it.

● *She Said: Breaking the Sexual Harassment Story That Helped Ignite a Movement* by Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey, Penguin Press



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.

- 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.

- For a new mass workers' party, based on the trade unions, and drawing together workers, young people and activists from workplaces, and community, environmental, anti-racist and anti-cuts campaigns, to provide a fighting, socialist political alternative to the pro-big business parties.

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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.

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Northern Ireland Assembly election

Mass party of the working class needed to stop sectarian impasse



Stormont PHOTO: GFDL/EN/CC

DONAL O'COFAIGH
MILITANT LEFT (CWI IRELAND)

Northern Ireland faces another Stormont election. While the main cause of this is the refusal of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), the dominant unionist party, to enter a mandatory coalition while the Northern Ireland Protocol remains in place, the true difficulties are even greater.

The power-sharing institutions, established under the 1997 Good Friday Agreement and modified by the 2007 St Andrew's Agreement, have not functioned properly for one-third of the last 25 years. This reflects both the mutual veto built into the objectively sectarianised devolved government, something meant to bring together the leading representatives of 'both sides', and the growing instability in Northern Ireland.

This year was supposed to have been a belated celebration of Northern Ireland's centenary. Instead, it has only served to reassert the continued sectarian divisions, which are based on the historical role of 'divide and conquer' rule by the ruling elites, and by decades of the dominance of pro-capitalist market policies of the main unionist and nationalist parties.

The current crisis stems from the Northern Ireland Protocol - agreed by the EU and UK government to avoid the need for checks on goods crossing the border in Ireland. The protocol represents a fundamental challenge to the constitutional status of Northern Ireland and its place in the UK market. While agrifood checks have long occurred on goods transiting from Britain to Northern Ireland, the protocol demands much more substantial checks, and would preclude the export of goods that don't comply to EU rules or standards.

Against a backdrop of profound demographic change, in which Catholics now outnumber Protestants, albeit by a small majority - and the seemingly inexorable rise of Irish nationalist party Sinn Féin and the likelihood of its coming to power in the South - political unionism and loyalism find themselves wrong-footed by events.

The result has been loyalist riots on the streets over the last years

(relatively small scale compared to the 'Troubles' but nonetheless symbolic), and the collapse of the Stormont executive as the DUP withdrew from power-sharing. This forced an early assembly election in May, and then led to the failure to re-establish a functioning assembly - through the refusal of the DUP to nominate a deputy speaker until their demands regarding the protocol are met - let alone an executive.

The British Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has deferred the assembly election to early 2023. Any election appears likely to reinforce the DUP and Sinn Féin power-blocs, as well as the Alliance Party, viewed by many as the main non-sectarian option.

The absence of a functioning executive will mean even the meagre measures that the parties would have introduced for the cost-of-living crisis will not happen or will be subject to further delay.

That said, few people would have any faith that the Stormont parties would take radical steps to improve things or to avoid the collapse of underfunded public services, but the prospect of any help from an unelected Tory overlord is even less likely.

While the sectarian chasm widens further, workers are increasingly stepping out together. The recent wave of strike action by workers united across the divide offers a glimpse of what is possible and needed. It must be generalised and coordinated by the unions to be most effective, and workers need to reach out to support those others, e.g. youth, women and pensioners, who are really facing the brunt of the latest capitalist 'cost-of-living' crisis.

Above all, a mass party of the working class is a political imperative. Militant Left (CWI Ireland) is part of the Cross-Community Labour Alternative (CCLA), which has contested elections in recent years, and has a council seat in Enniskillen.

This can act as an important platform for the creation of a mass party of working class people, standing on a clear socialist programme and offering the action needed by our class. Only socialist policies offer a way to overcome the divisive historic legacy and deliver real improvements for all.

Shac stops lavish housing awards



Protesting at a previous awards ceremony PHOTO: SHAC

Below is an edited extract from the Social Housing Action Campaign (Shac). You can read the full statement at shacaction.org.

