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the Socialist

Issue 1232

22-28 June 2023

formerly **Militant**

ONE RULE FOR THEM, ANOTHER FOR US



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BOOT THEM ALL OUT!

MILA HUGHES
COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

In December 2021, Boris Johnson told the House of Commons that all gatherings organised in 10 Downing Street ensured that Covid rules and guidance were followed at all times.

These events resulted in 183 fines for raucous boozing and partying, at a time when the rest

of us were told we couldn't see our families and friends. As a result of the Tories putting profit over our health, thousands died. Rather than face the music, Johnson has resigned as an MP, throwing a hand grenade into an already fracturing Tory party as he goes.

The Parliamentary Privileges Committee report, which recommended Johnson be symbolically suspended for 90 days and his parliamentary pass rescinded, was voted through by MPs on Monday 19 June. The report includes details of how he deliberately misled the public, parliament, and how he intimidated cabinet members and individuals involved in internal investigations.

Johnson's resignation letter accused Sunak

of no longer leading "a properly Conservative government", while Tory MPs in the cabinet shot back at Johnson, accusing him of 'mutiny'.

The aftermath of the report shows how truly weak and divided this Tory government is. Rishi Sunak couldn't bring himself to vote either way on the report, alongside 224 other cowardly Tory MPs! 118 Tory MPs voted for Johnson to be punished, while only seven voted against.

These Tory MPs make up a government that is making us pay for the cost-of-living crisis and clamping down on workers fighting back, attacking the right to strike. Split open in multiple ways, the Tories can be beaten if we get organised and fight back.

But working-class people desperate to kick out the Tories and their pro-rich policies won't find an alternative in Keir Starmer's Labour. Starmer has been selling himself to the bosses as a man who will continue to act in their interests, only without the mayhem of Tory infighting. Already in the last few weeks his pledges on climate change investment and childcare have been thrown out because the 'markets' aren't favourable! (See page 4)

We need political representation of the working class to fight back against this rotten system and its rotten representatives in parliament. A new mass workers' party armed with a socialist programme. So we can fight for a world where there isn't one rule for us and another for them.

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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

NSSN conference 2023

Saturday 24 June

Conway Hall, London



Building the strike wave: How workers are fighting back against the cost-of-living squeeze

11am - 1.30pm

Trade union activists from across the movement will contribute to the discussion, including rail workers, postal workers, teachers, nurses and more. Speakers from trade unions affiliated to the NSSN at a national level will introduce the discussion and have the right to reply. So far, confirmed speakers include: NIPSA General Secretary Carmel Gates, BFAWU General Secretary Sarah Woolley, POA General Secretary Steve Gillan, Unite National Lead Officer Onay Kasab, RMT London Transport Regional Organiser Jared Wood, NAPO National Official Annoesjka Valent, GMB Officer Gary Palmer from the victorious #GMBThree (personal capacity), Rob Williams NSSN Chair.



Fighting the Tory anti-union laws

2.30 - 4.30pm

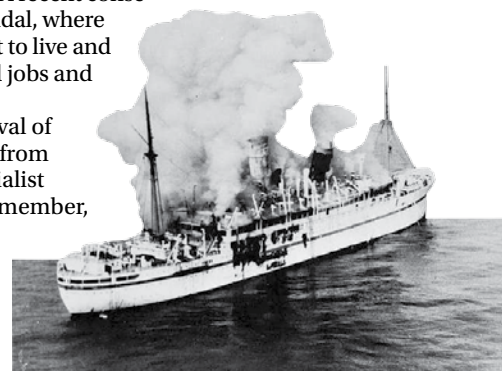
How can the minimum service levels legislation be defeated? The motion printed right, drafted by the NSSN steering committee, will be moved and discussed.
Elections to the steering committee will take place during this session.



Windrush anniversary: 75 years of racism and struggle

Putting up £750,000 to fund Windrush celebrations around the country, the Tories are pushing hypocrisy to new levels. Split on many issues, including on immigration, the Tories are on the one hand desperately signaling 'national unity' celebrations while at the same time extending the scope of the 'hostile environment' for migrants. A recent consequence, the Windrush Scandal, where Black workers with the right to live and work in the UK were denied jobs and medical care.

75 years on from the arrival of the Empire Windrush ship from Jamaica, **Hugo Pierre**, Socialist Party National Committee member, traces the experiences and struggles of Black workers in Britain. You can read Hugo's article in the June 2023 edition of Socialism Today.



Motion: Preparing to take on minimum service levels attacks

This conference/union/branch/trades council recognises the 'Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Bill' is a major attack on trade union rights. Sunak's Conservative government is attempting draconian, undemocratic measures to curtail the right to strike. Coming on the back of four decades of brutal Tory anti-union legislation, from that of Thatcher and Major through to Cameron, Johnson and now Sunak, it is clearly designed to cut across the strike wave across all sectors, rather than tackle the causes of the cost-of-living crisis. This is another crude attempt to shift the blame for inflation onto the working class whereas every worker knows it is the bosses and their class's profiteering, which has created the crisis.

The bill would allow employers to issue a notice to unions setting out who is required to work during a strike. This potentially leaves unions who refuse to comply open to serious financial penalties through sequestration of funds and removes workers' protection from being dismissed for undertaking lawful industrial action.

We believe no individual union or member should be left isolated and the whole of the trade union movement must mobilise - collectively - in defence of workers' rights.

We demand:

- All unions and the TUC urgently call a national Saturday demonstration against the new law
- Keir Starmer pledges an incoming Labour government to reverse fines and other measures taken against any union under the terms of the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act
- All employers refuse to use the provisions of the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act and that a lead in such non-compliance be given by any government, council, fire authority or other employer led by the Labour Party
- If any union is taken to court or worker threatened with dismissal, an emergency demonstration is called and an immediate meeting of the TUC General Council be convened to organise mass co-ordinated strike action, including a 24-hour general strike
- The repeal of all anti-union legislation

We support the rally to be held at TUC Congress in Liverpool on Sunday 10 September lobbying for this programme of action.

SOCIALISM TODAY

Monthly magazine of the Socialist Party

June issue includes...

- After the SNP implosion
- 75 years since Windrush
- Why India is not China
- Does LGBTQ+ equal radical?
- Peter Taaffe on Bernie Sanders

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Trade unions must prepare now for further explosive class battles



This year's NSSN conference comes at a crucial time. Hundreds of trade unionists will discuss and debate what response is needed from the workers' movement to the Tories' latest piece of anti-union legislation, the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Bill. We publish the motion circulated by the NSSN steering committee ahead of the conference (see left).

The strike wave, with scope and scale not seen for a generation, is not abating. Matching the unabating assault on our living standards from rising prices and real-terms pay cuts - the fuel source of the working-class anger being expressed.

The minimum service levels legislation is a desperate attempt by a weak and divided Tory government to curtail strikes.

For an employer to choose to issue a work notice, imposing a minimum level of service outlined by a government minister, would be a provocative act pouring more fuel onto already burning anger. Likely to get royal assent in a matter of weeks, it is possible work notices could be issued on strikes of railway workers, junior doctors or teachers before the autumn. Such a move could be explosive.

RMT general secretary Mick Lynch told a TUC-organised rally outside parliament in May: "We will not obey work notices issued by the employer or issued by the government."

Immediate tasks

The NSSN draft motion outlines the immediate tasks for the trade unions, and anticipates what will be necessary to respond to attacks on unions and workers.

But it's not just the minimum service level bill that has the potential to ignite further eruptions of turmoil. The bitter civil war in the Tories' own ranks, thrust under the spotlight again with the Partygate report, further fuels the instability.

The relentless squeeze on workers' spending power is the core fuel of the strike wave. But the attempts to tame inflation by raising interest rates stacks up further explosive matter too.

Banks are dumping mortgage deals in favour of more expensive ones, only to raise them again days later. 35,000 mortgages will reach the end of their term every week for the rest of the year, with an average additional annual cost under new deals set to be £2,900.

Meanwhile for the government, the cost of servicing the nation's debts continues to grow. It is now higher under Sunak than it was at the



PHOTO: PAUL MATTISSON

time of the Truss-Kwarteng fiasco. The markets aren't ditching British assets as they were in the autumn, but "there is unexploded ordnance in the UK economy", as BBC economics editor Faisal Islam puts it.

There will be no lasting peace for Sunak, the Tories, or Keir Starmer, who is overwhelmingly the most likely to be the next to enter number ten.

Before a general election has even been announced, Labour has rowed back on spending pledges for things such as energy and childcare, all efforts to appease the capitalist markets.

The trade unions will need to defend members from a Starmer-led

government overseeing a further decline in workers' living standards. An electoral challenge to pro-capitalist Labour, even if at this stage it was a relatively small number of workers' candidates backed by the trade unions, would apply working-class pressure on Starmer's Labour.

If even a handful were elected independently of a Starmer-led government, their platform would be a pole of attraction to the inevitable eventual working-class opposition to what will be a government acting in the interests of big business, not working-class people.

Such a stand would be an important step towards re-establishing

mass working-class political representation in the form of a new mass workers' party.

The Socialist Party has supported the NSSN since its initiation by the RMT transport union in 2006, spearheaded by its late general secretary Bob Crow. Its founding conference resolved to rebuild the strength of the working-class movement from the bottom up.

The strike wave has accelerated that rebuilding process. A whole new generation is being recruited into the trade unions, and many are becoming shop stewards learning in the heat of battle. The National Education Union reported it recruited over 20,000 members in the week following the announcement of its first strike mandate in January. It has since recruited thousands of new reps.

Unite has organised hundreds of separate disputes, led by thousands of shop stewards, since Sharon Graham was elected leader in 2021. Royal College of Nursing members have taken strike action for the first time in the union's 106-year history.

The strike wave, made up as it is by a variety of different disputes and of sets of workers with different characteristics and traditions of struggle, is putting all strike tactics and trade union leaderships to the test.

The necessity to defend living standards under attack has driven sections of workers to continue to reject inadequate, unfunded pay offers. And even sections of workers who, without a fighting lead from their union leaders, voted to accept pay deals or failed to meet the undemocratic 50%, will put pressure on to revisit pay as inflation persists.

RCN members defied their union leadership's recommendation to accept an inadequate government pay offer. General secretary Pat Cullen said she "underestimated" her members.

Coordination

The trade union lay leadership bodies have been hot with debate about the way forward in the individual strikes. It is positive that the RMT and Aslef rail unions are discussing joint meetings of their executives to discuss their dispute with their common employers, the Train Operating Companies. The Socialist Party has been raising the need for steps like this to plan coordination of the strikes in individual industries and for wider coordination of industrial action.

The recent series of union elections have not given a uniform picture of the union leaderships moving decisively to either the right or left. But it has been typical for these elections to have low, single-figure percentage turnouts.

A large proportion of the hundreds of thousands who have voted to strike, taken to picket lines, and to become shop stewards for the first time did not vote in the union elections this time. A feature of rebuilding the strength of the working-class movement will be these workers drawing the necessary conclusions about the need to exercise democratic control over their trade unions and industrial disputes. That includes organising politically in broad lefts to campaign for a fighting programme.

