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the Socialist

Issue 1237

27 July - 9 August 2023

formerly **Militant**

FORCE OUT HATED TORIES



FIGHT FOR A SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE TO PROFIT-DRIVEN CAPITALISM

MICHAEL JOHNSON
LEEDS SOCIALIST PARTY

Why do you hate the Tories? Ask ten different people that, and you can easily get ten different answers. Not surprising given that after more than a decade in power the Tories have launched attack after attack. And the last few local and parliamentary by-elections have shown that even previous Tory voters are finding reasons to hate them.

Most people will be very conscious that, regardless of any other views on Tory policy, in their time in power the rich have got richer and the poor poorer. The spiralling costs of food, rent and bills are leaving countless working people and families having to make hard choices that they shouldn't have to.

The Tories under Rishi Sunak are keen to blame all sorts of things for this but, funnily enough, their reasons all ignore the impact 13 years of their attacks and austerity have had on our communities, stripping services, and freezing pay and benefits. Meanwhile the Tories and their friends have found themselves growing richer and richer. As our pay has fallen, bosses' pay, profits and dividends have surged.

But don't worry, the Tories are keen to give even more reasons to hate them; recent weeks have seen communities worry about climate change as we experience record temperatures and other weather extremes. Well, the Tories have a hand in that. Profit-driven and short-sighted, whether dumping

sewage into rivers and beaches or just dumping environmental policies, the Tories have been described as "uninterested" in climate change, by their own peers!

And there's more! From divisive politics pitting workers against each other and attacking migrants, disabled people and others, to the sheer gall of Tories like Suella Braverman who claimed things like driving fines on expenses - we could give this whole paper to listing these reasons and probably still not fit everything in!

But can we seriously expect Labour under the leadership of Keir Starmer to change that? Well, look at his responses to workers fighting for decent wages or scrapping the two-child benefit limit or reversing NHS privatisation to see quite clearly the answer is a hard 'no'. Working people can't rely on Labour. We need an alternative based not on the interests of the bosses and super-rich, but the working class fighting for a socialist alternative to the hated policies of profit-driven capitalism.

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

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

Defy and defeat the minimum service levels law

This year's conference of the Trade Union Congress (TUC), beginning on 10 September, will take place at a critical stage. The Tories have, before the parliamentary summer recess, passed into law their latest tranche of anti-union legislation, the brutal Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act. It has the potential power to fine unions up to £1 million for every infringement of the law, as well as exposing striking workers to the clear risk of dismissal. The actual bringing of the new law into force will be a live issue for the TUC Congress.

The National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) conference in June agreed a model resolution to prepare for mass coordinated action should the law be used against workers; and to demand of employers, especially where that is a Labour-controlled authority, that they do not issue work notices. The model motion can be found by visiting tinyurl.com/ya7rp2tw

The NSSN is rallying and lobbying the TUC to take a lead at this crucial point.

Get all the latest union news

NSSN bulletin: shopstewards.net

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Speakers confirmed so far:
UNITE general secretary SHARON GRAHAM
BFAWU general secretary SARAH WOOLLEY
POA general secretary STEVE GILLAN
More to be announced

Socialist Party is levelling up its tech!

the Socialist summer fortnightly schedule

The Socialist Party is soon set to carry out its necessary IT upgrade. With our technology upgraded and future-proofed, we will be better prepared to play our important role in the struggle for socialism. Our publications – the Socialist, Socialism Today, our website, leaflets and posters – containing vital ideas, slogans and strategy, can be produced, printed and distributed. All the political and organisational tasks done by staff in the Socialist Party national centre can continue to be completed.

In a reflection of our members' and supporters' confidence in our fighting ideas and the tasks that flow from them, the financial appeal to raise the funds for the tech upgrade has had a great response. The target of £15,000 has been smashed. £24,369 has been raised so far. The extra money raised will be used to replace our more aged remaining computers going forward. The appeal remains open until the end of July, and all donations are gratefully received.

This issue, and the next, of the Socialist will be published fortnightly, in part to allow the upgrade to take place. Issue 1238 will be published on 10 August, resuming with a weekly schedule on 24 August.

During the week beginning 14 August, while work is ongoing, there can be no guarantee of emails reaching addresses ending @socialistparty.org.uk. For this reason, we are asking for contact with the Socialist Party national centre to wait until the following week. Regional organisers will be contactable by the usual means, and centre workers can be reached on their mobile phones.

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

- **Mother jailed for abortion released**
- **Ulez costs Labour in Uxbridge**

Carla Foster, the woman handed a 28-month sentence for terminating a pregnancy after the 24-week legal limit for an abortion during Covid lockdown, has been released. The mother of three was forced to spend 35 days in prison, until her appeal was granted under pressure from public outrage.

Shockingly, there remains no legal right to abortion in Britain. Within the 1967 Abortion Act, authorisation from two doctors simply sets out exemptions from prosecution. The Socialist Party supports demands for decriminalisation.

But, as Christine Thomas says in her article in the July/August issue of Socialism Today: "The fight to defend and extend abortion rights is a political fight that cannot be limited to legal changes. It's a fight for the reversal of all cuts and privatisation of reproductive services, and for abortion and other services to be publicly funded and provided as part of a fully funded NHS."

"It's a fight for policies that will allow people to have a real choice about when and whether to have children, such as a minimum wage of £15 an hour, decent benefits, universal, free, flexible, good-quality childcare, and massive investment in building genuinely affordable public housing. And to maximise the fight for all of those things we need a collective political voice in the form of a new mass workers' party, based on the trade unions, in which the discussion of a socialist alternative to a capitalist system in crisis would be central."

SOCIALISM TODAY

Monthly magazine of the Socialist Party
July-August issue also includes...
● NHS at 75 - fighting for survival
● After Boris' fall - election prospects and tasks
socialismtoday.org/subscribe / 020 8988 8777
● Paper subscription £3 a month, e-subscription £2.50

The cataclysmic drop in Tory support wasn't quite as deep in the Uxbridge by-election. Anger about London's Labour mayor Sadiq Khan's expansion of the Ultra-low emission zone (Ulez) – charging drivers of mainly older cars £12.50 a day – cost Labour the seat.

In the July-August edition of Socialism Today, Socialist Party member James Ivens says: "The full truth of Ulez's usefulness is uncertain. What is certain is it tries to make the working class pay for the pollution crisis.

"It is not the fault of workers driving in London that big car and energy firms have put them in a polluting framework. Instead of charging workers Ulez fees, give them more help to use less polluting options.

"You can tax and fine as much as you like, but without other options workers will still have to drive. Big areas are poorly served by public transport, especially at unsocial hours, and these tend to be where many workers can afford to live. The fact that Khan is expanding Ulez at the same time as attacking public transport gives the lie to his claims about wanting to tackle pollution and traffic.

"The funding deal he accepted from central government includes reducing London bus provision by 4%. He is also coming after jobs and pensions on the tube.

"The mayor of London has a bigger platform than most cabinet ministers, and could mobilise an unstoppable fightback in the capital, instead of a euphemism for another tax on workers."

TORIES SET FOR GENERAL ELECTION DEFEAT

Prepare now a workers' alternative to Starmer's Labour

WHAT WE THINK

“Voters were pissed off with us”. That response of a Tory MP to two crushing by-election defeats on 20 July was putting it mildly. A 24% swing from the Tories to Labour in Selby and Ainsty - the second highest ever - and a 28% shift to the Lib Dems in Somerton and Frome confirmed that the Tories are on their way out and a Starmer-led government is on the cards at the next election. As pollster John Curtice explained, the Tories are in “a deep electoral hole”.

Sunak desperately tried to talk up holding on to Boris Johnson's former seat in Uxbridge and South Ruislip with a majority of just 495 votes. But as the Independent put it, unless every Labour council and mayoralty imposes an exorbitant Ulez before the election that is not going to be replicated across the country.

According to some pollsters, even an overall 6.7% swing to Labour like the one they achieved in Uxbridge could mean the election of a Labour government. But the swing across the three constituencies was a whopping 21%, and in line with most opinion polls. In a general election that would mean a landslide – greater than the 179-seat majority Tony Blair won in 1997.

The swing to Labour across the three constituencies was a whopping 21%, and in line with most opinion polls. In a general election that would mean a landslide – greater than the 179-seat majority Tony Blair won in 1997

However, these by-elections also confirmed that the overwhelming mood is “anyone but the Tories”. “Pissed off” with high interest rates, soaring prices, a crumbling NHS, and collapsing services, people turned to whichever party they thought would give the Tories a hammering. Or they stayed at home - turnout in all three constituencies was under 50%.

So, in the words of one Selby voter, a Starmer Labour government would be “the best of a bad choice”, propelled into power by visceral hatred of the Tories, not enthusiasm for Labour.



And the Tories were right about one thing, Ulez. Sadiq Khan and the Uxbridge result do give a glimpse of what a Starmer-led Labour government will mean: continuing the Tory agenda of making working-class people pay the price of the capitalist economic and climate crises. No wage increases for struggling public sector workers, and no tax rises for the rich either; no extra funds for the NHS and other services – just ‘reform’, ie more money to private profiteers; hundreds of thousands of children living in poverty and going hungry because of ‘fiscal responsibility’.

Labour policy forum
This was underlined at Labour's recent National Policy Forum which voted to back Starmer prioritising fiscal discipline rather than spending to relieve poverty, ditching the two-child benefit limit or scrapping tuition fees. Although, in a party where democratic structures and decision making have been gutted, neither this toothless body, nor the national

conference, have the final say in what goes into the manifesto.

With capitalism in crisis globally, and a special crisis of British capitalism within that, only a party prepared to mount a mass, fundamental challenge to capitalist economic interests would be able to resolve the problems that working- and middle-class people are facing. And clearly, Labour is not that party. Preparations for building an alternative union-backed party that will fight for the working class with socialist policies needs to take place now.

Unite the Union refused to support the document coming out of Labour's policy forum, which also watered down policies on workers' rights, including on zero-hour contracts. Unite general secretary Sharon Graham said: “Starmer has to prove that Labour will deliver for workers”. But it's clear that wrenching any reforms from a Starmer government will only be possible on the basis of mass collective struggle and strike action that forces it to act, just as we have seen under the Tories.