We won. The UK Housing Awards has been cancelled.

It only took 54,000 signatures on a petition by the Shac, and a threatened mass mobilisation to picket and protest the event. The annual UK Housing Awards ceremony is a lavish self-congratulatory event for the executives of housing associations and council housing departments.

This year's event was to be held during the worst cost-of-living crisis in 40 years. But attendees pay anything between £370 and £2,700 to attend. They were to be treated to a lavish dinner, wine, and entertainment.

Among the nominees was Hyde, the housing association most frequently reported to Shac for

service-charge abuse. It regularly charges for services that are extortionate, non-existent, or not delivered. And fails to act when inaccuracies are highlighted.

L&Q was named and shamed by ITV Housing Stories for subjecting tenants to prolonged, appalling housing conditions. Tenants and residents, organised by Shac, have been forced to withhold service charge payments just to get heard by their landlord. Their presence among the nominees was a surprise, except that L&Q's director of finance is one of the judges.

Add scandal-prone Clarion. The UK's biggest housing association was out of action for almost five months. It claimed it was unable to provide access to services because of a cyber attack.

It received three 'severe maladministration' judgements from the housing ombudsman in as many months. Its decade-long, deliberate, managed decline of the Eastfields

estate featured on ITV.

What have housing associations – holding £4 billion reserves – done to support struggling tenants and residents? They only have a record of failure.

Housing associations were more likely than councils and private landlords to evict through the courts. As more people fall into rent arrears, eviction will be the penalty that too many people pay for being unable to afford their home through no fault of their own.

There is no reason for housing associations to self-congratulate. The financial struggles that people face give plenty of reasons to cancel this extravaganza.

The money spent on this event would be far better targeted towards helping people in desperate need of safe, secure, affordable housing. Opposition showed a new groundswell of anger at the gap between wealthy, pampered executives, and the daily struggles that people face.

'Charged' book launch

How the Police Try to Suppress Protest



PHOTO: NIALL MULHOLLAND

NIALL MULHOLLAND
EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

The book launch of 'Charged: How the Police Try to Suppress Protest' drew a big audience. Authors Matt Foot, a barrister specialising in defending protesters, and journalist Morag Livingstone, have forensically revealed how the increase in coercive state powers has seen police apply more aggressive tactics towards protests, provoking violence, and with police officers breaking the law.

In 1983, a Tory home secretary secretly sanctioned police paramilitary powers. Through undisclosed documents and eyewitness

accounts, Charged reveals planned police violence against miners at Orgreave, print workers at Warrington, anti-poll tax campaigners, student protesters and Black Lives Matter activists. The suppression of dissent continues, with the current Tory government seeking to extinguish any effective protest.

Michael Mansfield spoke about his work as a defence barrister for miners arrested at Orgreave in 1984. Jeremy Corbyn spoke about violent police tactics used against protests over the Criminal Justice Bill in 1994.

Ben Smoke was one of fifteen protesters charged for blocking a deportation flight at Stansted. They were eventually acquitted of ludicrous

terrorism charges in 2021.

Socialist Party member Lois Austin is a former chair of Youth Against Racism in Europe. That campaign was successful against the far-right British National Party (BNP), getting its headquarters in Welling, south east London, closed during the 1990s.

Lois and other activists were spied upon by Metropolitan Police officers for years. While we should resist oppressive laws with mass mobilisations of working people and campaigners, Lois said at the book launch, experience shows that the 'capitalist courts' cannot be relied upon to give us real and lasting justice. For that, we need to get rid of the entire rotten profit system.

Quarter of jobs to go at English National Opera - unions must act



PHOTO: JAMES IVENS

JAMES IVENS
EQUITY AND SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBER

The English National Opera (ENO) is losing its entire £12.8 million grant. A quarter of jobs are under threat.

Arts Council England (ACE) has shifted emphasis across its portfolio from firms which produce new work and have union contracts, to those which simply receive existing shows and don't. Performing arts union Equity will have to negotiate over 100 new agreements.