Socialist Party members, working with others, are fighting to assist in the establishment and re-establishment of these bodies across the trade unions.

Labour cave on childcare pledge

CORINTHIA WARD
BIRMINGHAM NORTH SOCIALIST PARTY

A week after the Labour Party's U-turn on its 2021 green pledge, the party has also announced that it's scaling back its commitment on childcare.

At the start of the year, Bridget Philipson, shadow education secretary, said that Labour would transform childcare with reforms on par with "the birth of the NHS". Only some six months later, the party is claiming this is not "fiscally responsible".

The UK has the third-highest childcare costs in the world. Some parents spend 80% of their take-home pay on childcare.

Exiting the workplace

The soaring costs mean many parents, in particular women, have to cut their working hours, or leave the workplace entirely. The number of women having to leave work to look after family has risen by 5% in the past year – a reversal of the trend of the last three decades.

Labour had said it would fund 30 free/affordable childcare hours for eligible parents from the end of parental leave. But now Labour is looking into other plans so they can "reduce their spending commitments". It had already dropped a pledge from the Jeremy Corbyn 2019 manifesto of funding 1,000 Sure Start Centres.

Even the Tories are feeling pressured to make token gestures on childcare. Their pledge to extend free childcare hours for eligible parents from age nine months won't fully kick in until 2025.

The Tories' policy falls far short of what is actually needed – by nearly £2 billion! But if even the Tories are prepared to make these commitments,

then why is Labour suddenly U-turning?

Keir Starmer is presenting Labour as a safe pair of hands for the bosses and their system, capitalism, by scaling back spending plans. This is not the first time Starmer's Labour has played down voter expectations on what a Labour government could achieve.

Steve McCabe – Labour MP for Selly Oak in Birmingham – spoke at a childcare protest in October. He stated that a Labour government would inherit the Tories' mess, and have to be "practical".

When the Tories came to power in 2010, they claimed they had to 'balance the books' after the financial crash. This 'balancing' came out of the pockets of the working class via austerity. And any future 'fiscal restraint' from a Starmer Labour government would continue to do the same.

The UK is still the sixth-richest country in the world, and has 250 billionaires. It is not about where to find the money, but who has control of it! the last three decades.

Nationalise

Nationalisation – under workers' democratic control – of the leading heights of the economy, like energy, rail, water and mail, would be a start to the redistribution of this hoarded wealth. Workers' control of the childcare sector would also be needed as it has become increasingly dominated by international chains in a profit-led industry.

We need a new mass workers' party prepared to fight for policies, such as universal childcare, and others, which are in the interests of the working class.

The money can be invested back into society, creating free, high-quality childcare, where staff are given inflation-busting pay rises,

The cost of unaffordable childcare

- Women collectively lose **£11 billion a year in forgone earnings through lack of affordable childcare.**

- Providing 30 hours a week free childcare for children from six months, year-round, in England – bridging the gap to age three and covering the school holidays – would cost an additional **£10.4 billion a year. At least three quarters of that could be recouped in increased tax revenue and lower benefits.**

- 1.7 million women would like to work more hours, but can't because of childcare problems. Another 1.3 million turned down a job for the same reason.

- The 'free' 30 hours is available only during term-time, leaving many parents scrambling to find help during school holidays. While the average cost of a week-long holiday club is **£148, up 5% on last year.**

and paid at least £15 an hour. That way, families would have a better work-life balance. And the children would be given the best start into their education journey and development.



Labour says social care will stay privatised

Labour's proposal for a National Care Service fails to address the real problems of private ownership that have worsened under the Tories.
Glynn Doherty, a social care trade union organiser, explains why.

Adult social care is in such an appalling state that the facts and figures no longer shock us. 110,000 more people requested social care in 2021-22 than six years earlier. But only 11,000 more received it.

It's a staggering statistic. But no longer headline news.

In that same year, 400,000 social care workers left their jobs, fed up with poverty wages and poor working conditions. In response, the Tory government cut £250 million from its budget that was meant to improve knowledge, skills, staff wellbeing and recruitment.

Chaos

With the backdrop of this chaos, the Fabian Society has issued a report, commissioned by the trade union Unison and the Labour Party, 'Support Guaranteed: The Roadmap to a National Care Service'.

Almost 80% of filled posts in adult social care are for employers independent of local authorities. Nearly three quarters of these are in the private, for-profit, sector.

The writers of the report admit that "investment firms and private equity funding... have flooded into the sector... with fears that sharp practices are undermining the quality of care as well as staff terms and conditions". Yet, they make no plans to change

the mix of providers. Instead, they propose a "partnership" of national and local government with more than 10,000 mainly private providers.

Historically, trade union collective agreements in local authorities had won better pay, terms and conditions for workers. The writers say that just "some independent providers display unacceptable and exploitative behaviour with respect to... the treatment of their workers".

But it is very much more than this. In reality, it is rife in the sector. Very few employers even match the better employment practices of local authorities.

Profit

Care should be a public service, and not organised for private profit. The writers suggest the market should be replaced by "networks of collaboration". But don't say what will happen when any, some, or all of the 10,000 private providers refuse to collaborate!

Social care workers will support the proposals for nationally negotiated pay and conditions, and improved training. But unless the issue of ownership is tackled, it will leave a situation where thousands of private providers protecting their profits will suppress fair wages.

The report is meant to be the blueprint for an incoming Labour government. But given Keir Starmer's refusal to make any election pledge which will damage his standing with big business, care workers rightly expecting answers to their problems will be sadly disappointed.

Greek authorities lie about preventable migrant tragedy

MAX MCGEE
NUNEATON SOCIALIST PARTY

The economic rush to the bottom and the callousness of capitalism is seen in the Greek boat tragedy. On 13 June, a boat carrying an estimated 750 refugees capsized. Already, 78 are confirmed dead, while up to 500 are still missing.

The Greek authorities are already proven to have lied about events surrounding the tragedy. They first claimed they'd kept a "discreet distance". But survivor claims directly contradicted this. The authorities later admitted that they had attached a rope and attempted to board.

Officials also claim that the boat was on course for Italy, and didn't need help. But analysis of tracking data shows this to be another lie. The vessel was basically stationary for hours.

Failure

Compare what the Greek authorities failed to do to prevent this tragedy, with the resources that have been made available to search for the OceanGate submersible near the Titanic wreck.

We can't trust the capitalist authorities to get to the truth of what happened 50 miles off the coast of Greece. There must be an independent, public inquiry, democratically run by the trade unions and organisations representing migrants to find answers.

The nationalities found on board represent a cross-section of the failures of capitalism worldwide – war, poverty and climate change. Pakistanis, Egyptians, Syrians, Afghans and Palestinians – men, women and children – are said to make up most of the 750 that paid extortionate fees to smugglers in the hope of escaping the instability and persecution in their home countries.

Tory and Labour governments, and exploitative international capitalist companies, have contributed to problems that breed migrant crises. The rapid withdrawal of the American troops from Afghanistan, supported by governments in the UK and Nato, following the failed, two-decades-long invasion, has contributed to the migrant crisis.

Austerity

In Britain, the Tories and the bosses use refugees as a scapegoat, saying that's what is putting pressure on our public services. In reality, its austerity that has cut services to the bone.

Since 1989, the European Union (EU) has built over 1,000 kilometres of border wall. Policies that fail to deal with the root causes show the short-sightedness of available solutions for the capitalists.

Instead, socialist policies to tackle poverty, climate change and war, a democratically planned economy, and mass workers' party to fight for these policies, are needed.



London abortion rights protest on 17 June HELEN PATTISON

Protest against outrageous abortion jailing

HELEN PATTISON
LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY SECRETARY

Everyone that Socialist Party members spoke to on the demonstration outside the Royal Courts of Justice on 17 June, was furious.

They were furious that a woman who had sought abortion healthcare was now in prison. They were furious that the same police and justice system which has been outed as systemically sexist and racist acted with impunity against a vulnerable woman.

And they were furious at this rotten Tory government. The Tories have overseen huge attacks to our living standards.

And now this weak and divided government is trying to prevent discussion on a women's right to choose when and whether to have children.

Socialist Party members on the protest were clear. The campaign to defend the right to choose needs to be linked to the fight to kick out the Tories, and fully fund the NHS and other services.

Poverty

It has to be linked to the fight to pull women and their families out of poverty, and ensure timely access to the services they need. This isn't on offer from the Labour Party either though.

Labour MP Stella Creasy spoke on the platform about the need to

defend rights. But she herself lined up with the right wing of the Labour Party to oust Jeremy Corbyn, despite the fact Corbyn's 2019 manifesto included decriminalising abortion.

While Creasy opposed Corbyn, she's backed other Labour leaders, like Keir Starmer, and their promises to carry on with Tory austerity.

And she supports her local Labour council in Waltham Forest implementing Tory cuts. She also supported the bombing of Syria.

Creasy supports abortion rights. But, she doesn't fight for policies that will give women a real right to choose the kind of family they want – such as free childcare, council homes and fully funded healthcare.

Teesport – public money handed to Tory donors

ALAN DOCHERTY
TEESSIDE SOCIALIST PARTY

The Tories' 'independent' review into the finances of the Teesside Freeport (Teessworks) is likely to be a PR exercise to exonerate the local Tory mayor and to reassure big business investors. 'Freeports' are areas where multinational businesses can avoid most regulations and taxes.

Musgrave and Corney

In Parliament, a Labour MP accused the Tory Mayor, Ben Houchen, of channelling public money to his business friends Martin Corney and Chris Musgrave. The taxpayer has already invested over £260 million into the site, and loaned Teessworks another £170 million!

Teessworks was originally under the ownership of the Tees Valley local authority. However, it is now 90% owned by Musgrave and Corney.

Musgrave and Corney were sold the 90-acre site at just £1 per acre! They have taken out £43 million in profits since, mainly from selling the scrap metal.

A close family member of Martin Corney, who is a director of one of the companies that own the site, has donated at least £12,000 to local Tory politicians. Chris Musgrave is also a Tory.

The inquiry is limited to just Teessworks, even though Musgrave and Corney are also linked to other Tees Valley mayoral projects.

The Teessworks site is highly contaminated. To allow for bigger ships to use the port, deeper dredging is required.

This has disturbed years of toxic chemical dumping from the former industries. This sludge is dumped just a few miles offshore.

Dead sea life regularly wash up along the Durham and North Yorkshire coast. Dogs have even taken ill after walking on the beach at Redcar. There have been mass die-offs of shellfish and other marine life, putting the jobs of local fishermen in jeopardy.

Despite such dredging being banned in certain conservation areas, because it is known to kill sea life, the Environment Agency has, in

this case, denied that dredging is the cause, and is blaming algae blooms. But campaigners and independent scientists blame the toxic waste from the dredging and the site itself.

Is health and safety on the site a priority? A bulldozer and its driver ended up in the Tees, and he was lucky not to have drowned.

Invest

Under capitalism, private companies only invest in public projects like this if they can make substantial profits. The Socialist Party does not support freeports for this reason.

