



Issue 1236 20-26 July 2023 formerly **Militan**

TORIES - OUT-

And their policies

- Starmer keeps Tory two-child cap
- We need to organise a workers' alternative

hings cost, on average, 11.3% more than they did this time last year, according to the government's own RPI inflation rate. The cost of renting a room has gone up 17%, and if you have a mortgage coming to the end of its fixed term, annual payments are set to go up by thousands.

But not everyone is struggling to pay the bills in this rigged and rotten profit-driven system. Britain's top companies are making bigger profits - 89% higher at the start of 2022 than three years earlier, according to Unite the Union.

By refusing to accept the Tories ruling out even talking about pay last autumn, workers in the trade unions have forced them back by striking, winning improved pay offers.

More still can be won. The junior doctors' union the BMA has already rejected their pay offer, which is still below inflation and without extra funding. Teachers are voting too on whether to settle. It's not over yet. (see pages 2-3)

By refusing to fully fund the new pay offers, the Tories are promising more cuts to services, on top of 13 years of austerity. There's nothing left to cut! Socialist Party members are fighting for fully funded, inflation-proof pay rises, and to kick the Tories out.

But, would a Labour government spend more on public services? That was the question BBC journalist Laura Kuenssberg repeatedly asked Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer – with no response.

Starmer is at pains to demonstrate his so-called "fiscal responsibility", that is what is behind his long list of dropped pledges. The latest: Labour will no longer scrap the Tories' two-child benefit cap which, as it stands, keeps 250,000 children in poverty.

We need a working-class, political alternative. One which is prepared to back workers' strikes for pay rises, fully fund services, and fight for a socialist alternative to profit-driven capitalism. A step forward would be trade unions organising a workers' list of candidates to contest the next general election. It could include Jeremy Corbyn and others barred from standing by Starmer, such as Jamie Driscoll in the north east (see page 5).

NEU members – Vote No! Reject 6.5%! Fight on for inflation-proof pay rises

NEU NEC MEMBERS SEAN MCCAULEY. SHEILA CAFFREY, LOUISE CUFFARO, NICKY DOWNES. STEVE SCOTT (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

The National Executive (NEC) of the National Education Union (NEU) has voted, by 44 votes to 22, to recommend acceptance of the government's latest pay offer, a 6.5% increase for September 2023. There is now an online consultation of members running until 28 July.

The five Socialist Party members on the executive voted against this recommendation and are campaigning for a 'No' vote in the consultation. Accepting the deal means accepting two more years of pay cuts.

NEU members have taken determined strike action for good reason. Teachers' pay in England has fallen by over 20% in real terms since 2010.

Nothing more offered for 2022

We started this dispute because last September's award was just 5%, still correctly described on the NEU

website as "another huge real-terms pay cut".

6.5% for 2023 is vet another pay cut With RPI inflation currently running

at 11.3%, this is effectively another 5% pay cut. Even the government's own CPI inflation measure is more than this, at 8.7%.

The general secretaries are claiming the deal should be accepted as it is the "largest-ever recommendation" from the School Teachers' Review Body (STRB). But we're also facing the "largest-ever" inflation rates since the STRB began! It's a lot less than teachers in Scotland have won, leaving their main scale £7,000 better than

At the same time, the Tories have announced that they will be accepting the pay review bodies' recommendations in all sectors where they exist That includes police and prison officers being offered 7% and doctors 6%. But this has only happened



because the Tories have been put under massive pressure. So now is the time to increase that pressure - we

The deal is being sold to members as 'fully funded' but we are yet to see figures which show clearly what the funding position is. The Tories are 'reprioritising' to fund 3% - and Sunak proposed increasing racist charges on migrants to pay towards it but schools are expected to find the rest out of existing budgets. That will mean further cuts in many schools. The Tories know that, which is why they've also announced a £40 million 'hardship fund', but that's just a few hundred pounds each when divided up over thousands of schools.

Members should vote reject and join us in arguing at the NEC and throughout the union for a bold, serious, escalating fight in the autumn! The majority grouping in the current eadership of the NEU is the 'NEU Left, whose members have split over this issue. However, this development shows that it is now necessary to start to build a new left in the union, to campaign for a fighting programme and hold the leadership to account.

The junior doctors, hospital consultants, radiographers, rail workers and others are still fighting. The strike wave is not over and we can win more from this crisis-ridden Tory

Rebuild the PCS national campaign

Vote 'No' in the consultation

Elect Marion Lloyd as a campaigning PCS General Secretary

PCS BRANCH SECRETARY WIGAN, PERSONAL CAPACITY

The PCS civil service union's National Executive Committee (NEC) met 12-13 July and agreed to the attempt by the 'Left Unity' majority to end the union's national campaign on pay, pensions, redundancy rights and jobs for 2023.

Broad Left Network (BLN) supporters on the NEC, along with Independent Left (IL) members, voted in opposition to these proposals, insisting that the NEC must carry out its

Our view is very simple. The PCS national campaign must continue there is more to be won!

Annual Delegate Conference (ADC) in 2022 and 2023 issued instructions to the NEC to demand a 10% pay rise for 2022-23, to fight to recoup the 2% we have overpaid on our pensions for years now, to defend the civil service compensation scheme (for when there is redundancv) and to demand a jobs guarantee. In addition, the NEC speaker at the 2023 conference gave a commitment to the demand put forward by the BLN, for an inflation-proof increase



been achieved.

Members will have suffered an average real-terms pay cut in the last two years of approximately 10%. On pensions, not an iota of progress rights, the government is continuing to run their public consultation on cuts and plainly intends to implement those cuts in 2025. On jobs, no guarantee was achieved.

As recently as May 2023, the NEC won a renewed mandate for strike action in an all-members ballot. ADC also instructed the NEC to reballot DWP, which just missed the threshold.

Despite this, when news broke in Westminster civil servants, president Fran Heathcote and her NEC allies immediately suspended strike action, including calling off in-progress strikes in the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, and called off the

The 'Left Unity' leadership argued that we now needed to see what departments would offer, so they voted for pay bargaining to begin department by department. They knew that would not entail departments offering inflation-proof rises, as pay across all Westminster areas is constrained by the Treasury insistence that average pay rises live within a cap of 4.5%.

That is why this fight is a national one, with the Tory government.

Outgoing general secretary Mark imembers and reps, rebuild the un-Serwotka called the 4.5% cap "insult- : ion into the campaigning body that ing". Yet it is precisely with this cap: members deserve... We can win

As we stand, very little of this has i choice to succeed him as general secretary, Fran Heathcote, wants to declare victory

The leadership is now balloting members from 3-13 August. The ballot is not on whether the pay 'offer has been made. On our redundancy is enough, but is on whether or not members "endorse the NEC strategy". Many members will ask, "what strategy?!

> Members should vote to continue the campaign by voting 'No' in the

Change the leadership

It is clear that a change of leadership is needed. BLN supporters have endorsed Marion Lloyd as our candidate for PCS general secretary, and June that the government would of: have agreed a joint platform with fer a £1,500 non-consolidated, pro-: IL members to support incumbent rata, one-off lump sum payment to: Assistant General Secretary, John Moloney

The statement by PCS BLN and II

"The announcements from the NEC majority to try to end the campaign to improve our pay, protect jobs and defend pensions demonstrate how urgent it is to change the leadership of PCS.

"It is now crucial we build activity and support to mount a serious and meaningful challenge to beat the leadership's candidates, Fran Heathcote and Paul O'Connor - neither of whom have the inclination nor the capability to build and deliver the necessary campaign to win on jobs. pay, pensions, office closures.

"Our candidates stand on a programme which will, working with

STRIKES FORCE TORIES BACK MORE CAN BE WON

socialistparty.org.uk

the **Socialist**



he Tories have been forced to make concessions on pay as a result of determined strike action - that's the main takeaway from their announcement that they will honour the recommendations of public sector pay review bodies.

In the autumn, Rishi Sunak's government would not negotiate with the public sector unions about pay. Then following strike action he was forced to. Just a month ago he would not honour the pay review body 2023 recommendations - still well-below inflation but higher than the government wanted. Now he says he will honour them in full. That means of fers of 7% for police and prison of ficers, 6.5% for teachers, and 6% for

Now he says this offer "... is final We will not negotiate again on this vear's settlements and no amount of strikes will change our decision."

Well, we'll see about that!

He was attempting to dig his heels in, not because the Tories are tough and strong, but because of their fear of opening up the floodgates to demands from other workers. As soon as this announcement was made NHS workers in unions that had just accepted 5%, such as Unison, took to social media to say 'What about us!'

Workers will be looking at this turnaround and correctly drawing the conclusion that striking works! And the other takeaway has to be

that more can be won. Now is not the time to release the pressure but to step it up. As the BMA said regarding the of-

fer to doctors, it "represents yet another pay cut in real terms and serves only to increase the losses faced by doctors after more than a decade's worth of sub-inflation pay awards". The same is true for the other workers fighting over pay.

These inadequate pay increases will be imposed anyway, so workers can bank them and fight on for more.

Now Sunak is desperately trying to assuage his fractured and restless party that this about-turn is ok because apparently, contrary to all the propaganda thus far, suddenly these wage rises won't lead to inflation or affect borrowing.

Trying to appease the Tory right, he is even suggesting that the only people who will be adversely affect-



cess the NHS. We oppose any attempt to divide

workers against each other using racism or any other methods. That is why the question of funding

for public sector pay is so important. In the case of teacher pay, for example, the government claims that it is providing funding for 3%, but the other 3.5% will come from existing budgets. That inevitably means cuts. Cuts to resources, perhaps cuts to the 'nicer' aspects of school life such as trips, and potentially cuts to the jobs of support staff. That's why Socialist Party members are campaigning for the fight to continue - for inflationproof pay rises and full funding.

In the life of this issue of the Socialist there will be national strike action by hospital consultants and rail workers in the RMT and Aslef, as well

as St Mungo's homelessness charity. In recent weeks there has been action by bin workers and Amazon workers, to name just a few. This is testament to the extraordinary resilience of the strike wave - both in terms of workers keeping on going, and of more layers coming in to action.

Leadership That determination is what has driven forward the strike wave, pushing leaderships from below. Leaders who in many cases not only underestimated the willingness of their members to fight, but also continue to overestimate the strength of the Tories, attempting to wind down disputes in the mistaken belief that more cannot be won.

and in multiple local disputes, such: rejected these offers and are continuing their action - a sign of the transformation that has taken place as a result of years of austerity, inflation, and the strike wave itself, with layers who would previously not have been seen as part of the working class taking action, and propelling forwards the leaders of an organisation that was originally a professional body, not a trade union at all.

