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the Socialist

Issue 1223

20-26 April 2023

formerly **Militant**

Teachers, nurses, civil servants and more...

STANDING FIRM FOR REAL, FULLY FUNDED PAY RISES



NEU strike guidance p7 // RCN members respond to ballot result p3 // PCS elections p15 PHOTOS: PAUL MATSSON

Back the May Day weekend 'mega-strike'

An electoral
voice that supports
striking workers

Vote TUSC on 4 May

NHS PAY BATTLES: FIGHTING UNION LEADERSHIPS NEEDED

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VOTE FOR WORKING-CLASS FIGHTERS AGAINST AUSTERITY

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NHS PAY BATTLES

Maximum unity, coordinated action, and fighting union leaderships needed

Socialist Party

WHAT WE THINK

The strike wave for a real pay rise is well and truly still on! And so is the fight to save the NHS and all our public services.

The news that Royal College of Nursing (RCN) members have rejected the latest Tory pay offer, despite the leadership's strong recommendation to accept, is an incredible result.

The leadership of what was, throughout most of its 100-year history, a non-strike professional body, has been defied by its members and has now been forced to call more strike action.

This result follows the fantastic four-day strike by junior doctors in the BMA and HCSA – who have now taken seven days of action so far this spring. In these pages, nurses and junior doctors say what they think.

Now the May Day weekend has become another 'mega-strike': as the RCN strikes coincide with more national strike action by teachers in England in the National Education

Union (NEU - see page 7) and civil servants in the PCS (see page 15). Everywhere, nurses and doctors are already demanding that their strikes coordinate in future.

The Unison consultation finished on the same day, with members accepting the pay offer, following a massive propaganda campaign by the right-wing leadership in health. Most Unison members have not been part of the strike action so far, as Unison only managed to get over the Tory anti-democratic turnout thresholds in ambulances and a small number of hospital trusts. Nonetheless, 40,000 members voted to reject – a huge number (see report from Unison's health conference below).

Consultations continue till 28 April in Unite and the GMB, with Unite calling strikes in the Yorkshire Ambulance Trust, and at Guy's and St Thomas's Trust in London, on 1 May, with potentially others to follow.

Confidence

The fight of the nurses and doctors will give confidence to thousands of other workers. Even where a pay deal is accepted, it should not mean those workers are off the battlefield. There is a lot to do to build solidarity with the strikes, to give every assistance to the big numbers of health workers still striking over pay. But there is also a huge fight to continue to wage

to save our NHS and public services from the cutters and privateers.

And there are still new layers potentially entering the struggle. That includes previously unorganised workers: Amazon workers in Coventry are striking again and GMB is balloting at other warehouses.

Importantly, in May, Unison begins a strike ballot of hundreds of thousands of members in local government and schools.

It is essential to strive for maximum unity across trade unions – with coordinated action and with national demonstrations.

Different disputes – in the NHS, schools, universities, postal service and railways – are at different stages. But it is clear, as it has been all through the strike wave, that it is the members that have pushed their leaders to fight and to keep doing so. With a bold leadership, more can be won.

The votes in the RCN and Unison both clearly raise the need for a fighting leadership. It underlines the importance of voting for Socialist Party members and other genuine fighters in the union national executive elections currently taking place in Unison, Unite, the NEU and PCS.

Even the most conservative leaders can be forced to go further than they want to. But in these struggles, a new generation of union activists is cutting its teeth and developing as the fighting leadership needed in the future.



Bristol MIKE LUFF

The next 'mega-strike':

- Thursday 27 April: NEU in England
- Friday 28 April: PCS
- 8pm Sunday 30 April – 8pm Tuesday 2 May: RCN in England
- Tuesday 2 May: NEU in England

Socialist Party candidates for Unison's NEC:

- **Hugo Pierre**, national black members' male seat
- **April Ashley**, national black members' female seat
- **Adrian O'Malley**, national health service general seat
- **Paul Couchman**, national local government male seat
- **David Maples**, national disabled members' general seat
- **Jim McFarlane**, Scotland male seat
- **Mary McCusker**, Scotland female seat
- **Naomi Byron**, Greater London reserved seat
- **Tom Hunt**, East Midlands region male seat

Unison health conference

Steely determination to continue to battle

ADRIAN O'MALLEY
UNISON HEALTH SERVICE GROUP EXECUTIVE, PERSONAL CAPACITY; STANDING FOR NEC NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE GENERAL SEAT, IN THE UNISON ELECTIONS

Unison health conference took place in Bournemouth from 17 April. The background to the conference was the announcement of a three-to-one vote by NHS members to accept a pay deal covering years 2022-23 and 2023-24.

The deal would close down the 2022-23 dispute, with an unconsolidated lump sum starting at £1,665 and a below-inflation pay rise of 5% for 2023-24.

The deal was recommended by the leaders of all the NHS unions except for Unite. However, Socialist Party members on the Health Service Group Executive had argued to reject, and the vote to recommend acceptance was carried by a close vote, 20-15.

On the same day as Unison accepted the deal, the RCN announced that its members had rejected the deal, and reinstated its strike action over the May Day bank holiday.

An emergency motion accepting the deal and planning for the 2024-25 pay year was carried at conference. A critical motion was ruled out, but the debate did reflect members' anger and frustration. The deal was criticised in contributions from delegates during the conference.

Unison General Secretary Christina McAnea responded in her address to conference by saying: "To those who never have anything good to say, stop talking down our union!"

Even delegates who supported the deal found it hard to celebrate. "A great offer? No! What we wanted? No!" said one delegate, who then went on to say we won't get any more from a Tory government. On the contrary, Socialist Party members and many others had campaigned for

reject, because with a determined lead, more could be won from this broken government.

Delegates spoke on the need to support the RCN and BMA in their strikes, and give supportive advice to Unison members who refuse to cross their picket lines.

The 5% rise for 2023-24 was condemned for doing nothing to address low pay and the shortage of staff, in particular nurses.

The main message of conference was to keep up the fight and prepare for future battles on pay.

Conference unanimously agreed to withdraw Unison from the NHS Pay Review Body (PRB – an unelected body of handpicked supposed 'experts') as soon as possible and to negotiate directly with the government on pay. This in itself is a reflection of the pressure from members on the leadership, which has gone along with the PRB for years previously.

Local disputes over the banding of health care assistants and others are spreading across the country.

The right-wing leadership of Unison health is deluded if it thinks a Labour government will come to its aid and deliver decent pay rises for NHS workers. Even in the last couple of days, Starmerite Labour shadow health secretary Wes Streeting has refused to back the RCN strikes.

There is a steely determination among Unison health activists to continue to battle on pay and ensure future ballots are successful. On the SGE, we will be holding the right-wing majority to account. The countdown begins now to next year's pay claim and beyond.

The message of conference is change will have to come from below. The forthcoming NEC elections give members a chance to elect a leadership that is prepared to fight with them.

RCN members respond to ballot result

We've been given no choice

MICHELLE JARRETT-RUECROFT
NURSE PRACTITIONER AND RCN MEMBER

RCN members have once again voiced their anger at the government's below-inflation pay offer by voting to reject the deal. 54% voted against the derisory offer of a one-off two-part non-consolidated payment for 2022-23 and 5% for 2023-24.

Further strike action was immediately announced by the RCN leadership, who advised acceptance of the deal, but have now been pushed by the strength of feeling from the members.

The strike action will run from

8pm on 30 April to 8pm on 2 May, without derogations (agreements with managers to provide cover). This takes the RCN to the end of our lawful strike mandate period, so members are being balloted again so that further action can take place if necessary throughout the spring and summer.

We must put pressure on the government to get back round the table and improve the insulting offer. No healthcare professional wants to strike or put patients at risk, but RCN members feel they have been given no choice and are fighting for the future of the NHS itself.

Nurses need a fighting leadership

HELEN PERRIAM
MENTAL HEALTH NURSE AND RCN MEMBER

The announcement that nurses in England rejected the current pay offer from the Tory government led to celebrations by many. The offer falls well short of a pay rise. It doesn't even bring pay in line with that of 2008, taking into consideration the increase in the cost of living.

Nurses are struggling to get by on the current wage – especially if you are a single-parent family, if you drive as part of a community job, or have no non-social hours payments. This insulting pay offer does nothing to retain already burnt-out staff, or recruit new nurses to the

profession. Even without the level of responsibility, stress, understaffing, and physical and emotional toll nursing takes, everyone should be afforded a dignified wage.

This result shows there is real appetite to fight. We now need the RCN leadership to get a backbone and lead it.

This result should give confidence to nurses that we can win, even when the leadership puts obstacles in our way. We need a leadership with the humanity and determination the nursing workforce has shown. I would urge the leadership to join up with other trade union leaders whose members are also engaged in a struggle.



Kendal MARTIN POWELL-DAVIES

Striking junior doctors speak out



Southampton CATHERINE CLARKE

'We're not backing down'

TOM SHARP
PICKET LINE SUPERVISOR AT ST JAMES'S HOSPITAL, LEEDS, AND ON THE BMA JUNIOR DOCTORS COMMITTEE (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

I remember, in 2010, being a wide-eyed, impressionable 16-year-old, attending a medical school open day. We were told that as doctors we shouldn't expect to be rich, but that we could expect to be comfortable.

I don't come from a wealthy background. Honestly, comfortable sounded all right to me. So I worked hard. As well as a part-time job at a pizza shop, I picked up a voluntary role in my local hospital.

I studied hard. I went through years of study, clinical placements and exams, accumulating tens of thousands of pounds of debt, to come out the other side as a junior doctor. I'd finally made it - I would finally be "comfortable".

Well, here's the punchline - I'm anything but comfortable. In fact, I'm deeply uncomfortable.