Instead, we say the old site should be developed in a genuine democratic consultation with the local community. The trade unions could help ensure rigorous health and safety is enforced, with workers employed directly by the local authority. That way there would be no profit-driven corner-cutting so toxic materials would be safely disposed of.

• Read more about how 'Freeports spell deregulation, low pay and a new race to the bottom' at socialistparty.org.uk



Corinthia Ward and her son

Unite Executive – which way forward?

SUZANNE MUNA
UNITE SOUTH WEST EXECUTIVE COUNCIL MEMBER

The first meeting of the newly elected Executive Council (EC) of Unite the Union highlighted two things: both the opportunities to pursue and strengthen the fighting programme of the leadership of the union, and the determination of forces in the union that are opposed to Sharon Graham's leadership to undermine it.

Supporters of Sharon's 'Plan for Change' and supporters of the misnamed 'Members First' (the United Left - UL) are finely balanced on the new executive. This marks a significant decline for the UL, which once held a large majority. The UL is seeking to reverse the militant steps forward that have taken place since Sharon became general secretary in 2021.

Nationalisation

One of the main political discussions was on renationalisation of energy and steel ('Take the Power Back') both of which are key demands being developed by the 'Unite for a Workers' Economy' project.

Socialist Party members see nationalisation of infrastructure and industries as important steps forward, but oppose paying billions of pounds to big shareholders who

have already made massive financial gains from essential services and manufacturing (see 'Unite general secretary demands: Nationalise energy' at socialistparty.org.uk).

At the EC, the Unite leadership was asked to consider shareholder compensation only on the basis of proven need.

The Unite leadership is open about the challenges of getting Labour Party agreement to a programme of nationalisation for key sectors and industries as part of the manifesto that it will take to the electorate next year. This is despite growing popularity for nationalisation amongst the general public.

The union has already agreed a policy that Labour Party candidates for council seats seeking Unite's support would be required to sign a commitment to key Unite policies before receiving backing. This will now be extended to parliamentary candidates. This will include nationalisation.

Constitutional Battleground

As previously reported in the Socialist, the Members First group forced through elections of the chair and membership of committees, including the important Finance and General Purposes committee, despite the fact that elections for some EC seats are still ongoing.

EC members who support Sharon Graham's manifesto issued a statement for the minutes opposing this manoeuvre (see 'Unite Executive Council – a warning to the left' at socialistparty.org.uk).

The UL quickly regretted their decision. One person immediately quit the UL and joined the Sharon Graham group. The new chair backtracked and offered to share seats equally. But Sharon Graham supporters decided to wait until all sectors are represented on the executive before populating constitutional committees.

- Assuming a contested election, voting for three Civil Air Transport executive council seats will open on 17 July and close on 4 August. It is critical that every Unite member in this sector votes, and the Socialist Party advocates for candidates who support Sharon Graham's manifesto.



St Mungo's strike LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Universities on strike: Leeds and Liverpool

Indefinite strike action by University College Union (UCU) members began at the University of Leeds on 15 June, following the implementation of 100% pay deductions for staff taking part in the national marking and assessment boycott (MAB).

The MAB is to back up the recent national strike action over the pension scheme and pay. Employers in different universities have responded differently to the boycott, with varying threats of pay deductions. UCU members at 14 other universities have taken or announced strike action, including eight days of strikes at Liverpool John Moores University, and nine days at the University of Leicester.

Unison members at Leeds have successfully rebalotted over pay and began a programme of 11 days of strike action. Another six

St Mungo's homelessness strikers fight on

Homelessness workers at St Mungo's charity, members of Unite housing workers branch, have embarked on indefinite strike action for a decent pay rise. A Mungo's striker spoke to David Maples to explain the difficult decisions workers make when they decide to go on strike:



"When you spend the entire week supporting clients with their lives it can be emotionally draining. And then not having enough money to pay your bills or even pay a visit to the cinema just to be able to unwind, it's mentally hard.

"Everyone needs some downtime, but not being able to afford it can be so disheartening. When you look at the rising prices for everything it makes everything so much harder. We are not asking for a massive pay rise, just enough to make life a bit easier.

"Then you look at the amount the managers get paid and you look at Thomas More Square (Mungo's HQ) and the price that must cost to rent, that makes me even sadder.

"I did not take the decision to strike easily. I feel like I am letting down my clients by not being there for them. But without the frontline workers, St Mungo's would not exist."

Leeds bus workers show striking works

Around 800 drivers for First Bus across the Leeds depots, members of Unite, started indefinite strike action on Sunday 18 June. The next day the strike was suspended due to an improved offer!

First has made over £200 million in profit in 2022 yet it wants to delay paying its drivers in Leeds a pay rise. Many drivers we spoke to on the picket lines were also angry that the company was insisting on a pay rise covering more than a year, given the uncertainty over inflation levels.

IAIN DALTON, LEEDS SOCIALIST PARTY

RMT AGM

RMT has fought attacks on trains and tube for over a year - now we must win!

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN THE RMT

As we open our Annual General Meeting (AGM – the union's conference), our members in the Train Operating Companies (TOCs) have been in dispute for over a year.

Our members have shown again and again that they are prepared to do whatever it takes to defend their jobs and our precious terms and conditions.

TOCs

In the latest rebalot, members at the 14 TOCs returned huge 'yes' votes with Cross Country trains and Avanti members leading the way at over 95%. This is despite Network Rail members' acceptance of an offer that removed those members from further strike action in the current dispute.

If these incredible mandates are to result in a successful campaign to push the employers back and deliver an offer our members deserve, then we must go beyond staying in the fight, and adopt a strategy to win.

This means calling a fresh series of dates for strike action, united across the TOCs, and coordinating with our sister unions on the railways.

It is very positive that Mick Lynch is seeking to organise a joint meeting of the executive committees of RMT and Aslef, something Socialist Party members have campaigned for. Members of both unions should put pressure on their reps and officials to ensure that this happens.

Our campaign over the last year has delivered a slight improvement in the pay offer and the apparent shelving of some of the very worst attacks.

But it needs to be said that the odd day of strike action will not and cannot put sufficient pressure on the employers to concede to our demands, and risks allowing the resolve and determination of our members to dissipate over time.

We need an escalation of the campaign within the union itself in order to reconvene the reps and wider membership that it is possible for us to drive back the employers. Branches and regional councils should be holding special meetings to inform and update members. This needs to

be done in conjunction with adopting a strategy to win.

Moves towards generalised strike action are not the only action we should take but the government fears a generalised movement and so we must do all we can to build one. That means RMT raising the need for coordinating days of strike action wherever trade unions are in dispute, such as in the NHS and other public sector services.

Defend jobs, pensions and agreements on London Underground

Six days of all-grades strikes, and another day by station grades, has pushed back attempts by the Labour London mayor Sadiq Khan and the Tory government to attack pensions on London Underground. However, the bosses are pushing ahead with job cuts, around 10% across stations and trains, with engineering reorganisations also threatened, and demands for flexible working.

We have taken pre-emptive action on the tube. That is, we have put demands on Transport for London to rule out attacks, and then taken action when those assurances have not been given.

The cuts agenda is now gathering pace. Action on the tube is sometimes taken separately to the TOC dispute. On London Underground we have over 10,000 members, and the cuts proposed amount to around half of the total cuts across the UK rail industry.

But the only way to win our demands in full is to win back from the government an operating subsidy of around £1 billion a year. To achieve this, we want to be part of a bigger, generalised fight across the trade union movement.

That's why this issue, how RMT can act as a lever on the whole movement, is now the most important issue facing our union.

Minimum service law must be defeated

The TUC's response to the Tories latest anti-strike bill has been hopelessly inadequate. No national demo, no 'council of war'. RMT should approach other unions, especially those currently taking strike action, and seek a coordinated fightback

and commitment to support each other in the event that the laws are used against us.

We should also publicly demand that any local, regional or national authority not run by the Tories commits not to issue a work notice to its workers. There is nothing in the legislation to compel any Labour council, mayor, or the Scottish or Welsh governments to demand a minimum service level in the event of a strike. All possible pressure must be put on them to refuse.



How RMT can act on the whole movement is the most important issue

Time to review RMT political strategy

Sir Keir Starmer has been rapidly eliminating any remaining policies from the Corbyn era. Jeremy himself is no longer allowed to stand as a Labour MP and Corbyn-supporting Tyne and Wear Metro Mayor Jamie Driscoll has now been undemocratically blocked from standing by the Labour leadership.

Meanwhile, Merseyside's Labour mayor Steve Rotheram oversaw the wholesale degradation of RMT members' jobs on Merseyrail, and Sadiq Khan leads Transport for London, attempting to drive through the 'managed decline' of public transport in London.

Socialist Party members support the emergency resolution going to RMT's AGM calling for the union's current political strategy to be reviewed: "Our 2018 SGM took the decision to align RMT's political strategy to the Labour Party, while remaining unaffiliated. Developments since the election of Starmer call into question whether Labour does align with the aims, objectives and policies of our union."

We support the call to launch a consultation among the membership, before holding a Special General Meeting to decide on a new political strategy that is appropriate for the current situation.



Bristol RMT on strike BRISTOL SOCIALIST PARTY



Massive Aslef vote

Members of the Aslef train drivers union have delivered a massive response to the employers' shoddy offers in the rebalot demanded by Tory anti-strike laws.

In only one company was the vote to strike under 90% - and that was 86%.

Turnouts in the 12 Train Operating Companies that were balloted all smashed through the Tory anti-democratic turnout thresholds, ranging from 68.75% to 90.91%!



A STRIKING CONCIERGE SPOKE TO JAMES IVENS.

"We're on strike because of our pay. They don't listen to us. My mortgage went from £450 to £980 in three

months. We were due to get a pay rise in January. They've just started talking to us about it in June, if you can imagine that. If we didn't strike, they wouldn't have wanted to talk about it! They increased the offer from 4% to 8%. We say the minimum we will take is 10%. And we're still fighting for it. We're also asking for full sick pay - which some of us get and some of us are not getting. So we said make it all even, give all of us the same thing. If they don't listen, we're adding more days to the strike."

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Low-paid London workers strike together

Cleaners, carers and concierges at nine different workplaces across London are striking together for better pay and conditions. The United Voices of the World (UVW) union organises this predominantly migrant workforce and has coordinated the actions.

Strikers picketed Ogilvy on the morning of 15 June. The international ad agency claims its values "enable everyone to thrive". Underpaid night cleaners chanted: "Ogilvy - walk the talk!" Here they're demanding £15 an hour and full sick pay. Also on strike are workers at the London School of Economics, Amazon HQ, Mercedes-Benz, La Retraite Girls' School, West End Quays luxury flats, the Department for Education, Sage Nursing Home, and Streatham and Clapham High School.



With the Tories bringing in new anti-union legislation in the form the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Bill, the 1970s' struggle against the Industrial Relations Act is rich with lessons. **Bill Mullins**, a shop steward in the car industry at the time, revisits the events of that period, in an article first published on the 50th anniversary in 2021.

Not since the 'Great Unrest' of 1911-14 and the period of strikes following World War One had there been anything like it.