The 'NEU Left' leadership of the National Education Union (NEU). however, is recommending acceptance of 6.5%. But NEU members are getting organised and campaigning for reject, with Socialist Party NEU NEC members to the fore. The 'Left Unity' leadership of the PCS civil servants' union is attempting to wind down its campaign having

£1,500 lump sum, but again, mem bers are campaigning, with Socialist Party members and the Broad Left Network taking a lead. In Unison, Socialist Party members have fought for the Time for Real Change grouping to take a bold fighting lead.

EDITORIAL

Unlike others - such as the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), who are now campaigning to say 'no' but are in alliance with these leaderships and have provided a left cover for the last period - in all of these cases, Socialist Party members have worked with others to put forward a fighting

In the case of Unite the Union, it is vital that the gains made under Sharon Graham's leadership are defended against those in the 'United Left' 'Members First' group who want to undermine them. These developments all pose the need for new rank-and-file lefts to be built that can campaign among the members and hold leaderships to account, and for fighting socialist candidates to stand for election - as in the upcoming PCS general secretary and assistant general secretary elections.

Anti-union laws

The pressure is also being applied to union tops to urgently prepare to act together, decisively, against the Tories' planned minimum service levels anti-union laws - to defy and defeat these measures. RMT and Unite conferences have agreed motions put forward by Socialist Party members That's what makes the model motion and the lobby of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) called by the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) on 10 September so important.

In response to demands from trade unions for inflation-proof pay rises. Keir Starmer will only commit a Labour government to "improving public service workers' living standards throughout the parliament' He has repeatedly warned of "tough decisions, while shadow chancellor Rachel Reeves promises "fiscal discipline'

That's why the debates that have taken place at union conferences about political representation and workers' candidates in the general election are a key part of continuing the fight on pay and funding

For more on the battles in the different unions involved in the strike wave see pages 2, 6, 7, 10



NEWS LABOUR PARTY 20-26 July 2023 socialistparty.org.uk

the **Socialist**

20-26 July 2023

DO YOU HAVE NEWS FOR US?

bought by ordinary workers, trade unionists, young people and Socialist Party members. We want you to write for the Socialist.

Send us reports of your workplace and community campaigns, short letters on working-class issues, or ideas for other articles.

CONTACT US

editors@socialistpartv.org.uk 020 8988 8777 - ask for the editors

DEADLINES

Friday before publication, or Monday morning for urgent news, unless otherwise agreed with the editors

The Socialist goes to press on a Tuesday night. We publish online on Wednesday and in print on Thursday

SUBSCRIBE

to the Socialist for weekly working-class news, analysis and fighting strategy

- socialistparty.org.uk/subscribe Paper subscription £4.50 a month
- or £6.50 including Socialism Today E-subscription £2.50 a month, or £4 including Socialism Today

SOCIALISM TODAY our monthly Marxist magazine

socialismtoday.org Paper sub £3 a month, e-sub £2.50

on all major podcast platforms

FOLLOW US

facebook.com/CWISocialistParty Instagram @SocialistPartyCWI YouTube - Socialist Party Twitter @Socialist_Party

SOCIALIST PARTY The Socialist is the weekly newspape of the Socialist Party, the England and Wales section of the Committee

> for a Workers' Internationa socialistparty.org.uk





socialisthooks.co.uk Left Books: Marxist classics bookshop leftbooks.co.uk

OUR NEWSPAPER TEAM Editorial

Editor of the Socialist Mark Best

Chris Newby

Scott Jones Ian Pattison Paula Mitchell Mark Best

ISSN 1366-9621 Published by Socialist Publications PO Box 1398. Enfield EN1 9GT Registered as a newspaper at the Post Office Printed by trade union labour at Reach Printing Services

Militant issue 1: October 1964 The Socialist issue 1: 7 February 1997

"The philosophers have only terpreted the world, in various ways: the point is to change it."

Tories drop gas boiler pledge

Nationalise energy – don't reward shareholders for pollution

ELLEN KENYON-PEERS

Domestic gas boilers emit more nitrous oxide than a new car. Combined, our boilers have a carbon footprint double that of all power

They're our most popular heat generation source. They're currently in 78% of UK homes. And account for a whopping 21% of UK emissions.

Simply put, we need better ways to create and retain heat in our homes. Better insulated accommodation, with modern, efficient methods of heating would vastly decrease

Cold, damp homes

And it would increase occupants' wellbeing. Over 1,000 people died due to the cold, damp conditions of their homes last winter.

The Tories' environmental legacy includes sewage in our waterways, opening a new polluting coal mine, and pursuing fracking despite local and national opposition. They have sacked off yet another climate pledge - to replace our gas boilers.

But the scrapped Tory scheme

controversially proposed volatile hydrogen as an alternative. A lack of investment into research around the potential pitfalls - in addition to a hurried attempt to force a hydrogen-based solution onto the village of Whitby in Ellesmere Port - has resulted in plans being halted after a public campaign.

The short-sighted and profit-centric approach taken by the Tories is no surprise. The government's flagship 'Green Homes Scheme' offered grants to retrofit insulation in existing properties. But it was scrapped just six months after its launch.

People and planet before profit

The Socialist Party demands mass retrofitting to insulate and add ancillary energy sources to existing build ings. Under capitalism, privatised energy firms choose profit over the health and wellbeing of us and the

We need a socialist solution. Energy companies, who have raked in huge profits over the last year, must be nationalised to fund this work. And if these giants are democrati cally controlled by the working class we can make a real plan to combat





ADAM HARMSWORTH

COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

Tory prime minister Rishi Sunak claims he will be forcing migrants to foot part of the bill for the public sector pay rise. He's told us he hopes to make £1.4 billion out of the £5 billion cost by hiking up the immigration health surcharge and visa fees.

But who actually believes the Tories will hit this immigration target, when they've failed so many times before?

The money is there. Profits for the richest 350 companies in the country jumped 73% during the pandemic.

Nevertheless, with Sunak's latest attack, a migrant on a five-vear visa would pay £5,175 up-front on the health surcharge alone. According to one estimate, a family of four hoping to settle in the UK will have to pay at

Tory anti-migrant bill

Meanwhile, the Tory majority in the House of Commons has rejected further changes made to the Illegal Migration Bill. This terrifying bill would demand the government throw people who arrive here through unofficial routes – like small boat crossings - back to their home country, or to

Even a House of Lords amendment to exempt victims of modernday slavery was too big a concession for most Tories! Victims who are trafficked into the country would be treated like criminals.

And they would be thrown out of the country if they went to the authorities for help. That will encourage

Even with all the horrors of this bill. Labour has said it has "no plans' to repeal it.

Additionally, there was a third shameful attack on migrants in a week. Immigration minister Robert Jenrick personally ordered that child-friendly murals of Mickey Mouse and other cartoon characters on the walls of an asylum centre be

Micky Mouse mural

The 'I' newspaper reports that Jenrick said make the place less "welcoming". And that it was a "law enforcement environment... not a welcome centre". According to the Telegraph. Ienrick said: "Make it unambiguously clear" to the children "that they have broken the law, and that they can expect to be removed" and "prosecuted". These are all open displays of Su-

nak's government desperately trying to divide working-class people striking for pay rises. Trying to get a portion of the pay rise funded by migrants, forcing through a dodgy antirefugee bill, painting over murals this is a government hoping halfbaked ideas and blaming minorities will get it through the next week or month of crisis The Socialist Party calls for an

immediate end to the attacks on migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. Trade unions that fight for their members have the power to unite workers, wherever they're born.

This is a weak and divided government. Working-class solidarity can prevent a drastic worsening of the

North East mayor

Jamie Driscoll independent stand - chance to challenge Starmer's pro-rich policies



SOCIALIST PARTY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

rth of Tyne Mayor Jamie Driscoll has left the Labour Party, and announced his intention to stand as an independent candidate in the North East mayoral election in May 2024. This followed a move by Keir Starmer to block Jamie from being longlisted as a Labour candidate for the contest.

Jamie's removal from the selection contest is just the latest in a string of expulsions and bureaucratic manoeuvres by Starmer's head office in its campaign to crush the last vestiges of Jeremy Corbyn's manifesto pledges from the 2017 and 2019 general elections. And now Starmer has promised to keep the Tories' hated two-child benefit cap.

In less than a day after announcing his independent stand, over £76,000 was raised online for the campaign. This is a clear reflection of the level of enthusiasm which exists for a working-class political alternative to Starmer's pro-capitalist Labour

by Labour Party HQ was met with outrage across the workers' movement. Sharon Graham, general secretary of Unite the Union, said: "What is emerging from Labour is a pattern of behaviour to literally take out any MP or mayor who backs key manifesto demands on the renationalisation of energy, action on rampant profiteering, and investment in UK steel." This is the reason why Socialist

Party members brought motions to Unite's recent rules conference to open up Unite's political fund to back any candidates who fight for Unite's policies, including outside of Labour

An open letter to Starmer and the Labour National Executive Commit tee called for the decision to initially exclude Driscoll to be reversed. It was signed by general secretaries and presidents from nine different unions. including Mick Lynch from transport union RMT.

The recent RMT conference voted to support Jeremy Corbyn standing at the next general election. He's also been barred from Labour.

opportunity for the trade union movement to take the steps now to prepare a workers' list of candidates for upcoming elections - including mayoral, local and the general election - standing for anti-austerity and socialist policies. This could include unions, like the RMT, using its political fund to help finance Jamie's

Such financial backing from the trade union movement should be accompanied by demands for him, and other union-backed candidates on a workers' list, to stand on bold social-

Back striking workers

ernment cuts

- Inflation-proof pay rises Refuse to vote for local
- Nationalise key industries under democratic workers' control and
- Refuse to implement Tories' new anti-strike 'minimum service levels'
- Read what we've written about Jamie Driscoll before at socialistparty.org.uk - 'Last Corbynista in power blocked from

Southampton – how can Labour council stop cuts to jobs and services?



Just days after May's council election. Southampton Labour council promised to cut £35 million by cutting council jobs, with its knock-on effect to council services.

Labour has been elected with their largest majority since 1990, the year of the Tories' hated Poll Tax, following the sharp fall in support for the

Why is Labour proposing to make fend jobs and services?

Since 2010, cuts to council funding by the Conservative government have removed over £1 billion from Southampton's council budget. The effect? City-wide cuts to youth services, social care, adult services housing and direct works - with

Services saved

Campaigners over that time, including council trade unions, have fought to halt some cuts successfully. Oaklands Pool, Holcroft care home, Kentish Road respite centre, and more recently St Marys Leisure Centre, have all been saved from closure.

