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# the Socialist

Issue 1217

9-15 March 2023

formerly **Militant**

# TORIES OUT

## Unions must meet to prepare

# 24-HR GENERAL STRIKE

## For fully funded, inflation-proof pay rises

### Teacher: why I'm striking on 15 March

STEPHEN  
NEU MEMBER

**O**n 2 March I stood on a picket line with a teacher in her first year of teaching whose rent has gone up by 20%. She is struggling to get by in one of the most expensive cities in Britain. And beside her was a teacher who is retiring at the end of this academic year, and is unlikely to benefit much from an improved pay deal, but is prepared to take a stand for the future of the teaching profession. Both were appalled by the government's refusal to get into talks about funding as well as pay.

Just one reason for striking is the fact that there is a clear correlation between the 20% real-terms pay cut over the last twelve years and the fact that the government is missing its recruitment target for next year by 40%. This will put a strain on everyone and degrade educational standards across the board.

We are not just striking to get a better pay deal for ourselves, but to improve pay, conditions and funding for the whole education system, for education workers and students alike, for next year and beyond.

And it is clear that, far from valuing education and educators, this government looks on teachers with utter disdain.

So, we set up the first-ever picket line at our school and had almost 20 teachers join us. They all sensed that we are in a new phase and that the outcome of this strike could determine the future of the education system in Britain for years to come. There was a defiant mood and plans were made to continue the fight by marching in London on 15 March.

WHERE NEXT AFTER 15 MARCH?

▶▶▶ p3

STRIKE WAVE

▶▶▶ p2-6

TORIES OUT BUT WHAT'S TO REPLACE THEM?

▶▶▶ p12-13





# Royal Mail dispute at crucial point

## SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN THE CWU

The Communication Workers Union (CWU) national leadership has agreed a national joint statement with the Royal Mail Group board, after involvement of the former general secretary of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) Sir Brendan Barber, in talks with ACAS.

The statement followed a significant move by Royal Mail – the removal of CEO Simon Thompson from negotiations.

The joint statement was supposed to move the long-running and extremely bitter dispute forward and bring in more intensive negotiations towards a final national agreement. But in the view of many union reps and activists, the statement did not go far enough, and lot of pressure has been put back onto the local reps in the workplace.

In previous months, Royal Mail pushed ahead with their 'executive action': imposing changes to duty structure and start times, and bringing in new starters on significantly worse terms and conditions, among other things.

The joint agreement was supposed to put a hold on the bosses' actions, instead holding a joint review of what has been forced in, and making no changes to start times or duty structure unless agreed locally. But in practice, bosses are still continuing at pace, with the ink not even dry on the paper.

It seems that despite the CEO being removed from negotiations, he's

still trying to dictate to certain managers to push ahead with his plan to smash the influence of the CWU in the workplace.

Managers were let off the leash in the last few months, told that it's their company to run, which has seen over 300 reps and members suspended and a number sacked. The CWU cannot make any agreement while reps and members are still suspended. All must be reinstated.

The company has also threatened the prospect of going into administration. The CWU leadership has said, at recent meetings with reps and members, that we have got to realise the financial situation the company is in.

But this is a situation created by senior management, giving £600 million to shareholders and huge pay-outs to the senior directors. Now they expect ordinary postal workers to pay. We say, open the books! Show us where the billions have gone.

A clear demand must now be made for Royal Mail to be brought back into public ownership, from the completely corrupt mismanagement which has been taken place to enrich multimillionaires. The CWU should demand that the Labour Party commits now that an incoming Labour government would immediately bring Royal Mail into public ownership, with compensation only where there is proven need.

The postal executive should name a series of dates for industrial action, if there is no clear sign of an acceptable national agreement to meet the aspirations of the membership.



MARTIN REYNOLDS

## Tyneside walkout

Barely a few hours after the national joint statement issued on 2 March, including to find "the most constructive way to work together in local revision activity", management at the Tyneside delivery centre attempted to unilaterally implement the working practice revisions at the heart of the current dispute, and suspend local CWU stewards.

In response, around 1,000 CWU members on the night shift walked out at 2.30am, and were followed by the day shift on Friday morning. The management climbdown was rapid, with the work revisions and suspensions withdrawn. Work was resumed at around 11.30am.