I'm uncomfortable with the fact that I worked so hard to secure a

position in a healthcare system that abuses me and my colleagues every single day, that takes us for granted, and which is led by a government that simply couldn't care less.

I'm uncomfortable with the fact that the value of my pay has decreased every year since I became a doctor, that - like everyone - I'm struggling to meet the cost of living.

I'm uncomfortable working in a healthcare system that's haemorrhaging hard-working doctors, who are either heading off to countries that will pay them properly, or else leaving the profession altogether.

I'm uncomfortable with the fact that this is all happening in an NHS that's already bursting at the seams, and where up to 500 patients are needlessly dying every single week.

So far, we haven't even managed to get the government around the negotiating table, but the strikes and demos should send a clear message to our prime minister and health secretary - we're not going anywhere, and we're not backing down.

'Work together to protect what we have'

AICHA
TRAINEE PSYCHIATRIST, CHESTERFIELD

Junior doctors' need to strike goes beyond wanting full pay restoration. On the mental health front line, we are thinly spread to meet unprecedented demands that require a sensitive and in-tune workforce to provide the proper care required. Care that uplifts not only the patient but their loved ones, who often come with stress after waiting so long for help.

As doctors and allied healthcare staff, we are facing endemic burn-out and fatigue, which require our own

remedies and help beyond that of 'resilience training'. On the backdrop of the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis, junior doctors are starting to strain.

We are striking so that our working conditions can change, so that our needs are met, our work environment becomes more attractive to staff, and ultimately we safeguard our NHS, so that it remains open and accessible to all that require help. We are all patients and will all need help from time to time. We all need to work together to protect what we have.



"We sacrificed being away from our families, with no certainty of a career until at least 35, so that we could do the best job we can. No one signed up to watch patients decline, when you know things could be better."

"BMA members can see firsthand what is being done to the NHS and we are fearful. This fight is about pay restoration, but it isn't just about an individual's pay. It's shouting out that it's a worthwhile profession and organisation. It's the whole basis of the NHS and its funding. The NHS has been plundered for years by private companies, and governments of all colours have facilitated it. It's reported that waiting lists are backing up due to strike action, but we see clinics and theatre lists cancelled weekly due to lack of staff or equipment."

"I've never worked less than a 50-hour week in my career."

"It would be great to be able to join pickets with the nurses."

"I really love this job, I want to keep doing this job but I want to be valued for it!"

Thanks to Iain Dalton, Jon Dale, Denise Tooley-Okwonko, Sally Griffiths, Corinthia Ward and Nick Hart

CATHERINE CLARKE, SOUTHAMPTON SOCIALIST PARTY, REPORTS FROM THE PICKET LINE AT SOUTHAMPTON GENERAL HOSPITAL

Newly qualified doctors told us they start working at a pay grade of £14.09 an hour. One doctor came off a 12-hour shift and joined the picket line. He was responsible for five to six wards with 60 to 100 patients. Junior doctors are allowed two half-hour breaks, but rarely take them since their beepers constantly go off.

One doctor informed us that he graduated in a class of 40 medical students. He said that at least ten have moved to Australia, some are in Europe and Canada. Nearly half of his cohort are no longer working in the UK. He said that in Australia the wages are much better and the hours are shorter. Canada has just put out an advert offering four times the wage he is on, with accommodation included.

We talked about how unions must fight for coordinated strike action. We also talked about the preparation of a workers' list of candidates for the general election: we need the Tories out, but Starmer's Labour does not support the NHS strikes.

Corbyn should stand in the next election

- Dave Nellist's letter the Observer wouldn't publish

In its 2 April edition The Observer published an article by Andrew Anthony under the heading, 'Jeremy Corbyn's last stand: should he run and could he win?'

The article included a reference to "when Militant-supporting MPs Dave Nellist and Terry Fields were deselected as Labour candidates in 1992". By using the word 'deselected' - a specific procedure in the Labour Party when local party members have the opportunity to remove their sitting MP - rather than the correct term, which is 'expelled' (by the national party over the heads of the local members), the article is misleading.

Terry and Dave were prominent parliamentary representatives of the mass campaign of non-payment of the poll tax, the critical factor behind the resignation of Margaret Thatcher in November 1990. Terry was actually jailed for 60 days for refusing to pay the tax in solidarity with his working-class constituents who couldn't pay. Labour, under Neil Kinnock, 'opposed' the poll tax verbally but, much like Sir Keir Starmer's 'disagreement' with austerity today, went along with its implementation.

If Andrew Anthony had genuinely forgotten what happened at least a 'progressive' publication like The Observer would print a corrective letter, surely? The late Terry Fields is not here to defend himself but Dave Nellist, a member of the Socialist Party, Militant's successor, and the chair of the Trade Unionist and

Socialist Coalition (TUSC), is. And so Dave sent a letter for The Observer's 9 April edition, setting the record straight but also urging Jeremy to stand as a candidate in the next general election.

But encouraging in any way a bold stand against the capitalist establishment's austerity consensus is a little too much for its 'liberal' media arm. So we are publishing Dave's letter below. Because The Observer wouldn't.

Andrew Anthony is mistaken ('Corbyn's last stand?' Observer, 2 April). The late Liverpool MP Terry Fields and I were not 'deselected' in 1992; the national Labour Party expelled us. The distinction is important.

Like Jeremy Corbyn today, I had, in 1992, the overwhelming support of local Labour members - 500 held a special meeting in Coventry in January 1992 to endorse my candidacy as Independent Labour. In April 1992, we came very close to retaining the seat.

If Jeremy were to hold a similar meeting, I suspect it would be larger, and he, with a much higher profile, would win a subsequent election. If, as I hope, along with even just a couple of unions he initiated a new democratically organised party, I would wager it would be the third largest in the country, with 100,000 members, within one week!



Dave Nellist at the 2015 TUSC election launch PHOTO: PAUL MATTSOON

But the moment won't last forever. Shakespeare was right in Julius Caesar: "There is a tide in the affairs of men. Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune."

According to Anne McKelvey's unnamed Labour source (also in The Observer on 2 April), the next election is currently shaping up to be a choice between "Tories being crap and Labour being a bit less crap". Working people deserve better than that.

Jeremy being the impetus for a new party, rooted in the organisations and communities of the working class, could provide a real alternative at the general election.



Campaigning in this year's Coventry local elections

Young people abandoned by Southampton City Council

Fight for fully funded services - vote for TUSC

CATHERINE CLARKE
SOUTHAMPTON WEST SOCIALIST PARTY

When the Socialist Party does campaign stalls in Southampton city centre, everyone who stops knows there is something terribly wrong in society.

36% of children in Southampton live in poverty. The city is the third (of 64) most deprived local authority in the South East. It has the highest percentage of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), who have social, emotional and mental health needs. And the second highest self-harm admissions of those aged 10-24 years.

It is also the most dangerous city in Hampshire. In 2022, crime was 58% higher than in the whole of Hampshire. Southampton is among the top five most dangerous cities in the UK. The most common crimes are violent and sexual offences. 50% of the population feel unsafe out after dark, according to a council survey.

But what is the Labour-run city council doing to address this social

crisis? For most of the last decade, the city has been led by a Labour administration, passing on Tory cuts.

In 2013, the Labour council voted to close the majority of youth centres, sacking a large proportion of the council's youth workers. Wholesale closure was only taken off the table after a concerted campaign led by the Socialist Party, along with youth workers in trade union Unison.

In 2019, Unison reviewed the state of youth service provision in the UK. It came to the conclusion that 2010 provision should be restored. Formally, councils have a statutory duty to provide youth services "so far as is reasonably practical". Often youth service provision is merged into other services and provided as part of a broad package of educational and social care measures. As a result, real youth work is lost.

When youth services go, benefits to young people and communities are lost. Councils must provide universal, open-access youth services, backed up by the necessary resources, such as qualified staff and a dedicated building.

When Southampton youth services provision was being stripped from the community in 2013, rebel ex-Labour councillors Keith Morrell and Don Thomas put forward an alternative balanced budget for Southampton City Council. They proposed using the council's powers to access borrowing, financed by reserves, to fund the budget deficit and protect all jobs and services in

the city, including fully staffed youth centres. The Labour mayor refused to even hear the budget proposal in the council chamber, despite the city's chief financial officer being of the opinion the proposal was legitimate.

If the council had adopted Keith and Don's defiant stand, and linked up with other councils to do the same, it would have laid the basis for a huge campaign to force

a government U-turn on council spending and restore the money stolen from councils since 2010.

Ten years later, Southampton Socialist Party members are among 17 standing for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC). Campaigning to, among other things:

- Fund school kitchens to provide free meals for all school children including FE colleges in collaboration with ex-Labour (now independent) councillor Barrie Margetts and ex-councillors Keith Morrell and Don Thomas
- Reinstate council-run youth service provision throughout Southampton providing state of the art, fully resourced buildings with professional staff, including mental health professionals, as well as youth workers
- Improve workers' pay and conditions through supporting union strike action. Fight for a £15-an-hour minimum wage
- Campaign to return all our lost services back under council control including social care, pre-school and nursery provision



Catherine campaigning for free school meals PHOTO: NICK CHAFFEY

VOTE TUSC ON 4 MAY

VOTE FOR WORKING-CLASS FIGHTERS AGAINST AUSTERITY

All Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition candidates pledge to refuse to implement Tory cuts in the council chambers, to use councils' powers to set no-cuts, needs-based budgets, and build mass campaigns to win back the resources taken from communities by over a decade of austerity.

In 260 local election contests, and in Leicester and Mansfield where TUSC candidates are standing for mayor, workers and young people have a chance to vote for a 100% anti-austerity socialist candidate. Socialist Party members are taking part in these campaigns alongside other trade unionists, community campaigners, students and more.

Find the TUSC core polices and the full list of TUSC candidates at www.tusc.org.uk. See if you can vote for one of the 260 candidates, and find a local election challenge which you can help take part in.

