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the Socialist

Issue 1238

10-24 August 2023

formerly **Militant**

GARETH BROMHALL
AMBULANCE SERVICE WORKER

The NHS is on its knees, with A&E waits at unprecedented lengths, ambulance response times growing, and routine procedures and referrals taking longer than they ever have.

Once a world-beating and ground-breaking example of socialised medicine and public ownership, our health service, still held up proudly as one of the great victories of the working class, is facing an existential crisis.

But it has not failed, it is being failed, and the role of the bosses and their politicians in its destruction is plain to see. Steve Barclay, Tory health and social care minister, has announced plans to increase the use of private providers to clear waiting list back logs and private diagnostic hubs for routine testing. This is the latest example of the push toward NHS privatisation that has been waged since its foundation, ramped up over the last few decades.

This will mean more private companies profiting from our health, attacking staff conditions to keep costs down, and it won't solve the crisis the NHS is facing – a lack of the resources needed to truly provide universal healthcare.

The answer from the Labour Party? The exact same strategy. Shadow health secretary Wes Streeting criticised the Tories for not going to the private sector sooner! The NHS is not safe in their hands either.

The strikes over the past year, by nurses, doctors, radiographers, paramedics, clinicians and call handlers in the ambulance services, across the country, have shown the power of the NHS workforce as they take action on pay and conditions, and also for the future of the service itself.

We say put health before profit! We need a party that will back workers taking action and with a socialist programme that places at its heart the fight for a fully funded health and social care service, under democratic workers' control. A health service planned to meet the physical, mental and public health needs of the entire population is possible. By restoring all that had been privatised, scrapping PFI debt, nationalising the wider private and third-sector providers and expanding the health services' scope. Nationalising the pharmaceutical, medical equipment and other connected industries as part of a genuine planned economy is vital to achieve this.

On this basis, planning for health not for profit, we could have a health service that puts us ahead of what makes a profit for a few.



CARTOON: ALAN HARDMAN

HEALTH BEFORE PROFIT

KICK PRIVATE VULTURES OUT OF NHS

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

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

Lobby the TUC Fight the anti-union laws!

The National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) has called a lobby of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) on 10 September. The NSSN says: "The Tories have sneaked their new attack on the right to strike, the Minimum Service Level Act (MSL), into law before the parliamentary summer recess. The NSSN agrees with fighting unions that are calling for action to ensure that no union is left isolated. The NSSN believes that if workers take action together, the crisis-ridden Tories and their anti-union offensive can be defeated. "The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) has called for 'mass opposition' and for unions to 'act together to build a movement to defy and defeat this law.' At its AGM, the RMT rail union passed a motion calling for a national demonstration against the MSL and coordinated strike action. And Unite the Union's policy conference passed a motion to 'call on the TUC to coordinate action, in the form of a 24-hour general strike'. "The annual NSSN Conference on 24 June agreed a model motion (see latest NSSN bulletin at shopstewards.net), including supporting a rally and lobby of TUC Congress in Liverpool on Sunday 10 September. We encourage all union branches and trades councils to discuss the motion and agree it."



RMT members on the Train Operating Companies were back out on strike on 29 July, including in Salisbury. PHOTO: SALISBURY SOCIALIST PARTY

Cardiff trades council: 'About time!'

Cardiff trades council voted unanimously to support the NSSN motion for trade union action against the Tory Strikes (Minimum Services Levels) Act and to support the lobby of the TUC in September. So the officers decided to see if we could organise a coach to Liverpool and appeal for funding from union branches. So far we have had promises from two Unite branches and the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), with positive responses from other unions as well. So we have booked the bus and are starting to fill the seats.

It's striking how much support there is this year for the lobby. A Unite worker in the chemical industry said: "About time!" when he heard about the lobby. There really is a mood to push the TUC into fighting the act.

DAVE REID ASSISTANT SECRETARY, CARDIFF COUNTY TRADES UNION COUNCIL

London

Hundreds of pounds has been donated to assist transport to Liverpool from London. These donations have come from Unite branches in both health and local government, RMT and Unison branches, and several trades councils.



South West NSSN launched

Following a year of picket lines, with trade unionists and socialists supporting each other's action, a founding meeting of the NSSN in the South West took place in Plymouth. We assembled on the RMT picket at the train station, and met afterwards in the local Railway Club. Key speakers included Robbie Woodland, president of the bakers' union BFAWU Kernow, who appealed for support for its campaign for better pay and conditions, and union recognition at Ginsters and all Samworth Brothers sites nationwide. See 'Appeal from Robbie Woodland, President BFAWU Kernow' at socialistparty.org.uk. Robert Kitley, Aslef Exeter branch chair, spoke in a personal capacity on the continuing overtime ban being held by train drivers to bring the Train Operation Companies to the negotiating table. Dave Goard from the RMT executive committee praised his members for launching the widest strike wave for 50 years, and their determination to continue their year-long campaign on pay and conditions. Dave Roberts, regional secretary of the FBU, drove from Weston Super Mare, and will encourage more local FBU reps to participate in future South West NSSN events. The meeting was chaired by Alex Moore, National Education Union Plymouth secretary (in a personal capacity) and Socialist Party member. Participation in the meeting and subsequently has included Jill Napo, vice chair of Napo in the south west, University and College Union members, and striking reps from the National Union of Journalists at the BBC and the Society of Radiographers. We unanimously agreed to set up a steering committee, endorse the NSSN model motion on fighting the anti-union laws, and to campaign to get local union branches to affiliate to the NSSN. We are now looking into booking transport to the lobby of the TUC in Liverpool. PLYMOUTH SOCIALIST PARTY



PHOTO: SOUTH WEST NSSN

Desperate Tories drive environmental destruction Build a working-class alternative for the general election

Socialist Party WHAT WE THINK

Facing a potential electoral landslide against them, the Tories are desperate. Hundreds of Tory MPs threatened with losing their jobs are desperately clawing to find a ledge to cling onto. Narrowly holding onto Boris Johnson's old constituency, Uxbridge and South Ruslip, in the July by-election, where they achieved 11,386 fewer votes than in 2019, is deemed good enough for a populist bent towards anti-climate measures.