When first elected in 2012, Labour mmediately moved to carry out Tory austerity, with another 'emergency' cuts budget. They were opposed by Labour councillors Keith Morrell and Don Thomas.

Keith and Don moved an alternative council budget in 2013 to protect jobs and services from proposed cuts. That outlined how a campaign to oppose cuts, with the mass support of council unions and the local community, could force the unpopular Tory government to retreat and instead restore council funding.

At the time, they were rebuked and told by the Labour council that the use of reserves and borrowing powers was illegal, and would bankrupt

Keith and Don were kicked out of Labour for opposing cuts, and stood independently of Labour against austerity. The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) has stood consistently in Southampton, taking Keith and Don's fighting stance. A list of workers' candidates at the next general election would hold Labour's feet to the fire, like Keith and Don did.

first stand against Labour cuts, coun cil workers face a huge attack on jobs Hard-pressed council tax payers face cuts to their services. We have seen tax, rents and charges rise.

The impact of austerity has been disastrous. Failing services have left the vulnerable without support. Council workers left delivering services are ever more stretched to breaking point.

The anger at rising poverty, hungry children, rising rents and homelessness has seen Tory votes fall to their owest for years. Labour is now the largest party in local government fo the first time in 20 years.

Is there an alternative to Southampton Labour's proposals? What could Labour do to protect jobs and services?

The first step must be to withdraw these cuts, use their election mandate and mobilise support for a citywide mass campaign - restore council services, tackle the crisis of the lack of council housing, and adopt policies, such as free school meals, to show what difference an incoming Labour government would make to the lives of ordinary people.

Unite the Union policy is to call on Labour councils to set "legal, no-cuts budgets". The trade unions should demand that an incoming La bour government commits to restore council funding to all Labour coun cils, who use reserves and borrowing powers to protect jobs and services between now and the next general

Southampton Labour used £20 million from reserves in its February budget to avert cuts before the May elections. The council retains substantial reserves, and powers to

Tories rejected

Support for Tory cuts has been rejected. The government is in a civil war meltdown. It may not last the next 18 months.

Southampton workers have been on strike against pay cuts. Council unions are now balloting to strike on

What possible reasons can there be for not making a stand? Enough is enough. Mobilise a popular revolt against cuts that would gain support far beyond Southampton, and show other councils facing a funding crisis

WORKPLACE WORKPLACE 20-26 July 2023 20-26 July 2023 socialistparty.org.uk

After the CWU ballot: Build a fighting left in the union **Renationalise Royal Mail**

Union (CWU) members in Royal Mail have voted to accept the national "Business Recovery Transformation Growth Agreement" by 75.8% to 24.2%, with a 67% turnout.

But this should not be viewed as a positive vote in favour of the national agreement, or a vote of confidence in the national leadership. It is more the result of a brutal long-running national dispute. Postal workers took 18 days of strike action and saw around 400 reps and activists either suspended or sacked by a vicious senior management team, hell-bent on smashing the CWU.

Socialist Party members in the CWU called for a 'reject' vote.

We recognise that our action pushed back Royal Mail management on a number of issues and stopped them smashing the CWU as an effective trade union. CEO Simon Thompson was eventually removed.

The dispute showed the massive potential power of the postal membership, which was only partially realised. We saw the strongest picket lines that anyone can remember. Perhaps the most impressive event was the massive 20,000-strong strike rally in Parliament Square in central London, which marched to Buckingham Palace - probably the first time that it has happened in living memory!

But we don't believe this is the best deal we could have won, and we think some serious mistakes were made by the leadership.

The agreement covers a 10% pay rise over three years, with another 2% from April 2024, and a non-consolidated £500 lump sum. Added to this is £900 from a surplus in the pension scheme, forced out of management by the pressure of members

attacks on a range of terms and conditions, including sick pay, absence procedures, ill-health retirement and

in annualised hours, where there are periods in the year where you work less than your contracted hours and periods vou do more. Along with changes in start times, this will impact greatly on members, particularly those with childcare issues.

actions went too far should be taken under the agreed conduct code.

we said that this dispute was of a far more serious level than previous postal disputes. We said that the CWU leadership should launch a strike fund, and put a call out for solidarity to the wider trade union movement, many of whom were moving into action themselves, and working-class communities. This would have raised the stakes against a ruthless employer.

pared for this. But what is undoubted was the determination of our members to fight. They took part in the longest period of strike action for decades, through the summer of 2022 up to Christmas Eve. But after

But also in the agreement there are

voluntary redundancy payment.

by Lord Falconer, a barrister who served in Tony Blair's cabinet, into the dismissed and suspended members. We don't believe this is good enough. All of these members should be reinstated, and managers whose

Right at the start of the campaign,

The CWU leadership was not pre-Christmas, momentum was lost.

mandate for more strike action, there was a lack of will at the top of CWU to call more strikes, accompanied by a tone of 'we must understand the po-

There has also been a move to bring

The agreement includes a review

Despite us getting another massive



Keir Starmer and Co to commit a La-

bour government to bringing Royal

Mail back into public ownership, a

position passed at last autumn's La-

bour conference. That demand must

be made now. Unless Royal Mail is

taken out of the hands of the vulture

cially as it was raised by management that the company was on the verge of going into administration. This was a clear attempt to frighten us into accepting a poor deal. We consistently said that postal workers should not have to pay for a crisis caused by privatisation and by senior management. The directors got their disgusting massive payments and shareholders pocketed hundreds of millions of pounds, while our mem-

The question now is how can we keep the fight going? Many rankbers only got crumbs and-file activists campaigned against Yet at no time did the CWU leadthe offer, including Socialist Party

formed. Many members have drawn the conclusion that a more fighting leadership is needed. These groups can be the basis for a new left in the union, across all sectors, to bring together those who are prepared to fight and build from the ground up, and appeal to reps at all levels to get



capitalists, there will be further vicious attacks on postal workers and

The fight for a real and fair pay rise for Unison members must continue!



UNISON IN KNOWSI FY BRANCH SECRETARY

Since the close of the strike ballot of local government members in Unison, Socialist Party members in Unison have campaigned for a fighting strategy. As we go to press, the full results have still not been made public, nor the discussion taking place on leading bodies about the next steps, pending the conclusion of the strike pallot of Unite members on 24 July. The GMB, representing 200,000 local government workers, has also rejected the pay offer by a 64% majority vote, though are vet to move to an ndustrial action ballot.

Nonetheless, it is clear that there was an overwhelming vote for action by Unison members. As the vote

turnout threshold of 50% has been

the service.

Socialist Party Unison members put forward the strategy set out in last week's Socialist to our regional National Joint Council reps via the union's consultation exercise. We argued for action in all schools which met the threshold as coordinated action with teachers in the autumn and in the councils that hit the threshold, and for a reballot of any council that got a turnout of 40% or

We believe that the Unison leadership should adopt our strategy. National Education Union members are being consulted on the pay offer of 6.5%, and while the leadership is: back Unison as a fighting union and was disaggregated by employer, the : recommending acceptance, many : keep it safe for a Starmer-led Labour

all the areas that the Tory anti-union : maintain the battle into the autumn Unison should seek to coordinate action with Unite where they meet the threshold

If a fighting lead is not taken, it means a further real-terms pay cut for our members in local governpay fall by 25% since 2010. This is already showing in recruitment and retention issues for councils across England and Wales, and those who are working are seeing an increase in their workloads as a result.

It will risk undermining support for the Time For Real Change majority grouping on the union's national executive, which needs to demonstrate a fighting lead if it is to prevent Unison falling back into the hands of the right wing, and that wants to hold

Rail unions take joint action on London Underground

JOHN REID

RETIRED FORMER RMT EXECUTIVE MEMBER

London Underground unions RMT, Aslef and Unite are taking action between 23-28 July to fight savage attacks on working conditions, pensions and jobs

The London Underground is the only major metro system in the industrialised nations not to receive a

The government is looking for £600 million of 'savings,' which includes 600 jobs going on stations and hundreds of jobs going in other areas of work, including train drivers and

This will result in unstaffed stations, leading to less safe travel. Transport for London admits that 1,813 sexual offences were reported to the police in one year from 2021-22, and vet these enormous cuts are still being imposed. Maintenance cuts will lead to an unsafe system for staff and passengers.

After seven days of strikes by the RMT on stations, six all-grades, management finally agreed to review the cuts and their impact on weekend working. But no sooner did they agree a process to review them than they announced a further programme to cut another 200 station jobs and demand hundreds of workers apply for their own jobs. No protection of substantive earnings is on

The attacks also include savage cuts in pensions. Strike action by the RMT held these attacks at bay for a vear, but a timetable to move workers into the local government pension scheme is now imminent. Bosses are also ripping up agreements on sickness and attendance policies - a bullying manager's charter.

won reasonable working conditions from years of struggle. The Tory govwho have stood up against cutbacks from both Tory and Labour administrations. If the rail workers are defeated it will make other attacks further down the line easier. Fighting these attacks must go hand in hand with fighting the Tory minimum ser vice levels legislation.

them through

It is good that RMT, Aslef and Unite

Workers on the underground have

London Labour mayor Sadig Khan

has a choice: join with London Underground workers to fight these cuts and refuse to carry them out, or side with the Tory government to push

are unified in action. This is a battle

network d (a) NUJ napo (A) (b) - 5 (c) - 6WU

UNITE general secretary SHARON GRAHAM

BFAWU general secretary SARAH WOOLLEY

Doctors strike and reject the Tory 'unconscionable' pay offer

started five days of strike action on Thursday 13 July. Hospital consultants in the BMA are on strike for the first time in 50 years on 20 and 21 July, and have set more dates for August.

In response to the Tories' "final" offer of a 6% pay increase, the BMA's chair of council Philip Banfield said he offer "is exactly why so many doctors are feeling they have no opion but to take industrial action".

He said: "With an NHS in crisis, seven and a half million patients on waiting lists, chronic underfunding and doctors being directly targeted

government should not be supporting pay uplifts which don't reverse years of sub-inflation pay awards.

"The political choices this government is making continue to make ordinary people sicker and poorer; that is an unconscionable position for a 'civilised' society to be in." Socialist Party members visited

the junior doctor picket lines in support. Elaine Brunskill reports from the Oueen Elizabeth Hospital. Gateshead Alongside striking for pay, junior

doctors talked about their conditions at work. Long hours are the one calls in sick there's an expectation that the others will take up the slack; this is increasingly the case as hospital bosses tell them they are over budget for using locums.