Standing independent trade union-backed candidates in the next election could be a vital step in building that collective fightback and the new mass workers' party that is so desperately needed. Even a small group of trade union-backed socialist MPs could become the focus for the struggle that will be necessary both inside and outside parliament with a Starmer government in power.

Standing independent trade union-backed candidates in the next election could be a vital step in building that collective fightback and the new mass workers' party that is so desperately needed

That's why Socialist Party members promoted resolutions at Unite and other union conferences calling for the political funds to be freed so that unions could back any candidates in elections who support union policy.

The outline of what could be possible is already there. At its AGM, the transport union RMT voted to support Jeremy Corbyn should he decide to stand independently in Islington North in the general election. If he stands, other union branches will be faced with the choice of supporting an anti-austerity, pro-worker candidate who backs nationalisation of rail, mail, water and other utilities, or a Starmer-imposed Labour candidate committed to continuing the Tories' policies of cuts and privatisation.

The £120,000+ collected by Jamie Driscoll to fund his independent campaign to be elected as mayor of the North East, after he was blocked from standing for Labour, also gives a glimpse of the enthusiasm that could be generated if the unions were to stand and support their own candidates.

A general election could be less than nine months away. Staring at an electoral rout that now seems almost inevitable, some Tory MPs are hoping that they might be able to cling on to a few more seats if the election is held in May rather than later in the year. But whenever it takes place, the Socialist Party, while continuing to push for the unions to take more decisive action at a wider level, will be campaigning as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition for the widest possible list of workers' candidates, as well as fighting for the socialist programme that will be necessary to bring about the fundamental change that working-class people desperately need.

Threatened with losing their seats, Sunak is set to face continued revolts from backbench Tory MPs
SIMON DAWSON 10 DOWNING STREET/CC

Labour promises to keep toothless Tory corruption rules



ALAN SANTOS/PALÁCIO DO PLANALTO/CC

MAX MCGEE
NUNEATON SOCIALIST PARTY

Speaking at the pro-business Institute for Government, Labour deputy leader Angela Rayner stated the party's plans for cleaning up corruption and Tory sleaze – a new 'watchdog', the Ethics and Integrity Commission. But the only addition to the Tories' current toothless 'anti-corruption' rules is to slightly increase the time before paid lobbying work can be done by politicians after leaving office.

MPs that break the current Tory rules can be fined. But this never happens. Labour has failed to say how it would be different when it's in power.

Value for money?

Since 2010, MPs from all parties represented in Westminster have seen their pay swell by an eye-watering £20,000. The useless Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority defends this as "value for money", while the wages of ordinary workers have gone down in real terms.

The Socialist Party – and our predecessor Militant – have put into practice, on a smaller scale where we could, ideas against corruption, and the conditions in which corruption thrives, the capitalism system and its pursuit of profit.

Our Militant MPs in the 1980s – Dave Nellist, Terry Fields and Pat Wall – didn't take the full MP salary. Instead they only accepted the average wage of a skilled worker, to tie the representative to the represented. The rest was donated to the local trade union and workers' movement.

The Socialist Party fights for all elected politicians to be subject to the right of recall. And Labour's failure to fundamentally address another problem created by the Tories is more proof we need a new mass workers' party to fight for us.

Tory uni cap targets working-class students

NOAH EDEN
SHEFFIELD SOCIALIST STUDENTS

As somebody who has recently graduated, it has been frustrating watching the government attack so-called 'low-value' degrees.

The latest plan by Tory prime minister Rishi Sunak is to cap student numbers on these courses. This will only make it harder for working-class people to get into university.

Due to financial pressures, working-class students are more likely to drop out of their degrees. Working-class students are less likely to get 'graduate' jobs too.

According to the Tories' Office for Students, 'low-value' degrees are where a certain proportion of students either do not graduate, or do not have a 'graduate-level' job or a further course of study 18 months after finishing.

Courses with a high proportion of working-class students will be dubbed 'low-value' and subject to

caps. This is yet another deterrent on working-class young people studying and developing their interests at university.

It's the Tories that have made it increasingly difficult for students to complete their degrees, especially those from working-class backgrounds. Years of below-inflation student maintenance loan increases force many students to skip meals and use food banks, all while racking up tens of thousands of pounds in debt.

Struggling

The fact that people are struggling to get jobs after higher education is not the fault of certain degrees. It is the fault of this Tory government, and the capitalist system they defend – a blind, unplanned system, dictated by the short-term profit interests of a tiny minority.

Tory MP Robin Walker is chair of Parliament's 'Education Select Committee'. He defended the plans,

saying: "Substantial amounts of public money... go into supporting students to go to universities".

But real-terms spending per university student has fallen massively under the Tories. As a result, students have seen a collapse in our living standards. And staff have been forced to take unprecedented strike action due to rock-bottom pay, overwork, and cuts.

Nonetheless, Walker's comments hint at the main financial motivations behind student number caps. As a large portion of student debt continues to go unpaid, the current number of young people taking out student loans to go to university is increasingly intolerable for the Tories. And, if fewer young people go to university, then there is a bigger pool of cheap labour for British capitalism to exploit.

The wealth exists in society for a fully public-funded, and free, higher education system. But pro-capitalist politicians, like Walker, Sunak, and Labour leader Keir Starmer want to

preserve that wealth in the hands of a super-rich minority at the top.

In order to win democratically run universities, free at the point of use for all, students and staff must link up with the wider working class to fight to take the wealth and control of society into our hands.

Socialism

All of this means fighting for a socialist society, where resources are publicly owned and democratically planned to ensure that the needs of everyone are met. On this socialist basis, this would include planning the education sector – alongside the wider needs of society – to ensure that education offers young and working-class people a decent future.

This could mean either a decent, socially useful, and well-paid job, or the chance to pursue our interests – academia or otherwise – free from the rigid economic constraints that burden us under capitalism.

Students and staff protest together during graduation

GEORGE PHILLIPS
CARDIFF UNIVERSITY SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Staff were protesting throughout Cardiff University's graduation week – 17 to 21 July. It's part of the University and College Union's (UCU) long-running dispute over pay, pensions, working conditions and workload.

Throughout the week, UCU members handed out sashes and badges for graduating students to wear. Students were running towards the UCU stall to collect anything they could, and chat with lecturers.

I was one of those students and, wearing a pink UCU sash, I protested against the university whilst walking the graduation stage. And I joined the UCU on their stall every day for the rest of the week.

UCU members are currently taking part in a 'marking and assessment boycott' – part of their larger strike action. This involves refusing to mark students' coursework and exams. Many students now have missing marks and unconfirmed degrees.

Celebrate

Staff want to be celebrating their students' success, and not taking this action. But workers have been forced into this action due to malicious actions by Cardiff University and university bosses nationwide.

Staff have been hit with pay deductions of between 50-100% – a huge impact during the cost-of-living crisis – despite all other work being completed.

University leaders have the power to end this strike. But they are refusing to negotiate.

Many students support striking staff in their battle with the bosses. We are on the same side.

University bosses do not care about us, or our degrees. They only care about squeezing as much money as possible from staff and



George Phillips (right) protesting with Socialist Students and UCU...

students, and their position on the league table.

Staff working conditions are students' learning conditions. We will not receive the quality of teaching we deserve if staff are overworked and underpaid. Anger must be directed at the university bosses who are undertaking this vile campaign against staff and students.

Any university that claims it can't afford the UCU's reasonable demands should open its finance books to inspection by campus trade unions, as well as democratically elected worker and student representatives. If a university genuinely can't afford to give its staff at least

what the UCU wants, then the government should step in to make up the difference, with money given to universities under trade union oversight.

We must stand together – now and always – and fight for the future of higher education. Fighting for fair pay, conditions, workload and pensions, for the total abolishment of tuition fees, and a higher education system democratically run by workers, students and local communities.

● Read more – 'Marking and assessment boycott – students stand with staff' at socialistparty.org.uk



...and protesting during his graduation

Tories and Labour back callous 'two-child' benefit cap

CHLOE LESLIE
BROMSGROVE SOCIALIST PARTY

The 'two-child limit' policy prevents parents from claiming child tax credit or Universal Credit for any third, or subsequent, child born after it was introduced by the Tories in April 2017.

This vital support could be worth up to £3,235 per child per year, according to the Department for Work and Pensions. 1.5 million children - one in ten - have already been affected.

There are some exceptions. Multiple births, adopted children, and those living with kinship carers.

Children conceived as a result of rape, or during abusive relationships, are also exempt. There are many reasons why in a lot of these cases the total entitlement is not claimed.

The 'non-consensual conception clause' requires victims to fill out a mandatory eight-page form. A section also needs a third-party professional to complete.

Victims are required to not be living with the rapist or abusive partner.

This tragically excludes many who are not able to leave abusive partners.

The two-child limit followed on from the Tories' benefit cap. That limits the amount of benefits a household can receive if they have no or low earnings.

The cap affects 114,000 households, including 280,000 children. It is estimated that affected families lose £50 per week.

Serious, dire and devastating

These policies have a serious, dire and devastating impact on many ordinary working-class people. Both Tory policies have a greater impact on households living in private-rented properties, single-parent families too.

The Tories claim they're promoting fairness in the benefit system. However, research has found no evidence that either policy achieves its intended behavioural goals and, in some cases, has had the opposite effect.

The Tories claim they're providing incentives for parents to work more hours or make different family-planning decisions. Actually, they just force more children and families into hardship.

Both of these policies were implemented by the Tories under David Cameron, and kept in place by the Conservative governments since.

Keir Starmer's recent announcement to rule out scrapping the two-child benefit cap shows that the persistent failure of the Tories to address child poverty will not change under a Labour government.

Years of Tory cuts, unopposed by Labour councils, have ensured that living standards for working-class families have continued to fall. The capitalist system is in crisis, and cannot improve the lives of working-class people.

In order to fight against child poverty, we need socialist policies that see housing, food, and education as basic rights for all people. We need a welfare system that is a proper safety net for those who fall on hard times, not something that people are fearful of using.

The Socialist Party fights to scrap the two-child benefits cap, and for a permanent uplift in benefits, with regular rises to keep pace with the cost of living.

Childcare - what are we supposed to do over summer?

KATIE SIMPSON
NORTHAMPTON SOCIALIST PARTY

Childcare costs continue to be a burden for families. On top of food, rent and everything else, childcare fees have increased too. More parents needing to go back to work full-time sooner also increases the demand for childcare.

This poses even more difficulties over the summer months. Most parents are working while schools are closed.