A victory for the CWU, due to rapid collective action of the local reps and members. It's a warning to keep vigilant for wildcat action from management during this period of negotiations.

**NORMAN HALL**

SOUTH TYNE AND WEAR SOCIALIST PARTY

## Leicester rep sacked

CWU members streamed out of the Leicester Meridian mail centre for a gate meeting on 6 March. This followed news that their main union rep, one of around 300 nationally suspended or dismissed on trumped-up charges, has now been sacked.

The joint national statement (see left) says that the disciplinary action taken during the dispute will be independently reviewed, in an effort to "minimise the current tensions across Royal Mail Group workplaces."

The sacking of union reps is a blatant attempt to neuter the effectiveness of the union and, alongside pay and conditions, is a key issue that would need to be resolved before any agreement can be reached. CWU members are concerned that reps are still being sacked even while this 'independent review process' is meant to be taking place.

**STEVE SCORE SPOKE TO LEICESTER CWU REPS**

# Courage and organisation in the fight against the biggest of bosses



COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

**ADAM HARMSWORTH**  
COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

Taking on one of capitalism's biggest employers demands a great deal of courage and organisation. The Amazon strikes in Coventry are impressive events that show both. Well-organised picket lines have dozens of picketers at every shift change. They have blocked lorries and cars to try to convince their co-workers to turn around.

And it's working. Miles of traffic build up as workers stop in their cars and lorries to hear the arguments of the unionised workers. Most of the striking workers weren't even in a union until a few months ago, when spontaneous protests erupted against the 50p-an-hour pay rises.

By the January strike day, GMB membership at the site had grown from 30 to 300, out of a workforce of just over 1000; by the February action it was around 350; after several trucks and cars refused to cross the picket line, it has been reported another 70 joined the union.

On the warehouse floor

conversation is extremely limited and is watched by cameras and managers. On the picket line, workers are able to discuss the horrendous conditions and the impact of low pay.

Every worker now knows about the colleague who was threatened with the sack for being off ill with cancer for too long, and about another called into the manager's office for looking at his phone for five seconds. Everyone knows someone who struggles to pay the bills, or is stuck in debt, or uses a food bank. They know their best chance of changing that right now is by winning against Amazon, which they know can afford to give them £15 an hour and better conditions.

Amazon has responded by sending police up to the picket, by labelling some striking workers as 'no shows,' and organising 'all-hands meetings' at sites across the country, presumably to plan workarounds for the strikes.

It is important to continue the union recruitment drive across the Coventry site, combined with mass meetings of the striking workers, to discuss what next after the

week-long strike, including possible further escalation.

The action could inspire walkouts at other sites, as we saw last summer. Socialist Party members have raised the need for coordinated strike action. The week of action 13-17 March includes Budget Day, when Amazon workers will join 600,000 other workers on strike.

That day could be used as a rallying call for Amazon workers across the country to protest. Further days of national protest, and depot meetings addressed by Coventry strikers, would aid union recruitment and the potential to spread the strike.

Defeating Amazon would be a gigantic step forward for workers at Coventry and for the other 75,000 Amazon workers in Britain.

**Get all the latest union news**

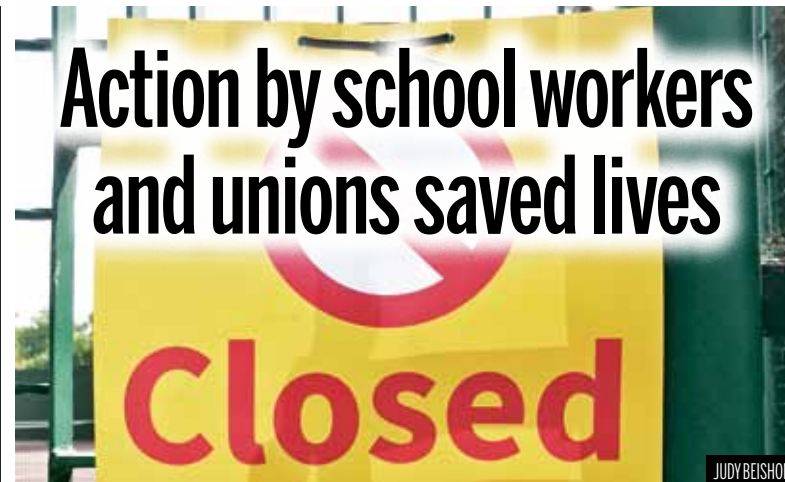
**nationalshop**  
**stewardsnetwork**

with the NSSN bulletin  
[shopstewards.net](http://shopstewards.net)

