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the Socialist

Issue 1216

2-8 March 2023

formerly **Militant**

BUILD FOR BUDGET DAY MASS STRIKES

- **Fight for fully funded, inflation-proof pay rises**
 - **Prepare for a 24-hour general strike**
 - **Force the Tories out**
 - **No trust in Starmer's Labour – build a new mass workers' party**



PHOTO: PAUL MATTSSON

ISRAEL-PALESTINE: VIOLENCE ESCALATES WITH SETTLER RAMPAGE >>> p11

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY >>> p6-7 & 12

FIGHTING FOR PERMANENT VICTORIES FOR THE WORKING CLASS >>> p2-3

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

Hundreds at Socialist Party conference

FIGHTING FOR PERMANENT VICTORIES FOR THE WORKING CLASS



Around 300 delegates and visitors attended the Socialist Party conference 25-27 February. Longstanding Socialist Party campaigners were joined by many more recent recruits, some representing new branches of the party.

Discussions and debates covered the crisis of capitalism worldwide and here in Britain, and the growing numbers of workers fighting back against real-terms pay cuts and austerity. Most importantly, we discussed the role of the Socialist Party now and over the coming year.

Introducing the first discussion on the situation in Britain, Hannah Sell, Socialist Party general secretary, particularly welcomed new delegates, who have "joined at a good time, when Britain's working class is re-entering the scene of history. We are witnessing a qualitatively larger scale of strike action, of a more serious character, than we've seen at any time in the last three decades."

Workers' voice

At the same time, Hannah pointed out that "the lack of a mass political voice for the workers' movement is posed very starkly by Keir Starmer's annihilation of the left wing within Labour".

The conference agreed that the workers' movement is facing an incredibly weak and divided Tory government. The fact that the traditional party of British capitalism - the Tories - is in such a sorry state is ultimately a reflection of the ailing character of British capitalism.

In a sense, the historical justification for the capitalist system was its ability to develop the productive forces - industry, science and technique. The decline of British capitalism is demonstrated by its non-existent productivity growth; which is at its lowest level for 250 years!

For 12 years, the Tories have tried to make the working class pay for the failures of capitalism - most recently and brutally by inflicting huge



National Education Union (NEU) members on strike in Slough on 1 February

real-terms pay cuts and, as a result, are now hated throughout most of society.

However, the weakness of the government, and the huge potential power of the workers' movement, does not mean that victories for our side are guaranteed. The majority of the national trade union leaders have not prepared their memberships for the current battles.

The low level of strikes in recent years means that most workers are striking for the first time in their lives. Our class learns more about the class nature of society in one day of strike action than a decade of inactivity, and lessons are being rapidly learnt in the course of the struggle. At each stage so far it has been pressure from below which has been the main force leading to continuation and escalation of the strike action.

The Socialist Party is playing an

important role. We agreed that our central demand at this stage remains the call to build for a 24-hour general strike to bring all the struggles together - linked to demanding inflation-proof pay rises for all and scrapping the proposed and existing anti-trade union laws.

Budget Day strikes

The next days of coordinated strike action on 15-16 March could be a significant step towards a 24-hour general strike, and are currently set to include teachers, civil servants, junior doctors, lecturers, plus national rail and London Underground workers, with the possibility of more joining.

The strike movement could force the Tories out of office in short order. Socialist Party members would be cheering that along with millions of workers to see the Tories out on their

"needs a completely new type of political party to compete with the Conservatives and Labour for power".

As Socialist Party executive committee member Sarah Sachs-Eldridge explained - introducing a session on our demand for a new mass workers' party - a glimpse of the potential for such a party has been shown by the half a million people who have signed up for the Enough is Enough campaign, led by Dave Ward (CWU general secretary), and Mick Lynch (RMT general secretary). The leaders of that campaign see its role, however, as limited to putting demands on Labour.

Since Starmer's speech declaring unequivocally that Jeremy Corbyn will not be allowed to stand as a Labour MP, and inviting other lefts to take the exit door too, enthusiasm has increased among trade unionists and young people for taking the first steps towards building a new mass workers' party before the general election. Not least because it would be the most effective means to put pressure on Starmer. However, Starmer's speech has so far been met with silence from both the few remaining left Labour MPs, and left trade union leaders.

In response, it was agreed that the Socialist Party will step up its campaign for steps towards a new mass workers' party, and that as part of that "a central political campaign for the party in the next period will be the fight for the widest possible independent working-class challenge at the next general election, and in other electoral contests that may precede it, beginning with the local elections in 229 English councils in May".

This will include campaigning for the passing of resolutions in the trade union movement enabling steps in that direction. Socialist Party members from Kirkby in Merseyside - who are playing a leading role in campaigning against racist attacks on asylum seekers, and for 'jobs, homes and services for all' - spoke to emphasise how the absence of a mass workers' party left a vacuum which the racists and right populists would try to fill.

Discussion at our conference covered many issues, which can only be touched on here. The statement that was agreed on the political situation in Britain can be found at socialismtoday.org/britain-on-the-boil.

Workers and youth

There were also important discussions on the Socialist Party's work in the trade unions and in the universities. Plus discussions on building the Socialist Party, the need to raise finance to fund our activities - if you agree please donate at socialistparty.org.uk/donate - and the important role of this newspaper, the Socialist, and our sister publication, the monthly magazine Socialism Today. Elections to the Socialist Party national committee also took place.

The thread running through the whole conference was that, alongside fighting for every possible immediate step forward for the working class, our most urgent job is to argue for a socialist programme. And that permanent victories for the working class will come only with ending this barbaric capitalist system, and building a democratic socialist planned economy, under democratic working-class control, both in Britain and worldwide.

Our own party

Among both strikers and others, there is a growing recognition that what is really needed is for the workers' movement to build its own party. A recent poll in The Independent shows that 61% agree that the UK

Capitalist profiteering and competition - why are shelves empty?

KATIE SIMPSON
NORTHAMPTON SOCIALIST PARTY

UK supermarkets are limiting purchases of tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers and other staple fruits and vegetables. Further restrictions can be expected thanks to climate change, soaring energy prices, big business profiteering, and how capitalism runs its supply chains.

Much of the agricultural land that grows our produce relies on a delicate balance of weather conditions. With melting ice caps and hotter summers, many crops are failing or having reduced harvest.

Climate change

COP27, the global climate summit, exposed again that capitalism - driven by profit and organised on the basis of competing nation states - has no solution to the environmental crisis.

The National Farmers' Union (NFU) has called on the government to support farmers with soaring energy costs. Across Europe, farmers have planted fewer crops and delayed heating and lighting greenhouses during the cold winter, because of unaffordable energy bills.



The bureaucratic wrangling of various competing capitalist markets around the world also causes delays in food distribution. And betting on the stock market, so vulture capitalists can make a profit, also drives prices up for working-class people.