No one to step in

My child isn't yet school age. But I'm still looking to family to take care of my baby while the childminders closes for over a week in August. For many families there is nobody able to step in and no spaces in nurseries or with childminders.

For many, free school meals are a lifeline. The Tories ignored footballer Marcus Rashford's call to provide them during the school holidays in the long term. And they're still not universal for every child.

Unfortunately, the Labour Party agrees with the Tories. Labour is also not willing to pledge to provide free school meals over the summer to struggling families, let alone provide them for every primary or secondary pupil.

Even in Wales, where the devolved



Katie Simpson and her daughter campaigning with the Socialist Party NOTTINGHAM SOCIALIST PARTY

Labour government is introducing free school meals for primary pupils painfully slowly, they've ruled out extending them for the school holidays - (see "Labour dropping Corbyn policies makes breaking 'class ceiling' harder" at socialistparty.org.uk).

The competition for childcare space hits the most vulnerable

hardest. Many children with disabilities have been refused by childcare services, due to the extra support required. This is a direct consequence of the privatisation of childcare services. By bringing childcare services back in-house, we can cap costs and provide childcare for all children.



Israelis protesting against the Netanyahu government LIZZY SHAANAN/PIKIWIKI ISRAEL/CC

Israel's ultra right-wing coalition passes judicial reforms amidst largest-ever protests

ELLEN KENYON-PEERS
WALTHAM FOREST SOCIALIST PARTY

In the 28th consecutive week of mass protests, on 24 July, Israel's ultra right-wing coalition passed a judicial reform bill that will give the government greater powers over the legal system and hope to drop fraud charges against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The vote passed by 64 votes to 0, as the opposition refused to take part. The 500,000 demonstrators, some of whom have been attending demos with the support of their capitalist employers, marched largely peacefully on Jerusalem, many camping in tents outside the Knesset (parliament), and others chaining themselves across roads to try and prevent Knesset members from voting.

Police couldn't stop march

Local news reported that the police, who have received criticism in recent weeks for their use of water cannons, tear gas and excessive physical force to remove protestors, were unable to control marchers who blocked main roads with parked cars and set fire to barricades. Protesters shouted "where were you during Huwara?" at security forces; recalling their failure to stop settlers from attacking the Palestinian town in March. Mounted police and 'Skunk' - a weapon which sprays a long-lasting, foul-smelling substance - was unable to deter the thousands assembled late into the night, prompting the use of stun grenades.

Doctors in the Israeli Medical

Association will hold a 24-hour protest strike on 25 July. Israel's largest labour union, the Histadrut, is under pressure from demonstrators to call generalised strike action, as it did on 28 March. Even sections of the capitalist class opposed to the reforms have called on it to act. However, it is necessary for the trade union and workers' movement to play an independent role, so action by the Histadrut must be to act under its own democratic leadership, and for the interests of the working class, rather than the interests of the capitalists and their judicial system.

Palestine

10,000 reservists, including military health workers, have withdrawn from service in recent weeks. As the government continues to lose its grip on the Israeli population, the brutality traditionally reserved for Palestinians has been partially re-appropriated - in a more restrained form - in an attempt to suppress civil unrest that shows no sign of dissipating. Although the movement has developed around what many Israelis see as an attack on democracy, issues around the cost of groceries, housing and the affordability of a broad education affect much of the population.

To succeed, the movement must take steps to engage the layer of disillusioned working-class people with demands around these issues to develop into the revolutionary socialist force needed to bring genuine democracy and peace to both sides of the conflict.

Amazon workers taking on the biggest boss

One year on



Amazon workers early in the campaign COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

ADAM HARMSWORTH
COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

On 4 August it will have been a year since Amazon workers began fighting back. Last year, workers rose up in anger at an abysmal 50p-an-hour pay rise from one of the wealthiest companies on the planet. They rallied nationwide in workplace canteens, took to sit-down protests, and even walked out.

Soon, a small group at Coventry's BHX4 site began organising in the GMB union. Before 4 August there were only around 30 union members at BHX4; within a month they numbered over 300. After just missing the Tory anti-union turnout in an industrial action ballot, they balloted again, won, and struck in January.

Since then, they have taken 22 days of strike action, and grown to 1,000 members! The picket lines are impressive, lined with hundreds of strikers, blocking traffic for miles despite the efforts of police and private security. Many workers have gone from not knowing what a union is to working the pickets, turning trucks around, and persuading colleagues to join.

Amazon feared this would happen, and fought back from the start. Security started searching workers' clothes, bags and gloves to find and confiscate union material. They hired over 1,000 extra workers just to ensure GMB didn't have the legally required proportion of the workforce to win automatic recognition.

The union has encouraged workers at other Amazon sites to join the fight. Now, Coventry isn't alone. The Rugeley, Staffordshire, site BHX1 has successfully balloted to strike. German workers and American Teamsters have also struck against Amazon.

In one year, a fledgling but powerful group of unionised workers has been built in Amazon. The company couldn't ignore it, or stop it growing. But the fight is far from over, and the workers know it. Amazon boss Jeff Bezos won't grow a conscience. The only way to get Amazon to give a decent wage and working conditions is to fight them and beat them.

The strike must reach more sites so it can paralyse Amazon. More picket meetings and a fighting, democratic union structure will galvanise the members. They will need a new layer of combative stewards and lay organisers. The National Shop Stewards Network could aid by bringing together experienced rank-and-file reps from across the trade union movement.

The GMB could add a political dimension to strengthen the struggle. Instead of blank cheques to Labour, GMB should demand a £15-an-hour minimum wage from an incoming Labour government, and scrapping all anti-union laws. If they supported worker candidates at the next election who support their members, that would be a good start.

With a growing fightback armed with those ideas, by this time next year the workers could bring Amazon to heel!

St Mungo's: Pay up!

UNITE HOUSING WORKERS BRANCH MEMBERS

St Mungo's homelessness workers have entered their ninth week of indefinite action.

The workers are showing immense determination and courage to continue in the face of a highly intransigent and bullying management. There was no movement in talks at ACAS on 24 July, as the bosses irrevocably drag the strike out.

Workers take confidence from the recent legal judgement overturning a Tory anti-union measure that allowed employers to use agency workers to break a strike. St Mungo's have been able to keep some of their services running by relying on agency staff. This will cease as of 10 August.

This ruling is useful but we cannot rely on it exclusively - workers should

take advantage of it by maintaining and strengthening the action.

Strikers are joining the picket lines with other workers on strike, such as doctors, transport workers, university workers and now traffic wardens in Camden, London. This marks an important phase in the strike, with workers increasingly realising that one of the strengths of the movement lies in linking up with other striking workers who are waging their own struggles on pay.

Unite general secretary Sharon Graham has made a commitment to the strikers and Unite has put more resources into the dispute, determined to win and reach out to other workers in the homelessness sector.

Local authorities, especially Labour ones, cannot stand aside and watch as this rogue employer takes their money, keeps CEO pay secret,

rewards senior management with a 5% pay increase (meaning they take almost five times the pay of the average worker at the charity), and then tells frontline workers that they can only afford 3.7% for them - and not even backdate it!

Senior management say they cannot afford to pay more, but fail to show evidence of this. We say: open the books! Unite reports that the March 2022 accounts show total surpluses of £6 million, and cash balances have rocketed to £22.5 million! Labour authorities should intervene now by convening a meeting with Mungo's senior management and Unite to resolve the dispute. If Mungo's can show that they are genuinely unable to afford a decent wage for frontline staff then local authorities should step in to pay the difference.



Endell St picket LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY



Tube strike suspension: Fight still needed

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS ON LONDON UNDERGROUND

Many RMT members in the London Transport region are dismayed at the calling-off of strike action on London Underground (see 'Rail unions take joint action on London Underground' at socialistparty.org.uk).

A week-long strike would have shown the resolve of our members to fight to defend our pensions, jobs, and conditions of service won over decades of struggle.

The decision to call off action without a meeting of all our reps, which is the way our region normally

democratically operates, has blunted our action.

The regional leadership and reps should meet and resolve to build for future action decided by our reps and members, to fight the attacks on our members by a Tory government aided by a Labour London mayor.

Action over the last year by RMT members kept attacks at bay, but now more action is needed to push the bosses back. All the attacks on jobs, conditions and pensions remain on the table, albeit temporarily delayed. This must be met with future united strike action by the RMT and Aslef on London Underground.

NEU members mobilise to fight



JAMES IVENS

As we go to press, National Education Union (NEU) members in England are voting on whether to accept the 6.5% offer from the Tory government as a conclusion to the strikes, or to bank that increase but continue to fight in the autumn for a better, and fully funded, pay offer.

The outgoing general secretaries and majority of the National Executive are campaigning for members to accept. But a third of the executive voted no.

Showing the scale of the anger and debate, 1,000 people attended a Zoom meeting under the banner of 'Educators say No', and hundreds are voting in NEU district meetings around the country to reject and fight on.

The five Socialist Party members on the NEU executive have consistently fought for national action, and for a serious, escalating campaign, including support staff. They called a Zoom public meeting on 19 July in order to answer questions and gather together members, reps and district secretaries who want to both campaign for a reject vote, and build a fighting union in the future.

Whereas, unfortunately, the 'Educators Say No' meeting was dominated by Socialist Workers Party (SWP) members, who, along with their new allies in Socialist Alternative, excluded Socialist Party members from speaking, this meeting was open to all to ask questions and say what they thought.

Meeting hosted by NEC members in the Socialist Party

The Socialist Party meeting was chaired by Sean McCauley, and Sheila Caffrey introduced the discussion. Sheila said: "For most of us we're in the last few days of term, exhausted and looking forward to being able to sleep! But this is what the government is banking on in delaying the pay announcement till now.

"The offer is almost half the rate we were fighting for, with nothing extra for this year, and nothing that

deals with the decade of pay cuts. It is funded for 3% but the other 3.5% is allegedly already there in schools' budgets. Those same schools that have already been cutting hours and making redundancies, affecting jobs and affecting children's life chances. It is an offer that does nothing to address the recruitment and retention crisis. And if you're in 6th form or FE, there is absolutely nothing.