# Matt Hancock leaks – Tories put profit above safety

100,000 WhatsApp messages from Matt Hancock – the Tory health secretary during the Covid pandemic – have been leaked. Here, two Socialist Party members respond, and explain what key workers and trade unionists were really doing during the crisis.

PIPPA FOWLES/NO10 DOWNING STREET/CC



JUDY BEISHON

**Jane Nellist** was part of the National Education Union (NEU) health and safety organising forum during the pandemic.

Matt Hancock should have remembered the old saying: “Be sure your sins will find you out”. His WhatsApp messages reveal what we knew all along – the absolute contempt that he and others showed education workers and trade unions. We especially came under fire from them during the height of the pandemic.

Then education secretary, Gavin Williamson, states in one WhatsApp message, in reference to a request for PPE for schools: “So they can’t use it as a reason not to open... Some will just want to say they can’t so they have an excuse to avoid having to teach.”

## Scandalous profiteering

School staff, health workers, and others were demanding PPE to protect themselves. We now know the extent of the scandalous profiteering and fraud with PPE contracts.

£4 billion of useless PPE has been destroyed – what an utter waste. That money could have been invested into making schools safer.

These leaks have caused real anger and hurt throughout the education sector for a number of reasons:

- Schools immediately ensured that children of key workers and vulnerable pupils attended school during lockdown
- We set up online learning – even though there were shortages of laptops for pupils
- We ensured that every child

entitled to a free school meal had that delivered

- We checked on pupil’s welfare, and countless other measures to meet their needs, despite government inaction

In another exchange, Matt Hancock states: “What a bunch of absolute arses the teaching unions are”, and Gavin Williamson replies: “I know they really do hate work”.

Trade union health and safety reps and officers supported staff to ensure that risk assessments were in place. We worked with local authorities to ensure that all appropriate measures were taken in schools to safeguard staff and pupils – with adequate cleaning, social distancing and PPE. We also had to fight to ensure that vulnerable staff, and those with vulnerable family members, could work from home, to prevent transmission.

## Huge step

By January 2021, Covid infection rates soared. NEU members took the huge step of using Section 44 of the Employment Act – refusing to work in an unsafe environment. It wasn’t helped that we were opposed by the Tories and the Labour Party led by Keir Starmer.

The fact is, despite the many failures of the government, education workers, supported by their unions, with fully researched, evidence-based guidance, saved many lives. The heart of the government’s policies during the pandemic was never really about protecting communities, but about protecting the profits of the capitalist class. Those responsible must be held to account by the working class.

## Social care worker: ‘I saw people die’

**DAN SMART**  
SOCIAL WORKER IN ADULT CARE

These leaks confirm the Tories’ catastrophic handling of the crisis. And they stress what those working in the social care sector already know, that the Tories put profit above public safety.

As a newly qualified social worker in adult care during the Covid crisis, I saw people who could no longer remain at home, entering care homes only to catch the virus and die shortly after.

### Impossible decision

I remember no tests being available for people with learning disabilities going into supported living. This created the impossible decision of either leaving someone at risk at home, or potentially infecting multiple other vulnerable people. There

was a 175% rise in the number of unexpected deaths of people with learning disabilities and autism from April to May 2020.

Matt Hancock assured us that he had put a ‘protective ring’ around care homes, to shield those most at risk of the virus. But, as shown in the messages, he ignored advice from Chief Medical Officer Chris Witty saying there should be “testing of all [people] going into care homes”.

Bafflingly, Matt Hancock said in private that testing community admissions would “muddy the waters”. Community testing wasn’t introduced until August 2020. In this gap, 17,678 died of Covid in care homes.