The need for socialist economic planning, democratically controlled by the working class, to meet the needs of people in every country has never been clearer.

Prior to Brexit, massive agribusinesses made massive profits using cheap migrant labour. Now, it's harder to get those workers.

We are in the insane situation of

importing food from around the world, at huge environmental and economic cost, while UK farmers are shutting up shop. Farms should be subsidised - on the basis of on proven need - to save jobs, lower import costs and help the planet.

There's enough land, labour and technology to staff off shortages and supply enough food to feed the world twice over, without detrimental environmental damage. But it requires a socialist alternative - reorganising to take the wealth and resources in society out of the hands of the capitalist class - to end free market and capitalist competition.

Students suffer as school buildings crumble



DAVID ANSTISS/CC

SECONDARY SCHOOL SUPPORT WORKER

In the past three years, 39 schools in England have either partially or fully closed due to their buildings becoming unsafe. 13 years of Tory government have left us with underfunded schools with crumbling buildings.

This has a real impact on children's education. I know. I've seen it.

Five years ago, children at the school I work in would have had the chance to be in a school play or concert. In bad weather, they did PE indoors.

Wet dinner time meant sitting around a table with friends, chatting, drawing or playing card games. It was used for assemblies, drama

lessons, and doubled as a dining hall. As a small secondary school, our hall had many uses.

Our hall is now closed off. Due to the roof being unsafe, it has been out of bounds since partway through the pandemic.

What are we left with?

We have one sports hall, which is also used for exams. If the weather is bad, either boys or girls can do physical PE lessons. The rest work in a classroom on 'theory'.

When it rains at breaktimes, students stand or sit in the corridors as the dining area we have isn't big enough to accommodate all of our students.

There is no stage, no lighting, and no sound equipment for concerts either. Drama lessons take place in classrooms where there is often little room for physical acting.

This generation is used to missing out. They don't complain about it. Many don't know any different.

But the reality is that these children are expected to put up with fewer facilities and fewer life experiences than the cohorts that came before them. Meanwhile, Rishi Sunak's alma mater boasts a new sports centre, a music hall, and a 240-seat theatre, complete with its own wardrobe manager.

We can't continue to tolerate this level of inequality. Our children deserve better.

Nurses say: 'Fight till we win'



On 21 February, the leadership of the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) suspended strike action planned for 1-3 March in England, because the Tory government offered talks. These talks made no new offers on 2022-23 pay.

CHARLIE KENNEDY
RCN NURSE

Last week, in the Socialist 1215, I wrote an article outlining why myself and other nurses in the RCN were striking. This week I find myself perplexed at the RCN's decision to pause strikes. At a time when the very core values of the NHS are on the line, why are we stopping now?

We stand at a key juncture, and the longer we halt the fight, the more we risk losing momentum. Every day standing still is a day lost for the fight for workers across the country.

Gaining a seat at the negotiating table is indeed progress, but it also potentially allows the Tory party to drag talks out and drain the power behind our movement. We must show this government that we will not stop until we get the offer we want.

We cannot let them exploit us and run the NHS into the ground. Stand with me in fighting for escalating strike action until we win!

- RCN members in Wales have rejected the paltry offer made by the Welsh Labour government.

FE staff consulted on action over poor wages and unsustainable workload



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

Further Education (FE) college staff in the University and College Union (UCU) will vote in a consultative e-ballot, opening on 3 March, about possible national industrial action on pay and workload.

Since 2009, pay for college staff has fallen by 35%, because of year-on-year below-inflation deals. The starting pay for a qualified FE lecturer is less than £26,000. For tutors and assessors it is often far less, with two-thirds heating their homes less frequently and a quarter skipping meals.

Due to rising workloads, college staff now effectively work an average of two days unpaid each week, according to a UCU report.

College staff have already struck at 29 FE colleges in England last autumn, after the employers' body, the Association of Colleges (AoC), recommended a pay award of 2.5%. That action was disaggregated. The proposed action members are now being consulted on would be the first ever aggregated ballot of FE staff.

A college lecturer at City College Plymouth, where UCU members

struck for ten days in September and October, spoke to the Socialist.

"We were driven to strike because of the poor wages, but more than that, the unsustainable workload. You can't get all the things done you're asked to do without working more hours than you're paid for."

"The experience of striking alongside my colleagues was brilliant. We supported each other, and had a chance to talk to the students about why we were striking, and they were very sympathetic. We didn't get everything we wanted but we achieved a big percentage pay rise for lower-paid workers. It was definitely worth it."

FE workers should definitely vote "yes". Lots of people on my picket line had never been on strike before, they were a bit frightened, but enough is enough."

National strike action by FE workers must be coordinated with other unions. It must push for a consolidated pay offer at least in line with inflation, to begin to address the real-terms pay cuts of the last ten years, to deal with the recruitment and retention crisis and impossible workloads.

The UCU leadership must pursue a strategy to win, agreed by members' representatives on the union's Further Education Committee.

Surrey Council workers' ballot: 'No option but to fight to prevent our members becoming poorer'

ISTVAN GULYAS
STAINES SOCIALIST PARTY, AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES CONVENOR WITH SURREY UNISON
(PERSONAL CAPACITY)

Surrey Unison branch has about 5,000 members. This increased recently due to the political climate and people starting to see the trade union movement taking strike action, to achieve some sort of compensation for the cost-of-living increases. Do not be mistaken, most trade unions are only asking their employers to match inflation, and not even asking for a real-term pay increase.

The government argument, that the country can't afford to keep wages above inflation, is flawed. We know that they found billions of pounds, much of which was distributed to their rich business friends, during Covid. The energy and fuel companies have announced obscene profits, which are again going in the same direction, from working people to the super-rich.

So we were not surprised that the latest pay offer from Surrey County Council mirrored the national situation. The lowest-paid workers have been offered the lowest amount of lump-sum payment of £1,500, while senior managers at the top would receive £4-10,000 lump-sum payments.

The overall pay offer was 5%, which is less than half of what we were asking for - 12%. Surrey is considered to be an affluent area. However, it has

many deprived areas, where the local services and community resources are continuously declining. House prices and rents are unaffordable for most of the workers in the council.

Our Unison branch has launched a campaign to mobilise our members to reject the pay offer and consider taking industrial action. We see no other option other than to fight back and prevent our members becoming poorer.

The task is huge as, due to Tory anti-union laws, we must get at least half of our members to vote. Our members are not just in one location, they work all over in Surrey, in hundreds of different roles. The stakes are high as other council unions have announced they won't be actively campaigning.

However, we are very hopeful and energised. We are producing YouTube and TikTok clips, and updating our Facebook page daily. Most importantly, we are organising online and in-person workplace meetings, sending emails and calling our members to get the vote out.