"Have we won everything we can? I believe we haven't and that we need to vote to reject that this is the end of the fight. We should use the mandates coming from the reballos now of teachers and support staff to fight for the pay and funding we need. We were told before Easter that that was the final offer. But after four more strike days we got an offer 2% higher and with greater funding. So we've

proved that striking works! Now let's look at how we can strengthen hard-ship funds, build our ballots in the final few days, and hit the autumn term ready to fight.

"If members do reject and vote to continue in the autumn, we need to have a good plan of what this looks like. Some disingenuous members of the executive have been using this lack of a plan as a reason why we can't continue the action. I say disingenuous because the Socialist Party members on the executive have been putting forward the importance of having next steps in the campaign. But unfortunately there's been hesitancy on the executive to even discuss this. In May, we tabled a plan for escalating action from the end of September - one day one week, two days the next, three days the

next, building to four days after half term - but that discussion has been postponed.

Build a new left in the union

"What do we do if the vote is to accept? We must be clear that we can still fight. We must not demobilise those who are angry. We want to draw those people in, and show that although this would be a setback we are stronger as a union now, with over 70,000 new members joining since February. Our strike action was solid and growing, with new picket lines. Hundreds have stepped forward as reps. We need to link up those people, and build up a rank-and-file organisation that organises in the districts and on the executive to build a democratic fighting union."

The building of a new left in the union is important for the period ahead. There will be many pressures on the new general secretary, Daniel Kebede - from the Tories, from employers, and from those forces in the union that want to move it away from being a union that is prepared to fight for its members. This will be all the more so as a general election approaches and the pressure is on to keep the unions 'safe' for a Starmer-led Labour government that will not deliver for workers or public services.

A left in the union that organises at all levels should, rather than attempt to paper over differences like the current 'NEU Left', campaign for the fighting approach necessary and help to organise and channel the counter-pressure of the interests of the members.

Unison local government pay - members want a fightback

APRIL ASHLEY
UNISON NEC BLACK MEMBERS' SEAT, PERSONAL CAPACITY

As we go to press, public sector union Unison has still not formally released the outcome of the local government pay strike ballot, nor its decision on the next steps. The National Joint Council (NJC) committee, Unison's leadership body that negotiates on pay, has decided to wait for the outcome of the Unite the Union ballot, the results of which are expected by the end of July.

The other main local government union is GMB. Its industrial action ballot timetable is unclear but seems to be delayed until the autumn school term.

However, most members know that although Unison members overwhelmingly voted for strike action - up to 85% in some branches - only a limited number of branches met the Tory anti-trade union turnout threshold of 50%.

Socialist Party members put forward a fighting strategy, including



Unison members on strike in the Environment Agency - local government workers need a fightback too IAIN DALTON

reballoting all branches where turnout was over 40%. But this has not been taken up by the NJC committee, who countered that the number of branches whose turnout was over 40% would not deliver national action.

The Time for Real Change (TFRC) Unison leadership commended the enormous amount of hard work branches and activists carried out to double last year's turnout in the pay ballot, but there was disappointment amongst activists that branches did not reach the 50% threshold nationally.

Coordinate

The leadership seemed to signal they would not pursue further action on the 2023 pay claim, even though there is still potential scope to coordinate action with other unions. The teachers in the National Education Union are currently holding a consultative ballot on the government offer of 6.5%.

The national disaggregated ballot to achieve the above-inflation pay

claim of 12.7% followed on from last year's 2022 pay campaign where the leadership refused to make a recommendation to reject the employers' flat-rate pay offer of £1,925. This seemed to be a tacit acceptance of the offer and it was not surprising that, with no campaign from the top, members voted to accept on a low turnout.

The local government employers made the very same offer this year. Therefore, if the TRFC leadership does not put forward a fighting strategy, the real-terms pay cut for local government and schools continues for a further year.

The TFRC majority on the union's National Executive Council (NEC), similarly to the right-wing elements on the NEC, are putting their trust in a Starmer-led Labour government to deliver for Unison members. They will be sorely disappointed!

Unless they prepare for the fight that will be needed, they risk becoming indistinguishable from the previous right-wing leadership of the NEC.

CAN CAPITALISM BE REFORMED?

As the cost-of-living crisis continues in Britain - with 30-year high inflation and the effects of over ten years of austerity that have decimated our public services - a growing number of people are beginning to question the profit-based capitalist system and whether it is capable of providing a decent, secure standard of living.

We live in unstable times: the Truss-Kwarteng minibudget fiasco, the chaos in America under Trump, war in Europe, climate catastrophe, and worldwide economic turmoil.

Are the ongoing crises just down to poor management, or is there something fundamentally flawed in the capitalist system that always leads to crisis? What needs to change?

Callum Joyce, Socialist Party Southern and South East regional organiser asks, 'Can capitalism be reformed, improved to better serve the interests of workers and youth?'

Reforms like the NHS have been won in the past, isn't that proof that things can be improved, without having to bring an end to capitalism?

75 years after its creation, the NHS, universal healthcare free at the point of use, remains a significant reform, won by working-class struggle. But, since its birth it has been under attack. Capitalists seek to spend less and less on our health, and exploit it for profit. The same goes for other public services - water privatisation for example (see 'Thames Water crisis is capitalist failure laid bare' at socialistparty.org.uk).

But the circumstances in which the NHS was won are very different to those today. Following the Second World War, Britain and other western European countries saw a prolonged period of economic growth, as societies ravaged by years of fighting were rebuilt. The 'post-war boom' saw a general rise in living standards for the working class.

This time also saw the creation of the 'welfare state' in Britain, with the 1945 Labour government bringing in numerous reforms to improve the lives of ordinary people, most famously the NHS, founded in 1948.

However, these reforms and the Labour government that granted them were not brought about just because of the favourable economic situation. Following the war there was a huge increase in working-class militancy, with many people determined that they would not go back to the conditions of the pre-war period.

The presence of a strengthened Soviet Union emerging from the war also had a huge effect on working-class consciousness. Despite being run under a repressive Stalinist bureaucracy, the existence of an alternative

economic system to capitalism served to increase the number of people questioning whether they had to endure the misery of capitalism in their own countries.

In the face of this anger at home and recognising the revolutionary mass movements that were taking place in other parts of the world, the ruling class was forced to grant these concessions to try and stem the tide of rising struggle. As well as reforms in Britain there was the 'Marshall Plan', implemented by the US to provide millions of dollars' worth of 'economic aid' to western European countries, extending its economic and political influence.

Given the period of economic growth, the capitalist class could afford to give concessions while still making large profits at the same time. In the following years, even the Tories continued to build thousands of council houses every year and maintained many of the nationalised industries - something unimaginable today!

The period of the post-war boom did not last forever though. Into the 1970s, the economy went into crisis. The bosses, determined to restore their profits, attacked working-class living standards and looked to undermine the reforms that they had been forced to tolerate in previous years. Although not without facing significant working-class resistance and mass trade union struggle.

By no longer having to give up a share of their profits to fund social services or subsidise nationalised industries, they hoped to maintain profits by passing the burden onto the working class. Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government, with its sweeping neo-liberal counter-reforms, privatised previously nationalised industries. In tandem it also sought to undermine the power of the trade unions. The trend continued under Tony Blair's New Labour, and since.

As a system based on maintaining the maximum profit possible, capitalism is unable to uphold lasting reforms, faced as it is with inherent periodic crises.



But does capitalism always have to lead to economic crisis? Could we find a way to run the global capitalist economy stably, making it possible to bring in permanent reforms at the same time as allowing the bosses to profit?

As Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels explained over 170 years ago, capitalism is not a system that is capable of continuing for long periods without crisis. This stems from the fact that the working class cannot buy back the full product of what it produces.

In periods of economic growth, capitalist production, unplanned and

based on competition, compels the capitalist to invest in new machinery, driving down costs, boosting profits and potentially capturing a bigger share of the market. More factories and workplaces are created in turn.

The same contradiction, however - 'who can afford to buy the ever-expanding pile of products?' - remains, and a boom cannot be sustained. This is a factor leading to periodic crisis, with production scaled back, and attacks on jobs, pay and conditions the outcome.

For decades however, British capitalism has not invested. Instead, profits have been restored by driving down workers' wages and also from financial speculation, rather than productive investment.

Today, Britain is again in the grip of economic crisis, with inflation at around 10% and well above the rate at which pay is rising. Rising interest rates are creating financial difficulties for mortgage holders and other borrowers. The share of the wealth held by the working class continues to shrink, and the capitalists' grows.

Faced with economic turmoil, even dealing with the stark threat of climate change is deemed 'impossible.'

Wouldn't Labour in government be able to be at least make some positive changes?

Not if it sticks to its pledge to be 'fiscally responsible' - in other words, stick to the dictates of the international 'markets' demanding the working class is made to pay for the crisis. Sir Keir Starmer and his front bench have been at pains to use every opportunity to show that they would govern in the interests of the bosses and not the working class. Even reforms as limited as simply reversing the cruel two-child benefit limit introduced by the Tories in 2017, are ruled out.

Previous Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn did however pledge a large number of reforms, on a scale not seen in the lifetimes of many young people, with a plan to increase taxes on the wealthiest in society in order to fund them.

A Corbyn government, elected on Labour's 2019 general election manifesto, would have come into

of what reforms they might demand would have threatened the bosses' profits. This was what was behind attacks on Corbyn from all corners of the capitalist establishment.

To deal with this, Corbyn should have adopted a strategy to transform the Labour Party, as the Socialist Party advocated at the time, by removing the pro-capitalist right-wingers who were openly attempting to sabotage his leadership. This, combined with adopting a full socialist programme, could have attracted a huge layer of workers and young people to join the party and make it into a genuinely democratic, socialist organisation.

But with Corbyn and other left-wingers now blocked from standing again for Labour, and even expelled from the party in some cases, Labour remains an out-and-out capitalist party under the leadership of Sir Keir Starmer.

The 'markets' and financial institutions would likely have rallied against a Corbyn government too - inflicting economic pain in an attempt to prevent any policies that they deemed too radical being implemented. Even previous Tory Chancellor, Kwasi Kwarteng, triggered the markets to increase government borrowing costs and sell off large sums of British currency after he promised unfunded tax cuts against the wishes of the more 'sensible' capitalists. Any government promising reforms in the interests of the working class would need to prepare to face the same, or worse.

Even ahead of winning an election, the threats to Corbyn came from beyond just the media or the right wing of the Labour Party. Even some British Army generals expressed worry about Corbyn's programme should it ever be implemented, concerned as they were about defending capitalist interests.