Another series of messages shows the Tories’ privileged arrogance. Hancock arranged for the child of Tory cabinet member Jacob Rees-Mogg to get a prioritised Covid test, when there were mass shortages. An aide messaged Hancock to say:

“We’ve got a courier going to their family home tonight... courier will take it straight to the lab. Should have result tomorrow AM.”

These revelations reinforce that the Tories ignored scientific advice which could have saved thousands of lives, failed to plan for social care, prioritised the market and profits over people’s health, and were mired in self-interest and corruption.

### Democratic control

The Socialist Party calls for full public ownership of the social care sector, with democratic control by workers, service users and the community. Armed with scientific advice, these ‘frontline’ experts – carers, social workers, nurses and so on, who were putting their own lives at risk throughout the pandemic to support those most in need – would ensure that decisions are made by and for those they directly affect.

## Bus strike set to grind West Midlands to a halt

**NICK HART**  
BIRMINGHAM SOCIALIST PARTY

The West Midlands is set for a historic bus strike after drivers and mechanics at National Express West Midlands voted by a massive 96% to take all-out continuous strike action, starting on 16 March.

Thanks to the virtual monopoly held by the company over bus

services in Birmingham, the Black Country and Coventry, services are set to grind to a halt when the 3,300 Unite members covered by the ballot walk out.

The same day that the ballot result was announced, the National Express parent company made an announcement of its own – of underlying profits during 2022 of £197.3 million.

**£197.3 million**

**National Express profits**

While profits have doubled, National Express bosses can only find the funds to offer a below-inflation increase of 8% to the workforce, claiming there’s no more money available.

To add insult to injury, following the ballot result, a management communication suggested that workers should “look at their payslip” – as if they needed reminding how little

they earn – and referred them to online counselling!

Speaking to workers on the garage gates, it’s clear that there is a strong mood to strike among workers who have had many years of declining pay and conditions, as the job becomes ever more stressful. Socialist Party members will be right behind them in their fight for a living pay rise, as we are with all workers.









# 'France at a standstill' on 7 March, towards an all-out strike?

Translation of a statement of *Gauche Révolutionnaire*, CWI France, written by **Cécile Rimboud** in advance of the March strikes

Since 19 January, six days of strikes and national demonstrations have brought together millions of workers, young people and pensioners in a formidable struggle against the destruction of pensions. In one month, the question of the total shut-down of the country is being posed. This lightning pace of events shows the power of the workers' movement and of mass strike action. We have the possibility to humiliate President Macron by making him withdraw his pension law.

70% of people are still against retirement at 64. Once again, Macron has tried to take us for fools by telling us that we had "not understood" the reform. Showing his contempt, it is he who has not understood the depth of the anger and frustration that drives the movement. So, the more the government expresses itself on the reform, the more the opposition grows!

It is a very political groundswell, because it carries the underlying desire to end the reign of Macron and all his dirty tricks. The movement has the pension reform as its figurehead, but it is carried by the anger against the whole system - the one that lowers wages, that destroys public services to transform them into markets, and that plunges millions of people into misery.

Record profits are piling up. TotalEnergies has made €19 billion in profits - a record. Exxon made €56 billion in 2021. Engie has made €5.2 billion in revenue. There is enough money for workers to be able to retire at 60 with 37.5 years of service based on the ten highest-earning years, and to hire everywhere where there is a need, to rebuild the hospitals, invest in education, create free public transport, and to increase wages in the face of the rising cost of living!

It is all this that must be expressed in the struggle, and which is indispensable to broaden the movement. The struggle, the strikes, the unions must translate all this into demands. In our workplaces and in our places of study, let's discuss our demands.

The unity of the unions has been a strength from the beginning. Leaders have been pushed to the left by the power of the struggle and Macron's intransigence, right up to this call, supported by six out of ten people, to

"blockade the country" on 7 March. Left leader Mélenchon and others have also called on shopkeepers to close, on young people to strike and to come and demonstrate. The day of strikes and mobilisation is already looking huge.