Why I'm standing: For those angry at the council's inactions

ANTHONY BRACUTI
LEEDS SOCIALIST PARTY

Over the last 13 years of the Tories in power in Westminster, Leeds city council's Labour majority has acted as Tories in red ties. In that time we've had school funding pulled, cuts to road maintenance, questionable housing developments, rubbish piling high, rat epidemics, closing of public swimming pools, and any other number of cost-cutting measures imposed by a Labour council at the request of a Tory government.

We've also had a Labour council ignore the concerns of unions as taxi ranks get destroyed, bin workers get their wages slashed, and other council workers have their working conditions stripped away.

I'm a student at the University of Leeds and a member of the University and Colleges Union (UCU). The

word on the street in my council ward is anger. Anger at the Tories for abusing the state for the benefit of their pals. Anger at the Labour Party for providing no resistance whatsoever. Anger at the landlords that charge through the nose, while providing squalor to live in, at the waste piling up in our streets, and the rats. Anger at the unwanted roadblocks and the pothole-ridden roads. And anger at the council for not dealing with these issues. And yet council tax goes up again!

My friends, neighbours, and colleagues are angry. I'm angry. That's why I go out onto the pickets, both of my own union, and others in the area.

And that's why I've decided to run against the incumbent Labour councillor in Leeds. With enough well-placed and well-directed anger, maybe we can make a difference.



TUSC campaigning in Plymouth



TUSC campaigning for Karen Seymour standing for Mansfield mayor

I'm a striking teacher and I'm standing for TUSC

ALEX MOORE
DISTRICT SECRETARY PLYMOUTH NATIONAL EDUCATION UNION (NEU) (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

I am a teacher and Secretary of Plymouth NEU. We have been striking for a fully funded inflation-proof pay rise because we know school budgets are so stretched after over a decade of underfunding.

Here in Plymouth, both Tory and Labour administrations have passed on £110 million of cuts to local services since 2014. This year alone, Plymouth schools face cuts of £4.5 million (about £150 per child). Special Needs (SEND) places and Teaching Assistants are often the first to be cut. Parents of SEND children are furious that there are not enough places.

We need councillors who will lead a fight to fully fund children's services and we need more than just words. Plymouth Council has £124 million held in reserves. Some of this could be used to stop cuts immediately while mobilising our community in a mass campaign to win the funding we need for future generations.

Every child deserves a place in a nursery. Every child deserves a free school meal. Every child deserves a place in a school that meets their needs.



Sheffield TUSC PHOTO: MICK SUTTER

Why I'm standing: there is a working-class alternative

JOELLE DONALDSON
LEEDS SOCIALIST PARTY AND RMT MEMBER

It has been a difficult period for workers, students and young people. Since 2008, successive governments have dragged people through crisis after crisis, each time taking more from the underprivileged in society. The system we live under is failing and this is forcing the bosses to ramp up their war on the masses. As a worker on the railway and RMT member, I have witnessed the forefront of these attacks as billionaire bosses desperately seek to defeat working-class solidarity. And those who have already been cut to the bone - junior doctors, nurses, care workers, civil service workers, bus drivers and many others - are being told to endure yet another pay cut. As if 15 years of stagnant wages and cuts to public services weren't already enough.

In this position there is not much to be done but to fight back. The

working class is demonstrating its ability to fight and win improvements on pay and conditions, which has sparked fear in the capitalists. But it is my belief in the ability of the working class to secure good housing, childcare, health services and so much more that I am standing as a Socialist Party member as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist (TUSC). The Labour Party is no longer a party of the working class, instead choosing to position itself as a more competent and less regressive version of the Tories.

I feel that to simply reverse the damage done by the Tories would be too small an ambition, yet this is not even close to what is being offered by Labour. We must go further if we are to meet the coming environmental and economic challenges. My aim in standing is to help build a new democratic vehicle for workers to assert their rights to fair living conditions and a future defined by peace instead of catastrophe.

the Socialist formerly Militant

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Editor of the Socialist: Josh Asker
Editorial staff: Scott Jones, Ian Pattison, Paula Mitchell, Mark Best
Circulation manager: Chris Newby

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

Sleazy Sunak faces probe

All my disclosures are declared in the normal way, so says prime minister Rishi Sunak. Parliament's standards commissioner needs some convincing. An investigation has been launched as it emerged Sunak's wife Akshata Murty will be a beneficiary of a policy announced in the Tories' Spring Budget.

Murty is a shareholder in one of six private childminder agencies. So it was great news for her when the government announced a premium for new members of those agencies signing up. A new childminder can be in line to get £600 from the government for signing up. But if they sign up to an agency this figure doubles to £1,200. Why?

Typically, employment agencies charge more for services and pay workers less, they are run for profit after all, and it doesn't come out of thin air. Supply teachers, once employed in-house by local authorities, are now largely sourced through agencies. The major framework for these agencies has a mark-up of around 15% - extracting profits from our school's budgets.

Meanwhile, Britain's childcare remains in crisis. The Spring Budget's

promised limited extra free hours in the future does not address the very real crisis now. Thousands of parents remain unable to afford to return to work. Every week private nurseries go under, leaving parents in the lurch without childcare.

Another dad I got speaking to in the library recently told me how his boy's nursery had closed with less than a week's notice, unable to find staff. His own research informed him that its workers were paid minimum wage. His question was: "Well what did they expect?" We need fully funded, high-quality, flexible, publicly owned childcare for all, with staff paid at least £15 an hour - now.

Sunak is not the first Tory prime minister mired in sleaze, as much as he tries to paint himself as different to his predecessor Boris Johnson. With a net worth of £730 million reported in last May's Sunday Times Rich List, the Sunak-Murty household is likely to appear again in this year's list out next month. How long must Sunak's list of commercial interests be?

Not that there are any doubts in most working-class people's minds about whose interests he is governing in - his own and the rest of the capitalist class.

THOMAS ASHER



Rishi Sunak PHOTO: NUMBER10/CC

Deluded Tories and useless Labour: We need a new party to fight for public services



PHOTO: PAUL MATTSSON

"Overall our public services are in good shape", according to Conservative Party chair, Greg Hands. "Are you joking?" was the retort from LBC radio presenter Andrew Castle.

In figures released recently, one patient waited 65 hours for an ambulance after a category 3 'urgent' call. Once inside the hospital, over 3 in 10 of those visiting A&E in one east London trust waited more than 12 hours to be seen in February.

Another Tory, prime minister Rishi Sunak, was forced to accept there aren't enough Maths teachers to enable his plans to keep all students studying the subject to age 18.

There are 165,000 vacancies in social care and over 1.5 million people have unmet care needs.

Across public services, workers are being forced to strike - for a pay rise to keep up with the rising cost of living, and for the funding needed to save our services from collapse.

Greg wasn't joking. He must be deluded.

We need a party that backs workers on strike defending their pay and our services. Asked by Laura Kuennsberg whether he backs nurses' strikes, Labour's shadow health secretary Wes Streeting responded: "How could I?"

In the next general election we need candidates fighting our corner, for fully funded, inflation-proof pay rises. That's why the Socialist Party is campaigning for a trade union-backed workers' list to stand.

Nationalise energy

The government has announced energy companies have agreed to no longer forcibly fit pre-payment meters... if you're over 85 or have a terminal illness. Everyone else that is struggling to find money to cope with sky-rocketing bills is out of luck! This action comes after the scandal of magistrates issuing warrants en masse, allowing bailiffs to get into people's homes and put in meters.

So when people can't afford to pay, they pull out the key and cut themselves off from their energy supply.

Energy companies have made massive profits and given bumper payouts to shareholders off the backs of thousands of working-class people paying them through the nose. We need to take the energy companies into democratic public ownership, with no compensation given to the fat cats at the top, so we can all heat and light up our homes.

Royal Mail CWU update

As we go to press, the Communication Workers Union (CWU) leadership is starting a consultation process with reps over a potential deal in the Royal Mail dispute. We will have material in next week's paper and on the party website.

Let them eat quiche!



Charles and Camilla have personally chosen a quiche recipe to mark the coronation on 6 May - "perfect for the Coronation Big Lunch", according to Buckingham Palace.

While the rest of us struggle to afford lunch at all, with eggs in particular rocketing in price, an estimated £100 million will be spent on the coronation, according to the 'Operation Golden Orb' committee which is organising the circus.

That's over double what the last one cost in 1953, in today's money.

Of course we're paying for it. That's despite the King having a personal fortune of £600 million! That's enough to pay for a lunch for the reported 13 million people going hungry every day in the UK at the moment.

It's been estimated that Charles has inherited gems and jewellery worth at least £533 million from the queen.

They say never sell off the crown jewels, but starting there would begin to help ease the cost-of-living crisis for the rest of us, and abolishing the monarchy would help even more!



RMT in the Train Operating Companies Some concessions achieved but more can be won

WEST MIDLANDS RMT MEMBER

The railway employers have presented a new 'dispute resolution agreement' to the RMT rail union, in an attempt to bring an end to the long-running Train Operating Companies (TOCs) dispute.

The RMT leadership called off the last two strike days in anticipation of this 'new' set of proposals. However, despite a few small changes since the previous document, it remains a shopping list of our terms and conditions which the employers have been after for decades.

For example, while it seems that the intention to close every ticket office on the network has been deleted, the plans to introduce a new multi-skilled station grade remain, which

will facilitate the future elimination of ticket offices.

While specific mention of Driver-Only Operation has been removed, the bosses' big savings will be realised over coming years as new starters will receive reduced benefits, such as less annual leave and inferior sick pay.

Part one of the two-year proposal is a pay increase of the greater amount of either 5% or £1,750, for 2022-23. Part two is a further 4%, based on erosion of terms and conditions, the heaviest burden of all falling on new starters.