All this demands a fighting response. Equity general secretary Paul Fleming tweeted that "no tactic is off the table." Equity and sister unions must start explaining to members that industrial action is their best hope and their union is ready to take such a fight to the end.

This must be linked to a demand for more public money. Arts funding has declined by £467 million since 2005.

Equity, technicians' union Bectu (part of Prospect), and the Musicians' Union held a packed protest against the government's attacks on culture funding on 23 November. Hundreds of chorus members, backstage workers and others filled the pavement outside the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). They chanted "the luvvies, united, will never be defeated!"

Tory 'culture wars' extend into the culture sector - sterilising arts diversity under the guise of fighting 'elitism'. We say every kind of cultural

experience should be fully funded and thrown open to everyone.

But the ENO specifically is an English-language producer, founded to make top-quality opera accessible to wider audiences. And that quality rests on a company with secure, long-term union contracts that allow artists to grow both as individual practitioners and as a well-oiled ensemble.

Arts councils are supposed to make decisions at 'arm's length' from the DCMS. They have never been truly independent of government, but ACE now reflects Tory priorities quite brazenly. Real independence means democratic control by arts workers and audiences.

ACE claims the cut is part of re-balancing funding away from London to the regions. But seven-tenths of its cuts fall outside the capital. Instead, funding should be 'levelled up' across the board.

The arts council has offered ENO a one-off payment of £17 million to relocate to Manchester. Aside from forcing workers to uproot families or lose their jobs, this would put it in competition with Opera North, the subsidised English-language company ENO set up to cover the north!

Labour could end this crisis now by stating it would restore the ENO grant and reverse DCMS cuts after the next election. Keir Starmer has instead committed to Tory austerity. The working class needs a new, mass party where organised workers set the agenda.

China explodes with protests against draconian lockdown rules...

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Issue 1205

1-7 December 2022

formerly **Militant**

We need:

£15-AN-HOUR MINIMUM WAGE

NATIONALISE ENERGY

FULLY FUNDED NHS

AND A PARTY THAT FIGHTS FOR THEM!



ALASDAIR COOK
SALISBURY SOCIALIST PARTY

From food banks to warm banks, the latest 'solution' to the various crises we are facing is for doctors to prescribe heating and for the NHS to offer fruit and veg vouchers. All in the sixth richest economy on earth.

But these policies are not enough to even count as a 'sticking plaster'; an estimated three quarters of UK households are set to be in fuel poverty by the new year. Meanwhile, UK energy companies are seeing excess profits of up to £170 billion, so the case for nationalisation has never been clearer. These profits could easily cover the costs of energy bills for the UK population.

Also, while cold homes and cheap unhealthy food may cost the NHS large sums of money, this pales in comparison to how much austerity has cost the NHS. We also need a fully funded public health service!

Additionally, a £15-an-hour minimum wage would be a great step towards tackling the cost-the-living crisis and allow people to afford the basic necessities of life.

New workers' party

Workers are already fighting for pay rises, and to defend services by taking strike action. But the fight for all these demands would be strengthened if we had a mass working-class party to fight for them.

Starmer has made it abundantly clear that a Labour government with him at the helm would follow the will of 'the markets'. Rachel Reeves, the shadow chancellor, has spoken of her commitment to 'sound finance' - which is translated to mean carrying out more austerity.

We need a genuine alternative. If even a few trade unions were to stand candidates independently of Labour in the next general election, a handful of workers' MPs could get elected. This would act as a beacon to the workers' movement and prepare the ground for a new mass workers' party to develop. But if trade union leaders do not act decisively, then the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition is preparing to stand candidates to fight for socialist policies at the ballot box.

Join the fightback
JOIN THE SOCIALISTS

- Visit socialistparty.org.uk/join
 - or call **020 8988 8777**
 - or text your name and postcode to **07761 818 206**
- to find out more today!

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



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