The new Tory anti-trade union legislation, introducing minimum service levels, is an example of how another part of the capitalist state, the courts, can be used to try and combat growing working-class organisation, which the bosses fear could represent a threat to their system.

Any government promising reforms in the interests of the working class would need to be prepared to mobilise the working class in support of its programme, or be forced to back down and institute counter-reforms. The defeat of the Greek Syriza government is one recent example. (See 'Taking on 'the markets' - lessons from a Greek tragedy' at socialistparty.org.uk)

In the face of economic sabotage, a government would need a socialist programme to nationalise the banks and the major companies under democratic workers' control and management, in order to ensure production of necessities can continue and be properly funded. This would be coupled with a refusal to pay any debts to foreign capitalists who may try to raise the price of repayments. A state

monopoly of foreign trade to ensure reasonably priced access to required goods, and capital controls to prevent huge amounts of money being removed from the country, would also be necessary.

Then, crucially, if elements of the capitalist state were used to attack such a government, then mass mobilisations of the working class would be necessary to defend the actions of this government from sabotage outside of parliament as well.

To win lasting, substantial reforms today means fighting for such a programme. By taking big business and the banks out of the hands of a few individuals, and instead putting the commanding heights of the economy into public ownership, under the democratic control and management of the working class, the basis would be laid for society to be transformed along socialist lines.

How can we fight for socialism? What needs to be done?

The Socialist Party believes in fighting for every immediate improvement in the lives of ordinary people, be that trade union action for better pay, a raising of the minimum wage, or implementing democratic rent controls.

In the 1980s, Liverpool's Labour City Council, led by Militant (forerunner of the Socialist Party), fought for and won millions of pounds from Margaret Thatcher's government to build thousands of council homes, schools, and leisure centres. In the words of Tony Mulhearn, one of the heroic 47 socialist councillors, it "translated socialism into the language of jobs, housing and services".

Winning reforms builds the confidence of workers, and can raise the sights of what greater reforms can be won through collective struggle. Even defensive struggles to prevent attacks on existing conditions or winning improvements to pay offers, even if they remain below-inflation, can show how workers' action gets results.

The working class in Britain today has no mass political party. The Socialist Party fights for every step forward towards the creation of a new mass workers' party, in which millions of workers could be brought together to discuss and develop the policies needed to transform the lives of working-class and young people.

The Socialist Party also makes clear that any reforms which are granted cannot be made permanent under capitalism. Whatever the bosses give with one hand they will take with the other. So it is necessary to fight for such a workers' party to be armed with a socialist programme.

Only a society run along socialist lines would be able to guarantee permanent reforms where the wealth in society is democratically controlled by the working class and invested where it is needed rather than just where it is profitable.

Only through fighting for immediate reforms linked to the need for the socialist transformation of society to make them permanent, can we end the capitalist system of poverty and exploitation. Then it will be possible to provide a decent standard of living for everyone and create a world where humanity's full potential can be harnessed for the good of all.



WHAT WE STAND FOR

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

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

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

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

WORK, PENSIONS AND BENEFITS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PUBLIC SERVICES

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

ownership under democratic control, in order to provide free, high-quality services for all who need them. Expand services for all women suffering violence.

- For local councillors who are committed to opposing austerity and all cuts to local services, jobs, pay and conditions.
- For a socialist NHS to provide for everyone's health needs, including dental and eye care – free at the point of use and under democratic control. Kick out the private companies! Nationalise the pharmaceutical industry under democratic workers' control and management.

- Renationalise privatised utilities – including rail, mail, water, telecoms and power – under democratic workers' control and management.

- Free, publicly funded and democratically run, good-quality education, available to all at any age. Abolish university tuition fees and write off student debt, end marketisation, and introduce a living grant. No to academisation. For all schools to be under the genuine democratic control of local education authorities, school staff, parents and student organisations.

- The right to a safe secure home for all. For the mass building of genuinely affordable, high-quality, carbon-neutral council housing. For rent controls that cap the level of rent. Fair rent decisions should be made by elected bodies of tenants, housing workers and representatives of trade unions. For cheap low-interest mortgages for home buyers. Nationalise the privately owned large building companies, land banks and estates.

ENVIRONMENT

- Prioritising major research and investment into replacing fossil fuels and nuclear power with renewable energy, and ending the problems of early obsolescence – where products are designed to 'wear out' and be replaced - and unrecycled waste.

- Nationalisation of the energy companies, under democratic workers' control and management, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need, in order to carry out a major switch to clean, green energy, without any loss of jobs, pay or conditions.

- A democratically planned, massively expanded, free to use, publicly owned transport system, as part of an overall plan against environmental pollution.

- For a major, publicly funded, insulation and energy transition plan for existing housing stock.

- Agribusiness to be taken into democratic public ownership. For a food processing and retail industry under workers' control to ensure that standards are set by consumers, small farmers, and

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

DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

- For united working-class struggle to end discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, disability, sexuality, age, and all other forms of prejudice and oppression.

- Repeat the anti-trade union laws and all others that trample over civil liberties. For the right to protest and to strike! End police harassment. For the police to be accountable to local committees, made up of democratically elected representatives of trade unions, local community organisations and local authorities.

- For the right to choose when and whether to have children – for the right to access abortion, contraception and fertility treatment for all who need it.

- For the right to asylum – with democratic community control and oversight of emergency funding resources. No to racist immigration laws.

- Expand democracy. For the abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords. For all MPs to be subject to the right of recall by their constituents at any time, and to only receive a worker's wage.

- For proportional representation and the right to vote at 16.

- For the right of nations to self-determination. For an independent socialist Scotland and for a socialist Wales, both part of a voluntary socialist confederation of Wales, England, Scotland and Ireland.

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

- 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

- 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.

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

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

Barts Health workers prepare to fight



Barts workers striking in 2022. PHOTO: ISAI MARJERLA

LEN HOCKEY

UNITE BARTS HEALTH BRANCH SECRETARY

Over 1,000 health workers in east London employed by Barts NHS Trust are being balloted for strike action.

The Unite members, employed at hospitals including the Royal London, Whipps Cross and St Barts, are seeking an inflation-protected pay rise for 2022-23, and action on the continuing failure to address the NHS staffing crisis by resolving the problems of recruitment and retention.

The workers include workers formerly employed by Serco, whose historic strike victory last year saw 1,800 of them return to direct NHS employment.

Other issues in the ballot include the trust's refusal to pay the 'Agenda for Change' 2022 pay award lump sum, worth £1,655, to employees who transferred into the trust after 31 March 2023.

Impacted by this decision are domestics, back-of-house catering, and ward host workers who transferred in on 1 May and comprise the biggest number of the former Serco staff. It is

unacceptable that our overwhelmingly female domestic and catering membership should be denied the lump-sum payment given to other colleagues.

Unite are also demanding the trust commits to increasing bank shift pay in line with the 2022-23 pay award, and the consideration of service length when assimilating workers to a pay band point.

The lie from Westminster politicians that the NHS can't be fully funded, and that private sector profiteering in the service is necessary, is frequently pushed. The truth, however, is it's a political choice the government has made to run down our NHS. £170 billion profit was made by the energy companies, a windfall tax of £50 billion on them would give every health worker in England an inflation-proof pay rise, with change left over!

The ballot opened on 11 July and runs till 22 August.

- Unite trust-employed members in Barts Health branch not in receipt of a ballot paper are urged to call Unite on 0208 596 9966.

Camden parking wardens strike against poverty pay

HUGO PIERRE

CAMDEN UNISON SCHOOLS CONVENOR, PERSONAL CAPACITY

Camden Unison members who work for NSL parking enforcement services started indefinite strike action on 24 July. There was a 100% yes vote by members across three sites in the borough in their fight for £15.90 an hour.

They work in the lucrative parking contract for Camden council, in the privatised company. The contract covers central areas of London like Holborn and Tottenham Court Road, and makes NSL millions in profit. This goes to a private equity

company. Meanwhile, the Unison members

enforcing parking regulations in all weathers are expected to exist on £12.70 an hour, in one of the most expensive cities in the world!

Camden Unison members are determined to keep up their fight for fair pay. Duncan, one of the stewards, said: "The picket line outside Guilford Street is really well supported, with at least half the members turning out. We joined up with the other sites for a really lovely protest outside Camden council offices.

"This should put an end to any thoughts the company might have about sitting this dispute out. It will give us all confidence that, with the support of the union, we can go on to win!"

From the picket lines...

The strike wave has continued with junior doctors and hospital consultants in the BMA, the Society of Radiographers, RMT members in the Train Operating Companies and National Union of Journalists (NUJ) members in BBC local radio all taking strike action. Socialist Party members have been there in support.

Doctors

Tracy Jackson, consultant gynaecologist at St James Hospital, Leeds, told Socialist Party members: "I've been a doctor for 35 years and I'm sad it's come to this. For me this is not even mainly about pay, it's about the future of the NHS".

Striking consultants at Newcastle's Royal Victoria Infirmary were getting a lot of support from passing motorists - including a taxi driver who held up the traffic while playing a tune on his pipe for them! Among the consultants there was a lot of discussion around the need to fight to save the NHS. One consultant told how cancer services were so overstretched, he even took his computer on holiday so he could ensure his patients' notes were updated and dealt with. None of them held any hope that Starmer's Labour

would be any better than the Tories, and this included some who were Labour members.

Roger Thomas, Bristol Socialist Party, reports that on 17 July about 200 junior doctors and supporters marched through central Bristol to the Bristol Royal Infirmary to College Green. There was great support from the public applauding, and car and bus drivers sounding their horns. The doctors talked about their tremendous anger at the government's non-offer to settle the dispute, and examples of the low pay and long hours expected of junior doctors. Speaking from the BMA, one doctor talked of the challenge the government has thrown down and how they intend to face them down to win a proper pay rise. Chants of "What do we want? Fair pay!" rang out from the marchers.



Newcastle PHOTO: ELAINE BRUNSKILL



Swansea



Southampton

Journalists

At BBC Leeds, the NUJ strikers chanted: "We shall not do news!"

Rail workers

An RMT member at Tyseley West Midlands Trains depot in Birmingham told Socialist Party members: "There's a hiring freeze on fitters so we hardly have any left on our team, but they keep bringing in new managers every few months. All these care about is their own jobs - and beyond that, the bottom line!"