While the leadership can point to the fact that there has clearly been some movement on pay, and that the attacks on terms and conditions can be fought on a company-by-company

basis, taken as a whole, this proposal remains a below-inflation pay deal with very serious strings attached.

General Secretary Mick Lynch has stated in an online members' briefing that the leadership will be seeking feedback from branches and regions before making a decision on what to do next.

However, there is a very real danger that without a fighting lead from the National Executive Committee (NEC) combined with new strike dates, members can become demobilised and after ten months in dispute could look to take the 'least worst option'.

Socialist Party members will argue to reject this offer and prepare for the national strike action necessary to win more. RMT should not settle for any deal which is paid for by future generations of rail workers. Our responsibility is to protect jobs, terms and conditions.



PHOTO: PAUL MATTSSON

RMT fights pension attacks and cuts on London Underground

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN THE RMT ON LONDON UNDERGROUND

RMT members and reps on London Underground are considering our next steps in our dispute to defend jobs, pensions and agreements. London Underground management continues to implement massive cuts, demanded by the Tory government and passed on by the Labour London Mayor Sadiq Khan.

Transport for London (TfL) and the government published their responses to TfL's pension review at the end of March. Both the government and TfL management say they can support transferring the TfL pension fund into the local government pension scheme (LGPS). This would mean tube workers facing increased employee contributions and losing around a third of our pensions, if

retirement is taken at 60. There are many other detriments associated with transferring into the LGPS, including a shift of risk to employees in the event that the pension fund runs into deficit.

The risk to our pensions has driven six days of RMT strike action already, holding management at bay for a year, but now the risks to agreements on terms and conditions and job cuts is taking on a more immediate importance.

Reorganisations across London Underground's engineering departments carry the threat of members being displaced into lower-paid roles, with only time-limited protection of earnings. Train operators have been asked to agree to extensive productivity measures that will casualise working arrangements and cut hundreds of jobs. On stations, management's

plan to cut 600 jobs is proceeding and the number of station closures, due to staff shortages, has exploded.

Further action will inevitably follow. The London Mayor has become nervous. He now says that pension reform, which was originally proposed by a committee he hand-picked and commissioned, is not necessary. But these weasel words are not enough. He must decisively break with the Tory government attacks on tube workers and refuse to go any further with pension attacks. He should also refuse to make further cuts. He has delivered £400 million of cuts already but the government demands another £600 million.

RMT knows which side it is on and will fight to reverse cuts, win a realistic funding arrangement for TfL, and defend members' jobs, pensions and agreements.

Schools strike guidance

Following the massive 98% rejection of the Tories' latest derisory pay offer, teachers in the National Education Union (NEU) in England are taking two more days of national strike action on Thursday 27 April and Tuesday 2 May.

Union members are discussing what to do about students preparing for exams. Socialist Party members argue that if members discuss in their union groups and decide to offer some support to students, then that is their choice. But it should not be up to the schools to call the shots. We publish here an extract from guidance to members issued by Bristol NEU.



PHOTO: PAUL MATTSSON

Striking has already forced the government to meet with us and give an improved offer. However, it's not enough. Continuing the fight will bring other unions on board and keep pressure on the government.

Every member out on a strike day increases the likelihood of you and your colleagues all winning on funding and pay. Every member in work on a strike day undermines this, gives free PR to the government, and makes it less likely we win.

What about the disruption?

An NEU strike causes no more or less disruption than a bank holiday or a coronation!

If the government was serious about the education of children, they would have resolved this dispute by agreeing to properly fund education and pay us what we deserve. Working in education can (and should) be a good, decently paid job! Through action we can win a future where education is properly funded.

On the picket line

One principle of the picket line is to

be visible to the public; so, the NEU will have leaflets for parents, grandparents and carers.

The other aim of a picket line is to ask others not to cross it and not go into work. On these strike days, teachers will ask other teachers, support staff, delivery drivers and anyone else going into school, not to go in that day, to show their support for pay, funding, and their colleagues.

If they ask you not to cross, this means you can choose not to go to work that day. This is your legal right. The law says, "Non-union members who take part in legal, official industrial action have the same rights as union members not to be dismissed as a result of taking action."

You will be treated the same as those on strike, so you will lose a day's pay. Laws about industrial action are designed to confuse us to try and stop us from taking action, so your school might not fully understand either. The NEU will support any member if schools are difficult about this or do not understand the law.

Get all the latest union news...



DEJI OLAYINKA

CWU MEMBER AND SOUTH WEST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Racism in the workplace is a sad reality for many workers. One recent prominent example was the case of Belly Mujinga, a London transport worker, subjected to racist spitting during Covid, who died as a result of the attack. While far less socially acceptable than it was 40 years ago, racism is still an issue and one that is on rise, with increased reporting of racist attacks, not helped by the right-wing 'culture wars' being promoted by the Tories and capitalist media. In a time of economic hardship, the Tories want to set us against each other rather than blame them and the capitalist class for falling living standards, and small racist groupings can try to make headway, recently trying to mobilise people against migrants in hotels, for example.

It was therefore great to see, last November, that the Trades Union Congress (TUC) launched an anti-racism network with the aim to "agitate, educate and organise anti-racist activists, nationally". Alongside this it announced its Anti-racism Manifesto and held a conference to help explore ideas for the future of the network.

Workplace practices

In the manifesto, the TUC calls on "employers [to] monitor and review their recruitment, retention and employment practices". But we can't trust the bosses on this. As we argue in the Socialist Party's Black Workers' Charter, unions should push for their own oversight of all work practices, with their own objective and transparent criteria to be used, giving elected reps more power in challenging discrimination.

One point is the aim "to monitor cases, to tackle race discrimination". That's good, but trade unions shouldn't just monitor these cases, workers' organisations should have a say in the investigation and disciplinary process to ensure justice and the right protections are achieved, and run their own, democratically convened, investigations where necessary.

The TUC pledges to campaign for mandatory race pay-gap reporting is a positive step towards fighting the racist impacts of capitalist crisis. Statistics show that Bangladeshi (33%), Pakistani (29%) and Black (25%) workers are more likely to be earning below a living wage than white workers (20%). And as workers in the UK from migrant backgrounds are disproportionately likely to be working in lower-paid sectors, that promise must also be joined with a campaign for inflation-proof pay rises, as well as a minimum wage of at least £15 an hour now, rather than the TUC's current 2030 deadline.

Representation

While their call to increase the 'representation' of Black workers at all levels of union structures is welcome, it's important that these leaders truly represent the interests of, and be democratically accountable to, Black workers. As we see with Tory MPs like Kemi Badenoch and Priti Patel, merely being of the same race as oppressed people doesn't mean you'll fight for an anti-racist programme. As part of maintaining the link with those they represent, all elected officials should receive a worker's wage.

REPRESENTING BLACK WORKERS AND COMBATING RACISM NEED A FIGHTING TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

People are most attracted to trade unions when they are seen to be fighting on their side, and trade unions can support our fight in many areas. A fighting, campaigning trade union will attract Black workers. For example, the Unite campaign to save bus routes in London benefits Black and migrant workers most, because those cuts are more likely to be in their neighbourhoods, and they are more likely to be both working on the buses and using them.

Collective action

There have been countless cases where discrimination against a single union member has been taken up collectively by their fellow workers, through action up to and including striking. For example in 2019, Royal Mail workers in the Communication Workers Union walked out at the Bootle and Seaforth delivery office, followed by solidarity action in Cheshire, against the racist abuse of a Muslim worker by a manager. By taking up these cases in a collective way, unions can attract those already fighting against oppression. These cases also demonstrate to people that fighting against oppression isn't just the responsibility of the oppressed, but that a united working-class movement is much more powerful than an individualist or separatist one.



People are most attracted to trade unions when they are seen to be fighting on their side, and trade unions can support our fight in many areas. A fighting, campaigning trade union will attract Black workers

Shared struggle in unions can unite the working class, as was seen in the Smithfields Tar Heel factory strike in 2006 in North Carolina, USA. Latino, Black and white workers recognised their shared interests and engaged in union action against the firing of Latino employees. That cut across the divisive racist narratives created by their real enemy, the bosses.

Trade unions and communities

While many trade union members were at the mass Black Lives Matter protests in 2020, their union banners were not. That was a missed opportunity which the TUC anti-racism network could help correct. Unfortunately, except for a few demands related to public policy and the hostile environment, the TUC manifesto



PHOTO: PAUL MATTHEWSON

Fighting racism in the workplace

- We demand that the trade union movement fights against the racism which remains endemic in our workplaces
- Job security – no forced redundancies. Trade union action to fight any job losses and cuts in the workforce
- End the race pay gap. A Trades Union Congress (TUC) study found that black workers with the same qualifications as other workers are more likely to be employed at lower rates of pay. For an equal rate of pay for the job
- Fair reporting systems, free from judgement. Any type of racial abuse, verbal or physical, needs to

be reported and acted on by management immediately. All incidents must be recorded, and the log of incidents to be reviewed by elected shop stewards and the trade unions. Regular public data must be made available showing the number of staff experiencing grievances, or facing disciplinary by ethnicity

- All workforces to organise anti-racism training for all staff, and mandatory 'unconscious bias' training for managers – overseen by elected shop stewards and trade unions
- Ensure election of equality officers in trade union branches
- Trade union oversight

over the recruitment and promotion process

- Defend the right to protest. Scrap the anti-trade union laws and the anti-democratic legislation

Taken from the Socialist Party's Black Workers' Charter: A programme to fight racism published in February 2021 – scan the QR code below to see the full charter



doesn't advocate enough for trade unions to use their organising power to support campaigns for justice outside of the workplace. Their plan for "building and improving links between our trade unions and Black communities" should have a wider purpose than only making "recruitment practices more relevant to Black workers". The foreword of the manifesto refers to how trade unions supported the Stephen Lawrence campaign (see page 10), but that focus should have continued into the manifesto.