## How to win?

All the unions need to call very seriously for an increase in strike militancy. Thousands of workers have joined the unions since the beginning of the year, so they can be real activists rather than just members. They should call on every union delegate and representative to talk to workers, to organise workplace assemblies and meetings everywhere to discuss demands, and to convince as many people as possible to take part in the next strike. Specific demands in certain sectors of work are not contrary to the struggle coordinated together, instead, they can allow a debate involving more workers in the struggle.

From 7 March onwards, there should be picket lines everywhere, to discuss, to be visible, to generalise the strike. In Paris, pickets in sectors like education are going to take place in the form of a 'coffee table' in front of schools, an example from which we can draw inspiration: no need to only be in a factory to picket!

And the same goes for students, who are quickly repressed in the event of a police 'blockade', but can set up picket lines like filter road-blocks. It's also an opportunity to have strike funds specific to workplaces so that loss of pay is not an obstacle for anyone, especially workers on low wages. And on the demonstrations, let's march together, in identified contingents, to show our collective strength. So far the demonstrations have been really massive, especially in medium and small towns, but have been characterised by a low level of organisation, with people coming to demonstrate on their own.

## Renewed strikes

Faced with an intransigent but fragile Macron, we need to move up a gear. We have to prepare ourselves for the possibility that he won't give in on 7 March. Some unions have already announced renewed strikes. For example the RATP (public transport workers in Paris) calls for a mobilisation at least on 7 and 8 March; the CGT railway workers' union for a massive movement from the 7 March onwards. This discussion must continue because strikes limited to just



PHOTO: GAUCHE RÉVOLUTIONNAIRE



**The struggle, the strikes, the unions must translate all this into demands**

24 hours have rarely won. The trade union leaderships must already say: "If the pension law is not completely withdrawn on 7 March, then it will be the beginning of a national, renewed strike". This must be openly discussed in strikers' general assemblies.

The level of organisation, discussion and demands of the strike must be increased. Here are the demands that *Gauche Révolutionnaire* proposes to discuss in order to build and broaden the struggle:

- Full retirement at 60, 55 when necessary, after 37.5 years of service
- An immediate increase in wages, which must at least follow the rise in prices, at least €300 immediately for all
- No net income below €1600 a month
- A massive reduction in prices and their subsequent freezing
- Quality employment for all - massive resources for quality public services (health, education, public transport and so on)
- Satisfy the needs of all: expropriation of the capitalists, nationalisation under the control and management of the workers

## Power

An all-out, indefinite strike cannot take place on the simple demand of "withdrawal of the pension reform", even if it is necessary to obtain this withdrawal. Because the general strike is a political movement, it poses a question, which will be in the air

on the 7 March - if the working class can put society on hold, why can't it lead it? A mass movement poses the question of power: who runs society and in whose interests? A general strike's movement alone won't bring all the answers to these questions.

It is also in order to be able to discuss all this that the workers need their own party, which can organise and unify our camp, to discuss a programme to really get rid of the capitalists and put an end to this exploitative society by replacing it with a democratic socialist society.

Yes, we will have to get rid of Macron and all his pack in the service of the capitalists, who are a minority in society and its institutions, and replace them with a workers' government born of the struggles and organisations of the workers' movement, of worker-fighters. "Those who are never talked about and who make France run every day", as France Insoumise's MP Rachel Kéké puts it.

This government will have to remove the control of the capitalists over the economy by nationalising the main sectors such as energy, health, public transport, large-scale distribution, and so on. Democratic control and management by the workers will meet the needs of all, not just the profits of a few. Enough of capitalism and Macron-style governments, let's fight for socialism!

Come and discuss and build the struggle with us!

## Shock turns to anger over horrific Greek rail crash

The pictures of incinerated carriages strewn across the tracks following a head-on train crash outside Tempi, in central Greece, will have shocked everyone who has seen them. In Greece, that shock is turning to anger. Rail unions have made clear that, thanks to enforced cuts and privatisation, such a disaster was always "an accident waiting to happen."