It wasn't surprising to hear some of these young doctors talking of the possibility of migrating to Australia or New Zealand. Drivers of cars and ambulances passing the picket line indicated their ongoing support with toots, waves and shout-outs. A BMA rep in Sheffield says:

"The pay offer not only still equates to a real-terms pay cut to all grades - as is the case for majority of public sector workers - but the pro posed funding source is unaccep table. Increasing the International Health Surcharge discriminates against migrant workers with these extortionate upfront fees, and adds another point of exploitation for workers that contribute so greatly to our public health service. As the government attempts to divide us their actions only serve to unite us in our ongoing dispute.





Woking council announces wholesale cuts Trade unions must fight back

SECRETARY OF SAVE OUR SERVICES IN SURREY

Woking Borough Council in Surrey has issued a section 114 notice to cease all 'non-essential' spending, with debts approaching £2.6 billion.

What does this mean for staff working for the council and for residents and service users? The council's Lib-Dem majority are showing their true colours - promising to work with government commissioners to 'balance the books' by making 350 council employees vulnerable to redundancy, and closing almost every service that they do not have to provide by law.

The council has started a 'consultation' on which services to cut and

includes: parks, play areas, public toilets, leisure centres, street cleaning, community meals service, community alarm service, day services and community centres. They ask: 'Which of these services should we consider reducing or stopping funding?' There is no option in the survey

Can we stop the cuts? Is anyone fighting back? Unfortunately an official from Unison, the trade union representing workers at the council, was quoted in the local paper saying: "It's difficult, really difficult. We are doing what we can to support them [staff]. The money the council has got to save makes it so clear cut. It wouldn't be in anybody's interest to aggravate things and start

Industrial action and a mass local campaign, led by trade unions and community groups, to force the government to come up with the necessary resources, is exactly what

If the current councillors are not prepared to make a stand against the government and their enforcers they should make way for trade unionists and socialists who will.

Save Our Services in Surrey, along side Surrey Socialist Party and the local active trade unions, will be putting forward a fighting alternative to defend our jobs and services.

Get all the latest union news

AUTOMATION WHAT IMPACT WILL IT HAVE ON WORKERS AND THE ECONOMY?

MARK BEST

SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

he latest developments in Artificial Intelligence (AI) - the impact they might have on workers' jobs, livelihoods and our day-to-day lives - are being discussed in the press. Recent advances don't mean we are about to develop machines capable of human or superhuman thought, but have brought forward the potential automation of a wider array of jobs and tasks. The race between different companies to produce ever bigger and more powerful models in the hope of capturing the lion's share of future profits has some capitalist politicians worried about the economic, social and political impacts these new technologies may have.

At a time when capitalism across the world limps from crisis to crisis, what consequences could AI implementation have and how do we fight to make sure the potential gains of new technology don't come at the expense of workers' living standards?

The impact of new technology isn't inherent within the science itself but will be determined by the outcomes of battles between workers and the bosses, dependent on the organisation of both sides. How could society be organised in a way that science and technology is developed for the good of us all instead of what makes a profit for a few at the top?

What can the tech do?

Artificial Intelligence in the broadest terms refers to machines and computer programs able to react to conditions and complete tasks. This includes computer programs that can play chess, recognise images or check your spelling and grammar, and even, in a way, many of the mechanical systems that make up robotic production.

The explosion in the capability and availability of generative AI: generative AI. It calls for a ban on

algorithms - programs which when given an input will output text, images, computer code, music and so on - has thrown AI and its implications for the capitalist system under the spotlight.

Open AI's ChatGPT, Google's LaM-DA and other generative algorithms can take part in human-like conversation, produce realistic photographs and video, and write convincing articles.

Algorithms able to mimic human writing and art may give the impression that there is a thinking, intelligent being behind them. But there is still a large jump to so-called Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) with the capability to think and reason as humans can, and beyond.

AI technologies are developed by machine learning; algorithms that have the ability to modify themselves, to 'learn' by checking if their output matches what is expected and making internal changes to approach an ideal

In the case of the large language models that produce text, vast amounts of written material from books, text from the internet, computer code, etc. have been plugged into a model which processes and refines itself. Similarly, image generators have been trained with thousands of images. Advances in computing, allowing for more processing of testing data, have enabled these powerful al gorithms to be developed.

These algorithms have been trained using the results of hours of human creativity, sometimes seemingly without the permission of the creators themselves. Some image-generating algorithms produce new photos with watermarks of popular stock image sites already baked in, hinting where the training data may have originated

Hollywood's ongoing Writers Guild of America strike for better pay and rights includes demands related to writers being made to work on or edit scripts created by generative AI, and to not allow language models to be trained on material produced by

scriptwriters. It's not just in the creative industries, the automation of a number of jobs in a wide range of fields is posed. Goldman Sachs, the investment bank, predicts that two thirds of jobs in Europe and the US are exposed to some degree of automation and that a quarter of work could be replaced. It estimates this would mean 300 million full-time jobs automated by algorithms, with an unknown number of new jobs created as the technology is implemented.

Although the exact impact new avenues of automation will have on jobs is unknown, individual capitalists are compelled to shrink their wages bill to look after their profits and keep up with their competitors.

Responding to lower than expected profits, BT has announced it plans to cut 55,000 jobs from its global workforce by 2030. While many of these come from the ending of the rollout

of fibre broadband, the company promised 10,000 of these jobs will be replaced by generative AI. Is this technically feasible or does it represent an attempt to reassure investors that although BT is not profitable now, AI will make it so in the future?

BT workers in the Communication Workers Union recently took strike action, extracting an improved pay deal from the bosses. And attempts to make tens of thousands of redundancies in the future will be met by resistance from a unionised workforce.

Mass job losses won't develop without resistance from the working class. Any attempts to make workers pay for advances in new technology must be resisted by collective action. Trade unions should demand that gains in productivity aren't used to sack workers or drive down wages. The demand should be put on bosses who argue such measures are necessary to open the books to trade union inspection.

Companies which proceed with attacks should be nationalised to save jobs, with compensation only on the basis of proven need. Publicly owned

and run democratically by the working class, measures can be agreed to share out remaining work without loss of pay. High-quality education and training on full pay, and with a guaranteed job at the end for those who want it, must be fought for too.

Entry level, less-skilled jobs will be at risk of automation. Many already are with the introduction of things such as self-service checkouts. But traditionally better-paid professionals, which the capitalist class has been able to draw some social support from historically, losing their jobs to automation can further undermine support for the capitalist system. Already, attacks on pay and conditions have forced lawyers and doctors to take strike action, pushing them closer to working-class methods of struggle.

For some sections of the capitalist class, including some of those involved in the development and monetisation of AI, the risks of continued unregulated, unplanned advances in AI come in many forms. Individual capitalists worry their capital and ability to make a profit may

be adversely impacted by new developments, or they may have already missed the boat and the existing AI industry leaders have already won out.

These developments are another source of instability in an increasingly chaotic global situation.

Already malicious computer programs have caused real damage to physical infrastructure. The Stuxnet virus which spread around the world is believed to have been designed to disrupt Iran's nuclear programme, reportedly damaging up to 1,000 centrifuges. Computer programs generating viruses, either by design or accidentally, could have real economic consequences.

Automated stock-trading programs already exacerbate instability in the financial markets, in some instances causing stock values to rapidly collapse and recover within minutes. Far from creating these crashes, new technology has merely sped up transactions, feeding into stock markets used by bankers to gamble trading increasingly complex things divorced

opers of these AI research companies have been presented as attempts to minimise the 'damaging impact' the new technology may have. It is actually primarily an attempt to lock in the handful of companies currently ahead in research as the leaders of the field, with the profits that will come with it. States, acting in the interest of their nations' capitalists, may regulate the development of AI to protect their position and profits on the world

AI models will continue to be developed and released in an unplanned way in attempts to capture parts of the market, as has already been done. This is the way the capitalist system works. The drive for profit pushes individual capitalists down this road, even if it has the potential to destabilise or damage the capitalist system as a whole. As Geoffrey Hinton, called a 'godfather of AI,' who recently resigned from Google and warned about the impact of AI, said: "The problem is, in a capitalist system, if your competitor then does do that [develop and release larger, more powerful models], there's nothing you can do but do the same." The direction AI is heading, as has happened with new technologies in the past, is of a few companies monopolising knowledge under lock and key, stifling the free and open development of science

Capitalist automation

Over the course of its development, capitalism has enabled the replacement of manual jobs in production with machines. Driven by higher profits, capitalists replaced workers with machines, implementing advances in technology to compete with rival producers. Through the socialisation of production, advances in science and technology were able to be used to take society forward and improve overall living standards, while increasing the gap between those at the top and bottom of society.

This trend, of increased automation

in production, cannot be taken to its conclusion by capitalism. Capitalists only invest in implementing new technology when they can be sure of realising a profit. This means that new technology will be implemented if the capitalists think society is stable enough to justify investing large amounts of money now to realise a profit over a number of decades, and if there aren't other more profitable opportunities for them to use their capital in the short term. The production of semiconductors, a vital component in the chips in all modern electronics, requires \$15-20 billion of investment for a new factory. Capitalists have to

Calls for regulation from the devel- ; be persuaded to invest in new infrastructure with government subsidies, even though profits for these are likely to be guaranteed over their years-long Already automatic factories, in

which raw materials enter and finished products leave, exist. That they are not implemented on a wide scale indicates that in many industries paying and attempting to drive down workers' wages as far as possible is more profitable than full automation. The struggle over the impact of

new technology is class struggle, with workers fighting for jobs and wages on the one side and the bosses who own the factories, the patents and the infrastructure on the other. Under capitalism, technological advances will be used in ways to maximise profit.

A democratically planned socialist society, based on public ownership of big business and the banks, would be able to use technology in a different way. Instead of hunting for profit, production could be planned with other priorities in mind, such as reducing the necessary time for people to have to work, alongside protecting the environment and the wellbeing of workers

In a number of fields, the potential for technology to be used for the good of us all is there. The advances in electronics and computing which have fuelled the gig economy contain within them the potential to be used to improve the lives of workers across the world.

Automating jobs with generative algorithms could mean some of the drudgery of life is abolished. Workers in call centres, admin staff processing forms and workers doing jobs only necessary for the maintenance of capitalism, could have a real choice about what they want to do. Whether that is to use their current skills or to do something completely different.