The trade union movement has a long history of solidarity action. As part of a campaign against slavery in 1862, Lancashire mill workers refused to accept cotton that had been picked by US slaves. They did this despite mass unemployment and poverty because, as one London trade union stated, "The cause of labour and liberty is one all over the world".



The TUC and unions should now take steps towards a new mass workers' party

The TUC should coordinate and support local trades councils and union branches to help them engage with communities and support local campaigns. But that doesn't mean we should just wait for the TUC to do these things: Socialist Party members are active in our trade union branches and local trades councils, organising and advocating for these actions at all levels of the trade union movement.

For example, following the recent attack on a Black girl outside her school in Surrey, Socialist Party members in Surrey Unison branch argued for a meeting to develop a united front against racism and discrimination, which was also then raised at Surrey trades council.

Opposing the far right - jobs and homes, not racism

By bringing together working-class people in a shared struggle against bosses, trade unions are in a unique position to counteract the racist narratives that the far-right attempt to spread. This was seen in the Lindsey Oil Refinery dispute in 2009 when workers were faced with being laid off and replaced by lower-paid Italian workers. This was because of the European Union posted workers directive which allowed bosses in one country to hire EU migrant workers on the lower wages of their home country. The British National Party used this as an opportunity to leaflet outside the workplace spreading the racist idea that it was the Italian workers that were the problem. But trade

union activists in the GMB, including Socialist Party members, were able to cut across this with a fight for jobs and rights for both sets of workers.

The TUC should act on the "jobs and homes, not racism" campaign agreed at the 2018 TUC Congress, proposed in a resolution moved by Socialist Party members. We then produced a model motion for union branches which argued: "If the trade unions mobilised with energy and with clear demands to fight for jobs and homes and to kick out the Tories, we'd have hundreds of thousands on the streets and could cut across the appeal of far-right leaders." This approach would have the potential to mobilise much greater numbers than those that attended the recent TUC/Stand up to Racism demonstrations on UN anti-racism day.

In the context of the mobilisation of the Democratic Football Lads Alliance (DFLA) in the late 2010s, the motion also said that branches should act to get "workers taking all legal steps (up to and including strike action) to disrupt all attempts to organise for the purposes of extending the rhetoric of the DFLA or any similar organisation."

Now, in the face of a historic cost-of-living crisis, such a class appeal is even more important. As the recent protests and violent attacks at hotels with migrants have showed, small racist groups are attempting to attract people living in poverty and hit hard by the cost-of-living crisis, struggling in poor, expensive housing, to reactionary, racist and xenophobic ideas. Just as anti-Muslim ideas were raised by the main capitalist parties, including Tony Blair's New Labour, to justify the invasion of Iraq twenty years ago, today anti-migrant hate has been spread in a desperate attempt to save the Tory party from its crisis.

If unions formed links with existing networks and groups on a local level, including local Black Lives Matter groups and community organisations, it would help facilitate fast and large mobilisations when necessary. Trade unions should offer and organise for safe stewarding for counter-protests against the far right.

Socialist alternative needed

Capitalist politicians will continue to whip up racism in the future so the TUC anti-racism network must not limit itself to reacting against racism but fight to end it. This can only be done with socialist policies, on pay, jobs, homes, services, renationalisation of services, and so on.

Many of the small numbers of working-class people who are attracted to far-right ideas are alienated by austerity, downtrodden by capitalism, and in reality are crying out for an 'anti-establishment' alternative.

Jeremy Corbyn's politics at least began to give people an alternative to immiserating austerity, a programme "for the many" that could begin to unite working-class people and undercut support for the far right. But now, Keir Starmer's New Labour is wiping out every trace of that in the Labour Party. Starmer says there is "not a great deal between the major parties on immigration". The TUC and unions should now take steps towards a new mass workers' party with a socialist programme to end capitalism and racism. That should start with backing Corbyn to stand, along with other banned Labour candidates and trade unionists, as part of a workers' list of candidates for the next general election.

Stephen Lawrence's racist murder 30 years on – what's changed?

ISAI MARIJERLA

SOCIALIST PARTY BLACK AND ASIAN GROUP

30 years ago, on 22 April 1993, Stephen Lawrence, a Black 18 year-old waiting for a bus in south east London, was brutally murdered by five thugs in a racially motivated attack.

Some events spark mass movements, like the killing of George Floyd in the US in 2020 reignited the Black Lives Matter movement globally. Similarly, Stephen Lawrence's murder was the straw that broke the camel's back. There was an uproar of mass anger and demands for justice. The anti-racist movement that took place following his death exposed capitalism's institutionalised racism.

Stephen Lawrence had the ambition to become an architect but his life was unfairly cut short. He was the fourth person to be murdered because of his race in the area in two years.

These attacks were correctly seen to be closely linked to the British National Party (BNP)'s divisive campaigns that saw an increase in racism in the area. Its headquarters were near Welling, south East London, and they were actively encouraging racist attacks.

There was a growing mood to fight the racist BNP, and two weeks after Stephen's murder a demo was organised, demanding the ending of racist murders and the closure of the BNP headquarters. The Socialist Party, through the Youth against Racism in Europe (YRE) campaign, co-organised the demo along with Panther UK, a socialist Black organisation. 8,000 people of all backgrounds took part in the demo that marched past the BNP headquarters. A few months later, YRE, the Anti-Nazi League, other organisations and trade unions called another march. Nearly 60,000 took part.

The demonstrations and campaigns by the community, anti-racist activists, socialists and trade unionists forced a defeat of the BNP activities.

The YRE also organised community defence campaigns, and we launched a 'jobs, homes, not racism' campaign to cut across the divisive rhetoric of the far-right. We also campaigned for more youth centres and for real opportunities for young people of all backgrounds.

The BNP's only national public activity – a paper sale in Tower Hamlets, east London – was closed down and they lost their only councillor at that time. Within two years the BNP's headquarters had been shut.



There was a growing mood to fight the racist BNP and two weeks after Stephen's murder a demo was organised, demanding the ending of racist murders and the closure of the BNP headquarters

There have been multiple inquiries into Stephen's murder that resulted in no convictions. Under pressure, including from the mass movement, in 1997 a public inquiry was launched by the newly elected Labour government, led by retired High Court judge Sir William MacPherson. 88 witnesses and over 100,000 pages of statements and documents were heard as evidence.

Youth Against Racism in Europe (YRE) and Panther platform in Welling campaign to drive the racists out after the murder of Stephen Lawrence
PHOTO: R. NEWTON

The report concluded that Stephen was let down by the institutions – that there was a "combination of professional incompetence, institutional racism and a failure of leadership".

It took until 19 years after his death for two of the thugs to be found guilty and sentenced to life imprisonment.

The MacPherson report of 350 pages ended with 70 recommendations. Some of those recommendations were on improving the community's confidence in the police force, recruiting more Black and Asian police officers, and the overall elimination of racist prejudice and disadvantage. Also to promote fairness in all aspects of policing.

According to the Home Office, at its 10th anniversary, 67 of the 70 recommendations have been implemented. But racism, particularly within the police institutions, is still very alive.

The gap between Black and white adults' confidence in the fairness of policing is persistent and has widened in recent years. Stop and search is used more disproportionately against Black people now than it was two decades ago. There are many more examples of racism that affect the lives of Black and Asian people in the UK.

30 years on, there has been various reports and inquiries with any number of recommendations: the Race Disparity Audit, the Lammy Review, the McGregor-Smith Review, the Windrush Lessons Learned Review, and so on. But since Stephen's killing, nothing has fundamentally changed.

There have been more and more examples of hate crimes, racist killings and police brutality. In 2021-22, the number of racist hate crimes exceeded 100,000 for the first time. Police forces recorded a total of 155,841 hate crimes in the year ending March 2022 – up 26% from the previous 12 months.



As long as capitalism exists, so does the fight against racism. The central point for socialists is that to end racism, we need a mass movement armed with a socialist programme that meets the needs of all, so that we can ultimately end all oppressions

Instead of addressing these issues, the government is looking at ways to reverse even the small gains made through the MacPherson inquiry. Ministers are pushing police to deal with fewer 'non-crime hate incidents' and for the police to record



Stephen Lawrence
PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS/CC

fewer hate crimes. This is part of Suella Braverman's 'common sense policing' campaign. This will mean that racist comments and actions that are deemed 'non-threatening' will be allowed.

At a time when more actions are needed to fight racism, the government is renewing its efforts to create an acceptable level of racism. Racism is used as a tool by the bosses and right-wing politicians to attempt to divide communities and encourage working-class people to blame each other rather than the capitalist system.

The capitalist system is failing. We can't trust right-wing governments or the police to fight racism. No number of recommendations can solve the underlying crisis that exists within this system. There are already more high-profile Black killings that are being investigated, including at the hands of the police, like Chris Kaba and Oladeji Omishore.

No racist comment or remark can be tolerated. Socialists and trade unionists played a key role to get justice in defeating the BNP and in the fight against racist killings in the aftermath of Stephen Lawrence's murder. The Socialist Party has continuously campaigned for the trade union movement to be the backbone of an anti-racism campaign to defeat the government's divisive policies.

As long as capitalism exists, so must the fight against racism. The central point for socialists is that to end racism, we need a mass movement armed with a socialist programme. A programme that meets the needs of all, so that we can ultimately end all oppressions based on race, gender, sexuality, etc.

We remember the events 30 years ago, we remember Stephen Lawrence, all those who were affected, and all those killed at the hands of the state. We also fight for a society where such events don't take place, that means fighting for socialist change. If you agree, join us.