The decade of the 1970s witnessed a wave of strikes averaging ten million days lost in production every year; and the growth of shop-floor organisation, with over 12 million workers in trade unions affiliated to the Trades Union Congress (TUC - the all-Britain union federation), mainly in manufacturing industry but rapidly being replicated in the public sector and white-collar industries as well, particularly among low-paid workers.

All this ferment came to a head during that stormy period of 'workers' power'.

The most striking phenomenon, commented on almost every day by the capitalist press, was the existence of the trade union shop stewards movement - with over 350,000 shop stewards, mainly in manufacturing, which included engineering, the car and steel industries, plus the docks, and elsewhere.

These shop stewards were directly elected by workers on the shop floor and generally subject to instant recall if found wanting. In other words, they were answerable to the mass of organised workers and not so much to the union officialdom.

The establishment daily newspapers were foaming at the mouth about how shop stewards were running things on the shop floor and continually calling 'wildcat' strikes without the say-so of the union leaders.

For the capitalist press, and the boss class they spoke for, this was an intolerable negation of the 'managers' right to manage' as they put it, and 'something had to be done about it'.

The UK ruling class was desperate to make the economy competitive with its foreign rivals, but since the capitalists had refused to reinvest sufficiently the enormous profits they had made from empire and the sweat of the British working class, they only had one option: that was to super-exploit the labour of the working class in the factories and industry in general. But to do that they had to remove their greatest obstacle, the power of the organised workers on the shop floor manifested in the power of the shop stewards.

This was not the same as saying the national unions were not strong; they were numerically. But, dialectically, real union power resided not so much at the unions' tops, but in the accumulated experience and tight-knit organisation which existed on the shopfloor. In the better organised workplaces this allowed the working class to act with independence and confidence when it came to repelling the boss's orders.

Not for nothing did Trotsky in an earlier period comment that the trade

unions, particularly in Britain, were "the schools of a future socialist society and how it would be organised".

Yet hardly any union rule book mentioned what a shop steward was. The Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) referred to a steward as someone who collected union dues and nothing else.

It was the 1968 Labour government of prime minister Harold Wilson which made the first attempt to curb this shop-floor power. But he had to rapidly retreat from his misnamed 'In Place of Strife' legislation.

Wilson's government, acting as the 'second eleven' of the capitalist class (it included future left-winger Tony Benn in the cabinet, who initially supported In Place of Strife) tried to use its influence over the trade union leaders to support its anti-working-class law.

There is no doubt that if it had been up to the overwhelming majority of the national trade union leaders, they would have gone along with Wilson's proposals - which contained the threat to imprison shop stewards if they disobeyed the instructions of the union leaders.

Wilson had based his legislation on the Donovan Commission's 'investigation into industrial relations', which Wilson himself had set up not long after he won his second successive election in 1966.

Political left

The political left at the time was of course aware of these developments, but the main political left party (albeit relatively small) in industry was the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) with its daily paper the Morning Star.

The CPGB was able to play an important role in politically arming the most class-conscious militants in the shop stewards' committees at the time. They did this through a front organisation called the Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions (LCDTU).

Militant, the forerunner of the Socialist Party, had been founded in 1964, based on the ideas and methods of Trotsky. It was slowly building at the time and was able to comment on these developments through its then monthly paper Militant (see The Rise of Militant).

The Labour government eventually was forced to withdraw In Place of Strife after a series of unofficial strikes organised by union militants.

June 1970 saw the election of a Tory government with Ted Heath as prime minister. Its manifesto had promised "to stabilise industrial relations by forcing concentration of bargaining power and responsibility in the formal union leadership, using the courts".

I had become a shop steward on the car track at the Rover (British Leyland)



Toolmakers mass meeting at British Leyland Longbridge PHOTO: DAVE EVANS

car company in Solihull, south east of Birmingham, the previous year. And I had been made aware of the proposed anti-union laws through reading the Morning Star sold to me by a CPGB shop steward on the next section of the track.

We had participated in debates that were taking place in the shop stewards' weekly committee meetings about these developments. And we had attended rallies in London organised by the LCDTU.

What really struck home (and made it very personal) was the threat to imprison individual shop stewards by the proposed Industrial Relations Court.

This was no idle threat. Later on five dockers' shop stewards, known as the 'Pentonville Five', were indeed imprisoned (see '1972: dockers face down the Tory government' at socialistparty.org.uk).

It was therefore no surprise to us when we received a letter from the LCDTU calling for a general strike against the proposed Industrial Relations Bill.

The 300-strong Rover confederated shop stewards committee, Solihull,

drawn from eight different unions representing 8,000 workers on the shop floor, agreed to call a mass meeting and propose a one-day strike against the bill.

The mass meeting took place (as probably did many others at the same time around the country) and voted almost unanimously to strike on 8 December 1970.

We had no real idea how many other workplaces were also doing the same, in fact nobody asked, we took it for granted that everybody else felt the same - which, in general, is a mistake!

As it turned out, the strike was supported by wide layers in engineering, the car industry, the docks, and other places - probably in the region of 250,000 to 500,000 workers.

Much later on I found out that this had caused quite a debate in the CPGB and the strike was disowned by its national leaders, as well, of course, by the national trade union leaders.

Nevertheless, it gives an indication of the febrile atmosphere on the shop floor and it was one of the first 'political' strikes of that period.

The effect of this unofficial 'political' strike was to put the fear of

god into some of the union leaders, who saw this as another example of how they were losing control of their members.

But there was also a developing layer of newish left union leaders who had come to the fore in the preceding years. These included Jack Jones (who had fought in the International Brigades during the Spanish Civil War), who was the leader of the biggest union, the TGWU, and Hugh Scanlon, the president of the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers (AUEW) - both unions are now part of Unite. Together, they were dubbed by the capitalist newspapers as "the two most powerful men in Britain".

Later on, when the Industrial Relations Court was in use, the TGWU was fined twice - £10,000 and £50,000 - for defying the law and not bringing its shop stewards to heel.

The AUEW was also fined but refused to pay the fine on the casting vote of Hugh Scanlon, who instead called a one-day strike of the union's 1.5 million members against the fine.

The fine was paid secretly by a group of businessmen to save the embarrassment of the Heath government,

delegated by their members to go to London and tell the Tories where to put their anti-union legislation.

I was there as part of a 100-strong delegation of shop stewards from Rover Solihull. Most of the factory had gone on strike for the day of action.

The demo was a forceful reminder, not just to the Tory government but also the TUC leaders, that there was no way the organised working class on the shop floor would accept from the Tories what they had rejected from the previous Labour government ie any attempt to curtail their painstakingly accrued rights on the shop floor by legal sleight of hand.

There were four unofficial days of strike action between December 1970 and March 1971, including one backed by the AUEW.

But the TUC leaders steadfastly refused to countenance strike action. Consequently, TUC general secretary Vic Feather was continually heckled when he addressed a 10,000-strong union rally in Glasgow against the bill on 7 March.

Eventually the bill became law, but it was made inoperable from the beginning despite all the huff and puff of the judges and the legal establishment.

Part of its provisions included the 'right not to be in a union'. This saw a number of attempts, including at my factory, by right-wing individuals to rip up their union cards. They were dealt with summarily by the shop floor who refused to work with them (we were a 'closed shop' ie 100% obligatory union membership) and management was forced to get rid of them.

In September 1971, the TUC conference voted for a resolution forbidding affiliated unions, on pain of expulsion from the TUC, from registering with the act. This resulted in a number of smaller unions being expelled from the TUC.

This was replicated at local level where, for example, SOGAT, a print union, was expelled from Birmingham trades council. I moved the resolution at that meeting.

Later, when the 1974 Labour government repealed the act, the expelled unions were readmitted into the TUC and the local trades councils.

A number of important lessons from that period were being drawn at the time as the pulse of events opened up new perspectives. Inherent within the whole situation at that time was a general strike.

It was debated quite a lot, and even though I had not yet met Militant or its small number of supporters at that time, I remember vividly discussing 'what next?' on the shop stewards committee.

Our convenor was a member of

the CPGB and he was putting forward the demand for 'all power to the general council'. This was the leading body of the TUC.

It seems this was an echo of what the CPGB called for at the time of the 1926 general strike. That was heavily criticised by Trotsky as wholly inadequate when it was clear that both the left and the right wing on the general council in the days and weeks leading up to the general strike were preparing to abandon the struggle before it even began.

It seemed that the CPGB of 1971 had not learnt much from the CPGB of 1926.

Unbeknown to me, the Militant paper and its supporters were addressing what was needed to advance the struggle at the time. It argued for a 24-hour general strike as a warning shot to Heath followed by escalating action if needed.

The battle against the Industrial Relations Act was won by the organised working class, and it would take the political defeat on the electoral plane in the 1979 general election, which brought to power Maggie Thatcher, for the capitalist class to get their revenge.

Only after the experience of a failed Labour government, which politically disarmed the working class, were the Tories able to gradually reintroduce anti-union legislation again.

Yet there were many opportunities throughout the Thatcher years that, with the right leadership, the working class could have once again defeated the bosses.

"As 1971 drew to a close the editors [of Militant, forerunner of the Socialist] predicted that the next year would see... the gathering storm. The British workers in 1971 have not yet thrown out the Tories or their hated system. But they achieved more than in any year since the war: three mass strikes and a gigantic march of 300,000 against the Industrial Relations Act; two token strikes of 150,000 Scottish workers in support of the mass action by Upper Clyde Shipbuilders workers; the Plessey sit-in; heroic struggles by many sections of workers, notably the postal workers and Ford workers; more mass strikes around the TUC lobby on unemployment; and a landslide rout of the Tories in the municipal elections.

The early 1970s witnessed the organised British working class flexing their muscles and defeating by direct strike action all attempts by the new Tory government of Ted Heath to bring them to heel."

From 'The Rise of Militant' by Peter Taaffe



The Rise of Militant: The First 30 Years by Peter Taaffe, £11.99

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NEU exec agrees July teacher strikes

SEAN MCCAULEY
NEU NEC, PERSONAL CAPACITY

National Education Union (NEU) teacher members in schools and sixth form colleges in England will strike again on 5 and 7 July.

The June National Executive (NEC) agreed, after lengthy debate, to continue to pressure the government this term to meet our demands for a fully funded inflation-proof pay deal for the academic years 2022-23 and 2023-24.

Our strike action already forced the Tory government to the negotiating table in March, breaking with the Tories' decades-old commitment not to talk directly to unions, instead outsourcing decisions on pay awards to the so-called independent School Teacher Review Body (STRB). The resulting offer was a major insult and members resoundingly rejected it.

The six days of action this calendar year have also forced the STRB to act more independently than ever before, ignoring the government's submission and recommending an increase in teachers' pay by 6.5% this September. We only know this through a leak. The Tories continue to refuse to publish the report, and refuse to announce whether they will firstly honour it, and secondly fully fund it. If they were to do both, it would still not meet all our demands, and the NEC and members would need to discuss what to do next.