A socialist society, in which the resources and knowledge of society are owned and directed democratically by workers themselves, would mean technology is freed from the narrow interests of the capitalists. Technology which under capitalism condemns workers to lower wages and unem ployment could be utilised for the good of us all.



or, if you're not online, write to the

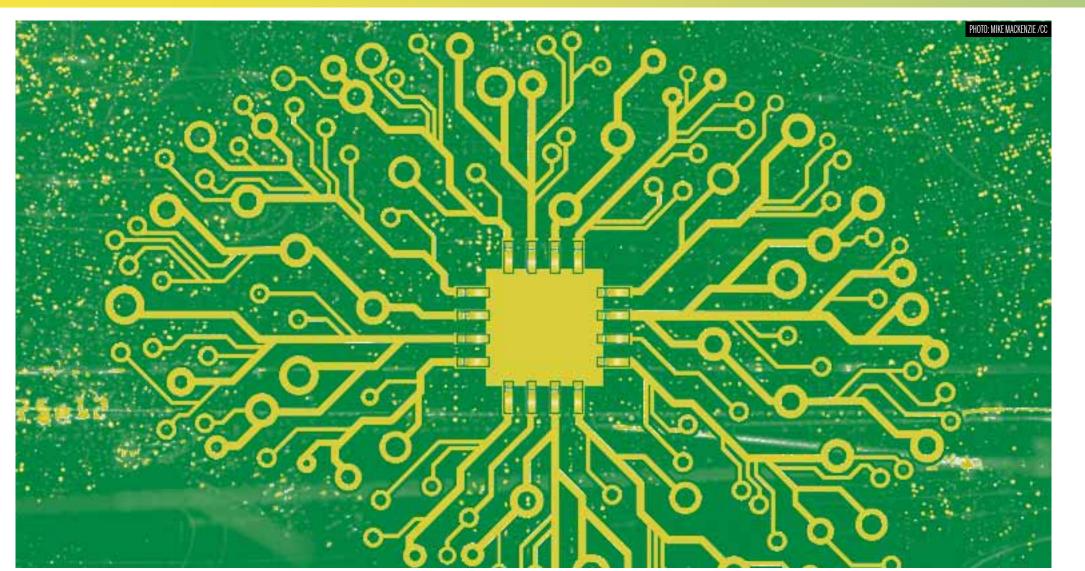
Socialist Inbox, PO Box 1398,

Enfield FN1 9GT

Come to a Socialist Party meeting near you

The Socialist Party has regular meetings in towns and cities across the country, in which we discuss socialist ideas, past events in working-class history and how we can apply those lessons to the fight for socialism today. If you would like to participate:

- Go to socialistparty.org.uk/join
- Or text 07761 818206 with your name and postcode.
- Or scan the QR code:



WORKPLACE socialistparty.org.uk socialistparty.org.uk 20-26 July 2023

Amazon union keeps growing and strikes spreading

COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

6.30am on a trading estate on the western edge of Coventry and Bob Marley tunes drift through the air. Already hundreds of Amazon workers have gathered for one of three days of strike action seeking union recognition and a £15-an-hour wage.

Workers were 'stamped in' - like at a nightclub door - and 'stamped out' to register their attendance for strike pay. By 7am Ian, one of many GMB organisers on site says: "I'm running out of ink!" as the protest and picket line grew to over 400 strong.

As pickets spoke to drivers about joining the union, creating huge queues in the process, the music moved on to their own version of 2 Unlimited's 'No Limit': "No no, no no no no, no we're not working" and to Sister Sledge's 'The Greatest Dancer: "Jeff Bezos, he's the great exploiter." There was also plenty of advice to the Amazon boss as to what he could do with his massive rocket.

As the picket went on, even more workers joined the union, taking membership well above 900 at BHX4. One worker who had stopped and decided to join the strike found that a police officer was about to book him for parking, but his car was quickly surrounded by over 20 protective pickets and the officer had to be rescued by a union official.

Confidence is growing among the workers who, while aware that they face a determined anti-union employer, are sick and tired of the way they are treated. Their confidence will have been further boosted by news the day after their strikes that worker colleagues at Amazon's Rugeley site, in Staffordshire, have become the second site to successfully ballot for strike action. The struggle grows.

Socialist Party members distrib uted hundreds of our latest Amazon bulletin reporting on the speech of Amazon GMB's Garfield at the NSSN conference in London, and advertising the NSSN lobby of the TUC in

being put in an impossible situation

- they can be disciplined if they inter-

vene to protect the safety of children,

At the protest rally outside the

council's Guildhall, several dozen

members and supporters were in a

One angry teacher said: "Yes, this

is a local dispute, but it affects every

achieve reinstatement now then no

teacher can feel safe against this type

of employer's bullying and threaten-

ing behaviour. If this is not resolved

determined mood to defend their

but they can also be disciplined if

they fail to intervene!"

victimised colleague.



A local dispute with national repercussions for teachers!



SWANSEA TRADES COUNCIL AND SOCIALIST PARTY

Hundreds of NASUWT members (the biggest teachers' union in Wales) walked out of secondary schools across Swansea to support a colleague who is being victimised by Swansea's Labour-controlled council.

92% voted for strike action to defend a teacher who intervened to stop two boys fighting. After being teacher in the country. If we don't initially disciplined, the teacher was exonerated on appeal, but was then, unbelievably, sacked after a second by Swansea Council then we will be

NASUWT Wales national officer

CALLUM JOYCE

Oxfordshire fire fighters

campaign against unsafe

recruitment practices

Over 40 Fire Brigades Union (FBU) members recently held a lobby of Oxfordshire County Council to protest against a new 'Direct Entry' measure. which allows the recruitment of staff into the Fire and Rescue Service at station manager level without sufficient prior experience working in the service itself.

The main concern raised at the obby was over the huge safety implications of this decision: that unquali fied managers will not be equipped for dangerous situations that require years of experience to know how to deal with properly.

Before the lobby, FBU Executive Committee member Steve Wright spoke to the assembled firefighters to explain: "If this is forced through here, it will be forced through every where else ... We're not going to walk away, we're going to keep challenging them."

This measure can be stopped through determined action - a similar scheme in Greater Manchester was dropped after local protest.

It is clear that those who work in the Fire and Rescue Service are most qualified to decide how it should be run. The Socialist Party believes that all decisions around hiring, funding, and station management should only be carried out with proper democratic oversight by representatives from the FBU and local residents.

This is part of a continued attack on workers' conditions and workplace safety, along with the Tories' new anti-trade union bill. The FBU has called for mass opposition to this

| Trelleborg Leicester all out strike



HEATHER RAWLING

LEICESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

More than 100 Unite members at Trelleborg Leicester have been on indefinite strike since Tuesday 11 July, demanding a 10% pay rise.

Pickets greeted the arrival of company negotiator with boos. The man strode over to talk with strikers, but they very quickly put him in his place in an exchange that lasted around five minutes. The company had accused the workers of laziness and shoddy work

"All we hear about is profits, profits, profits. You keep on about making profits. We just want a good living." Another picket said: "Trelleborg made £4.7 million last month but when we ask for a decent pay rise, there's nothing coming forward. You've offered 7% when inflation is running at 10% - Come on!" 7% is an increase on the company's original

offer of 4%, made before the threat of strikes.

All the manager would say was sit down and negotiate. But the workers told him: "Six months of negotiations is enough! We've not been offered a fair deal. It's just made us stronger because we feel we've been lied to."

"Your'e not making a loss, you're making a profit. Where's the profits

going?" someone shouted out. Another quoted some hard facts he said he'd got from Companies House: "You made enormous profits in the last year. Turnover increased by 13%. Per employee turnover has increased by £160,000. Rise in profit was 38% per employee. Shareholder dividends has increased to 67%."

This got a loud cheer from the picket line. The manager's lame response was "We need to sit down and talk." "It's too late now," the strikers shouted, as the manager walked away looking rather deflated.

UNITE CONFERENCES: CRITICAL INDUSTRIAL AND POLITICAL DEBATES But the assertive stance of the union

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN UNITE

his vear's Unite the Union rules and policy conferences took place together for the first time, at a critical time for the union. They brought together the main industrial and political issues facing Unite, as the strike wave continues to rage and the crisis in the Tories opens up the likelihood of a Starmer-led New Labour government. Sunak's new minimum service level anti-union legislation could be law by the beginning of autumn.

Socialist Party members played a key role in some of the most important debates, as well as in initiatives towards the building of a new left in the union, determined to prevent any obstacles to the militant trajectory of the union since the election of Sharon Graham as Unite genera secretary in 2021.

Sharon ended her main confer ence address with the words: "The re-birth of the unions has begun.' Unite has been to the fore in the rise in industrial struggle, leading the fight against the Tory cost-of living squeeze and the offensive of the employers. Sharon announced that, under her leadership, Unite has had 890 disputes, involving 170,000 members, and secured £400 million

Political strategy

It has also taken a combative anproach to Starmer, formulating key pro-worker demands and putting them to Labour, such as renationalisation and repealing the Tory antiunion laws. But unfortunately, the necessary conclusions to this were not drawn. Had they been, it would have added a powerful weapon to Unite's armoury

As we reported last week (see 'Unite conferences: Political strategy and anti-union laws' at socialistparty.org. uk), rules amendments, including one originating from Socialist Party members, that would have opened up Unite's political strategy, were defeated. The official Unite press release reported that this prevented dis affiliation, but disaffiliation was never called for in any rule amendment or policy conference motion.

Instead, had the amendments passed, the union would have been able to support candidates in elec tions, both inside and outside Labour, that supported Unite's policies and members taking action, instead of being restricted to Starmer's Labour Party. It would be then be the decision of Starmer and the Labour right if they wanted to expel their party's biggest financial backer!

The vote against the rule amend ments was on the basis of Sharon arguing that "this isn't the time." in what is effectively a pre-general election period. But the mood of the vast majority of conference delegates certainly wasn't pro-Starmer. Sharon promised that there would be no "blank cheques" for Labour,



and reminded delegates about the attack on bin workers by Coventry Labour council, which spent £9 million unsuccessfully trying to break the Unite strike, "You have to decide whose side you are on," she demanded of Starmer. He was met with almost complete silence later in the week when he took to the stage to address conference, and left to, at best, grudging and limited applause.