Read more at [socialistworld.net](http://socialistworld.net)

## Nigeria general election

Read reaction and analysis from Democratic Socialist Movement (CWI members in Nigeria) at [socialistnigeria.org](http://socialistnigeria.org)



# 'Jobs, homes and services for all' – our answer to racists in Carlisle and everywhere

**BRENT KENNEDY**  
CARLISLE SOCIALIST PARTY AND  
CHAIR OF CARLISLE AGAINST RACISM

250 people opposed to asylum seekers being housed in Carlisle marched through the city on 4 March. Racists on the march verbally abused and intimidated asylum seekers housed in a hotel. Fortunately, they were politically challenged by trade unionists, socialists and others mobilised by Carlisle Against Racism.

A number of volunteer groups, who help refugees and migrants, had previously met with the police and agreed not to call a counter-protest in order to “deescalate” the situation, and not “give them the publicity they crave”. As if the far right needs an excuse to express racial hatred!

## Free rein

Worse still, they neither invited Carlisle Against Racism to the meeting, nor even let us know about the racist march. When we found out, they asked us and other organisations to respect their decision and stay at home. The Labour parliamentary candidate and councillors announced canvassing in another part



Part of the 'Jobs, homes and services' protest, organised by Carlisle Against Racism. MARTIN POWELL-DAVIES

of town. If it were up to all of them, the racists would have enjoyed all the TV and press publicity without answer or challenge.

The Carlisle Against Racism protest was working-class opposition under the slogan “Jobs, homes, services – not racism”, with chants of “Workers united will never be defeated”.

The local paper reported that some people joined the march organised by the far right because of the cost-of-living crisis. But the most effective way to defend our living standards and public services is through trade union action.

Socialist Party members have stood on the picket lines of all striking

workers. But we've never seen the far right give striking workers support – not that they'd be welcome.

Both local people and refugees are not being housed properly. That's why the Socialist Party fought the bedroom tax. Why we called on the council to requisition empty houses when residents were flooded out.

The government is faced with a working class increasingly united in this strike wave and a mood of solidarity. So the unpopular Tories have a conscious strategy of whipping up racism, and other prejudices against minorities, to shore up their support – diverting attention away from the economic and social mess they have created.

## Labour

Labour is ducking these issues, or even demanding more deportations. Imagine if Carlisle's previous Labour council had done what the Socialist Party demanded – build council homes and refuse to implement the bedroom tax. Instead, when in power locally and nationally, both Labour and the Tories have refused to build the council homes that people need.

By failing to offer a political alternative, Labour has opened up a political vacuum for the far right to fill.

A new mass workers' party – fighting for housing, services and better living standards would undermine the far right's ability to find an audience for their dangerous ideas.

MAGDA EHLERS/CC



## U-turn or not – we can't afford energy bills

**LINDSEY MORGAN**  
SOCIALIST PARTY AND UNITE MEMBER

It's likely that the Tory government will U-turn on its proposal to lift the energy price cap from £2,500 to £3,000. Good news.

With falling wholesale energy prices, record profits for the energy companies, and tumbling support for the government, the Tories are weighing up whether they can get away with another rise.

Not raising the cap is a relief to working-class people. But it still doesn't help those who are already having to choose between a damp and mouldy, cold home or going without meals.

While the £400 discount towards

energy bills was nowhere near enough to protect people from fuel poverty, it provided some cushioning from the extortion. But the government will still scrap it when it ends in April.

## Budget for billionaires

On 15 March, the Tories will announce their budget. As always, it will be a budget for the billionaires. The Tories are attempting to stave off rising workers' struggle, at the same time as keeping their super-rich donors happy.

Labour has promised to save the average household £200 a year on energy bills. But bills have shot up £1,200 in the last year!

Labour is incapable of putting

forward any meaningful proposals, because its main goal is showing the capitalist establishment that it is a safe pair of hands for them.

The Socialist Party argues for the immediate nationalisation of the energy companies, under the democratic control and management of working-class people – the only way to effectively control gas and electricity prices. We can't control what we don't own.

We could plan resources and production. We would be able to ensure a transition to green energy without workers losing jobs.

And we wouldn't give a penny of compensation to the fat cats, whose bank accounts have grown fat on the back of our suffering and exploitation.