Building up to major action in schools

NEU is currently reballoting teachers in England and Wales to renew our mandate for strike action. It is going well but there is no room for complacency, due to the undemocratic anti-trade union turnout thresholds. But we've done it before and we will do it again.

A special executive in early June agreed to also reballoon support staff on the issue of funding, after a hugely successful online indicative ballot. For support staff, funding is crucial. Every time schools make cuts to meet unfunded pay awards, it is support staff who bear the brunt.

The aim is to unite all NEU state education members in the fight to end the staff recruitment and retention crisis in our schools - which has resulted this year in the largest-ever class sizes in secondary schools since records began.

The government will be feeling the heat. Not only are nearly 300,000 NEU members being balloted, but NASUWT, the other main teaching union, and the main primary heads' union, NAHT, are balloting. Unison and Unite are reballoon their support staff members on pay along with all local government employees.

July strike days

On the teacher strikes, however, April's NEU conference had agreed three days of action in July, not just two. However, along with confusing dispensation guidance for school groups on the April and May strike days, disorientating some school



ENFIELD AND LEA VALLEY SP

groups and reps, the 'NEU Left' majority leadership decided not to hold strike action from early May because of the exam period. Socialist Party members argued to keep up the momentum with action that ensured no disruption to students taking exams - teachers do not investigate exams. This mistake meant that some of the momentum and mood dissipated.

In many districts with strong local left leaderships, including Socialist Party members, the potential for achieving three successful days was clear. However, Socialist Party members on the NEC recognised that was not the case everywhere. Moreover, due to the failure of the NEU Left leadership to announce dates earlier, when the mood amongst members was still very high, this was short notice to reps and members.

Proposals from the general secretaries, which called for one day

of action, would, in the view of Socialist Party members, have appeared tokenistic and would not have sent the right message to the government.

The NEU needs to continue to offer a fighting lead when we enter into discussions about joint action in the autumn term with NAHT and NASUWT. The influence of Socialist Party executive members in pushing the leadership has meant the NEU has led the way. Patrick Roach, the NASUWT general secretary, is on record as saying he would have accepted a deal similar to the one offered to nurses. That was rejected by Royal College of Nursing members, despite their own leadership recommending it. It was a worse offer than the one we have now.

The other unions' members know that the STRB's 6.5% recommendation has not come about through talk. Striking works!

Members' votes invalidated

The NEC refused to re-run ballots for executive positions in three areas where there were significant numbers of invalidated results in the recent NEU elections. In Sean McCauley's executive district there were 438 invalidated ballot papers out of just over 2,000. 21% of members' votes were ruled out! By the NEU's rules, two of the three positions have to be filled by women. This meant the two women candidates were 'elected by rule' and the only candidates to vote for were the two men.

Despite that, for reasons still unexplained, the ballot paper was

conducted by single transferable vote (where you indicate your first and second preferences) rather a simple vote. The women's names still appeared on the ballot paper and many members voted for them, thereby invalidating their votes. Which man would they have voted for, if they had known their vote would have been invalidated? That was not a question the executive agreed to put to the test.

- The three Socialist Party members on the new executive from Sept 2023 will continue to lead the fight to provide a leadership that leads from the front and builds from the base.

DVLA workers in PCS still in fighting mood 'The one-off payment is not what the dispute was about'

DAVE WARREN
SECRETARY OF THE PCS ASSOCIATE AND RETIRED MEMBERS SECTION IN WALES, PERSONAL CAPACITY

PCS union pickets at the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) were in determined mood when Socialist Party members visited their picket line on 16 June.

Workers engaged in despatching driving licences and vehicle registration documents to the public have been on strike since 11 June as part of the PCS strategy of targeted industrial action to defend pay, jobs, pensions and the compensation scheme (redundancy entitlement).

The strike was due to continue until 25 June, but they had just learned that the national leadership of the union had called off the second week of industrial action to enable departmental talks around a one-off payment of £1,500 (see 'Oppose suspension of PCS national campaign' at socialistparty.org.uk).

The Cabinet Office has given all government departments discretion to make this payment in a transparent attempt to bring the national dispute to a close, but pickets at DVLA were adamant that this was nowhere near enough and that the dispute should continue.

The payment would be for this year only, non-consolidated and taxable. It would most likely be pro-rata for part-time staff and there is not even any guarantee that it will be paid.

To cap it all, there is no new money on the table, so the money would have to be found from the existing budget, raising the threat of further cuts to jobs or terms and conditions.

After an imposed pay settlement of just 2-3% last year, the current offer of 4.5-5% for this year plus the one-off payment does little to address the cost-of-living crisis. As one picket put it: "This one-off payment is not what the dispute was about."

Some of the DVLA pickets were keen to stress that the mood of members remains determined and angry. They had only recently voted by a whopping 97% in the national reballoon to renew the strike mandate. One picket told me that he thought the mood of members was harder now than at the start of the campaign.

Members of the Socialist Party and the Broad Left Network in PCS stand firmly with these workers and others throughout the country in their fight for a just settlement.



DVLA strikers in Birmingham BIRMINGHAM SP

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Unison conference: Mood to fight amongst activists, but strategy to win still to be developed

STEVE BELL
UNISON HEALTH SERVICE GROUP EXECUTIVE, PERSONAL CAPACITY

This year's National Delegate Conference (NDC) was held against the backdrop of increasing working-class struggles and strike action against the cost-of-living crisis and austerity. The junior doctors were striking as conference met.

Unison has also seen an increase in strike activity. Delegates from local government, health and other public services, with Socialist Party members prominent, spoke of the ballots and action they have pursued and the hope that they could beat the Tory anti-trade union laws.

However, as a union with over 1.2 million members, Unison continues to punch below its collective weight. The right-wing union bureaucracy over years has preferred to lobby and rely on talking to 'sympathetic' politicians to convince them and employers to change their minds. This policy has meant that Unison members have rarely heard of the need for collective action, including strike action, to either increase or defend our terms and conditions.

A fight necessary

Two years ago, a left-led National Executive Council (NEC) was elected, including four Socialist Party members, with the Time for Real Change grouping in the majority. That raised the opportunity to battle the right wing and bureaucracy to develop a different and more fighting strategy. The general secretary, Christina McAnea, elected separately, is part of the old right wing.

However, this battle has only been visible at Unison's conferences and

to activists, without being taken to the membership as a whole. Consequently, to many members the distinction is not always clear between the previous right-wing leadership and the left-led NEC. The TFRC group lost their majority in the recent NEC elections.

This was demonstrated with motion 74 on the need to grow the industrial action fund, which had been proposed by the left-led NEC but was opposed by the right wing. The motion proposed taking surplus funds from branches with excess reserves and putting them towards the industrial action fund; that would be matched with funding from Unison's reserves, up to £5 million. This would affect 22% of branches. The motion was lost, in part because it was described by the right as a 'smash and grab' - even though the branches that would contribute would still be among the wealthiest in the union.

Political strategy

The political strategy of the leadership, both TFRC and the right wing, of waiting for a general election, was also demonstrated in many of the debates. There was joy among the delegates that the Tories are in turmoil and many are hopeful of a Labour government returning soon.

However, it was left to the Socialist Party delegates to take the lead in raising demands on an incoming Labour government - to pay inflation-proof pay rises, fully fund public services, and end privatisation. Socialist Party members warned that, under Starmer, a Labour government would act in the interests of capital and quickly move against workers' interests. When these points were raised - and that to apply the pressure of workers there needs to be

both an industrial and political fight-back, including with Jeremy Corbyn and workers standing as candidates - there was always warm applause.

This support was demonstrated in the Socialist Party fringe meeting, which was one of the largest in a number of years. Over 50 people attended and several asked to join. The Socialist Party had the largest presence of all left groups at the conference, selling over 300 papers and raising over £2,200 in fighting fund.

● New Unison NEC meets - the left must put forward a bold programme

As explained in the Socialist (see 'Unison elections: Time for Real Change lose majority control of the NEC' at socialistparty.org.uk), the TFRC group lost its overall majority in the recent elections. Unfortunately, the Socialist Party now only has one member elected to the NEC, April Ashley, elected to one of the Black members' seats with over 26,000 votes.

At the end of conference, the new NEC met for the first time. The left won the presidential team by a tiny majority, including April. Socialist Party members will continue to put forward the fighting programme needed. It is essential that the debates about what is needed industrially and politically are not kept within the confines of the leading structures of Unison but are taken out to the members, in order to build a democratic and fighting union.



Glasgow Unison strike 2022 MATT DOBSON

CWU Royal Mail deal - vote to reject!

The ballot of postal workers in the Communication Workers Union (CWU) on the agreement with Royal Mail is back on. It was postponed by the CWU leadership following continued attacks by management and clear anger of members at the deal. An additional £900 lump sum has now been offered, showing that workers' determination and anger is putting the bosses under pressure. Although that is not new money - it comes from excess in a pension fund, so it is members' money. The main attacks on terms and conditions are still there. More can be won - including reinstatement of all those attacked by management. The ballot runs 22 June to 11 July. Vote to reject!

Junior doctors keep striking for the NHS



YORKSHIRE SP

Junior doctors in the BMA and HCSA struck for 72 hours on 14, 15 and 16 June. Protests and demonstrations backed up picket lines across England. 1,000 marched in London and 600 in Manchester.

"Junior doctors are willing to fight to ensure our NHS is staffed with the skilled medical workforce we require, and that we are meaningfully remunerated for our hard work and dedication... We will strike again and we are prepared for a summer of industrial action. We will do whatever it takes to get the government, which we have repeatedly requested help from, to respond with a worthy pay restoration agreement. Doctors stand in solidarity and we will not give up."

AICHA, JUNIOR DOCTOR IN CHESTERFIELD

"Over the last 15 years, pay has been eroded by 25%, and persistent rota gaps left unfilled. This has caused doctors to leave the NHS, often overseas to countries like Australia where pay is better. That then creates more work for those still doing the job - basically making us work even harder for less pay, with patients suffering

the most. Everyone should get a decent wage, wherever they work. But the government knows that if they pay junior doctors what we demand, then other public sector workers will fight and strike for the same."

JUNIOR DOCTOR AT NEWHAM HOSPITAL, EAST LONDON

"We're constantly trying our best to provide quality care to patients. We've made sacrifice after sacrifice, culminating in putting our lives at risk during the pandemic when the whole world closed its doors. After all that, another real-terms pay cut is just a slap in the face. We genuinely don't want to strike but without any meaningful discussion with the government it's become necessary for the profession and the NHS itself."

JUNIOR DOCTOR IN MANCHESTER

Maggie Fricker reports lots of solidarity for the junior doctors at Southampton General Hospital. The mood was still very determined. The plan is to roll out three days of strike action every month to force the Tories to make a better offer. The strikers also believe the consultants will vote for action with a 'Christmas Day' service only.

• Thanks to Jon Dale, Adam Powell-Davies and Oisín Duncan



Refugee Rights campaigners in 2016 PHOTO: SEMAN

Tory Government wants to create a hostile environment for asylum seekers

MARK EVANS
BRANCH SECRETARY CARMARTHENSHIRE COUNTY
UNISON BRANCH (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

The rushed and secretive Home Office plan to house 207 asylum seekers in Stradey Park Hotel's 77 rooms by 3 July, without consultation with the local Llanelli community, has inevitably resulted in opposition to the plans. Carmarthenshire County Council, Hywel Dda Health Board and other public bodies only received the plans at the last minute.