● *Read more: '30 years since the YRE was launched: How racism and fascism was fought in the 1990s' and 'Met Police Casey review and capitalist institutions' crisis of authority' at socialistparty.org.uk*

Capitalist crisis causes life expectancy to plummet for the poor

JON DALE

SECRETARY, UNITE UNION EM/NG32
NOTTINGHAMSHIRE HEALTH BRANCH
(PERSONAL CAPACITY)

The growing gulf between rich and poor has not only been in wealth in recent years. Life expectancy figures show the gap has widened in health too.

A baby born today can expect to live on average until 81 – just eight weeks longer than in 2011. If the rate of improvement between 1980 and 2011 had continued, life expectancy today would be over 83. That means between 2012 and 2022 about 700,000 people died sooner than they might have.

Covid worsened these figures, but the slowdown in improvement of life expectancy was clear after 2013. Glasgow University research has shown around 335,000 more deaths occurred between 2012 and 2019 than was expected based on previous trends, with the excess greater among men. The Tory-LibDem coalition's vicious austerity cuts to public services and living standards have taken a grim toll.

These figures are not just poorer older people dying younger than better-off older people. Death rates stopped reducing for infants – and rose among 30 to 49-year-olds – from around 2012.

A poor girl in England could expect on average to die 6.8 years younger than a rich girl in 2011, but 7.7 years in 2017. For boys, the gap increased from 9.1 to 9.5 years over the same period. Just six miles separates the most expensive part of Kensington from New Cross Gate in London. Life expectancy for men falls by a shocking three years a mile, from 92 to 74.

'Deaths of despair'

Life expectancy in the US has fallen even more sharply in recent years. 'Deaths of despair', from drugs, alcohol and suicide, have done the most harm. In Scotland, drug deaths have more than doubled in a decade. They are 18 times higher in the poorest 20% of neighbourhoods than the richest. Dundee has the worst drug-death rate in Europe. Drug overdoses have been second only to Covid as the biggest contributor to rising death rates in Scotland over the last four years.

These figures are also worsening in England and Wales, but the rate of drug deaths is nearly four times higher in Scotland. In England, 'deaths of despair' explain one sixth of the life-expectancy gap between the richest 20% and poorest 20% of neighbourhoods.

Income and employment accounted for 83% of the variation between local authorities in life expectancy between 2001 and 2016. And during the 2010s, councils' spending per person was cut by 16% in the richest authorities, but 31% in the poorest.

Unemployment results in poverty, poor diet, and worse mental and physical health. Low-paid work is often physically hard, with poor



working conditions such as dust and fumes, injuries and long-term 'wear and tear' like arthritis and lung disease.

Cold, damp housing, with mould-triggering asthma and other health problems, causes child deaths like two-year-old Awaab Ishak in Rochdale. Air pollution (traffic or industrial) causes deaths, like nine-year-old Ella Kissi-Debrah in south London.

The cheapest foods (heavily marketed by big food companies), lack of safe play and exercise facilities contribute to more obesity, diabetes, heart disease and road accidents. These and other factors shorten the quality of life as well as length – 'disability-free life expectancy' was 64.3 years in south east England but 56.9 years in north east England between 2018-20.

These statistics precede recent huge increases in heating and food prices. Although the minimum wage, pensions and benefits have always been far too low, many more people have suffered this past winter without adequate heating, hot water and food. The resulting ill health and premature deaths will undoubtedly show in future statistics.

Prevention of ill health would be massively helped by decent pay, benefits and pensions, good, well-insulated housing, easily available good-quality food, free safe local exercise facilities and restoration of school playing fields, cutting traffic with good public transport, trade union control of workplace safety and other measures. These and more would be possible in a socialist society, abolishing the rule of profit-driven big business.

The NHS

40% of the burden on the NHS could be preventable through tackling causes of avoidable chronic conditions like obesity and diabetes. Years of underinvestment and outright cuts in the NHS have left it in a critical condition. As the costs of treating ill health from poverty and inequality increase, the NHS has fewer staff and resources to meet these needs.

When it's hard to book a GP appointment or take time off work without losing pay, poorer people are more likely to delay going to the doctor. They are 20% more likely to be diagnosed with cancer at a later stage, when it is more complex and expensive to treat.

Lengthening waiting lists for diagnostic tests mean treatment delays, prolonging immobility so other health problems get worse and shorten life expectancy. GP and hospital services have fewer doctors and other skilled health professionals in poorer areas, despite the need being greater there.

Prevention is always better than cure. Although NHS cuts in general have been severe, public health and its prevention programmes suffered some of the worst cuts. Former Tory Health Secretary Andrew Lansley shifted public health responsibility from the NHS to councils in England in 2012. The Public Health Grant, paid to councils by central government, was cut by 24% in real terms per person between 2015-16 and 2021-22. Public health programmes were pared to the bone – or totally amputated.

This fitted with Tory opposition to the 'nanny state'. Less spent on prevention of smoking or alcohol addiction meant more tax cuts and profits for big business.

Their short-sighted outlook was exposed during the pandemic. Having starved local public health departments of resources to mount effective contact tracing programmes, the Tories splashed out £37 billion on the privatised track-and-trace system – which failed.

Tory cuts to prevention mirror decades of British capitalism's low investment in industry, preferring short-term profits. More far-sighted capitalist commentators are now pointing out the results. Many companies can't recruit enough workers to meet their needs, while workers are off sick long-term waiting for treatment, or retiring early in ill health.

Providing everyone the means to maximise their healthy life needs a mass council housing programme, nationalisation of the food industry and big supermarkets, pumping money back into schools and adult education, nationalised public transport run as a public service, renationalisation of utilities, and rebuilding the NHS. To achieve this will need a mass workers' party and a socialist programme.



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 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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Why I became a socialist

TOM YOUNG
CHESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

I joined The Socialist Party at the start of 2023 after a progression of my political views convinced me that socialism is the best way forward for the people of the world.

For many years now I, like many others, have been looking at the state of our country and of the world, with mounting fear. From the climate crisis, to collapsing public services at home, to the exploitation of workers here and abroad. As living standards have dropped for the working class, there has been an understandable reaction of anger and frustration, which the ruling class and the far right have capitalised on, polarising our politics and turning different sections of our class against one another.

I had searched for ways to improve the situation. I donated money to charities to address the issues I saw around me, and advocated for protections for minority groups. However, it was slowly becoming more and more apparent to me that these efforts were always doomed to fail in a system which prioritises profit over human needs.

Catalysed by the cost-of-living crisis and the wave of strikes, I kept searching and began to read and watch content about socialism, and as I learned more, I became more convinced of the socialist cause. Having understood this, I eventually decided I wanted to get involved in the movement for two primary reasons.

The first is that I hope to help communicate the ideas of socialism and our vision of a better society. I feel that many people know the problems of the system, but not all extend that line of thinking to a socialist conclusion, and too often have their anger misdirected at those they should be class allies with.

The second reason, and what ultimately made me take the plunge, is that it gives me hope. I believe that the socialist transformation of society will make life better for people and that it will bring a brighter future, and I will do what I can to make that transformation a reality.

• See left for what the Socialist Party fights for and if you agree then visit socialistparty.org.uk/join



From London to Santiago, CWI protests at Argentinian embassies in defence of left activists, César Arakaki and Daniel Ruiz



Protest outside Argentinian embassy in Santiago, Chile, on 13 April

Activists from the CWI protested at Argentinian embassies around the world, on 13 April, as part of an international day of action in defence of left activists, César Arakaki (a member of Partido Obrero) and Daniel Ruiz (a member of PSTU).

The action was on the same day as a court hearing convened to rule on the validity of prison sentences handed down to the two comrades in 2017 for participating in a

300,000-strong demonstration in Buenos Aires against government attacks on retirement and pensions (see 'Release Cesar Arakaki and Daniel Ruiz - stop criminalization of protests!' at socialistworld.net).

The harsh sentences of three and six months and three years respectively, for so-called 'public intimidation', were, in reality, an exercise in intimidation by the Argentinian state and an attempt to criminalise protest

Film: Close-Up

A blend of real life and fiction telling the story of working-class resilience and artistic spirit

THEO SHARIEFF

'Close-Up' tells the true story of an unemployed Iranian man, Hossein Sabzian, put on trial for fraud after impersonating the famous Iranian director Mohsen Makhmalbaf, and conning a middle-class family into believing they would star in his new film.

Close-Up's strength is in its blending of real life and fiction. It tells a real-life story. Its cast is entirely made up of the people who were involved in the case - including Hossein Sabzian himself, the family he met, the man he impersonated, the journalist who originally broke the story in the Iranian press, the judge, and the film's director, Abbas Kiarostami. There is no explanation throughout the film as to whether what we're seeing is documentary footage or a re-enactment being played out.

Confusingly, Sabzian denies from the outset that he's a conman. Kiarostami gives Sabzian - a down-trodden, reserved and otherwise voiceless man - the chance to explain to his audience why he did what he did, and more importantly to express his hardship. As the director explicitly explains to Sabzian in the courtroom, the camera is there for Sabzian to explain things that people might find hard to understand or accept.

Close-Up is a film which depicts and expresses the deep importance of art and cinema for ordinary working-class people seeking to deal with the hardships meted out by capitalism. It compassionately tells the story

of a man who, after being thrown into unemployment, is driven to extreme lengths both to escape from the difficult conditions of his life and to fulfil his creative ambitions.

"I am interested in art and film", is the first justification we hear from Sabzian. It explains nothing. But over the course of 90 minutes, we slowly discover what Sabzian really means and the real motives behind the crime he commits. There are the immediate material pressures he faces, including his desperation to provide a gift for his child, as well as to feed himself for just another day.

But there's another reason too. Sabzian feels deeply that Makhmalbaf's films speak for him and the day to day difficulties he faces. "No one wants to hear about them. Then a good man comes along who portrays all my suffering in his films, and I can go see them over and over again. They show the evil faces of those who trade on others, the rich who pay no attention to the simple material needs of the poor."