## Capitalist profiteering means high food prices and empty shelves

**DAVE CARR**  
NEWHAM AND EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Restricted food supplies and ever-rising food prices in the UK have been blamed on adverse weather conditions due to climate change; war in Ukraine leading to price hikes; global supply chain disruption; labour shortages and disadvantageous Tory-negotiated trade deals.

Underpinning all of these factors is the anarchic capitalist system – which has wrecked the global environment and pitted nation against nation, creating a dog-eat-dog, profit-driven dystopia. Consequently, billions worldwide live in food insecurity and are experiencing a cost-of-living crisis not seen in a generation.

## Turnips

But while UK shoppers search empty supermarket shelves, environment secretary Thérèse Coffey has come up with a simple solution – ‘eat turnips’ instead! This modern-day equivalent of the famous quote “Let them eat cake” is the kind of out-of-touch idiocy which will help hasten the end of the toxic Tory government.

At the recent National Farmers' Union (NFU) conference – once a bedrock of Tory support – delegates booed Coffey after she airily dismissed the current fruit and vegetable shortages as ‘beyond the control’ of the Tory government.

One year ago, Minette Batters,



SMBASE/CC

NFU president, derided the government's “total lack of understanding of how food production works”, its “completely contradictory policies” on farming, and the likelihood of “repeatedly running into crises”, due to the absence of a food production plan.

A food production plan – produced by non-exploited labour, that guarantees plentiful, wholesome, affordable food, while protecting the land against environmental degradation – cannot be provided under either ‘protectionist’ or ‘free trade’ models of the capitalist system.

Ending food insecurity and price volatility means fighting for workers' governments here and internationally, and the implementation of a democratically agreed and organised socialist plan of production.

● Go to [socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk) to read:

- ‘Food and a capitalist Brexit: No trust in Tory deals!’
- ‘Capitalist profiteering and competition – why are shelves empty?’

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# MARCH AND STRIKE TO SAVE OUR NHS



PHOTOS: PAUL MATTSSON

**HOLLY JOHNSTON**  
NURSE AND GMB UNION REP

**W**e know the government could invest properly in health, but over the last decade and more, we've seen it doesn't have the political will to do so. Instead it turns to private-sector providers which have failed the NHS time and time again.

Government policies and the crisis of capitalism have led to growing levels of inequality which have exacerbated the crisis in the NHS. We need emergency funds to make up for the

annual deficit of £35 billion. We need to invest in a fully, publicly owned NHS that guarantees free healthcare for future generations. And we need to pay all workers properly in order to recruit and retain staff.

Part of the fight for the future of the NHS is led by striking NHS staff. We fight for fair pay after years of real-terms pay cuts, but we also strike for the future of the NHS as a whole. At present the health union leaders have paused strikes to enter talks on pay - a pre-condition set by the Tories. There will be discussions around 'productivity savings' and 'efficiencies' which do not fill staff

with confidence. We say any offers must be put to members to vote on whether to accept or reject.

It is likely that the government will play one group of workers against the next, nurses may be offered something different and so on. Although we don't know the details of any offers as yet, staff are beginning to feel that there are attempts to divide the NHS workforce. It's vital we stick together and that unions push for a deal that respects the current 'Agenda for Change' pay scale so all our NHS colleagues are included and no one gets left behind.

Health unions have said strikes

will return with a vengeance should the talks break down. The worry is that the government will delay talks and push through new anti-trade union laws in the meantime - the Strike (Minimum Service Levels) Bill which, if passed, would allow the secretary of state to make regulations setting out the minimum service required in certain sectors during strikes. Unions and workers would be expected to comply with these or face losing protections from being sued or dismissed.

NHS staff, supporters, patients and the public are marching on the 11 March in the 'SOS NHS' national

demonstration. We want to show the government that people are defending the NHS, that we won't back down, and we stand by NHS staff forced to take action. The NHS and its staff have mass public support despite the attempts by the Tories to turn people against them. We need a 24-hour general strike, coordinated with all workers fighting on pay, and a new mass workers' party to fight Tory and Labour attempts to destroy our NHS.

● See 'The Fight for our NHS - new wave of struggle faces new phase of crisis' on pages 8-9

WHAT WE STAND FOR: THE SOCIALIST PARTY'S MAIN DEMANDS >>> see column on page 10-11



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