Around four hundred people attended a meeting in the Selwyn Samuel Centre where the Furnace Action Committee was set up to oppose the plans.

Carmarthenshire County Council has accepted asylum seekers; its policy has been to locate them across the wider community in Carmarthenshire. Putting up to 207 asylum seekers in a hotel in Llanelli will put significant pressure on council and health services locally that have been cut to the bone and underfunded for many years, due to Tory cuts passed on by a Labour Welsh Government and administered by Plaid and Labour-led Carmarthenshire County Council.

Local residents' concerns of how local services will cope are justified in this regard.

We understand that staff working at the hotel have already been dismissed to make way for Home Office staff. This could have a knock-on

effect of further jobs going in local companies supplying the hotel etc.

This is hardly creating a welcoming environment for asylum seekers. But this Tory government wants the opposite.

They wish to scapegoat asylum seekers in an attempt to bolster their dwindling support.

Feeding off local people's concerns, the far right have joined protests outside the hotel with the sole intention of whipping up racism and opposition to asylum seekers wherever they are housed.

It is not the fault of asylum seekers where they are placed, they need to be housed in appropriate accommodation. How will 207 asylum seekers fit into seventy-seven rooms?

It is the decision of the hotel owners, Sterling Woodrow, that has resulted in people losing their jobs. It begs the question, if the hotel was a going concern, how much are the hotel owners being paid by the Home Office?

The council has a strategy to house asylum seekers across the wider community; why doesn't the government fund the council to do this? Why doesn't the council put up a fight for this money? If council services and other public services had not been cut to the bone since 2010 by the Tories, the council and the health service would be a far better place to provide housing and services for all.

This Tory government is treating the residents of Furnace and Llanelli, and asylum seekers, deplorably. Many asylum seekers have suffered trauma and face difficulties such as emotional and mental health problems and have to endure discrimination and racism.

The Home Office and the far right are attempting to create a hostile atmosphere for those that have suffered too much already.

● Based on a press release by Carmarthenshire County Unison Branch



Carmarthenshire Unison protest against council cuts

Leeds protests against the far right

LOUIE
LEEDS SOCIALIST PARTY

The far-right 'Yorkshire Patriots', a split from 'Patriotic Alternative' who have organised some of the recent anti-refugee demonstrations outside hotels, held a small rally of no more than 60 in Leeds on Saturday 10 June. In opposition, around 200 trade unionists and local people joined a counter-protest organised by Stand Up to Racism.

The initial demonstrations were mostly peaceful. Placards, flags and banners were waved. A few overly excited (or drunk?) 'patriots' attempted to make their way towards our barriers but were ushered back to their own side by police. No action seemed to be taken when they repeatedly made nazi salutes or waved flags with nazi symbols on them.

The same couldn't be said for the police surrounding the

counter-protest. Instead, a man was almost wrestled to the ground for the 'crime' of wearing a surgical face mask. A group from 'Football lads and lasses against fascism' was also kettled by police for a period of time to stop them joining the counter-protest. This highlights the importance of democratically organised stewarding at such demonstrations, involving representatives from the trade unions and campaigning groups, instead of allowing the police to control its fringes.

Also lacking was a clear political alternative from the organisers, whose chants and messaging seemed to focus on celebrating diversity and welcoming refugees, rather than tackling the issues underlying why the anti-refugee rhetoric of far-right groups has gained some echoes. It was therefore welcome that a Fire Brigades Union speaker raised the need to put forward a socialist alternative to the far right.

The Socialist Party says:

- Build a united working-class struggle for jobs, homes, and services for all. For a united working-class fight against racism
- For councils to set no-cuts budgets based on what our communities need
- Defend the right to asylum - with democratic community control of emergency funding and resources. No to racist immigration laws
- Support the strikes! For fully funded inflation-proof pay rises for all
- Fully fund our NHS - no to cuts and privatisation

- No more austerity - reject council cuts and tax rises on workers
- Tories out! Starmer's Labour doesn't speak for us, so fight for a new working-class party
- Nationalise rail, mail, energy, utilities and the banks under democratic working-class control and management, with compensation only on the basis of proven need - nothing for the fat cats
- Take the wealth off the super-rich. For a socialist alternative to capitalism's poverty and crisis

Save Our Square demands fire safety on sixth anniversary of Grenfell fire



JOHN KINSON
WALTHAM FOREST SOCIALIST PARTY

Save Our Square protesters gathered in Walthamstow town square, East London, on Saturday 17 June - the sixth anniversary of the Grenfell tower fire. The campaign, led by Socialist Party members, has been fighting over the last seven years against new 'monster' tower blocks being built as part of the 'refurbishment' of Walthamstow's mall. We spoke to members of the public angry about building safety and the housing crisis.

The protest was called because the

buildings are being built with only one stairwell and lift. A likely conclusion of the Grenfell inquiry will be that newly built tower blocks will require two stairwells and lifts. These rules should apply to all tower blocks currently being built.

The blocks lack any council or even social housing. All of them have rents at prices unaffordable to the average worker in the borough. We propose that as these properties have been built on public land, they should all be council homes.

We are demanding that the council pauses construction on these buildings while the safety issues

around fire exits are reviewed. We are encouraging members of the public to send letters to Labour MP for Walthamstow, Stella Creasy, demanding that she intervenes with the local Labour council. These requests continue to go unfulfilled. Labour continues to enact policies that are not in the interests of the people they are supposed to serve. Workers need a new mass party of the working class that will.

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

Thanks to everyone who has donated to hit the Socialist Party fighting fund target

Now can you help us smash it?

Thanks to all the people that donated to the Socialist Party, to those who helped raise money on campaign stalls or put on events and socials. With less than two weeks until the end of the quarter, the Socialist Party has raised over 100% of our fighting fund target.

In the last week, Socialist Party members in Devon held a film screening and made over £60 in refreshment sales. A stall campaigning to save the NHS in Kings Heath, South Birmingham, also took part in a mini-Pride event and found people willing to donate to help us get our socialist ideas out there.

Socialist Party members took the previous issue of the Socialist out on the Orgreave Truth and Justice rally

in Sheffield, and found many people willing to buy and donate to help spread the lessons from previous working-class struggles so workers on strike today can win.

Socialist Party members have been asking their friends and colleagues to help chip in to fund the vital upgrade of our IT equipment in our national office. Those funds go towards making sure the Socialist newspaper, leaflets and placards can keep being produced, and more won to socialist ideas that can win.

So do you have any money you can donate to the Socialist Party for the end of the quarter, or money that needs to be paid in? Please do so today, every penny and pound goes towards the fight for socialism.

| AREA | £ RECEIVED | £ TARGET | Q2: APRIL-JUNE 2023 | DEADLINE: 30 JUNE 2023 | 2023% |
|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------------|------------------------|-------------|
| South West | 3,634 | 1,800 | | | 202% |
| Wales | 3,138 | 2,300 | | | 136% |
| Northern | 953 | 750 | | | 127% |
| Yorkshire | 2,514 | 2,550 | | | 98% |
| Eastern | 1,087 | 1,200 | | | 91% |
| Southern & SE | 1,933 | 2,350 | | | 82% |
| London | 3,325 | 4,600 | | | 72% |
| North West | 740 | 1,150 | | | 64% |
| East Midlands | 1,016 | 1,850 | | | 55% |
| West Midlands | 1,144 | 2,600 | | | 44% |
| Other | 5,986 | 3,850 | | | 155% |
| TOTAL | 25,469 | 25,000 | | | 102% |



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- or make cheques payable to Socialist Party, PO Box 1398, Enfield EN1 9GT

Visit socialistparty.org.uk/donate or scan the QR code and put 'IT upgrade appeal' in the comment box when you make your donation



Bringing socialist politics to Cardiff Pride

JOHN WILLIAMS
CARDIFF WEST SOCIALIST PARTY

Thousands marched in the streets of Cardiff for Pride Cymru 2023. It was a vibrant, joyous event, where everyone could be themselves and celebrate the gains made for LGBTQ+ rights in previous years, but there's still work to be done.

With Rishi Sunak and government ministers talking about possible new anti-LGBTQ+ legislation, a further reliance on divisive rhetoric, and transphobic hate crimes on the rise, Pride needs to be an inclusive event which can act as a rallying point in the fight to defend our rights.

Many Pride events have been commercialised with strict ticketing systems. In Cardiff it was £15 for a standard ticket! With the cost-of-living crisis, many people would not

have been able to afford to go on the event to celebrate their identity and get involved.

Various organisations, including private companies such as supermarkets, paid hundreds of pounds to go at the front of the march! This is in contrast to the first Pride Cymru event, then known as Cardiff Mardi Gras, in September 1999 as a response to an increase in hate crime in South Wales.

Socialist Party placards demanding equal access to public services for all, to stop the cuts and properly fund trans services, went down well. This shows the support for a political, fighting Pride.

We talked to people about the on-going strike wave; if we strike and unite together to fight for pay rises and against oppression and discrimination, we can struggle for LGBTQ+ liberation.

Our placards with 'Tories out' were popular, and there were doubts that Starmer's Labour was going to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with trans people. Only 11 Labour MPs broke ranks and voted against the government blocking Scotland's gender reforms, defying Starmer's orders.

Despite anger that Pride is now seen as a money-making scheme for the bosses, many working-class campaigners and trade unionists participated. The Tory government and the right-wing media attempt to use divide and rule to cut across groups of workers fighting back. To cut across that, and fight for LG-BTQ+ liberation, we need a mass movement to defend those rights.

And a new party that stands in solidarity with all those fighting for LG-BTQ+ rights and against capitalism around the world.

University of Manchester tries to punish students fighting cost-of-living crisis

SAM HEY
MANCHESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

On Thursday 8 June, rent strikers at the University of Manchester held a rally to show solidarity with 11 students facing disciplinary action from university management. The students occupied management buildings as an escalation of their rent strike campaign, after being forcibly evicted from a seven-week period of occupations. They estimate at least 350 students are withholding rents, demanding: a £1,500 cost-of-living reduction across all halls, a three-year rent freeze, a commitment to make 40% of halls affordable under the National Union of Students' (NUS) definition, and no repercussions for strikers.

The response from university

management, to forcibly evict the students, was described in a statement by the NUS as "brutal" and "disgusting". They now face being kicked out of the university for their protest. Around 30 students attended the rally to show support for the students facing their disciplinarys. A referendum held by the students union in March saw 97% voting to back the rent strike and demand they face no punishment.

When speaking with a group of University and College Union members who were there to show support, they said that the rent strikers had been clear in support of striking workers, stating: "The students were evicted at around 5am, and at 8am they turned up to our picket line."

Students starting university next year will take on student loans with a lower repayment threshold and a

longer period before they are written off. This means they will be paying more for their education, with higher levels of debt when they leave. We need to fight the government for the resources higher education needs. That means ending the marketisation of education and for free education.