We have never yet managed to get 50% of our entire council membership to vote in a ballot, but I have a feeling this year could be different. Workers everywhere are coming out and telling the bosses, 'enough is enough'. It feels like the working class has started to feel its power again, and when working people decide to go in the same direction, miracles can happen.



Surrey Unison members protest against the anti-trade union bill. PAUL COUCHMAN

Budget Day 15 March

► Junior doctors and others join the biggest coordinated action so far in the strike wave

► Strike and march together on 15 March to defeat the bosses and the Tories

- Following their huge vote of 98%, 45,000 junior doctors in the BMA have announced a three-day strike from 13-15 March. The HCSA doctors' union will also strike, for the first time in its history
- The University and College Union (UCU) has resumed its strike action, after a 'pause' for negotiations, and added 15 March to its programme of action
- They will join teachers in England, and teachers and support staff in Wales, in the National Education Union (NEU); civil service workers in the PCS; and London Underground workers in RMT and Aslef
- PCS has successfully rebalanced in ten more employers, including revenue and customs (HMRC), the second biggest group. 33,000 more PCS members will now join the strike
- Prospect union has also announced a strike on pay on 15 March, following an 80% vote for action on a 72% turnout. The strike will involve tens of thousands of staff across the civil service, including in the Met Office, Health and Safety Executive, and more
- National Union of Journalist (NUJ) members at BBC England have won a ballot and will strike on 15 March

NEU leadership debates next steps in campaign

SEAN MCCAULEY
NEU EXECUTIVE MEMBER (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

50,000 new members since the 16 January National Education Union (NEU) ballot announcement for strike action! When a union gives a fighting lead, union strength builds.

Hundreds of thousands of members took national strike action on 1 February: teachers in England, and teachers and support staff in Wales. Thousands marched on the streets of Bristol, Birmingham, Leeds, Oxford, and many other places. 50,000 marched in London.

We were joined by civil service PCS members, University and College Union (UCU) members, and RMT and Aslef train drivers, in the biggest show of union strength in England and Wales since the two million-strong public sector general strike over pensions in November 2011.

Following this, NEU members are taking rolling regional strike action between 28 February and 2 March, with regional rallies.

Under pressure and desperate to head off the strikes, the Tory government made overtures to the NEU leadership, begging us to call off our action.

But no new offer was on the table for this year's pay award. Nor was any extra funding put forward to offset the shortfall from the unfunded, below-inflation award imposed on us last September. To add insult to injury, moments after asking us to call our action off, the government announced a pay award for September 2023 that is 7% below projected RPI inflation. The strikes will continue.

Bold lead

The NEU National Executive (NEC) met on 25 February. Socialist Party members proposed a clear timescale for escalation, should the government fail to meet our demands for fully funded, backdated inflation-matching awards for this year and next.

The next stage is the 15 and 16 March national strikes, with assemblies in London and Cardiff on Budget Day.

Socialist Party members called for the 15 March London event to be built as it was originally intended: a national demonstration and rally, jointly with other striking unions,

timed to coincide with Jeremy Hunt's Budget Day speech in parliament.

Some in the union are seeking to present it as a carnival with merry-go-rounds and stilt-walkers. We argued that it needs to be a serious trade union event, to send a clear message that our members won't settle for anything less than what we have already demanded. That's what members are expecting.

Socialist Party executive members also said that the NEU should be at the forefront of calling for coordinated strike action with as many unions with live ballots as possible joining us. Socialist Party executive members signed an open letter from executive members of the NEU and PCS, addressed to other unions with live strike ballots, to join us in mobilising our members nationwide, and organise with us for a demonstration in central London on 15 March.

Lay control

The recent eagerness of the national officers to postpone the Valentine's Day strike action in Wales, after the Welsh Labour-led government tabled an offer that was far from what we have been calling for, was worrying. The Welsh government's offer was soundly rejected by 91% at a meeting of reps, but the action should never have been suspended; the offer was clearly unsatisfactory. The action was quickly reinstated for 2 March.

Socialist Party members on the executive successfully saw off a decision that would have resulted in any future offers being decided by a small group of officers. We supported a move that decisions on any government offer that could potentially warrant suspension of action be put to the full executive.

We went further and proposed that the wider membership should be consulted where practically possible on such decisions. Recent decisions by the general secretaries of the RCN and UCU to suspend action without proper consultation with the wider membership have led to anger in those unions. We were unsuccessful this time but will bring forward similar proposals at the March executive.

The undemocratic Tory anti-trade union laws prevented our support staff members from striking with their teacher colleagues in England, because the turnout threshold was

March together

The NEU has advertised a 'carnival' in Hyde Park and then a march to Trafalgar Square. The PCS has planned a march from Embankment, passing Downing Street, to Trafalgar Square.

Socialist Party members in the NEU have argued that calling a 'carnival' downplays the serious message of the strike. Calling a national demo like the postal workers did in December, with clear demands on pay and funding, could have coachloads of members from all areas flooding to London.

It would also mean that the striking workers from all the different unions taking action on Budget Day could march together. There is still time for the unions on strike to organise this and fill the streets of the capital while the Tories move their anti-working class budget in parliament.

- RMT rail union, the NEU and UCU have strikes planned for 16 March too



North West NEU strike demo 28 February in Manchester. MARTIN POWELL-DAVIES

narrowly missed by just 1,500 votes. We have over 50,000 support staff members now, an increase of 7,500 since 16 January. Three quarters of those were not previously in a union. And that's without an active recruitment campaign.

Support staff rebalot

Socialist Party executive members have consistently had to argue that NEU should take a serious stance in representing its support staff members, some of the lowest-paid workers in education.

With this year's inadequate government pay proposals only just announced, NEU should seek a joint campaign with Unison, GMB and Unite, to stand together to reject an

award that goes nowhere near toward addressing the desperately low pay our term-time-only, often part-time, members face. We joined the push on the executive to re-ballot our support staff members 'as soon as possible', and this has been adopted.

The current generation of children has already suffered enough as a result of Covid. We are fighting for a

future for education that means that school budgets fully meet the needs of all our pupils, that there are no further cuts that impact on their education, and that experienced teachers and new entrants, a third of whom leave after five years, are no longer forced from the profession as a result of a toxic mix of workload and shortfalls in pay.

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WHAT WE STAND FOR

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

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

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

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

WORK, PENSIONS AND BENEFITS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- 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.

- Oppose the dictatorship of the billionaire owners of the media. For the nationalisation of newspaper printing facilities, radio, TV and social media platforms. Access to these facilities should be under democratic control, with political parties' coverage being allocated in proportion to the popular vote at elections.

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

- Take the wealth off the super-rich! For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and the banking system that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working-class control and management. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need, not to the fat cats.