Elaine Brunskill reports that RMT strikers at Newcastle Central Station were in a determined mood. They were aware that BBC journalists were also taking strike action, and made it clear they would not be giving interviews to the BBC in solidarity with NUJ members. There was also re-sounding support for Jamie Driscoll standing as an independent, following Keir Starmer blocking him standing as a Labour candidate in next year's North East mayoral election. Strikers agreed that in order to support workers it is crucial that Jamie Driscoll stands on socialist policies.

Radiographers

Brighton radiographers shouted: "More staff. More pay. Then you can have your X-ray!" reports Penny Iveson. One said: "We do want more pay, but we care about the patients we can't look after properly. The pay is so bad we can't recruit and we can't retain. So many staff are going private or going abroad where the pay and conditions are better. I can't afford to live any more on what I get."

Hollywood strikes!



Equity solidarity protest in London. PHOTO: JAMES IVENS

JAMES IVENS

LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY AND EQUITY MEMBER

Writers and performers for TV and film across the United States are on strike. They are fighting for their livelihood and industry futures in a double crisis of inflation and new tech disruption.

Angry picket lines in Los Angeles, New York, and even in Britain and elsewhere, have disrupted or closed major productions. International celebrities have refused to work, alongside the ranks of jobbing writers and performers who struggle to get by.

Pay is the first demand. Screenwriters' union WGA is fighting for more, including for streaming services to pay the same as traditional broadcast. Meanwhile, screen performers have found that their union SAG-AFTRA's minimum rates are no longer a baseline - they're the norm.

As well as wages, both unions are demanding better 'residuals'. These are payments screen workers receive when the show is re-run (or continuously streamed). They can be essential to surviving in entertainment, the original gig economy. Streaming bosses take a much greater share as profits.

Artificial intelligence (AI) is the second main issue. Writers are demanding that AI tools only be used to generate ideas for consideration, not replace writers' jobs.

Screen performers are fighting for the right to control their own likeness - producers want to pay once for actor input that can be turned into unlimited AI 'performance'. This poses both a reduction in work - especially for lower-profile artists - and your voice and image being used on work you don't endorse.

SAG-AFTRA's sister union in the UK, Equity, held a noisy solidarity rally in Leicester Square on 21 July. Hundreds of jobbing writers and performers, mostly young, joined internationally renowned actors, like Brian Cox and Imelda Staunton, alongside union leaders.

The international solidarity, and elements of international action, are hugely positive. Equity has produced standard guidance on who legally can and cannot join the strike in the UK. Nonetheless, if any entertainment worker is victimised for refusing to cross a picket line, this must not be tolerated and mass action called in response.

Equity general secretary Paul Fleming looked ahead to our own coming negotiations with screen producers. He warned bosses that Equity's position would be: "We want what SAG-AFTRA got - and you know what, we might want a little bit more as well!" If the bosses don't agree, Equity should strike too.

Read more online



• Stanlow oil refinery: Victory!

• NSSF launch in the South West

at socialistparty.org.uk

Letter and reply: would workers' candidates let the Tories in?

The article in the Socialist newspaper, 'Is Mick Lynch right that voting Labour is the only option at the next election?' suggested that if a trade union-organised list of candidates were to stand at the next election there would not be a risk of letting the Tories in.

Well I'm not so sure. The article says that "today, in a situation where, as Mick says, 'we lead, others follow', why couldn't the RMT play a similar role in getting at least a bloc of MPs to represent our class in parliament? Especially if Mick himself gave a lead?"

"For a start, under Britain's electoral system, a general election is not one all-UK-wide 'Tory or Labour' contest, but 650 different elections to elect an MP in each constituency. So, for example, in the Islington North constituency, Jeremy Corbyn, who won in 2019 with 64.3% of the vote (with the Liberal Democrats second), could stand for a trade union-organised list without any prospect whatsoever of 'letting the Tories in.'"

I think this is misleading. Yes, of course, if Jeremy Corbyn stood against a Labour candidate in Islington it would not let the Tories in, in that constituency. But here's the problem. In Islington North, as it stands at the moment, a Labour victory is the most likely outcome. But if Corbyn were to stand, it's possible that he could beat Labour, and as a result, Labour would have one less seat. If there are several other similar situations, it's possible that

Labour could have several less seats. In a tight fought general election, this could make the difference between Labour being able to form a government or not.

Irrespective of this, I still think trade union-sponsored candidates should stand, but we need to be absolutely clear on this.

Comradely
ALAN MANLEY, WEST LONDON

Reply

"If Jeremy Corbyn were to stand [in Islington North at the next general election], it is possible he could beat Labour, and as a result, Labour would have one less seat." This is entirely possible - one less MP behind Keir Starmer's policy of 'fiscal responsibility' (more cuts), one more MP 'for the many, not the few', whose anti-austerity policies as Labour leader in the past have inspired hundreds of thousands of young people.

At the next general election, many working-class people will be primarily concerned with denying the Tories as many seats as possible - leaving in no doubt their defeat. As Alan acknowledges, a Jeremy Corbyn challenge in Islington North has very little prospect of giving the Tories an additional MP. What is there to lose? So too in any number of other seats where a Tory victory is almost certainly ruled out, such as the 120 seats where, even in 2019, Labour won over 50% of the vote.

Imagine what an impact even just a handful of workers' MPs could have, acting as a lightning rod for growing working-class anger at a new government overseeing further deteriorating living standards. The capitalists' fear of such a pole of attraction is at the root of Keir Starmer's ruthless purge to try to remove any person who would be susceptible to such

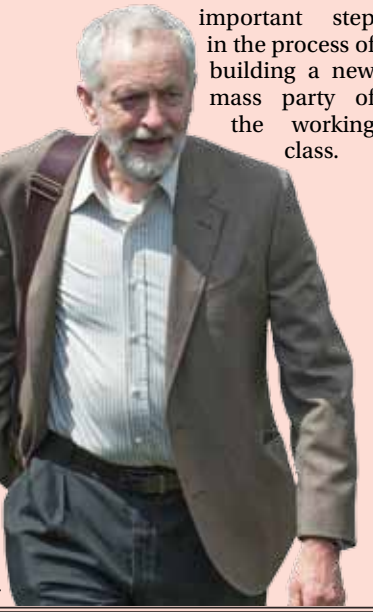
working-class pressure.

In fact, Labour is by far the most likely to be the biggest party after a general election. Polls consistently project a Labour majority. One megapoll based on new constituency boundaries put Labour 12% ahead of the Tories. The worst-case scenario had Labour as the biggest party in a hung parliament.

The Tories are fractured with deep splits in multiple directions, getting ever more unpopular with swathes of traditional would-be supporters facing a mortgage repayment cliff face and even NHS consultants on strike. What possible circumstances would win them a swing big enough to stay in power?

How can the trade union movement best use its political muscle before, during and after a general election? By backing Jeremy Corbyn and others to stand as part of a workers' list of candidates. That is what Socialist Party members have been fighting for at this year's trade union conferences. Such a stand would be an

important step in the process of building a new mass party of the working class.



Young people need socialist change

The United Kingdom has a large gap between poor people and wealthy people. In 2022, incomes for the poorest 14 million people in Britain fell by 7.5%. The richest fifth saw a 7.8% increase, according to Equality Trust. This makes you ask yourself, why?

Why in the 21st century are there people that live in poverty, some working all their lives to not even be able to pay for the basics like energy

or public transport?

Cities such as Coventry, Nottingham, Leicester, which suffer from some of the highest amounts of crime, are also cities that suffer from being some of the poorest.

According to the Trust for London, "52% more crimes were recorded in the most income-deprived areas in 2022", rates of crimes such as violence, robberies and sexual offences are twice as high in deprived poor areas in London than in the top ten wealthiest areas in the mega-city.

Capitalist property developers drive low-income households out of their homes so they can be improved and

passed onto wealthier occupants that 'deserve' them, shoving underpaid, poorer people into run-down tower blocks. This same trick has been played long before the Trotters, Del Boy and Rodney. Just because you are rich, doesn't mean you deserve it - remember that, capitalists!

There is a lack of investment in young people's future. I ask for the young people of this country - fight for your future, but also the lives of others too. I urge the people of my age and older to look for a better society, and that for me, and us, is socialism.

JAMES GIRALDI, WORCESTER

Labour - 105 years later

Contrast the 2023 Labour Policy Forum in Nottingham (see editorial) with Labour's 1918 national conference in the same city:

"The Red Flag opened the meeting and three cheers were called for, for the Russian Revolution, and for the International [the Socialist

Second International, which still included the Russian Bolshevik party]. When a delegate shouted for cheers for peace the hall rang with response. A cry from the audience: 'Cheers for Mac' evoked a spirited outburst, and was followed by cheers for Trotsky and Litvinov. Throughout the meeting 'delegates rose from their seats in the unbounded enthusiasm of their greeting with a hurricane of cheers.' Later Litvinov, the Bolshevik representative in Great Britain,

brought fraternal greetings and was 'received with loud cheers, punctuated with tremendous applause.' "Beatrice Webb [a leading Fabian, on Labour's right wing] wrote 'the leaders of the Labour movement are distinctly uneasy about the spirit of revolt among the rank and file which openly proclaims its sympathy with lurid doings in Petrograd... the whole body of delegates seem determined that the social order shall be different after the war and for the first time they are keen on the International'. From Wyncoll, Peter Harold (1982). The Labour movement in Nottingham 1880-1918. PhD thesis The Open University

JON, MANSFIELD

WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?

• editors@socialistparty.org.uk

or, if you're not online, write to the Socialist Inbox, PO Box 1398, Enfield EN1 9GT

Priced out of festivals and gigs by profit



Glastonbury PHOTO: CC BY 4.0

TOM YOUNG
WEST CHESHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY

It was a beautiful morning on the first day of Glastonbury festival, the sun pouring over the hills, and already the distant rumble of music. It was an amazing weekend, but this year it was impossible not to feel how inaccessible the festival had become for many. Since 2019, the ticket price has jumped an eye-watering 19.6%, and the 'food-for-a-fiver' scheme, touted so proudly by the festival in the past, had now quietly slid up to 'food-for-six-pounds', and even those deals were few and far between, with a decent meal usually costing the best part of £10, and drinks costing similar.