Join the student fightback: join...

socialist students

- Visit socialiststudents.org.uk/join
- or call 020 8988 8789
- or text your name and school, college or uni to 07749 379 010



WHAT WE STAND FOR

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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:

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London Irish: Private ownership causes demise of another rugby union club

NIALL MULHOLLAND

NEWHAM AND EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

In a cruel twist, in the same week that my West Ham-supporting son witnessed European glory in Prague, another team he has followed from childhood, London Irish Rugby Club, went the same way as Wasps and Worcester rugby union clubs and was kicked out of England's Rugby Premiership.

London Irish's demise is for different reasons to that of Wasps and Worcester, but what they have in common is the curse of commercialisation and private ownership. Worcester was undone by its co-owners, and Wasps was embroiled in a bond scheme. In London Irish's case, it faced a £30 million debt. Its owner, Mick Crossan, decided to pull out from funding the club and failed to sell it to an American concern before the deadline set by the governing body, the Rugby Football Union (RFU).

This is a devastating and bitter blow to the thousands of London Irish supporters, many of who travel to games, week in, week out. Up to 100 players and staff will lose their jobs. The players had a 50% wage cut in May. Instead of collapsing, the club should have been celebrating its 125th anniversary later this year, at its new stadium in Brentford, having had a good season on the pitch, with high attendances.

London Irish, also known as the Exiles, was formed as an amateur club by immigrants from Ireland. Club legend, Topsy Ojo, who played over 300 professional games for London Irish, and is a well-known pundit of the game, said of the club going into administration: "There's been a lot of tears, a lot of pain. People have committed their whole lives to this club through the generations. To not have that leaves a very big hole. It shouldn't have ended like this. Whether it was the prospective owner giving false promises, or owners not looking elsewhere... I firmly believe this could have been avoided. It's very troubling that this has to be the end of it."

The entire Rugby Premiership is in

crisis. Even the richest owner in the Premiership, Steve Lansdown, has indicated he is prepared to sell Bristol. Since the outset of 'professionalism' of the game in the mid-1990s, rugby has seen the dominance of wealthy owners. In 2019, the private equity firm, CVC, bought a 27% stake in Premiership Rugby.

"The clubs you think are secure at the moment are only secure because of a wealthy benefactor. And there is clearly investor fatigue. Every club is loss-making and those losses will accumulate to a point where we will be no longer able to fund them internally. I don't see any reason why this problem shouldn't get worse instead of better," remarked Leicester's former chief executive, Simon Cohen.

Many London Irish fans are hopeful their beloved club will eventually rise from the ashes, one way or another. However, amid speculation of London Irish joining the four provinces of Leinster, Munster, Ulster and Connaught in the United Rugby Championship, the Irish Rugby Football Union says "there are no plans to invest in rugby outside of Ireland."

Many London Irish fans are now also giving their backing to the London Irish Amateur Rugby Football club, which is based at London Irish's Hazelwood Centre training ground. But it is rumoured that Hazelwood may be sold off by the professional London Irish administrators to pay off the club's debts.

Cohen and other commentators have called for Premiership Rugby and the RFU to reform their governance and have a "sustainable model". Financially, the RFU dominates the Rugby Premiership. However, it also faces financial problems, with an estimated £40 million hole in its accounts, this year.

No amount of tinkering around with regulation and governance of privately owned clubs will bring about what the fans want. Wealthy owners will always bend the game to their will and stop bankrolling clubs when it suits. What is required is genuine fan-based, democratically run, community-controlled clubs, which would see the fairer allocation of resources all across grassroots rugby.



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London Irish in action PHOTO: Brett Lees-Smith/CC

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London Irish, also known as the Exiles, was formed as an amateur club by immigrants from Ireland. Club legend, Topsy Ojo, who played over 300 professional games for London Irish, and is a well-known pundit of the game, said of the club going into administration: "There's been a lot of tears, a lot of pain. People have committed their whole lives to this club through the generations. To not have that leaves a very big hole. It shouldn't have ended like this. Whether it was the prospective owner giving false promises, or owners not looking elsewhere... I firmly believe this could have been avoided. It's very troubling that this has to be the end of it"

The entire Rugby Premiership is in

crisis. Even the richest owner in the Premiership, Steve Lansdown, has indicated he is prepared to sell Bristol. Since the outset of 'professionalism' of the game in the mid-1990s, rugby has seen the dominance of wealthy owners. In 2019, the private equity firm, CVC, bought a 27% stake in Premiership Rugby.

"The clubs you think are secure at the moment are only secure because of a wealthy benefactor. And there is clearly investor fatigue. Every club is loss-making and those losses will accumulate to a point where we will be no longer able to fund them internally. I don't see any reason why this problem shouldn't get worse instead of better," remarked Leicester's former chief executive, Simon Cohen.

Many London Irish fans are hopeful their beloved club will eventually rise from the ashes, one way or another. However, amid speculation of London Irish joining the four provinces of Leinster, Munster, Ulster and Connaught in the United Rugby Championship, the Irish Rugby Football Union says "there are no plans to invest in rugby outside of Ireland."

Many London Irish fans are now also giving their backing to the London Irish Amateur Rugby Football club, which is based at London Irish's Hazelwood Centre training ground. But it is rumoured that Hazelwood may be sold off by the professional London Irish administrators to pay off the club's debts.

Cohen and other commentators have called for Premiership Rugby and the RFU to reform their governance and have a "sustainable model". Financially, the RFU dominates the Rugby Premiership. However, it also faces financial problems, with an estimated £40 million hole in its accounts, this year.

No amount of tinkering around with regulation and governance of privately owned clubs will bring about what the fans want. Wealthy owners will always bend the game to their will and stop bankrolling clubs when it suits. What is required is genuine fan-based, democratically run, community-controlled clubs, which would see the fairer allocation of resources all across grassroots rugby.

Political turmoil and social devastation shaking Pakistan

TONY SAUNOIS
COMMITTEE FOR A WORKERS' INTERNATIONAL (CWI)
SECRETARY

The arrest on corruption charges by police, and then release, of the former Pakistani prime minister and cricketing celebrity Imran Khan, have been followed by a massive wave of repression aimed at destroying and decapitating his party Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI).

This repression, driven by the government of Shehbaz Sharif's right-wing thirteen-party coalition government, the Pakistan Democratic Movement, has the blessing of the army, which de facto rules Pakistan. Having carried through three military coups since independence, the military has always maintained a powerful grip on civilian governments. All Pakistani governments, in reality, are allowed to remain in power only with the courtesy of the generals.

The corruption charges are linked to massive property speculation and corruption at the heart of Pakistani politics, which follow a trail to London. Two plush properties in central London are entangled in the movement of money between Islamabad and London. One is a mansion overlooking Hyde Park. The ten-bedroom mansion was listed for rent at £86,667 a month in 2017. It was handed over to the British National Crime Agency as part of a settlement involving the Pakistani property tycoon Malik Riaz Hussain, and was linked to the recent arrest of Khan.

Another property down the road featured in the Panama Papers, revealing that the former Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's family raised £7 million from four apartments in the building. Ownership of these properties featured in the ousting of Nawaz Sharif when he was prime minister in 2017. He was later cleared by the Supreme Court on the grounds that no evidence was produced proving ownership. Now his family is back at the centre of Pakistani politics, as his brother Shehbaz is prime minister.

According to Khan, thousands of PTI members have been arrested. Party leaders under threat of torture have defected from the party and abandoned Khan. It is possible that they could follow these attacks with increased repression against Khan and remove him from the board, even possibly by assassination.

Imran Khan was elected prime minister, with the backing of most of the military high command, in 2018. He had established a close relationship with much of the military. For the first two years, Khan and the military worked in collaboration. However, differences and clashes began to develop. Khan was removed from power in April 2022 by what amounted to a militarily backed parliamentary coup. Khan and the PTI have enjoyed mass enthusiastic support from millions, especially among the urban middle and upper middle-class layers.

Khan's populist rhetoric against corruption and the ruling elite has

resulted in him being seen as being different to the corrupt, ruling circles of capitalists and feudal landlords. This image was strengthened by his clashes with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and his resistance to accepting the package it proposed including vicious austerity measures. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Khan denounced Western imperialism's hypocrisy and opposed backing Western imperialism against Putin's Russia. The current chief of staff of the army, General Asim Munir, clashed with Khan when he was sacked by him from a top military intelligence position in 2019. For the ruling class, Western imperialism and the military, Khan had become an unreliable maverick who they wanted out of power.

This is despite the fact that Khan himself is a multimillionaire and is part of the corrupt capitalist class. These dramatic events have unfolded against the background of social and economic catastrophes throughout the country.

Crippling debt

The country is crippled by foreign debt which, as of December 2022,



Imran Khan PHOTO: KREMLIN.RU/CC



amounted to \$126.3 billion in external debt and liabilities. Of this, 77% is directly owed by the government to various international creditors. \$27 billion of the debt is to China and the rest to various international imperialist organisations, like the IMF, World Bank and Club of Paris. The total debt of Pakistan amounts to \$247 billion - 97% of GDP. Pakistan stands on the brink of a major debt default which would have far more devastating consequences than the crisis which erupted in Sri Lanka in 2022.

In addition, it is ravaged by high inflation and was shattered by the floods which swept through the country in 2022, displacing an estimated 33 million people. The infrastructure destroyed will never be replaced as long as capitalism and landlordism continue. The Sindh province, which produces approximately one-third of the country's food supply, saw 50% of its crops damaged or destroyed, which is having catastrophic consequences, nearly one year after the floods hit.

The economy is on the brink of collapse. In October 2022, the All Pakistan Textile Mills Association announced that 1,600 garment mills were closed due to the withdrawal of power subsidies. Textiles account for 10% of GDP. As a result, 5 million workers lost their jobs. In April 2023, all of the mobile phone assembly units shut down putting 20,000 jobs at risk. Shortages of foreign exchange reserves and the collapse of the rupee created difficulties in importing crude oil. Consequently, the largest petrol refinery was closed in February 2023. Most commentators estimate 18 million more people falling into poverty in 2023, with nearly 10 million young people having no work at all.