However, Starmer has decided which side he is on. He has repeatedly made clear that his government will defend the interests of the capi talist elite, rather than the workingclass majority, including by his steadfast insistence that public sector pay restraint will continue. By arguing to continue to exclusively fund Labour candidates, regardless of Starmer's policies, the majority of the Executive Council (EC) have given the Labour leadership a certain "blank cheque"

Nonetheless, this issue will continue to be discussed. If Jeremy Corbyn declares he is running as an independent, for example, some icies, would be challenged at the bal-

to back him, rather than the Labour candidate imposed by the Starmer

The question of Jeremy Corbyn was raised on the conference floor by Tony Woodhouse, who this year stepped down as Unite's national chair after 15 years. He criticised Starmer and made clear his support for Jeremy Corbyn, as well as remembering the Militant-led fighting Labour council of his home town Liverpool in the 1980s. Tony told delegates that his parents actually lived in one of the 5,000 houses that the council built in its defiance of Thatcher's brutal cuts.

But the tabling of the rule amendments, as well as an amendment to a policy conference motion from the Housing Workers Branch, all undoubtedly helped push this mood, by setting out a real political strategy. How much more powerful would have been the demands on Starmer if the union had been able to warn him that a Labour government led by him, carrying out anti-worker poli-

under Sharon is under threat from more conservative forces such as the United Left (UL), who want to make Unite safe for Starmer, who in turn has made Labour pliant for the

This was especially shown in the debate against the Tory minimum service levels anti-union attack Two motions, from Barts NHS Trust and LE1228 Waltham Forest Council branches, included the need for Unite to call for action on the scale of a 24-hour general strike. But the ULdominated Standing Orders Committee omitted that phrase when they put the motions together into

one composite! Initially at the conference, the EC, with a slight UL majority, had voted to recommend rejection of the composite motion in full. But before the debate. Sharon went back to the EC and, along with the likes of Socialist Party member Suzanne Muna, successfully argued that the EC change its position to support. The motion was moved by fellow Socialist Party member Kevin Parslow from LE1228 branch and was overwhelmingly passed. This puts Unite alongside the FBU and RMT in leading the charge for mass coordinated strike action to defeat Sunak's attack on the right to

The UL-dominated Standing Orders Committee also ruled out an amendment from the LE1111 Housing Workers' Branch calling for "a referendum of all Unite members asking them if they agree with opening up our political fund to support any candidate, inside and outside of the Labour Party", showing their fear of members, not putting 'members' first, as they claim.

They also opposed the motion from Greenwich Council Branch, which reiterated Unite's policy supporting legal no-cuts budgets, passed n Sharon's first conference in 2021.

New left needed

It is becoming clear to an increasing number of Unite activists that a new left has to be built, led by rank-and-file reps and members, in conjunction with militant officers Socialist Party members played a key role, with our allies, in an excellent meeting of over 50 delegates to discuss how such a left organisation can be developed. The day before, a 'Workers Unite' fringe meeting of 100 rules conference delegates, to defend Sharon Graham's manifesto also showed the potential, with Suzanne Muna on the top table of both

These are important developments that must be taken forward, to bring together and mobilise all those who are determined that the gains of the last two years are maintained and built upon.

The Socialist Party also held a very successful fringe meeting, with over 30 attending, with Socialist Party general secretary Hannah Sell and Unite EC member Suzanne Muna speaking. The audience also heard from Unite St Mungo's and Brighton UCU strikers. Both disputes are out in order to provide free, high-quality

For local councillors who are

services for all who need them. Expand

services for all women suffering violence

committed to opposing austerity and

For a socialist NHS to provide for

everyone's health needs, including

dental and eve care - free at the point

Nationalise the pharmaceutical industry

under democratic workers' control and

including rail, mail, water, telecoms and

Renationalise privatised utilities -

power - under democratic workers'

control and management.

Free, publicly funded and

democratically run, good-quality

education, available to all at any age.

off student debt, end marketisation.

academisation. For all schools to be

parents and student organisations.

The right to a safe secure home for

all. For the mass building of genuinely

affordable, high-quality, carbon-neutral

be made by elected bodies of tenants,

housing workers and representatives

of trade unions. For cheap low-interest

the privately owned large building

companies, land banks and estates

Prioritising major research and

and nuclear power with renewable

are designed to 'wear out' and be

replaced - and unrecycled waste.

control and management, with

loss of jobs, pay or conditions.

energy, and ending the problems of

early obsolescence - where products

companies, under democratic workers

compensation paid only on the basis of

proven need, in order to carry out a major

switch to clean, green energy, without any

A democratically planned, massively

expanded, free to use, publicly owned

transport system, as part of an overall

insulation and energy transition plan for

democratic public ownership. For a food

are set by consumers, small farmers, and

Do you agree? Join the fightback!

JOIN THE SOCIALISTS

processing and retail industry under

plan against environmental pollution.

For a major, publicly funded,

Agribusiness to be taken into

Visit socialistparty.org.uk/join

or call 020 8988 8777

postcode to **07761 818 206**

Help fund the fightback!

DONATE TODAY

or text your name and

to find out more today!

existing housing stock.

investment into replacing fossil fuels

mortgages for home buyers. Nationalise

council housing. For rent controls that cap

the level of rent. Fair rent decisions should

under the genuine democratic control of

local education authorities, school staff,

and introduce a living grant. No to

Abolish university tuition fees and write

of use and under democratic control.

Kick out the private companies!

management.

all cuts to local services, jobs, pay and

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

The Socialist Party organises workingclass 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 workingclass people to meet the needs of all not the profits of a few.

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

Because capitalism is a world system. the struggle for socialism must also

be international. The Socialist Party is part of the Committee for a Workers' international which organises across the world. Our demands include:

WORK. PENSIONS AND BENEFITS

- A £15-an-hour minimum wage for all, without exemptions. For the minimum wage to automatically increase linked to average earnings or inflation, whichever is higher. Share out the work. A maximum
- 32-hour working week with no loss of pay or worsening of conditions. The right to flexible working, under the control of workers not employers. An end to insecure working, for the right to full-time work for all who want it; ban zero-hour contracts.
- All workers to have trade union rates of pay, employment protection, and sickness, parental and holiday rights from day one of employment. End bosses using bogus 'self-employment' as a means to avoid giving workers rights.
- No to austerity through inflation. For all wage rates to be automatically increased at least in line with price rises.
- Open the books of all companies cutting jobs or claiming they can't afford to pay a real living wage. State subsidies, where genuinely needed, for socially-useful small businesses.

For trade unions independent of the

- capitalist state, with members having democratic control over their own policies, constitutions and democratic procedures. For all trade union officials to be regularly elected, subject to recall by their members and paid a worker's wage
- Reduce the state retirement and pension age to 55. For decent living
- Replace universal credit and the punitive benefit system with living benefits for all who need them.

PUBLIC SERVICES

 A massive expansion of public services including the NHS and council services. Reverse all the cuts, kick out the privateers. Bring private socia care and childcare facilities into public

- Repeal the anti-trade union laws and all others that trample over civi liberties. For the right to protest and to strike! End police harassment. For the police to be accountable to local
- whether to have children for the right to access abortion, contraception and fertility treatment for all who need it. For the right to asylum – with democratic community control and

oversight of emergency funding

- resources. No to racist immigration laws. Expand democracy. For the abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords For all MPs to be subject to the right of recall by their constituents at any time and to only receive a worker's wage. For proportional representation and the right to vote at 16.
- For the right of nations to self-Wales, both part of a voluntary socialist
- Oppose the dictatorship of the billionaire owners of the media. For the nationalisation of newspaper printing facilities, radio, TV and social media platforms. Access to these facilities should be under democratic control, with political parties' coverage being allocated in proportion to the popular vote at elections
- For a new mass workers' party, based on the trade unions, and drawing together workers, young people and activists from workplaces, and community, environmental, anti-racist and anti-cuts campaigns, to provide a fighting, socialist political alternative to the pro-big business parties.

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

 A democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, and in a way that safeguards the environment. a campaign with European socialists and workers' organisations to use the talks on post-Brexit relations to tear up the EU pro-capitalist rules. For a real collaboration of the peoples of Europe

all workers involved in the production processing, distribution and retail of food.

the **Socialist**

20-26 July 2023

DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

- For united working-class struggle to end discrimination on the grounds of race. gender, disability, sexuality, age, and all other forms of prejudice and oppression. committees, made up of democratically elected representatives of trade unions, local community organisations and local authorities. • For the right to choose when and

- determination. For an independent socialist Scotland and for a socialist confederation of Wales, England, Scotland and Ireland.

- No to imperialist wars and occupations!
- Take the wealth off the super-rich! For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and the banking system that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working-class control and management Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need, not to the fat cats.
- No to the EU bosses' club. Organise

Socialist Party members from across We raised the question of a concrete the south of England gathered at plan to oppose the new anti-trade Tolpuddle on Friday 14 July for the union (minimum service levels) annual festival in memory of the laws, including the demands that Tolpuddle Martyrs. This festival of Labour should commit to repealing working-class culture is held to comall anti-trade union legislation when memorate the six agricultural workin government (including those left in place by Blair and Brown). And ers who, in 1834, were prosecuted due to their, then illegal, memberthat all Labour authorities, including ship of a union and transported to councils and the Welsh government. Australia. Attacks on our right to should commit to not issuing a single strike by the bosses are nothing new. work notice. We also raised the demand that the We were eager to discuss the So-Trades Union Congress (TUC) call an cialist Party's ideas with attendees,

Tolpuddle festival rained off

but the fight for trade union

rights isn't extinguished

GLOUCESTERSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY

especially relating to the strike wave emergency meeting to discuss strike and the question of working-class action in response to any worker bepolitical representation. However, ing sacked or union penalised under opportunities to do this were limthe new law. This received enthusiasited by the extreme weather, which tic applause from the audience and led to the festival being called off on shows what an impact the Socialist Party could have had on the event if Saturday morning. This year's very wet and windy conditions, the reit had gone ahead as planned. sult of the unbearable heatwave in southern Europe, contrasted with last year's very hot and dry condi-

 Socialist Party members from across the country paid for transport to Tolpuddle, printed leaflets and prepared posters for the event. Can you help recoup some of the costs of this by making a donation to help us to continue to fight for socialism?

still able to attend a talk on Friday

featuring representatives from the

unions Aslef, PCS, UCU and the FBU



Struggle for public education and socialism in Nigeria

A meeting hosted by the Education Rights Campaign, a student organisation in Nigeria, on the fight against President Tinubu's student loan and fee hikes across campuses in Nigeria will be held on Saturday 22 July at 11am. These reforms will hit working-class students in Nigeria, and Nigerian students studying here in England and Wales.

tions. Someone bought a copy of the

Socialist to read the editorial (see 'Hottest month: socialist planning

and working-class organisation can

reverse climate crisis' on www.so-

cialistparty.org.uk) as the weather

itself highlighted climate change and

transformation of society.