He describes the desire he has held since childhood to create for himself, but explains that he never had the material means to do so. Impersonation for Sabzian in the end is the closest he is allowed to get to fulfilling his creative ambition.

Because of the film's format, there's no way of knowing for sure outside of the recounting of the events themselves if what is being expressed by the participants is the whole truth. Are they expressing their true thoughts, opinions, and motivations - or are they now performing for us?

It's a question which isn't answered. But when Sabzian speaks, it feels real. Outside of the film it's reported that Sabzian spent the entirety of the small inheritance he received from his mother on a film camera, and dedicated days of his life to writing screenplays which never saw the light of day.

Perhaps the most important part of the trial is when Sabzian explains why he insisted on taking the family he deceived to see Makhmalbaf's most successful film, 'The Cyclist'. "I wanted to tell them: Don't think a director is different from ordinary people. He's one of you." Sabzian and the film both want to challenge any preconceived idea of who in society is capable of creating art.

The film politically doesn't seek to offer ideas as to how the day-to-day economic hardships of working people like Sabzian can be ended. But it highlights the capabilities, passions and creative potential of working-class people, all of which tragically go to waste under capitalism, told through Sabzian's unusual story.

In the final moments of the film, the calm and eloquent Sabzian finds himself able to say very little when he finally meets his hero Makhmalbaf. Close-Up is an extremely moving and thought-provoking film, innovative and ground-breaking in the world of cinema for how it tells Sabzian's story, and touching in its optimism and faith in the resilience and artistic spirit of normal working-class people.

• Produced by Kanoon, 1990. Available to stream online



Obituary: Trevor Grewar 1947-2023



Trevor Grewar (right) with Tony Davison (left) and other Socialist Party members marching in support of Liverpool dockers on strike in the 1990s

MIKE WHALE
HULL SOCIALIST PARTY

It is with great sadness that Hull Socialist Party and Unite activists announce the death of Trevor Grewar after a battle with cancer. Trevor was a stalwart of the Socialist Party in Hull and played a key role in the 1990s and early 2000s keeping Marxist ideas alive in the labour and trade union movement.

He is perhaps remembered most for the legendary political partnership he struck up with Tony Davison which continued until Tony's death in 2021 (see 'Obituary - Tony Davison' at socialistparty.org.uk). Together on the construction sites of east Yorkshire, in the 1980s they would regularly sell 50-60 copies of the Militant newspaper each week. Trevor was blacklisted for his activities and was out of work for a year as a result. When he finally got some compensation for this outrage, Trevor made a substantial donation to the Socialist Party fighting fund.

Trevor was not just an activist. He absorbed Marxist ideas and always approached an issue or problem through a Marxist lens. Many was the patient discussion he had with younger members and activists, and although sometimes Trevor's explanations could be so thorough as to require a comfort break, his words were always well received! It is fair to say that a generation of young trade unionists learned how to be effective in the movement as a direct result of

his guidance. A trademark of Trevor's approach to politics was 'attention to detail! He was a stickler for minutes being correct and methodical in all aspects of his life. This was something that he instilled in younger activists in Unite and the Trades Council. Most recently, Trevor brought this approach to the successful campaign to elect Sharon Graham as general secretary of Unite.

Trevor was much more than a political activist. He was an internationally regarded Karate instructor reaching 2nd Dan Black Belt. It was only an injured shoulder that prevented him going to Japan to learn with the Japanese masters. He was a beloved family man and our thoughts are with his wife Pat, and wider family at this time. But, to Socialist Party members in Hull, Trevor was kindness personified. He always thought of other comrades and their circumstances. Perhaps this is best summed up by an anecdote from Ian Clarke:

"Back in the 1980s when we were in the Young Socialists, a lot of us always used our bikes to get around, Trevor christened us the Bolshevik bike brigade. One night I had my bike stolen on the way to a branch meeting. Days later Trevor turned up on my doorstep with a bike he'd cobbled together."

Trevor leaves a big hole in our lives but we are determined to fight even harder to complete the fight for socialism that Trevor dedicated his life to.

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Usdaw conference

Supermarket bosses raking in the profits – we need to fight back!

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN USDAW

The shop workers' union Usdaw has its Annual Delegates' Meeting (ADM) as many unions are rediscovering the effectiveness of strike action.

While its workers struggle on extremely low pay, Tesco has announced that it expects its retail-adjusted operating profit to remain flat this year - at about £2.49 billion!

In fact, all the 'big four' supermarkets, while seeing profits stall this year, are still hoovering up immense amounts. The Co-op reported operating profits remaining steady at £100 million. Sainsbury's estimates finishing the financial year with pre-tax profits of between £630-£690 million. Morrisons, while seeing a 15% fall, still reported £828 million profits in the year to October 2022.

With the cost of living skyrocketing, Usdaw members working in the low-paid retail sector are not only feeling

the pinch, but are seeing prices rise before our eyes, as our members are tasked with repricing produce. It is therefore vital that Usdaw members use the ADM as an opportunity to fight to join the countless other unions striking for better pay.

Indeed, Usdaw itself has shown what can be achieved when undertaking strike action, as the threatened strike by Tesco distribution members at the end of 2021 forced the employer to give an improved offer without a minute of strike action actually taking place!

Supermarket bosses have begrudgingly had to concede a number of pay increases as the minimum wage has been raised, but there is plenty of scope to demand wages be raised higher still. At last year's ADM, it was agreed that the union leadership should negotiate £12 per hour as an immediate step to £15, although the conference floor unofficially voted unanimously for the

union leadership to pursue £15 an hour when asked by a Socialist Party member from the rostrum.

After a number of bumper years throughout the pandemic, there is certainly scope to negotiate for higher wages which, if backed up with a strategy for industrial action, could see Usdaw members win above-inflation pay offers.

While the supermarket sector, where a majority of Usdaw members are based, remains profitable, a strategy needs to be developed to prevent the rising tide of shop closures and redundancies in retail more generally.

In the aftermath of the collapse of BHS, Usdaw agreed to campaign for struggling companies to be taken into public ownership. Such a strategy would need the political will to carry it through, which is why it's outrageous that Usdaw representatives voted with Keir Starmer at the recent Labour National Executive meeting to block Jeremy Corbyn



Marching on a TUC demo SOCIALIST PARTY

from standing at the next general election as a Labour MP.

A Starmer-led government will not meet the demands of Usdaw members. Tesco's chair John Allan declared last year that Labour is the "only team on the field"; Lord Sainsbury has just made a £2 million donation, having stopped his donations to the party under Corbyn. These facts demonstrate which side

Starmer will be on! This is why Socialist Party members in Usdaw argue for trade unionists to take steps towards building our own political voice, including standing as candidates the next election.

This ADM is an opportunity to hold the union leadership to account, and push for Usdaw to fight alongside other unions to win the above-inflation pay rises our members deserve.

Amazon unionisation grows

Fight to win £15 an hour!



COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

ADAM HARMSWORTH COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

The strike at Amazon's Coventry site 'BHX4' started again on 17 April with renewed enthusiasm and even larger membership, getting ever closer to a majority, since the impressive picket line is probably the best method of recruiting.

The union isn't just growing in Coventry. Five other sites are now preparing to ballot for industrial action, after Coventry strikers visited more Amazon workplaces to build unionisation efforts there.

If the rapid growth in union membership in Coventry is replicated at more sites, we could quickly see thousands of Amazon workers on strike.

Every Amazon workplace is plagued by the same poverty pay, horrendous conditions, and abusive

management that drove BHX4 to strike.

There has been great solidarity from the trade union movement. Thousands of pounds have been donated to Coventry Amazon workers' strike fund from union branches and individuals, and groups from local union branches, including other workers in dispute, have visited the picket line.

Union branches have also been inviting speakers to their meetings to discuss the dispute and how they can help.

In our latest strike bulletin, the

Socialist Party sets out what we think is needed next to build the fight. We're encouraging the new union members to get involved in the branch, attend meetings, discuss tactics on the picket line, take up a role, and help build the structures of the union.

It is important Amazon unions do everything they can to facilitate new activists coming forward. A fighting and democratic trade union will be essential to push Amazon back, and win better pay and conditions against a capitalist giant that has beaten down workers for too long.

national shop stewardsnetwork
2023 NSSN Conference
Saturday 24 June 11am-4.30pm
Conway Hall, London WC1R 4RL
shopstewards.net

FIGHT THE TORY COST-OF-LIVING SQUEEZE AND THEIR ANTI-UNION LAWS!

Month-long strike at St Mungo's homelessness charity



On strike in 2021 PAUL MATTSSON

UNITE HOUSING WORKERS' BRANCH

A month-long strike at St Mungo's homelessness charity starts on Monday 24 April. Workers are struggling to pay the rent, but bosses haven't resolved a pay dispute going back to 2021. 93% voted for strike action.

Dedicated charity workers, who are on the streets helping the homeless every night, have been left with no other choice. Unite the Union balled over 500 workers across southern England, including in London, Bristol, Brighton, Oxford, Bournemouth and Reading.

The workers are fed up with highly paid management at the top, while at the bottom they struggle to make ends meet. Since 2013, the pay of St Mungo's chief executives has spiralled 77%, up from £107,000 to more than £189,000. The homelessness charity won't reveal the salary of the newly appointed CEO, Emma Haddad.

In the last ten years, the pay of senior management has increased by 350%! In stark contrast, over a similar time frame, the real value of the wages of St Mungo's workers has plummeted by 25%. A frontline worker earns around £26,000.

Unite general secretary Sharon Graham said: "St Mungo's workers are dedicated to helping the homeless, but they can't afford to pay their own rent. Our members are ready for a sustained campaign of action and they have Unite's full support. The workers know the charity can afford to give workers a fair pay deal, and Unite is firmly on their side."