- A democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, and in a way that safeguards the environment.

- No the EU bosses' club. Organise a campaign with European socialists and workers' organisations to use the talks on post-Brexit relations to tear up the EU pro-capitalist rules. For a real collaboration of the peoples of Europe on a socialist basis as a step towards a socialist world.

- No to imperialist wars and occupations!

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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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The fight to defend and extend provision

The largely privatised early years sector was hit hard by the pandemic, with 3,847 providers closing between April 2020 and July 2021 alone.

This comes on top of the more than 500 publicly funded Sure Start centres closing since 2010. Consequently, long waiting lists exist in many areas, and expectant parents are advised to register their child well in advance of their child being born to guarantee a spot!

In Leeds, the Labour council is proposing to close five nurseries, with four being merged. In Southampton, four YMCA pre-schools are closing, leaving

145 children without a placement.

Instead of passing on Tory austerity by closing valued services, further exacerbating these shortages, councils should rescue the closing services, including taking private services at risk of closure in-house, and extending provisions to meet need.

Trade unions should lead and back parents' and workers' campaigns to save services, calling on council's to meet the community's needs – adopting Unite the union's policy that "councils should set legal, no-cuts budgets" and demand the funding from central government.

Safety and quality of care

In a desperate attempt to increase capacity, The Tories have proposed increasing staff-to-child ratios. Not only will this impact the safety of children and the quality of provision, it will exacerbate worker shortages in the sector by placing a greater workload on an already low-paid workforce.

A 2020 report from the Social Mobility Commission reported early years workers being paid an average of just £7.42 an hour, with 45% claiming benefits or tax credits to supplement their low income.

The below-minimum wage average is driven by the one in eight paid under £5.00 an hour as apprentices. A social mobility commission report stated there was "strong evidence that the instability of the early year's workforce is related to the low income

of its members". All those working in the childcare sector should be fully qualified with paid-for training and receive a real living wage of at least £15 an hour.

Studies show that inequalities between children are already well established before the age of five. Meaningful care, delivered by fully-trained staff at safe staff-child ratios, is hugely beneficial for children's development. At older ages too, youth services and purposeful and educational after-school clubs benefit children, as well as providing essential childcare.

Childcare provision should be publicly funded and democratically run, involving representatives of parents, the local community and childcare workers.

CHILDCARE IN CRISIS

Unions must take up the fight for free, flexible, public, high-quality childcare for all

BEA GARDNER
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

The question of childcare is a critical one for many families. Extortionate costs, limited availability, provider closures and quality of provision are all issues confronting those seeking childcare. Those providing most of the childcare at home face other pressures, including financial burdens from relying on one wage or universal credit payments, neither of which cover the real costs of raising a family. These issues disproportionately impact women, given that women continue to carry out the majority of childcare, both in the home and as workers in the childcare sector.

The situation is particularly acute in Britain. Even when factoring in government support, an OECD report – which placed the UK as the least affordable childcare overall – found that childcare costs for two children under 5 take up more than half of a woman's average wage in the UK. For women on a low income, childcare costs alone amount to nearly 100% of earnings!

And the situation is not much better for those with older children. Even when factoring in soaring supermarket costs, the average family in the UK spends more on afterschool clubs (necessary as childcare at the end of the working day) than on their weekly food shop; research by the children's charity Coram found after-school club costs have risen by over £800 a year since 2010.

Cost of living

The crisis of childcare, combined with rising living costs, is driving increasing numbers to fight back, especially women. Hundreds of thousands have joined the growing strike wave, notably in the public sector unions where women are the majority. Fighting for above-inflation pay rises is an important step toward alleviating some of the financial burdens on women with children. However, the trade unions can and should go much further, incorporating demands for genuine flexible working and a 32-hour week without loss of pay as a starting point.

In the economic boom following the Second World War, capitalism was forced to give some concessions, under pressure from the working class. For example, council-run nurseries were established, albeit on a limited basis, and maternity rights were extended. These measures reduced some of the burdens of raising a family and allowed for greater participation of women in the workplace and in the trade unions.

The capitalist class has persisted in clawing back these limited reforms



NEU strikers 1 February PHOTO: PAUL MATTHEWSON



Access to free, high-quality, community-run childcare should be extended to all ages to meet the needs of all

since, in an effort to maintain and boost profits. Services established as public services have been privatised. Those not deemed profitable enough closed down.

Today capitalism faces a new, deepening crisis, and with it, worker shortages and a childcare crisis. Consequently, increased pressure is being placed on individual families to fill the gaps left by a failing childcare system, with women feeling the strain sharply. The number of women having to leave work to look after the family has risen by 5% in the past year, a reversal of the trend of the last three decades, according to figures from the Office for National Statistics.

Under pressure of the childcare crisis, the Tories have been floating some changes to provision – but what is on offer amounts to tinkering round the edges. It will come nowhere near meeting parents' needs, and will be without sufficient funding to expand provision.

Labour's policies for breakfast clubs and the right to request flexible working from day one of employment are woefully inadequate. We already know that many flexible working requests are denied, and those who do work flexibly face discrimination as a result. Plus, flexible working often

means working from home, juggling paid work with childcare. While that may suit some women, for others it can be an impossible burden.

Trade union fightback

The trade unions, with over six million members, represent the strongest organised force in society. They, therefore, are best placed to fight for and win gains for workers, including childcare workers, parents and families.

Strong trade union organisation in the workplace is necessary to ensure existing policies are actually implemented and to challenge discrimination – alongside fighting to strengthen the law to give access to genuine flexible working and increased parental leave.

To ensure that those with children can participate, especially women, childcare must be offered across all levels of trade union activity. Workers still have to pay childcare costs when on strike, and unions' strike funds should account for this.

Unions should not limit their fight to workplace issues, but fight for broader political demands that benefit workers. The current free childcare entitlement (between 15 and 30 hours for over-threes and some

two-year-olds during term time) is not sufficient and overcomplicated. Parents are left having to fund up to 20 hours of extra childcare to cover a 37-hour week plus travel and commuting, as well as struggle to find provision outside of term time.

Access to free, high-quality, community-run childcare should be extended to all ages to meet the needs of all, including parents who are shift workers, with care available mornings, evenings, at weekends and during school holidays. Free School Meals should be extended to all children of all ages, as well as free public transport, so no child has to pay to get to school.

We need a political force that fights for these policies and more, that stands on the side of workers and the trade unions, not the bosses. Labour under Keir Starmer has shown that it is not that force. A new mass workers' party is needed to put a socialist alternative.

Capitalism – a system based on generating profits for a few – will continue to drive down living standards for parents, families, and the working class. By transferring responsibility for raising the next generation of workers to individual families, the capitalist class saves billions that it would otherwise spend on providing the care, food and other necessities required to raise a child. This is one of the reasons why the family remains an important ideological and economic unit for 21st-century capitalism.