Glastonbury's sharp increase in price is part of a trend across the entertainment industry, with ticket prices rising dramatically over the last few years, outpacing even the large inflation figures we have seen recently. This is often excused by event companies as necessary because of rising costs of personnel, but at the very same time, we are seeing the wages of people working in the industry stagnate and shrink in real terms. From the venue cleaners, to the promoters, to the artists themselves, with many saying they can't afford to tour anymore. And as the ticket prices rise, it is young and working-class people who are pushed out.

If people working in the industry can't afford to live, and working people generally can't afford to go to gigs, where is all this extra cash going? Unsurprisingly, the answer is that it is being hoovered up as profit by the large monopolies in the events industry with, for example, Live Nation-Ticketmaster reporting a staggering 44% increase in revenue since the pandemic. This short-sighted pursuit of profit will ultimately harm the industry, as skilled workers are forced to leave, artists are forced into other work, and young people can't afford to go to gigs to support the industry.

Glastonbury at least does try to make itself accessible, with volunteer programmes for those who can't afford the initial ticket price, but because it is part and parcel of a system which ultimately relies on capital, it ends up unable to deliver on its promise of being 'charitable' and 'egalitarian'.

This is why we need strong trade unions within the industry to bargain for better pay and conditions. We need to drive profit-seeking out of the system, so that artists can perform without going broke, and so that ticket prices can fall to a level where all can take advantage of them. If we fail to do this, a culture and industry that has brought joy to so many, will crumble away for the sake of profits for the few.

TV review: Once Upon a Time in Northern Ireland

'Harrowing and moving insights into decades-long troubles'

NIALL MULHOLLAND
NEWHAM AND EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Once Upon a Time in Northern Ireland, available on BBC iPlayer, is one of the outstanding documentaries on the conflict in Northern Ireland that is euphemistically known as the 'Troubles'. Rather than an overarching narrative, the programme has in-depth interviews with former paramilitaries, from both republican and loyalist backgrounds, former personnel from the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), the British Army, and its local regiment, the Ulster Defence Regiment, as well as with relatives of those who were killed during the conflict.

The five-part series, directed by James Bluemel, as a follow-up to his 2020 series Once Upon a Time in Iraq, uses footage rarely seen on British television. At times harrowing and moving, particularly for those who lived through it in the North, the series gives a real sense of the decades of turmoil and violence between 1969 and 1998.

The first episode begins with an interview with Billy McVeigh, the "Best rioter in Derry", who describes how he was brought up in one of three Catholic families sharing a three-bedroom house in Derry city.

A woman describes how her family endured similar conditions in the Protestant Waterside area of the city.

McVeigh describes how discrimination against Catholics in housing and jobs, and state repression, led to the rise of the civil rights movement in October 1968. He describes how the police beat the protesters. By August 1969, the situation had exploded in the Battle of the Bogside, a pitched battle between local youths in the Catholic Bogside area of Derry against the paramilitary police of the RUC and the notorious 'B-Specials'. With the prospect of a slide into civil war, British troops were dispatched by the Labour government to the streets of Northern Ireland. Catholic interviewees describe how the troops were initially seen as saviours and handed cups of tea and biscuits by local residents. At this stage, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) is described as dormant but, following brutal house raids by the British Army, the IRA grew.

In January 1972, a demonstration in Derry against internment without trial of innocent Catholics led to Bloody Sunday. Reflecting the extreme polarisation in society at the time, a former loyalist paramilitary member says on camera how he "feels bad that he and others cheered and called it Good Sunday". The



• 'Once Upon a Time in Northern Ireland' is available for streaming on BBC iPlayer, photo BBC

programme is told how "boys lied about their age to sign up to the IRA", following Bloody Sunday.

Episode two describes the horrendous events of Bloody Friday in Belfast on 21 July 1972. A series of bombings carried out by the Provisional IRA, as a retaliation against British Army violence, led to the deaths of scores of people and many injuries in the city of Belfast. A former IRA member, Richard O'Rawe, concedes that Bloody Friday was "embarrassing for the IRA", and how "the direction of the war after Bloody Friday went into a dark place". He adds: "There were Republicans who were sectarian... Protestants were killed because they were Protestants".

A former Protestant paramilitary member comments that he felt, "we needed to fight back," and he joined the 50,000-strong Ulster Defence Association. He adds: "We didn't know we had also joined the Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF)... We carried out lots of atrocities".

The Troubles saw thousands of young people going through the prison system, and this led to a major struggle between republican prisoners and the British state after political status was removed for prisoners. An interviewee describes how the 1981 republican prisoners' hunger strikes led to an "atmosphere so heavy we knew it would explode... Northern Ireland came close to an all-out civil war". An estimated 100,000 people attended hunger striker Bobby Sands' funeral out of a sense of "fear, anger and hopelessness".

The programme looks at the conclusion of the state with loyalist paramilitaries and attempts to recruit informers. An IRA member describes how, under questioning by the RUC, she was offered £35,000 to turn against the republican movement.

Attacks by loyalist gangs escalated in the late 1980s and 90s, just as a peace process began to emerge. Billy McManus describes how his father was one of the victims of a loyalist indiscriminate shooting in 1988. The UFF said it was in retaliation for a bombing by the IRA of workers going to a police barracks, in which eight people were killed, all of them

Protestants.

While the series sees former republican and loyalist paramilitaries express remorse for some of their organisations' armed actions, the British soldiers defend or justify their operations. Perhaps this is an institutional mindset, given that the British army has not called a ceasefire, anywhere, and continues its wars and military interventions (including in Serbia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria and, de facto, Ukraine) in pursuit of the interests of the British ruling class.

Once Upon a Time in Northern Ireland is a good introduction to the conflict and to daily life at the time. Popular culture is referenced, including Terry Hooley's 'Good Vibrations' record shop and label, set up in 1976, which helped launch bands such as The Undertones, and whose music nights were one of the few social places that brought Catholic and Protestant youth together in central Belfast. But there is not much historical background, however, regarding centuries of colonial and imperialist oppression and mass resistance, and the British ruling class' policy of sectarian 'divide and rule'. Still, the series is an eye-opener for many people outside the North.

Given the format of the series, it cannot be an in-depth analysis and, apart from the competing armed combatants, it largely ignores other important factors in society, such as the role of the political parties and politicians. Aside from footage of trade unionists on a demonstration demanding an end to conflict in the 1990s, the role of the organised workers' movement is missing from the series. The unions in the workplaces played a key role in stopping a slide to all-out sectarian conflict many times. However the leaders of the trade unions and long-defunct Northern Ireland Labour Party were found wanting in providing decisive leadership, with bold socialist policies, during the civil rights struggle, and on other occasions, that could have united Catholics and Protestant workers. A vacuum was left for other forces to fill and the Troubles were the tragic outcome.



Once Upon a Time in Northern Ireland is a good introduction to the conflict and to daily life at the time

NIGERIA COULD ERUPT FOLLOWING POST-ELECTION CRISIS

HT SOWETO
DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST MOVEMENT
(CWI IN NIGERIA)

If a poll was conducted in Nigeria today, asking average Nigerians how they have fared since 29 May when President Bola Tinubu came to power, the prevailing answer would be a tale of suffering, hardship and misery. Such is the scale, rapidity and magnitude of the attacks the new administration has unleashed on poor Nigerians, the working class and layers of the middle classes through its so-called economic reforms.

On 29 May, as he was being sworn in, Tinubu declared: "Fuel subsidy is gone". That declaration has now been revealed to be an off-the-cuff remark – that is, a reckless and irresponsible step that was neither discussed, let alone any mitigating plan prepared!

Immediately, fuel prices rocketed from N195 per litre to at least N500 per litre as hapless Nigerians raced to the nearest petrol station to stock up! Society came to a halt as transport prices shot up. Workers and students were stranded at bus stops unable to afford the new fares.

Weeks later, many workers are still trekking to work and a number of state governments have had to announce a reduction of the working week to three days. This anti-poor policy, which has been in the works for nearly three decades, was followed by a raft of others, including naira devaluation and a plan to introduce university tuition fees. Together they have had the combined effect of unleashing a cost-of-living crisis that has sent inflation soaring and living conditions crashing.

Inequality

Nigeria is no stranger to poverty. In 2018, the resource-rich country, which is the seventh-largest exporter of crude oil in the world and Africa's largest economy, was declared the poverty capital of the world. 133 million Nigerians, over 60 per cent of its estimated 220 million population, are said to be living in multidimensional poverty. But since 29 May, millions of poor and working-class families have suddenly found themselves in new levels of misery and deprivation. There is every possibility for pent-up rage to explode in any form – something which the youth restiveness and gang violence these past weeks in Ajegunle, a slum in Lagos State, already indicates.

By removing the fuel subsidy and devaluing the naira, the regime claims to have blocked fuel smugglers and currency speculators who have been making billions at the expense of the country. However, this only transfers the axis of exploitation from one layer of thieves (fuel smugglers) to another (petrol marketers).

This time around, Nigerians are at the mercy of petrol marketers who



The Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) is the international socialist organisation which the Socialist Party is affiliated to. The CWI is organised in many countries around the world. We work to unite the working class and oppressed peoples against capitalism, and to fight for a socialist world.

have taken to price gouging in order to better profit from the deregulation of the fuel market. By the time the new Dangote refinery becomes operational, a country of 220 million people would be at the mercy of one man for their energy needs! The same goes for unification of the exchange rate, which has led to soaring inflation and further distortion in the economy. The reality is that any solution to the crisis plaguing Nigeria can only succeed if it goes beyond the precinct of capitalism.

Policies like fuel subsidy removal do not address the root cause of the mess. That is why instead of ending the crisis, they produce new ones, while increasing the suffering of workers and the poor. We socialists demand instead that the rich who are responsible for the mess should pay for the crisis. This is why we call for a reversal of the fuel price hike, the arrest and trial of all subsidy thieves, and the seizure of their assets, a crash programme to repair old refineries and build new ones, and nationalisation of the oil and gas sector under working people's control and management.

Nationalisation

By nationalising the oil sector, we want all private profit interests (including local and multinationals) eliminated to permit the full utilisation of Nigeria's oil and gas resources for the benefit of its population. By linking this key measure with nationalisation of all other key sectors of the economy like the banks, big industry and mines all under workers' democratic control and management, it can be possible to implement a socialist plan to take the country's wealth off the one percent, and instead invest it massively in public education and healthcare, expanding industry and creating decent jobs on a mass scale, modernising public infrastructure, expanding food production, protect the environment, invest in renewable energy sources and build decent homes for all and a living wage with a reduction of the working day.