Zoom ID: 837 7499 7513



EDUCATION RIGHTS

Swansea socialists boot pounds into the fighting fund

SWANSEA AND WEST WALES SOCIALIST PARTY

While Harold Wilson said a week is a long time in politics, Swansea and West Wales Socialist Party has just discovered that a weekend can be

Events had conspired to mean fundraising for the Socialist Party's work had got off to a slow start this quarter, as other campaigning had to take

But come the weekend, a successful Saturday city centre stall in wind and rain raised £35. Shoppers responded strongly to our campaigning

to defend the NHS. They all had their own stories of how vital the NHS had been for them and their families, and how angry they were with how the service, doctors, nurses and other staff were being treated.

the **Socialist**

Sunday started with a 4am alarm and three of us taking two vehicles to the Swansea railway station multistorey for a car boot sale.

A hectic seven hours followed with a steady stream of customers eager to buy children's clothes, adult clothes. toys and other items.

The end result was more than £250 raised to fund the vital work of the Socialist Party.

We then had a conversation about

Angry staff rooms need the Socialist

Working in education, declarations of hatred for the Tories are commonplace. So when I overheard a colleague in our staff room saving she couldn't stand the government I struck up conversation: "Speaking of getting the Tories out, could I interest you in a copy of the Socialist?

After explaining a bit about what to expect from a copy, she was more than happy to buy one. Another colleague, after seeing the front page, said: "I'm not sure if I'm a socialist, but I'll give you a donation!"

the situation facing the working class, 'Thatcher was nice compared to this lot' was the consensus of the people there. There was an understandable mix of opinion on the best options for getting rid of the current government, whether to vote Labour or not. The overriding opinion was that MPs from all the establishment parties weren't serving the inter ests of working people; the idea of a workers' MP on worker's wage got support. We also talked about the upcoming NSSN lobby of the TUC conference and the UCU branch at our workplace.



Tower Hamlets residents want council housing

TOWER HAMLETS SOCIALIST PARTY

Residents and tenants of Tower Hamlets Community Homes (THCH) were out protesting on the 12 July. Many had stories to tell about how their estates have become more run down since they were taken over by THCH from the council many years ago, resulting in many poor repairs.

Now it looks like their debt-strick-

Poplar HARCA, another supposedly not-for-profit Housing Association Poplar HARCA recently renovated Balfron Towers, a listed council block in Poplar, and sold them off as luxury private flats! Tenants and residents of THCH

homes are demanding a vote and say in who their landlord should be as they are not being given one now. Calls for the homes to return to council ownership got a lot of support.

Hospitality workers fighting back



JOHN WILLIAMS

CARDIFF YOUTH FIGHT FOR JOBS

is fair to say that hospitality workers have taken a battering over the past few years. It's estimated that over 750,000 hospitality jobs were lost as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and the effects of lockdown, where the governments of the UK refused to take a serious approach to saving the jobs of workingclass people. And hospitality workers are affected by the same cost-of-living crisis as us all, but haven't as yet been part of the strike wave over the last vear. In the last few weeks there have been protests and strikes at Cardiff Glee Club (see below) and the 13th Note café in Edinburgh.

I've been trying to organise hospi tality workers in South Wales for a few years, it's exciting that we now have the potential to build something. There were around 15-20 hospitality workers at the launch workshop of

April. Some were in a union, others weren't yet. I recognised some from having leafleted their workplaces. If given a lead and an opportunity, precarious workers want to fight back.

We discussed the problems people had with rotas and holiday, issues we all face at work. Youth Fight for Jobs (YFJ) has consistently campaigned for democratically elected workplace committees to oversee rotas, distribution of tips, and workplace safety.

Another problem workers face is getting home after a night shift. This has particularly become a problem as bus routes have been cut to the bone.

Unite the Union, with the 'Get me home safely' campaign, campaigns for venues with a late-night licence to ensure their workers get home safe Councils should use their licensing powers to make all hospitality venues ensure their workers get home safely, including covering the transport costs of all workers. As is Unite policy, Labour councils should re-Unite Hospitality Cardiff Branch in : fuse to pass on the Tory cuts and pass

The strike wave has had an influ ence on hospitality workers - showing the way we can fight back and win. Hospitality bosses and the industry in general have plenty of money, so why can't the people who work there get more of the dough? We need to fight to end low pay, for trade union struggle for a £15-anhour minimum wage, with increases in line with inflation and to abolish vouth rates of pay.

As hospitality becomes busier over the summer, no doubt many more students and young workers will be thinking about how they can stop their own low pay and overwork. The potential for a campaign to unionise hospitality is massive. Workers' action can win better pay and conditions for all!

Youth Fight for Jobs

 End low pay. For trade union struggle for a £15-an-hour minimum wage. Abolish youth rates!

 End job insecurity and underemployment. Scrap zero-hour contracts!

 Establish democratically elected workplace committees to oversee tips, rotas, and workplace safety Provide free transport for workers

coming to and from work! Labour councils should refuse to implement Tory cuts, and instead pass no-cuts, 'needs budgets', which include the reinstatement and improvement of bus services so that workers can get home safely

• Make the 1% pay for the cost-ofliving crisis – for democratic public ownership of major industries so they can be run in the interests of the 99%, not the bosses!

Get in touch to join the fight:

YOUTH FIGHT 🛼 FOR JOBS

youthfightforjobs.com

Unite Wales activists leaflet Cardiff Glee customers. Fight union busting!

diff Trades Council and members of the Socialist Party supported the protest called by Unite members at Cardiff Glee comedy club agains victimisation of a union member. After over 80% of the workers at the club joined Unite, workers have been fighting hard to get the bosses to recognise the union, and have been faced with a vicious union busting

We gave out a leaflet to almost every single customer who went for a comedy gig at the venue. The real joke is the employer that is ignoring union recognition, after a court hearing ruled in favour of the union. The union is actively campaigning against victimisation of workers at



the venue. Most customers didn't know that this was the case, some friendly and willing to talk to us.

The support from the trade union movement is clear to see. The Cardif showed us their union card, were : Glee Club workers are discussing the **SOCIALIST HISTORY INTERNATIONAL** socialistparty.org.uk the **Socialist** 20-26 July 2023 20-26 July 2023 the **Socialist** socialistparty.org.uk

Clay Cross 50 years ago **When Labour councillors** fought the Tory government

50 years ago, eleven Derbyshire councillors were disqualified from office for refusing to implement the Tory government's attempts to massively increase rents for council tenants. **Dave Gorton**, Chesterfield Socialist Party.

ow often have we heard Labour councillors say "there's nothing we can do" as they unleash another round of cuts? Libraries, care homes, day centres and SureStart closures. privatisation of council services accompanied by thousands of redundancies, and even lowering pay through the disgraceful use of fire and rehire.

It makes a mockery of local government elections if the winners are only prepared to carry out the diktats of the national government. That didn't have to be the case in the last decade. Labour councils could have united with the workforce trade unions, community organisations and local residents to mount anti-cuts campaigns. These could have been linked across the UK and victories

50 years ago, the Labour Party was very different to Keir Starmer's current version. It had a mass workingclass base which the leadership of the party had to occasionally heed. Militant workers in the Labour Party were to the fore in the huge struggles in the 1970s. Labour is now transformed into an openly capitalist party, no longer with a working-class

Liverpool council defeats Thatcher

In the 1980s, led by Militant (the predecessor of the Socialist Party), Liverpool's Labour city council conducted a huge struggle to win back funding stolen by Margaret Thatcher's Tory government away from the provision of local services. Although every other Labour council barring Lambeth fell away, the council was able to win extra finance leaving a legacy of over 5,000 new council homes as well as building leisure centres and parks.

A decade earlier, in Clay Cross, a small north east Derbyshire town of less than 10,000 inhabitants, another Labour council held firm against Tory cuts, at great personal cost. Those Labour councillors were made bankrupt for their challenge but none of them regretted their stand.

Clay Cross is an area that thrived on coal. By the end of the 1960s. however, pit closures had a devastating effect. Within a decade, all 14 pits within a five-mile radius of Clav Cross had closed, Unemployment rocketed from 6% in April 1969 to 20% by the beginning of 1972.

Into this decline, the Tory government introduced the 1972 Housing Finance Act, which forced councils

to increase rents to a level comparable to the private sector. The majority of the UK's council housing stock was under Labour authority control as the Tories had been decimated in the 1971 and 1972 local elections. To implement the Act, the Tories needed Labour councils' help, and most obliged.

Labour-led Clay Cross Urban District Council (UDC) declared it would not implement the Act: "On this Council we like to think of ourselves as basic socialists. We regard housing here as a social service, not as something the private sector can profit from", said Councillor Arthur

The council had a proud record of defending working-class people and seeking to relieve deprivation.

The list of benefits they introduced was impressive: free travel and TV licences for pensioners, playgroups in the school holidays, the building of a swimming pool and three 'Darby and Joan' clubs for older people.

When the Tory government stopped free school milk, Clay Cross UDC operated its legal right to use a penny rate to continue to provide milk. When the councillors realised money would run out two months early, they circumvented the problem by increasing the never-used 'chairman's allowance' from £25 a year to £385, and used that!

The council expanded its direct labour force to provide work to unemployed miners and paid them a living

Slum clearance and new houses

But the real issue in Clay Cross was housing. Over 20% of the stock in the 1960s was slums. By 1971, the council had replaced over 550 houses. It was a costly programme as the slums had to be bought before they could be demolished and new land had to be purchased. However, council rents remained the lowest in the county.

When three councillors got cold feet in 1970 and jumped ship to form the Residents' Association, Labour won all three seats on a turnout double the national average for urban elections. The Sheffield Star said: "Democracy comes in many forms; some less satisfactory than others"!

The 1972 election saw Labour win all four seats against the Residents' Association. What became the renowned 'first XI' were in place: ten men and one woman prepared to stand up for their socialist principles. They held firm.

In Clay Cross, the tenants weren't fighting their local authority, it was local councillors leading the opposition When the government ordered an audit of the Clay Cross books, the deputy district auditor was met by the entire 100-strong workforce of the public works department taking an hour off work to greet him with a rousing chorus of the Red Flag!

3,000 people from all over Britain descended on Clay Cross in December 1972 for a solidarity march. The Militant newspaper (the forerunner of the Socialist) at the time noted "the solid support of the local tenants was indicated by the fact that the march increased in size five times over as it passed through the council estate".

Councillor Graham Skinner spoke to The Militant: "We fully understand the Act... we expect

there is a possibility of going to jail But we are... not carrying out Tory measures."