The unpaid work carried out within the family – primarily by women – leaves the bosses' profits intact. We stand for public provision of quality services, fully funded and democratically controlled. With capitalism in deep crisis, it is clear that we need to fight for fundamental change: for a socialist programme to transform society by taking big banks and businesses into democratic public ownership, so resources can be planned to meet society's needs.

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A&E wait times put disabled people's lives in jeopardy

CAS MIDDLEMAS
BRADFORD SOCIALIST PARTY

Ambulance waiting times spiked to over 90 minutes in December. 18 minutes is the target.

17% of people in the UK are disabled. For them, these problems can be life threatening.

Many disabled people rely on the safety net of emergency care, as their health is more likely to deteriorate rapidly than non-disabled people. Disabled adults are three times more likely to have heart disease and strokes than non-disabled adults.

Lack of resources for disabled people also means they often depend on emergency services, instead of scheduled assistance. These factors make easily accessible emergency care essential for disabled people in their daily lives.

Last year, I waited 27 hours in an A&E corridor until I finally met with a nurse, and was soon sent home.

The sad reality, she told me, was that there were no beds available for someone with my problems anywhere in England. How are healthcare workers supposed to do their jobs when the required resources simply don't exist?

The healthcare budget has increased by an average of 1.5% in cash terms each year since 2010. But that's less than half what is necessary to keep up with demand. Rising inflation and energy prices also affect the NHS budget.

The solution is simple – fully fund the NHS. Nurses cannot do their jobs if they've nowhere for their patients to stay.

They also can't do their jobs if they're being overworked and underpaid. The demands of striking healthcare workers must be met.

This problem is directly caused by austerity, and if we don't solve it, the lives of disabled people, and all of us, are on the line.

Hull has worst A&E – how did we get here?

PHIL CULSHAW
HULL SOCIALIST PARTY

Hull has the worst A&E wait time in the whole country – 57% of patients wait over four hours. Regrettably, it is not until you or a close relative experiences such a circumstance that the reality hits that these figures represent human pain and suffering.

Recently, my close relative, who is in her 80s, suffered septicaemia. Community nurses advised that she needed immediate hospital admission and treatment.

This decision was taken at 6pm on Friday night. However, the ambulance did not arrive until 7am on Saturday morning.

Hull has significant ambulance queues outside its A&E, which has led to lengthy handovers. 39% of patients wait over half an hour. 48% have experienced trolley waits over four hours.

Thankfully, my relative was seen much quicker. However, she now awaits assessment for eventual discharge and community care. The hospital social worker stressed there are limited resources, and discharge may be delayed.

48%

of Hull A&E patients waiting on trolleys for over four hours

Chief Medical Officer at Hull NHS Trust, Makani Purva, explained one problem. Every day throughout winter, an equivalent of eight hospital wards of patients at Hull, that did not require further hospital care, had to wait to be discharged until community support was in place.

And this has a knock-on effect on the speed in which new patients can arrive.

All this highlights the Tories' failure to develop a national plan or invest in community care. And local councils passing on Tory cuts only worsen the problem.

Recognising the human cost of this health and social care crisis should inspire a doubling of effort to fight Tory austerity, to support our health and care workers in their efforts to win better wages, conditions and defend services.

That struggle also needs to include the fight to renationalise health and care services, to drive out the private profiteers, and to enable a democratic integrated health and social care plan based on need. This will require our own political representatives that refuse to implement cuts, and whose goal is the socialist transformation of society.

Tory NHS plans – dangerous and unrealistic

ADAM GILLMAN
READING SOCIALIST PARTY

The Tories have promised thousands more hospital beds and hundreds of new ambulances. But who is going to staff them?

Health workers are not receiving the pay rise they need or deserve. This has led to over 130,000 vacant positions across the NHS.

Moreover, the Tories have unilaterally decided to change 999 response time targets that were put in place to save lives.

In December, the average response time for emergency calls was more than 90 minutes. The Tories say they'll reduce this to 30 minutes. But the official target is actually 18.

A 30-minute wait is dangerous.

The previous targets were put in place to save lives. The Tories are putting people at risk.

The crisis in the NHS is a direct result of years of underfunding, privatisation, and cuts. The Socialist Party believes that healthcare should be based on need, not profit.

We demand a publicly owned and fully funded NHS, under democratic workers' control and management. We call for the renationalisation of the NHS, reversing the Tories' and Labour's damaging privatisation policies, and a substantial increase in investment in our healthcare system.

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Scrap prescription charges in England



PHOTO: CHEMIST-4-U.COM / CC

ELLEN KENYON-PEERS
WALTHAM FOREST SOCIALIST PARTY

One in ten people have been forced to cut back on the medicines they need, according to a recent survey by Healthwatch. Sick and disabled people are avoiding picking up their prescriptions, and asking pharmacists: "What can I do without?"

It's a reflection of the impact of the cost-of-living crisis. In England, prescriptions cost £9.35 per item.

Those with long-term conditions, who use the prepayment certificate system, can also face fines. I spoke to two chronically ill people who had this issue. One had been given incorrect information about free prescription eligibility.

The other person I spoke to couldn't afford to renew their certificate. When they picked up another

prescription, they were charged £50. When they tried to appeal, it was escalated to £100! Adding insult to injury, literally.

Out of the people who have changed their regular prescriptions, 39% said it negatively affected their mental health. 35% said their physical health was impacted.

In addition to exorbitant heating bills, people face a record 16.7% rise in grocery prices. It's a choice of 'heating or eating'.

All this, combined with escalating numbers avoiding making GP appointments because of the associated costs, or refraining from buying over-the-counter medication to alleviate symptoms, will lead to further pressure on A&E, as patients are less able to recover at home.

The survey also showed that women are disproportionately affected – a statistic echoed in the pages of the

Socialist, and our analysis of how cuts impact marginalised groups.

The ongoing privatisation of the NHS is compounded by Britain's reliance on global pharmaceutical giants, which put eye-watering profits above our health and wellbeing.

Vaccine developer Pfizer doubled its profits during the Covid pandemic. NHS spending on medicine has gone up, on average, 5% each year since 2011.

Prescriptions are free in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The Socialist Party fights for them to be free in England too.

And to stop profiteering bosses squeezing cash from our NHS, we fight for the renationalisation of our NHS, and the nationalisation of the pharmaceutical industry, under the democratic control of the working class, and for health workers to be given above-inflation pay rises.



PHOTO: LONDON SP

Crown Prosecution Service reports disproportionate charging of minority groups

JUNE ANGUS
WEST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Black and minority ethnic suspects are more likely to be charged in England and Wales, according to a University of Leeds study commissioned by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). Analysis of nearly 200,000 cases revealed that Black and Asian people, and those from mixed backgrounds, were all more likely to be charged than defendants classed as 'White British'.