Labour must challenge the ruling elite orchestra that says there is no other choice, by posing a clear alternative. Unfortunately, the retreat of the leadership of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and the Trade

Union Congress (TUC) from continuing with the general strike initially called on 1 June to resist the subsidy removal, has helped embolden the regime. This can be overcome if labour changes course and calls for a 24-hour or 48-hour general strike and mass protests now as a starting point for a well-mobilised nationwide resistance against the regime's ruinous policies. This has become urgent seeing that the negotiation with the Federal Government for palliative measures is clearly not going to yield any concrete outcome for the working people.

Labour was correct to have flatly rejected the unilateral offer of the regime to pay N8,000 each to 12 million vulnerable families over the next few months. This conditional cash transfer is part of a suite of International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank facilities for the country to cushion the effect of the subsidy removal, for which the regime is requesting a new loan of N500 billion.

Reacting to this, the chairperson of the Lagos state council of the NLC, Funmi Sessi, said, "N8,000 cannot take care of a family for a week; it is not possible; it is going to be like a drop of water in the ocean... how will it [the government] identify those who are most affected, and how will the palliatives get to those actually in need? Labour is asking for a pay rise; for those in abject poverty, we believe the government can do better for them".



We call for a reversal of the fuel price, the arrest and trial of all subsidy thieves, and the seizure of their assets, a crash programme to repair old refineries and build new ones, and nationalisation of the oil and gas sector under working people's control and management

This is a generally correct critique, but raises the question of what labour is still doing at the negotiation table? The negotiation has gone on for about three months now while workers continue to suffer. The truth is that whatever palliative is eventually granted, it will likely end up like the Covid-19 palliative two years ago – hoarded by politicians and crooks while many poor people got nothing.

The only way out is struggle. There is a responsibility on the NLC and TUC to change course. The starting point of this can be the convening of a conference of trade unionists and socialists to discuss how to build a programme of struggle to save the working people from the ongoing nightmarish situation.

At the same time however, there is the need for activists to begin to organise to build united struggles from below. In this sense, the DSM supports the initiatives been taken by the Joint Action Front (JAF) and other civil society coalitions to organise a fightback. In January 2012 when a

mass uprising and general strike took place, it took independent initiatives like this in the preceding weeks and months to prepare the situation.

The question of what to do has now been posed sharply by the surprise 18 July hike in fuel prices. The NLC has issued an angry statement this hike and on the proposed N8,000 cash palliative. But, despite the angry words and the statement's ending that the NLC will "take matters in our own hands", there are no concrete proposals for mobilisation or action to defeat this onslaught.

This is why we hereby call for urgent preparation for mass protest to begin through leafleting and public mass meetings. Democratic action committees, made up of activists, workers in the workplaces and youth in the community and campuses, should be built from below and linked up across states and nationally, to give leadership to the movement. A series of protests and demonstrations can be a powerful lever of pressure on the leadership of the NLC and TUC to act. Given the suffering and the anger, any initiative for struggle can also quickly develop into a national movement that can force the regime to backtrack. The truth is that the regime remains fundamentally weak. It was 'elected' by just 8.7 million voters -10% of the total number of registered voters and 37.7% of votes cast.

If a mass uprising develops today, the regime can quickly fracture or collapse, raising the question of what replaces it. This is why simultaneously as we prepare to fight back, it is also essential for a mass workers' party to be built that can act as a lever for the working class and oppressed masses of Nigeria to take power and begin to run society along socialist lines. Otherwise there is a risk of a regime collapse leading to the coming to power of the military or, in the worst case scenario, a descent into sectarian conflict, something which can take Nigeria further along the direction of barbarism.

Fight for:

- Reversal of pump price of fuel to N195 per litre
- Arrest and speedy trial of all subsidy thieves and seizure of their ill-gotten wealth
- N200,000 national minimum wage to be regularly increased in accordance with the rate of inflation
- Immediate crash programme to repair old refineries and build new ones
- Refined fuel from Dangote refinery, when it starts operating, to conform to a price cap of N195 per litre otherwise it should be nationalised under workers control and management
- Reversal of all hiked school fees. No to student loan. For improved funding of public education
- Immediate meeting of the demands of academic staff, non-academic staff, doctors and all medical personnel
- Release of all political prisoners and end to attacks on democratic rights
- Nationalisation of the oil and gas sector, banks, big industry and mines under workers control and management
- A workers and poor people's government armed with a socialist programme

● This article in full can be read online at socialistworld.net

Resist tuition fees attacks



EDUCATION RIGHTS CAMPAIGN ACTIVIST

The Education Rights Campaign (ERC) organised a hybrid meeting on 22 July to address the recent part of the discussion with the most recent being the hike in fees by University of Lagos by over 400%. Plans to increase fees in Unity Secondary Schools across the country have also been announced, and parents who have voiced their opposition to it have had their children expelled from school. Attendees of the meeting concluded rightly that these policies and the planned introduction of tuition fees are in line with the government's agenda to shirk its responsibility of funding education as a social service, but rather, it wants to commercialise it.

The meeting's attendance included socialists, students' union officers and activists, and Nigerian students in Britain. The speakers also included officials of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) - the most radical trade union in Nigeria, members of DSM and ERC, representatives from Socialist Students and the Socialist Party in England and Wales.

Some of the speakers explained how the Students Loan Act is clearly an attempt to introduce tuition fees in public universities. Until now tuition fees have been officially non-existent, but the authors of the Act have stated that the loans are meant to cater for tuition fees, which by direct implication suggests more burden for the already impoverished students and parents in Nigeria.

In addition, the numerous conditions attached to the loans suggest a vast majority of students from poor backgrounds would not be able to access them, and it exposes the insincerity of the new Tinubu-led government. The ERC calls for a vehement opposition of the loan act and argues for student grants instead to support the studying and living expenses of students.

The wave of fee hikes across campuses in Nigeria formed another part of the discussion with the most recent being the hike in fees by University of Lagos by over 400%. Plans to increase fees in Unity Secondary Schools across the country have also been announced, and parents who have voiced their opposition to it have had their children expelled from school. Attendees of the meeting concluded rightly that these policies and the planned introduction of tuition fees are in line with the government's agenda to shirk its responsibility of funding education as a social service, but rather, it wants to commercialise it.

The effect of these policies, if not fought against, would be a massive drop out of students and job losses for education workers. Already, the enrolment of students into departments in the Lagos State University has dwindled significantly after a 300% fee hike was implemented ten years ago. Usmanu Danfodiyo University in Sokoto State also recently had to postpone its examinations because a huge number of students were unable to pay fees.

Evidently, the commercialisation of education has failed all over the world, and Pippa Evans from Socialist Students in London spoke on how the cost-of-living crisis has impacted students in Britain, and how the student loan policy in place has not ameliorated the situation. About 11% of students in Britain now have to use food banks and 18% cannot afford necessary learning materials. University lecturers in Britain have also been forced to take various strike actions as members of the University and College Union (UCU) demand better working conditions.

The plight of Nigerian students in the UK was also highlighted. Tinubu's policy on exchange rate unification has meant that the students suddenly have to grapple with the nightmare of sourcing more funds to be able to convert their money into pound sterling to offset their school fees.

It was agreed that all of the aforementioned policies of the capitalist Tinubu-led administration are attacks on public education in Nigeria. It requires an urgent coordinated action of students, parents and education workers, with solidarity from activists, civil society coalitions, and the Nigeria Labour Congress and Trade Union Congress, to organise mass resistance against government attacks.

Financial donations and pledges were made at the meeting, with a plan to commence mobilisation across campuses and begin a nationwide campaign against the student loan and fee hikes. An appeal for solidarity from all unions and sections of the working masses was made, including the Nigerian diaspora, in Britain specifically.

The wave of fee hikes and commercialisation of education are just a few out of the anti-working class and poor policies launched by the Tinubu-led administration (see opposite). This is why the ERC also believes in the need for the working and poor people to organise for a mass workers' political alternative that can transform Nigeria along socialist lines, by utilising the enormous resources of the country to provide free and quality education and jobs for the teeming youth who make up the largest chunk of the country's vast population.

£1/£2 solidarity price

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HEATWAVE CLIMATE EMERGENCY

FIGHT FOR SOCIALIST CHANGE

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BIRMINGHAM SOCIALIST PARTY

Frightening highs of over 40°C is the reality in southern Europe. Parts of southern Iberia have been labelled as 'extreme-risk' zones, with nearly 75% of the territory of the Spanish state being considered 'at risk'.

These temperatures are record-breaking, almost uncharted territory for emergency services and the population at large. In Sicily, temperatures have reached 47°C and Greece has experienced the hottest weekend in 50 years.

These extremely high temperatures, which

are becoming increasingly more common, have catastrophic consequences. After the driest Spring on record in the Spanish state, a harsh rationing of water is a real possibility. In Italy, workers are beginning to ask to be furloughed because the extreme temperatures are literally killing them. Extreme heat has been claimed as a cause of death for five people there, so far. As I write, the fires of Rhodes are devastating the island and forcing the displacement of thousands of people, fires of a magnitude not possible without the extreme heat.

Although it is true that there have always been odd years where temperatures have been higher or lower than usual, the

frequency in which hot and cold records are shattered leaves no doubt that behind these high temperatures are not only climatological accidents but climate change.

These local spiked heatwaves are part of a worrying upwards trend in temperatures around the globe. Long ago thought of as a future threat, climate change is now a present emergency.

Thousands of young people, in Britain and internationally, have been protesting and taking part in 'climate strikes' in recent years, demanding action against climate change - many demanding 'system change'.

The truth is that climate change cannot be solved by the profit-based capitalist system,

based on competition. Huge investment is needed to develop renewable energy production to replace fossil fuels, but capitalists only invest when they can be sure of making a profit.

By bringing the big energy companies, industry and the banks into democratic public ownership, the huge resources currently owned and controlled by a handful of individuals could be put to use as part of a plan, not to make maximum profits but to stop global heating.

Socialist change internationally is necessary for the level of global collaboration needed to solve the climate crisis. Join the Socialist Party to help us fight for it.

WHAT WE STAND FOR: THE SOCIALIST PARTY'S MAIN DEMANDS >>> see column on p10