The charity bosses imposed a 1.75% increase for 2021, and despite a year of negotiations they have refused to budge, except for an unconsolidated £700 payment. But the charity's total reserves as of 31 March 2022 were almost £15 million, and the latest year-end cash balance was £22.5 million.

Vote for a fighting alternative in the PCS elections

PCS is the union representing government workers in the civil service, public sector and privatised contracts.

Voting papers for the 2023 PCS president and national executive elections were posted out to members on 20 April. These need to be returned in time for the closing date of 11 May. There are also separate online group elections which open on 27 April and close 16 May.

In this year's elections, the ruling 'Democracy Alliance' leadership (made up of the 'Left Unity' and 'PCS Democrats' groupings) face a unified left opposition. The Broad Left Network (BLN), supported by Socialist Party members, and the Independent Left (IL) have agreed to fight the election with a joint platform and slate. The platform includes a genuine plan to escalate the national dispute on pay, jobs and pensions - one capable of winning.

The joint BLN and IL statement and slate

The BLN and IL have a shared view of what needs to be done to win our fight with the Tory government on pay and jobs, and to defend union democracy. We are seeking support for our joint slate around a platform to:

- Support the strikes currently taking place on pay and jobs
- Develop and build a genuine escalating programme of national, targeted and selective strike action to beat the Tory cost-of-living squeeze and the anti-union laws
- Ballot for action short of strikes to maximise the pressure on the government
- Ensure that PCS takes the lead in calling for mass coordinated action
- Campaign for a 'yes' vote in the ballot to renew the union's statutory strike mandate
- Strengthen democracy and accountability in the union, including extending elections to full-time officers and bringing their pay more into line with the members they represent

President: Lloyd, Marion (BEIS)

Vice Presidents: Brittle, Fiona (Scot Gov); Carlsen, Bryan (HSE); Laidlaw, Bev (DWP); Rosser, Jon-Paul (HMRC)

NEC members: Bartlett, Dave (MOJ); Bishell, Tom (DWP); Bowers, Rob (Defence); Brittle, Fiona (Scot Gov); Brown, Alex (NHS Digital); Carlsen, Bryan (HSE); Chown, Josh (Home Office); Clarke, Eleanor (Cabinet Office); Cuckson, Victoria (HMRC); Davies, Jaime (HMRC); Day, Chris (National Archives); Dennis, Alan (DSG); Doyle, Nick (HMRC); Exley, Matt (Culture); Hamer, Chip (Culture); Heemskerk, Rachel (DWP); Johnson, Karen (DLUHC); Jones, David (DLUHC); Laidlaw, Bev (DWP); Lloyd, Marion (BEIS); Marks, Chris (DWP); Menezes-Jackson, Vijay (DWP); Parker, Nick (ACAS); Ritchie, Rob (SSCL); Rosser, Jon-Paul (HMRC); Semple, Dave (DWP); Spencer, Gary (DLUHC); Suter, Paul (DWP); Tweedale, Saorsa-Amatheia (DWP); Young, Colin (DFE)



Marion Lloyd, right, supporting a PCS picket line at BEIS HQ in London in 2019 LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY



PCS members are engaged in targeted strike action, including members at eight passport offices across the UK striking for five weeks. Strikers in Durham told Elaine Brunskill they have members using food banks and on minimum wage. Pictured: Ofgem strikers LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Vote Marion Lloyd for PCS President

Socialist Party member Marion Lloyd received 55 branch nominations for president in this election, from all parts of the union. Marion spoke to the Socialist and explained why she believes PCS members should vote for her and the other BLN and IL candidates.

Why are you standing for president?

We are in the middle of a major dispute with our employer. With inflation at record levels, it's vital we win our 10% claim for 2022 and an inflation-proof increase, at least, for 2023. In our privatised areas, as well as areas of the civil service, many members barely scrape the minimum wage. This is scandalous. We need to do a job of work on this - for proper pay rates so that people can make ends meet.

It is vital we have a leadership which will build our campaign and work with members and reps for a plan capable of winning. We need to elect a leadership that is committed to winning, but that also recognises that we will all need to wage a major battle to win long-term. The BLN and IL candidates are committed to achieving this.

The current leadership's plan has failed.

In 2020, the leadership signed up to the concept of 'national unity' by setting aside the PCS pay claim almost before it had been submitted, letting the government off the hook. In 2021, the union leadership told the government that they were prepared to sell conditions for pay rather than challenge Tory pay restrictions.

In November 2022, having secured a statutory strike mandate by adopting the approach put forward by the BLN, they waited six weeks before taking any action at all - and then only small-scale targeted strikes - and three months before there was a day of national strike action. They have called only three one-day national strikes in six months. The huge gap between each national day of action risks demoralising and confusing members. Many of the brave members struggling on selective action are not clear what the plan is. We need clarity.

Up until 14 April there were no

talks with the employer. Now the Minister for the Cabinet Office has told PCS there will be no improvement at all on 2022's 2% pay rise, and just 4.5 to 5% for 2023.

All through, BLN supporters have argued a clear strategy of escalating national strike action, and of the need to coordinate action with other unions also fighting the cost-of-living crisis. It is essential that this strategy is now implemented. This Tory government is extremely weak and crisis-ridden - with serious and co-ordinated action we can defeat them!

It's time for change. We can win on pay and jobs by seriously escalating the national action, supporting the selective strikers and the levy on members to raise strike funds, balloting for action short of strikes, and changing the union leadership.

I'm standing to work with members and reps to build campaigns on the issues that worry our members most, to inspire confidence and get members involved.

What other issues are of the greatest concern?

Jobs, work pressures, and office closures are shared concerns right across the union. For example, in the DWP management has announced 48 office closures, and work pressures are growing. Where is the campaign of opposition? Members and reps are being left to fight alone and feel isolated and let down. This must stop. Having won in my own area (BEIS - Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy) on this, keeping all the offices open UK-wide and saving hundreds of jobs - including my own - this issue is very close to my heart.

These pressures on our members have consequences. The government's own civil service figures reveal 771,433 sick days last year due to stress and mental health problems. This is a 38% increase on the previous year. We must hold the government to account.

The environment should also be central to our concerns. I would want to see our union fighting for the nationalisation of energy and massive investment needed. We need also to oppose attempts by the employer to cynically use climate change to cut

office space, reduce hard-fought-for conditions, and make our quality of life poorer.

There is no place in our union for discrimination of any sort. I reject all attempts to divide us on the basis of race, gender, disability, sexuality, age and all other forms of oppression. I will fight alongside our LBGTQ+ members for equal rights in the workplace, union and society.

We must develop a campaign around all these issues that everyone can get behind and have confidence in.

What's your position on the local and general elections?

Like many of our members, I want to see people elected who stand on a programme to reverse pay decline and job cuts. I have no faith in the Labour Party under Keir Starmer to do that. It leaves a particularly nasty taste in my mouth to see so many Labour councils implementing cuts, leading to outrageous attacks on their workers.

I will vote for any candidate that stands against austerity and opposes all cuts. In my area that means the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), which is standing in many areas across Britain.

Starmer has driven out every scrap of Jeremy Corbyn's manifesto and even Corbyn himself. I would support Corbyn standing as an independent now that he has been barred from standing for Labour. In my view, that should be part of a process towards trade unionists building our own independent political voice. We need socialist policies.

What other changes would you fight for?

Getting rid of the Tory anti-union laws would be high on my list. In a capitalist system, the dice are heavily loaded against workers. Our ability to join together and take action, to inflict damage on an employer, even things up a bit. The Tory anti-union laws are an obstacle to action - even though they have not stopped the current cost-of-living strikes - and need to be met with serious mass trade union opposition.

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WE NEED SOCIALIST CHANGE TO END CLIMATE CHANGE



PHOTO: JAMES IVENS

MAYA KAUFMAN-IRISH
BRISTOL SOUTH SOCIALIST PARTY

The increasingly catastrophic effects of climate change are impossible to ignore. Globally we are experiencing more extreme weather: storms, wildfires, droughts and flooding. Last summer in England, during one of the hottest days on record, fires broke out in towns and cities, damaging dozens of homes and shops. The London Fire Brigade described it as its busiest day since World War Two. This cannot go on. People are standing up and demanding action against the looming crisis of climate change. It is the polluting capitalist system that is guilty of damaging our planet's environment. To end climate crisis we need real socialist change.

Over the last year, utility companies have recorded record profits - energy and water companies made billions of pounds while ordinary people couldn't afford to heat their homes. We avoid swimming in polluted rivers and oceans, and are subject to smoggy, unhealthy cities. Why should workers be forced to pay for a crisis we did not cause?

Capitalism doesn't care about people, our planet or the climate. As a system it only cares about its ability to continue to make profits for the bosses. Political

representatives who defend and rely on capitalism, like the Tories or the Blairites, will put profit ahead of a planet we can comfortably live on, exploiting workers, with low wages and long hours, and exploiting the planet with extractive, damaging processes. Under capitalism, the bosses will attempt to fund any moves away from fossil fuels with further attacks on the working class, either with 'green austerity', regressive taxes or unemployment.

A socialist society would organise production for people's wants and needs, not what makes a profit for a few. We fight for public ownership of our utilities, services and industries. We want to nationalise under democratic workers' control, the energy companies, the NHS, the banks, the bus and rail companies, the postal service, without compensation to the fat cats who have profited at our expense for years.

With democratic control of the economy, the working class can decide to fully fund our services, provide decent jobs and run industries for the benefit of all, not at the expense of the environment. We could plan society to fund coordinated action across the world to fight climate change and its effects. We could invest in public transport, renewable energy infrastructure and more to help avoid climate catastrophe.

WHAT WE STAND FOR: THE SOCIALIST PARTY'S MAIN DEMANDS ►►► see column on p12