These findings are unlikely to surprise most Black and Asian people, who continue to experience unfair treatment across many public services. The report comes in the wake of continuing controversies surrounding the treatment of Black suspects by the police.

In 2022, the death of Chris Kaba at the hands of police officers in Streatham brought thousands to the streets in demonstrations against police brutality. Disproportionate charging decisions are only one part of the wider problem of institutional racism.

In response to the findings, the

CPS has created its Disproportionality Advisory Group (DAG), consisting of academics and other specialists, to identify the causes of what it calls the "unexplained disproportionality" in charging decisions.

But can the CPS, with no democratic checks over its actions except the 'oversight' of its work by a Tory Attorney General, be trusted to tackle racist decision making? Institutional racism is inherent to capitalism - a system that benefits from dividing and exploiting the working class.

Regardless of what the DAG finds, a justice system run in the interests of the few, ultimately serving capitalist interests, cannot be trusted to protect and serve ordinary people.

The judicial system should be democratically run and controlled by working-class people, with elected judges and access to free legal representation for all.

But ultimately, to tackle the reactionary racist ideas that run through institutions like the CPS means fighting to unite the working-class in a struggle to end capitalism and for socialism.



Black Lives Matter protest in 2020 JUDY BEISHON

Protest against the far right in Newquay

ROB ROONEY
CORNWALL SOCIALIST PARTY

A Cornwall-wide mobilisation against the far right hoping to terrorise asylum seekers in Newquay stood firm on 25 February. Patriotic Alternative, a far-right racist group, had been leafleting in Newquay and using social media to whip up tensions against asylum seekers housed in a local hotel. They were outnumbered by a 300-strong counter-protest occupying

the footpath outside the hotel. Socialist Party members had material pointing out why this situation has developed and who is responsible - a Tory government and the Tory-run Cornwall Council who have destroyed Cornwall's infrastructure, cutting £380 million from the budget over ten years. We raised the need for the trade unions to take the threat of the far right gaining support seriously and to fight for jobs, homes and services, and against racism.

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Monthly magazine of the Socialist Party

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Amazon workers strike again: Taking on the billionaire bosses



COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS

On 28 February, the second day of strike action began at Coventry's Amazon warehouse. Socialist Party members went to the picket line at the first shift change, bringing our solidarity and discussing the fight.

Around us, dozens upon dozens of striking workers, in the GMB union, enthusiastically queued to sign up as picketers. They took up hi-vis jackets and placards, and set out to convince their co-workers to back this historic strike.

The organised picket quickly caused a gigantic traffic queue, a symbol of the power of the workers! At the front were picketers trying to convince a lorry driver to join his colleagues in turning around.

It's clear that Amazon's bosses - as well as those of other big businesses - are worried those

few could inspire the rest. The task for unions organising workers in Amazon and across the industry is to turn that fear into reality.

Striking workers today told us they know if they can build up action and spread it, they can win.

They know the billionaires that run big businesses like Amazon can afford to pay them a decent wage and give them decent working conditions, but they're also learning that under capitalism you have to fight for it!

Bringing Amazon workers into coordinated strike action alongside other sections of the working class would strengthen and embolden the fight against low pay, grim working conditions and austerity, and against the idea that bosses and their politicians can make us pay for the crisis of capitalism.

• GMB members at Amazon will strike for a week from 13 March

Outsourced workers in Hounslow appeal to Labour council

UNITE MEMBERS IN LE/1111 HOUSING WORKERS BRANCH

Hestia's striking housing support workers, together with Hounslow parking attendants, held a loud and enthusiastic lobby outside Hounslow council cabinet meeting on 21 February. The workers are calling on the Labour council to intervene positively to resolve their disputes.

The two sets of workers have a lot in common. Both are outsourced labour, both are low paid, both are overworked, and both have been given the runaround by the council. But crucially, both sets of workers are also organised in a fighting union, Unite.

The workers have a lot in common with each other but they have nothing in common with the council's well-heeled cabinet members who, last year, awarded themselves increases in their allowances between 47-56%!

Incredibly, the councillors justified their increase by saying that their allowances were not set at a realistic level and had not been properly updated since 2010. That is exactly what the strikers are saying, whose salaries are a fraction of these councillors' allowances!

The strikers have clearly pointed out this hypocrisy. If the councillors can award themselves such huge increases then they should be prepared to intervene in these disputes to ensure those workers get a fair pay rise. If their private-sector employers refuse to agree to this, both sets of workers should be taken back in-house, on fair pay and with decent conditions.

On 28 February, Unite and other activists protested at the full council meeting, aiming to force the full council to act in the interests of these workers.

Unite and its supporters have written to the council to remind them that Unite is a major funder of Labour and is affiliated to them. As such, Unite has a right to expect that Labour in power should act in the interests of our members.

If the Labour council fails in its task, it will be further evidence that the councillors should be replaced with genuine workers' representatives. Unite should seriously consider funding alternative candidates rather than continuing to fund a party which supports bullying, low-paying bosses.

Socialist Students conference 2023: Who can students vote for at the ballot box?

NOAH EDEN
SHEFFIELD SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Young people have been suffering under the brutal policies of the Tory government over the last decade. At the next general election, whenever it happens, it will not be surprising many students and young workers will vote Labour to get rid of the Tories. For many, this will be the only reason to vote Labour. Not because Keir Starmer's Labour offers up a vision of a better future, simply because they are not the hated Tories. Starmer has already refused to back striking workers, a £15-an-hour minimum wage, and has refused to pledge to abolish tuition fees. A Starmer government would offer little-to-no change from the greed and corruption we currently see in Westminster.

Workers and young people need

an alternative, a party which will back those on strike against the cost-of-living crisis, which will fight for free education and more.

At the Socialist Students conference, coming up on 18 March in Birmingham, Sheffield Socialist Students will be submitting a motion raising the need for a new mass workers' party. A party with genuine socialist policies and one which fights to end the injustices young people face. It's time that young people join with the striking workers to fight and build for a new party and a better future. Discussions and debates on this and other issues, such as how to build a fighting student movement for free education, and how do we tackle sexual harassment on campus, will feature at the conference. If you want to get involved and join the fightback on campus then you should come along.

£14,282 raised at the Socialist Party Congress with more pledges coming in

The marvellous response to the finance appeal at the Socialist Party Congress reflects the confidence of our members in the Socialist Party's ideas and the fight for socialism. At least £14,282 has been pledged, with £5,919 already paid in. All pledges should be paid in by the 31 March.

We appreciate all donations we receive and acknowledge the financial sacrifice they represent. High inflation, low pay and the general cost-of-living crisis affects our members as it does all workers. Can you donate to help fund the fight for socialism as well?