Imran Khan's populist appeal in such a situation has been massive. The military and ruling class is determined to prevent him contesting future elections and threatening a return to power. Yet, at the same time, the ruling government alliance, with the Sharif family dynasty now firmly reinstated in power, is incapable of resolving the deepening economic, social, environmental and political

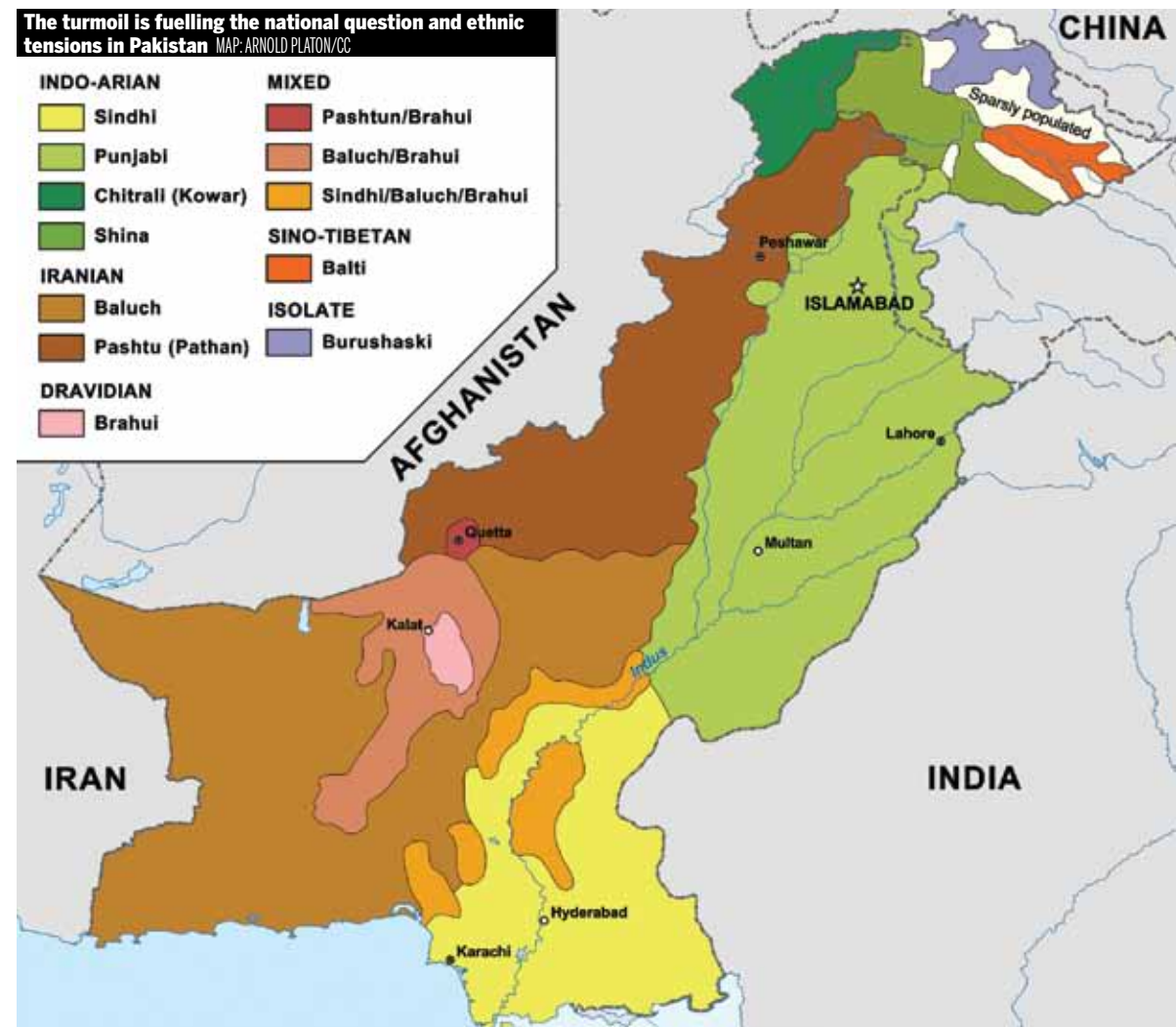
crises which are shaking the country. The devastating economic and social situation combined with the political turmoil is further fuelling the crucial national question in different areas. There is a growth of nationalism, especially in Balochistan and Sindh. Balochistan has seen the growth of armed groups, such as the Balochistan Liberation Army and the Baloch Army.

The coming to power of the Taliban in Afghanistan has also fuelled the growth of groups like the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, especially among the Pashtun population, which has been swelled by the arrival of nearly four million who have fled Afghanistan. Officially, 2022 saw a 27% increase in "terrorist" attacks compared to 2021. January 2023 was the bloodiest month on record with 135 killed and hundreds injured in over 40 "terrorist" attacks across the country.

Pakistan on the basis of capitalism and landlordism is not only on the brink of an economic collapse, it is on the brink of becoming a failed state. It is facing increasing centrifugal strains as support for nationalist forces increases. The very powerful military is the crucial factor holding Pakistan together.

The crisis in Pakistan is and will increasingly have crucial geo-political repercussions throughout the whole of South Asia. On the basis of the continuation of capitalism and landlordism, there is no way out of the crisis which now engulfs the country. The only possible way forward lies in the fate of the working class and the poor of Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh throwing off the shackles of capitalism, landlordism and imperialism, and building independent mass parties with a programme to establish governments of the workers and the poor with revolutionary socialist programmes.

These could then establish a voluntary confederation of socialist states of the whole area that could introduce an emergency plan of recovery and defend the democratic and national rights of all the peoples of the area. There is no other road out of the impasse that capitalism and landlordism have plunged these societies.



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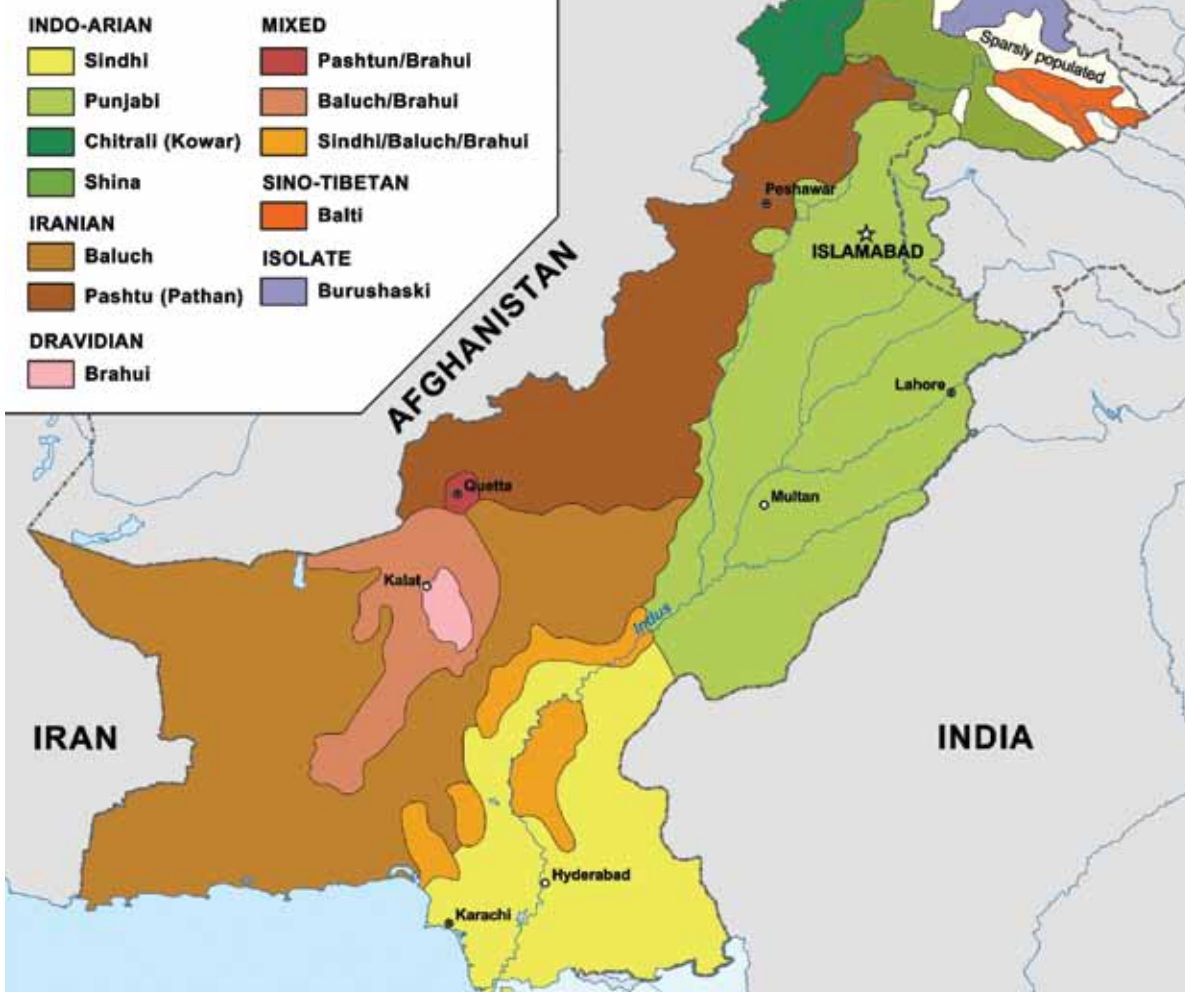
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The turmoil is fuelling the national question and ethnic tensions in Pakistan

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ANGRY AT WORK? GET ORGANISED FIGHT BACK!



MAX MCGEE
YOUTH FIGHT FOR JOBS

Regular hours, stress and overwork, rogue managers, unpaid overtime, pay not keeping up with prices... sound familiar? For young workers, poor wages and working conditions are all too common. From retail to hospitality, warehouses to social care, we make up large parts of the lowest-paid, most precarious sectors. Youth Fight for Jobs wants to help young workers to get organised and fight back - for a high-quality job and a future to look forward to.

The bosses won't just hand this to us. They want to keep our wages as low as possible, on 'flexible' contracts that suit them, in order to maximise their profits. While we struggle to afford rent, bills, fuel and groceries, shareholders make millions. To force the bosses to pay up, workers have to direct our anger through the trade unions, which allow our side - the working class - to mobilise our strength in numbers in a co-ordinated way, for a shared set of demands.

Workers' victories have shown that fighting through a trade union works. Unite the Union has won over £350 million in improved pay for its

members in the past two years. In hospitality, where young workers are particularly concentrated, there have been strikes over tip theft in restaurant chains TGI Fridays and Pizza Express. And following spontaneous walkouts in protest against a pathetic 50p-an-hour pay increase last summer, hundreds of workers at the Amazon warehouse in Coventry have now joined the GMB union to fight for a £15-an-hour wage.

Workers at the Coventry warehouse have already forced an offer of a £500 one-off payment. This shows that striking works. But we say that workers need hourly recognition of

our worth, in the form of permanent contracts with at least a £15-an-hour minimum wage, which rises in line with inflation. That's why we fight for the scrapping of zero-hour contracts, which give the bosses flexibility while we get instability.

These are the kinds of demands that young workers can fight for now in our unions, starting with getting active in the unions' youth sections. Youth Fight for Jobs campaigns for the building of democratic, fighting youth sections in every trade union, to channel young workers' collective energy into transforming the unions into vehicles for mass

struggle against the bosses and their political representatives.

The current economic system, capitalism, means crisis. From the economy to the climate, young people can see that the world as it's currently organised is not working for the vast majority. That's why Youth Fight for Jobs links our struggle for better living standards under capitalism to the need to fundamentally transform society along socialist lines - for democratic public ownership of major industry and the banks, with resources used in a planned way to meet the needs of all, for good.

WHAT WE STAND FOR: THE SOCIALIST PARTY'S MAIN DEMANDS >>> see column on page 14



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