There was a solidly supported six-week rent strike before focus switched to the law courts. In July 1973, the High Court found the councillors guilty of "negligence and misconduct" and fined the eleven a total of £6.985 (plus £2.000 costs) and disqualified them from office.

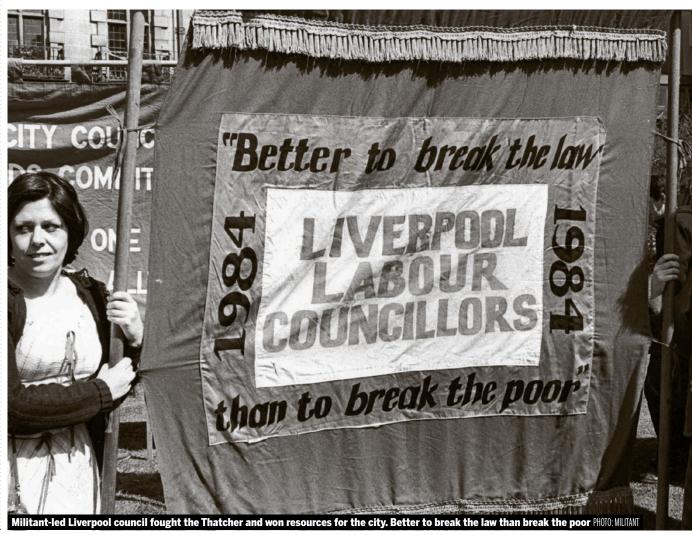
In the 1974 by-elections to replace them, ten out of the eleven Labour candidates ('the second XI'), standing on the record of their predecessors, were successful. The eleventh lost by two votes

Local government

The housing commissioner sent in by the government failed to collect a single penny in increased rents in six months and it was only local government reorganisation later in 1974 that ended the conflict with the abolition of the Clay Cross UDC. The in coming Labour administration in the new council imposed rent increases.

Today, Clay Cross has a Tory MP unthinkable in 1973. The 'village' has grown with a Tesco superstore at its centre, in the process driving out local small businesses. There has been a huge increase in private housing on its outskirts but its social housing stock, lower in number now, is operated by an arms-length management organisation and voung people, in particular, find the lack of affordable housing a big issue. If Labour had backed, instead of chastising, the Clay Cross councillors, the picture may have been very different.

There is no hope of Labour unde Starmer changing its pro-big business policies. Workers and tenants need a new party of the working class, built on the ideals of public ownership and social housing, which will challenge the capitalist system that confines the majority of the population to poverty and hardship.



DAVID JOHNSON

gypt's economy goes from bad to worse. Workers and the poor suffer even more sharply as a result. Food prices shot up 59% in May, forcing many to a single meal a day. Even middle-class families have had to reduce meat, eggs, and dairy products.

After the pandemic hit Egypt's key tourist industry and remittances sent home from Egyptians working abroad, for a while the economy was sustained by an inflow of speculative money attracted by high interest rates. Then its main suppliers of wheat and tourists. Russia and Ukraine, went to war, bursting this balloon of speculation.

\$20 billion was pulled from Egypt's foreign currency reserves to so-called 'safe havens' after the war began. The government was forced to devalue the Egyptian pound three times during 2022 and asked for a \$12 billion loan from the International Mon etary Fund (IMF), eventually having to settle for \$3 billion.

The IMF loan came with strict conditions attached: further devaluation (leading to more inflation); austerity public spending cuts (including subsidised fuel and basic foods): a slowdown of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's grandiose infrastructure projects (including the new capital city under construction); and privatisation of many industries, including those owned and run by the armed

In recent crises, Sisi's government could rely on bailouts from oil-rich Saudi Arabia and Gulf states. They have been less willing to help their larger neighbour this time. "The Qataris are willing to put in the money, but it needs to be a smart investment, it needs to be making money, or in a few rare cases at least breaking even," the Financial Times reported, "They won't just throw money away...they are try ing to find the right opportunity. Oatar offered to buy state-owned companies, striking hard bargains over their valuations. 32 companies have been identified for sale and \$2 billion worth are due to be sold off.

Over half of all government spending (56%) is now debt repayment But the government raises almost half (49%) its income by further borrowing. It may not take another pandemic or war to topple this unstable arrangement. "Within months, the country could be forced to choose between honouring its debt payments and feeding the many poor Egyptians who depend on govern ment-subsidised bread." (New York Times)

Sisi is trying to balance between creditors' demands and getting more of the money that his government desperately needs, while at the same time keeping senior armed forces officers' support. After retiring from the forces they are typically rewarded with well-paid directorships and executive positions in military-owned businesses. Sisi also wants support from workers employed in construction and other industries involved with his mega-construction projects as well as those relying on these workers' wages.

When Sisi and his fellow senior officers first seized power, Egyptian capitalists mostly united in supporting his regime. It promised stability after the mass uprisings and upheavals that took place between

Egypt: Economic crisis weakening dictatorial president Sisi



the overthrow of President Hosni Mubarak in January-February 2011 and the downfall of Muslim Brotherhood President Mohamed Morsi in Iuly 2013.

Ten years later, Mubarak's circle of business cronies, who had profited from his family's patronage, feel more resentful at being squeezed out by armed forces-owned companies. Sisi may not be able to rely on their continuing support when future mass opposition develops.

Foreign multinationals, such as BNP Paribas, Toyota, and Vodafone, have withdrawn from Egypt in recent years. "Restrictive economic and repressive political climate were factors," according to Associated Press. It's not the repression of strikers or democracy activists that concerns the iship, which state-run trade unions. directors of these corporations, but that even wealthy businessmen have been imprisoned. The father and son owners of Egypt's largest dairy company, Juhayna, were charged in 2020 and 2021 with being members of a Eventually, the spark of the Tunisian "terrorist organisation", meaning the

banned Muslim Brotherhood, after they refused to hand over company shares to the government. They were released from prison this January.

The developing split between sections of the capitalist class and senior military officers reflects a growing recognition that the past decade's 'stability' is ending. Economic crisis, the pandemic and the Ukraine-Russia war mean Sisi's previous methods of rule are no longer working. Both capitalists and senior officers fear a return of mass workers' action, as in the final years of Mubarak's regime.

From 2006-2011 the biggest strike wave in Egypt's history saw growing challenges to Mubarak's dictatorpolice, prisons, and torture could not stop. Workers grew in confidence. losing fear of taking action, inspiring and being inspired by the growing movement for democratic rights. mass uprising in December 2010

ignited the January 2011 uprising ending Mubarak's 30-year rule after

mittee for a Workers'

International (CWI) is the international

ocialist organisation which the Socialist Party

Sisi reinstated state repres sion, even harsher than under Mubarak. Strike leaders have

15

been imprisoned and sacked. Independent media outlets have been closed down People have been arrested after being stopped in the ing social media 'likes' on their phones. Torture in police stations and prisons is widely used. An estimated 60,000 political prisoners are locked up often without trial or access to lawyers, 538 people were sentenced to death in 2022, without

But needing foreign finance and sensing growing opposition within Egypt, Sisi has been trying to appear a little more conciliatory. 1,000 political prisoners have been released over the past year, although new arrests have also been made. A toothless 'national dialogue', announced in April 2022, eventually started this May. Handpicked opposition figures gain a platform to discuss with government representatives. The Muslim Brotherhood, various liberals and, of course, any genuine workers representatives are not invited. Topics such as Egypt's constitution, se curity issues, and foreign policy are

Meanwhile, as a sign of 'business as usual, dozens of thugs identified from the government-supporting Mustaqbal Watan (Nation's Future Party) violently attacked the Engineers Syndicate election count. Representing professional engineers, the syndicate's current head, Tarek el-Nabarawy, has links to the political opposition. A vote of 'no confidence had been called by Mustagbal Watan members but 90% of the members rejected it - despite thousands of government employees in the syndicate being transported in and given a free meal. The count was interrupted ballot boxes smashed and voting papers destroyed.

Days later, the 'national dialogue was suspended after just one month, supposedly after a sandstorm damaged the building where the talks took place. Sisi is caught between wanting to widen his base of support while at the same time not feeling secure enough to make any genuine democratic concessions.

The potentially powerful working class has yet to make its presence felt in this situation. The strikes reported earlier this year have not yet led to a wider movement. The combination of security forces and state-controlled unions make it very difficult for workers to take action, but as the five years before the mass uprising leading to Hosni Mubarak's ousting showed, when workers take mass action even the strongest repression cannot halt their movemen

Building the nucleus of independent trade unions can prepare for future strikes. Laying the base for a future mass workers' party with a revolutionary programme for socialist change and democratic rights is needed. Discussing the programme strategy, and tactics that will gain support among the working class and other oppressed layers is vital preparation for a socialist Egypt as part of a socialist Middle East and

the Socialist

Issue 1236 20-26 July 2023 formerly Military

TICKET OFFICE

NATIONALISE RAIL

A MIDLANDS RMT MEMBER

n the latest instalment of their scorched-earth plans for our railways, the Tories have announced the closure of all but a handful of England's 1,007 ticket offices.

Passengers have been granted a mere 21 days in order to take part in the 'consultation' and posters have been placed in stations informing of 'changes' to ticket offices with the actual closure of the facility being buried deep in mountains of text.

This is one of the most brutal elements of the assault on the railways, which will hurt vulnerable and disabled people hardest.

The government claims that only 12% of tickets are now sold through ticket offices. But that includes individuals who are unable to use self-service machines or would like

assistance from a trained member of staff.

Likewise, staff employed in ticket offices are on hand to assist disabled passengers on and off trains, with luggage, and can be a deterrent against antisocial behaviour.

Tory cuts

But this all counts for nothing to the Tory government, which directly contracts and subsidises the largely privatised, for-profit train operating companies (TOCs). It is trying to force the companies to ram the policy through to de-staff the railway and save costs.

Rail union RMT is striking again on 20, 22 and 29 July, as part of our long-running dispute with the TOCs over issues of 'modernisation' and pay. Aslef, the train drivers' union has a week-long overtime ban starting 17 July, with

another week announced from 31 July.

Anyone expecting a fightback from Keir Starmer's Labour will have had their hopes dashed. Neither Starmer nor Louise Haigh, shadow transport secretary, have said they will reverse the Tories' disastrous proposals if they take over after the next general election. They simply criticise the "rushed" nature of the plans.

Further managed decline of the railways is all that is offered by the Tories, and Labour.

To fight the cuts, the working class urgently needs political representation. For that we need a new party of our own - one which will end the disaster of privatised rail by renationalising the whole network under democratic working-class control and management, and fund a fully staffed, high-quality rail network.