Fund the fightback

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South West	2,653	1,800		147%
Northern	911	750		121%
Wales	2,372	2,300		103%
West Midlands	2,547	2,600		98%
East Midlands	1,218	1,850		66%
London	3,013	4,600		65%
Southern & SE	1,512	2,350		64%
North West	575	1,150		50%
Yorkshire	1,208	2,550		47%
Eastern	264	1,200	22%	
Other	1,969	3,850		51%
TOTAL	18,241	25,00		73%

Why I joined the Socialist Party – to fight against war and for a socialist world



Joe (right) marching on one of the anti-Iraq War demos in 2003 PHOTO: LONDON SP

JOE FATHALLAH
CARDIFF EAST SOCIALIST PARTY

I joined the Socialist Party twenty years ago as a first-year student at the University of Glamorgan. The political situation was dominated by the impending invasion of Iraq. US imperialism aimed to overthrow the rogue Saddam Hussein regime, to regain economic control and political influence in an important region for capitalism. Tony Blair, who spent the 1990s destroying what remained of the Labour Party, converting it into an out-and-out pro-capitalist party, threw in his lot with US president George Bush.

The total death toll of the invasion and consequent occupation is unclear, but some estimates exceed one million. Since the invasion, Iraq has been ruled by a series of corrupt pro-capitalist regimes, offering nothing but poverty and insecurity to working-class people in the region.

My late father was an Iraqi, an engineer from Baghdad, who fled the repression of the Saddam regime to settle in Britain. As a child, I met many Iraqis and heard stories about the horrors of the dictatorship - as well as some who my parents didn't speak about politics with at all! Saddam, while running a repressive police state, did have some base of support among a section of the working and middle classes in and around Baghdad, due to some advancements made in areas such as

health and education, off the back of the country's huge oil wealth.

The world in 2002-03 felt unstable and frightening. Hate and fear was being whipped up against Arabs and Muslims, used by imperialism to justify its adventures in Afghanistan and Iraq. I understood the character of the coming war - a mission to install a compliant regime in Baghdad and guarantee American companies lucrative contracts for 'reconstruction', and access to the oil industry. But I couldn't work out what we could do about it, or what the alternative was.

Soon after arriving at university, I saw a poster advertising a Socialist Students meeting, campaigning against the war in Iraq. The analysis I heard there made sense to me and filled in some gaps I had in my mind. A democratic socialist society, run by and for the working class, could distribute resources where required, as opposed to capitalist wars fighting over access to them.

I started attending local Socialist Party branch meetings and discussing these ideas further. How would socialism work? How can we achieve it? I didn't want to sign on the dotted line until I had confidence in the ideas and the organisation.

I attended the 3 million-strong demonstration against the war in London on 15 February 2003, my first-ever large protest. I felt the huge potential power of the anti-war movement, but how could this power be used? The Socialist Party called for a general strike against the war, and

for the anti-war movement to launch a political party in opposition to the pro-capitalist and pro-war New Labour. Nobody else made these demands, which could have given us victory. At that point I knew that I wanted to join the Socialist Party.

The Socialist Party understood the power of the working class to change society. I became more confident, arguing for these ideas, campaigning on the streets alongside more experienced members, and supporting workers in struggle, such as the firefighters taking strike action at the time.

The anti-war movement failed to stop the war. But the war did expose the nature of capitalism and imperialism, and steel a new generation of class fighters. Some of the members in my branch today weren't born when these events took place and, while I hope they can learn something from my experiences, I'm learning a lot from them too! If you want to fight against war, imperialism and capitalism, join the Socialist Party today!

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Israel-Palestine: Violence escalates with settler rampage - united working class struggle needed

AMNON COHEN

On the night of 26 February, 400 Israeli settlers rampaged through the Palestinian town of Hawara in the West Bank, torching homes and cars, killing one Palestinian and wounding 280 others. Settlers were allowed to continue their rampage for several hours before they were cleared out by the Israeli army. None of the settlers have been charged or even arrested.

This pogrom was organised to avenge the killing of two settlers who were shot driving through the town earlier that day. But the anger of the settlers was compounded by the Netanyahu government's agreement to suspend settlement construction for four months during the Aqaba summit under pressure from US capitalism looking to de-escalate tensions for its own strategic interests.

A member of Netanyahu's coalition Zvika Fogel, the chair of the Knesset's national security committee, said: "I want to see Huwara closed and burnt, that's the only way to achieve deterrence". Similarly the deputy mayor of the Samaria Regional Council (which only represents settlers) said in a Tweet that Hawara should be wiped off the face of the earth: "No more talk of suspending settlement construction. We must return the deterrence immediately, with no mercy," he said. His Tweet was 'liked' by finance minister Bezale Smotrich - who also serves as deputy defence minister with special responsibility for the West Bank.

Ultra nationalists

Smotrich, like national security minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, represents the political wing of the ultra-nationalist settler movement which carried out the pogrom in Hawara. These semi-fascist settler groups have been armed and nurtured by successive Israeli governments, as auxiliary armed units, which can act to terrorise the Palestinians into submission, by carrying out blatantly illegal acts of repression - murders, land seizures and so on - without the Israeli state being implicated in these actions.

Their members have previously carried out the Ibrahim Mosque massacre in 1994, and assassinated Israeli prime minister Rabin the following year. The collapse in support for the traditional capitalist parties, combined with increased polarisation, has created a vacuum where these elements have grown now to 14 seats in the Knesset (Israeli parliament).

Netanyahu is dependent on them for the survival of his coalition. But on the other hand he does not want to antagonise the capitalist class which is mobilising against him. They correctly fear that Netanyahu's government will provoke and plunge Israeli and Palestinian society into the abyss of armed conflict - one which will undermine the capitalists' profits and wipe out their investments. So



A car set on fire by ultra-nationalist settlers PHOTO: OSAMA EID/CC

Netanyahu is being pulled in opposite directions and forced to zig-zag. Hours after the Aqaba summit issued its statement, Netanyahu reneged on the accord and announced that there will be no halt in settlement expansion.

The capitalists have moved billions of shekels abroad, causing a fall in the value of the currency to its lowest price in three years. They are threatening major disinvestment. Ten tech 'unicorns' (companies worth over \$1 billion) are planning to move their operations overseas.

Sections of the Israeli state are moving to oppose the Netanyahu government. The commander of the Israeli police force in Jerusalem refused Ben-Gvir's order to accelerate the demolition of Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem. A series of former governors of the Bank of Israel wrote an open letter saying that the government's 'reforms' will sink the economy.

Recently, Netanyahu's son tweeted that the Shabak - the notorious Israeli secret service, known for the torture of prisoners and brutal repressive practices used against the Palestinians - was plotting a coup against his father. He said that its leaders should be put on trial and thrown in jail for many years. This tweet was rapidly deleted, but illustrates the splits and turmoil among the Israeli ruling capitalist class.

The pogrom in Hawara shows that neither the Israeli army, nor the Palestinian Authority can protect Palestinians from settler rampages. The Palestinian Authority (PA) has been weakened by decades of imprisoning and oppressing the Palestinians, often at the behest of the Israeli Secret Service.

The PA has lost control of the northern towns Jenin and Nablus, where they have been supplanted by local armed militia - the 'Lion's Den'. The new ultra-right Israeli government is undermining the PA even further, starving it of funds and withholding payments to it, while treating it with contempt. The zealots in the Israeli government are destroying the delicately constructed apparatus through which Israeli governments have controlled the West Bank.

The Israeli military recently raided the Lion's Den stronghold of Nablus, killing eleven Palestinians, including four civilians, and wounding over a hundred. The Lion's Den has won popular Palestinian support through its courage in confronting the Israeli military.

It has carried out attacks against settlers and the military, but the pogrom shows that it has no strategy to defend the Palestinian population. Ultimately, the Palestinian masses can only be defended by the mobilisation of the Palestinian masses themselves, reviving the democratic traditions of the First Intifada, but equipped with a socialist programme, including a class appeal to the Israeli working class, and with armed self-defence, under democratic mass community control.

Israeli society in crisis

Israeli society is convulsed in crisis. Tens and now hundreds of thousands of Israelis demonstrate every week against the government's dismembering of the Supreme Court. But what brings the masses onto the streets is not legal or constitutional technicalities, but opposition to what they fear is the transformation of Israel into a despotic theocratic

dictatorship, and to a government of zealots who risk provoking civil war which will engulf society.

But the protest movement is cross-class in character. It is led by capitalist politicians such as Yair Lapid, and army generals such as Bugi Yaalon, who are responsible for decades of brutal repression against the Palestinians. Yair Lapid was Israeli prime minister until December 2022, and his government had no solution to the conflict, continuing the repression of the Palestinians while failing to solve the cost-of-living crisis of Israeli workers. Unable to solve these problems, his government collapsed in just 18 months, paving the way for the current ultra-right government.

The leadership of Lapid and the capitalists, and their programme of defending the elitist and racist Supreme Court, has little attraction to most working-class Israelis, beyond the Tel Aviv tech workers who have enjoyed a relatively comfortable existence. The leadership of the protest movement has no programme, other than a return to the status quo that existed before January - apartheid in the territories and collapsing living standards for the masses in Israel itself.

The leadership has flooded the movement with Israeli flags - setting up a factory to manufacture tens of thousands of them. Their aim is to prove the patriotism of the movement. But the sea of Israeli flags - the symbol of Israeli supremacy and subjugation of the Palestinians - effectively excludes Palestinians, the people who suffer the most from the new government's programme, from the movement against this government. The movement cannot be subservient to capitalist politicians whose only fear is that the new

government will harm their profits.

Israeli nursery and primary school teachers have taken strike action against the erosion of their living standards. Palestinian teachers in the West Bank have been on strike for three weeks, because of the non-payment of the 15% pay rise they were promised.

The Hawara pogrom represents a dangerous escalation in the situation, accelerating the descent into the abyss of civil war. None of the capitalist forces can halt this descent into wholesale bloodshed, because they themselves are at the root of the problem. In Palestinian and Israeli territories, the working class urgently needs to stamp its authority on the struggle.

A struggle is needed to oppose the government and build an independent party and movement of the working class that opposes the capitalist Israeli regime. A party of the working class that defends the rights of all peoples of the area is essential. The CWI stands for the democratic rights of the Palestinian and Israeli peoples and oppose the oppression of all peoples.

We support a struggle against the brutal repression of the Palestinian people and defence of their right to self-determination to establish an independent Palestinian state, and also the defence of the rights of the peoples of Israel to their own state. To achieve this, a united struggle to establish a democratic voluntary socialist confederation of the region is necessary.

Only through such a struggle can the accelerating catastrophe be averted, and democratic rights and decent living standards of all the people of the area be achieved.

The **Committee for a Workers' International (CWI)** is the international socialist organisation which the Socialist Party is affiliated to. The CWI is organised in countries across the planet. We work to unite the working class and oppressed peoples against capitalism, and to fight for a socialist world.
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STRIKE TOGETHER FOR FAIR PAY – FIGHT FOR A WORLD FREE FROM POVERTY AND OPPRESSION

PHOTO: PAUL MATTISSON



KATRINE WILLIAMS
PCS MEMBER

Not only has workers' pay been kept down for decades with year-on-year real-terms pay cuts, but women's pay lags even further behind. Trades Union Congress research shows women earning 15.8% less than men, on a full-time annual basis - equivalent to women spending the first few months of the year working for free. Soaring costs are driving our already low pay down even further. It is no wonder that women workers are so angry.

The oppression of women under capitalism means that the work in sectors where women predominate is often undervalued and underpaid. The pay gap is even wider for women with children. While social attitudes have changed, caring responsibilities still overwhelmingly fall on women who are more likely to be the household's lowest earner.

Over 40% of women work part-time, unable to access affordable childcare. And while those in secure jobs have the right to request flexible working, there is no obligation for an employer to grant changes. Genuine flexible working, with no detriment or discrimination, has to

be fought for by trade unions to help workers juggle caring responsibilities with work.

Not only are women the majority of public sector workers, but we also rely on the services being delivered in our communities. Austerity has cut services to the bone, pushing the burden more and more onto individuals to deliver the support on top of long hours in work. As workers on the frontline, we can see what is needed to deliver the vital services our communities and families need. And it is worth fighting for.

We have seen the willingness to fight in struggles like the equal pay dispute in Glasgow City Council,

where strike action has won hundreds of millions of pounds for low-paid women. Workers recognise that strike action is necessary to force employers to deliver above-inflation pay rises.

Strike wave

Over half of trade union members are women and, especially in the public sector, women have been to the fore in the rising wave of strikes. Many who have never been on strike before are turning out in huge numbers to picket lines and rallies - linking the demands for increased resources and staff with the need to tackle low pay.

Workers' support for the idea of striking together, and the desire to pile pressure onto the bosses and the government, has helped drive our unions to begin coordinating action. We must keep up the pressure to increase the numbers on strike on Budget Day, 15 March, as a step towards a 24-hour general strike.

The determination is there to take on the bosses and the government and win not just our immediate demands, but also to fight for the kind of society we need - a socialist society run to meet the needs of the working-class majority, not to maximise the profits of a few.

WHAT WE STAND FOR: THE SOCIALIST PARTY'S MAIN DEMANDS >>> see column on page 6