But, like other desperately attempted 'populist' stances - against trans rights, building migrant barges and others, it won't salvage the political careers of hundreds of Tory MPs. In fact, it will drive further splits in the party which splinters and fractures - at times under the surface, at others in front of our eyes. Tory MP Chris Skidmore, described plans for over one hundred new North Sea oil and gas licenses, announced at the end of July, as "the wrong decision at precisely the wrong time". However, more revealing was his comment that it would put the party "on the wrong side of modern voters". The party is much less concerned about how best to protect the environment, than on how on earth it can survive being so deeply unpopular.

When the government-created Climate Change Committee released a report in June about net-zero plans, it said: "Our confidence in the UK meeting its medium-term targets has decreased in the past year". Since, we have lived through the hottest month ever recorded in July.

"Eco-zealots at Just Stop Oil are writing Keir Starmer's energy policy", so says Rishi Sunak. In fact, Labour politicians have refused to commit to revoking the new licenses. And the party under Starmer's leadership has dropped its planned start date for green investments worth £28 billion a year, yet another policy sacrificed at the altar of 'fiscal responsibility'.

Starmer and Co. viewed London's Labour mayor Sadiq Khan's expansion of the Ultra-Low Emission Zone (Ulez) as a major reason why Labour could not mobilize enough voters to beat the Tories in Uxbridge. From 29 August, 5 million more people will need to pay £12.50 a day to use their car in their own London neighbourhood if it is deemed too polluting - poorer drivers with older vehicles are more likely to be effected and less able to buy new vehicles.

Under pressure, Khan has



PHOTO: GARY BEMBRIDGE/CC

expanded the car scrappage fund from £110 million to £160 million, and to beyond just those receiving means-tested benefits. But the new amount is only enough to help around 40,000 drivers, a long way short of the estimated 300,000 owners of non-compliant cars in outer London. The extra £50 million was found from Greater London Authority reserves. Why not fund what's needed to replace and upgrade all polluting vehicles, scrap the planned fees and give the government the bill? After all, BP, just one of the big oil and gas companies, reported £2 billion profits in the three months to the end of June. Even just a fraction of oil and gas profits could pay for it.

91% of the world's population live in places where air quality is unhealthy, that includes London. Ulez expansion is supposed to address the issue. But what of the Edmonston Incinerator expansion, where construction has recently begun after being given the green light by an

authority made up of entirely Labour councillors in London?

And why is Transport for London, headed by Khan, proceeding to run down the tube network by threatening workers' jobs and pensions, and implementing a 4% cut to bus services - instead of investing in extending public transport networks to meet need?

Significant, planned and coordinated investment is needed to prevent an even more severe climate and environmental crisis. But that's not how capitalism operates. Instead, capitalists compete with each other to maximize profits. Capitalist nation states, representing the dominant interests of their own capitalist classes, compete too.

Far from more global collaboration to address climate change, the world is heading in the opposite direction. The Ukraine war is the sharpest expression of this. In fact, 'energy security' was Sunak's justification for more oil and gas licenses.

A rational system, motivated by

providing a safe and fulfilling life for ordinary people, would prioritise the health of people and the planet. Instead, profit and the private ownership of wealth and industry lead to poverty, war and climate destruction.

BP invested eleven times more into oil and gas than low-carbon energy in the last quarter. The company, previously majority state-owned until Thatcher's privatisation in the 1980s, should be fully nationalised - this time under the democratic control and management of the working class. The same is true for the other oil and gas giants, as well as other major industries and the banks. On the basis of democratic public ownership, production and investment can be planned to meet need and not profit.

As it stands, no mass political force is set to contest the next general election putting forward these demands. The Socialist Party fights for a new mass workers' party with a socialist programme. Such a party, if launched by even just a few of the fighting trade unions, would attract hundreds of thousands of working-class people wanting an end to the cost-of-living crisis. It would also be a forum in which working-class people could discuss and agree policies to address environmental and climate destruction.

This year's RMT transport union conference voted unanimously to support Jeremy Corbyn standing in Islington North at the general election. Why not Emma Dent Coad too, another anti-austerity former Labour MP who has announced her candidacy in Kensington, London? Or Jamie Driscoll who has raised hundreds of thousands of pounds in a matter of weeks to stand in the North East Mayoral contest after being blocked from standing for Labour? A workers' list of candidates, backed by the trade unions, contesting the next general election, would be a huge step forward.

If such a stand doesn't get off the ground in time, the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, in which the Socialist Party participates with others, will stand. It has put the call out to prepare for the roughly 100 candidates required to get 'fair media coverage' during the election campaign - seeking to bring together all those who see the need for a fighting, working-class alternative to pro-capitalist Tories and Labour.

For more on the TUSC campaign see 'Want a united socialist challenge to Starmer at the ballot box? Then let's organise!' at tusc.org.uk

IT upgrade pending - the Socialist fortnightly schedule

14 August 2023 is the day that, thanks to the fantastic response to the Socialist Party's 'IT upgrade appeal', our technology will be upgraded. As a consequence, emails ending '@socialistparty.org.uk' will not be receiving emails for most of that week.

This issue, 1238, will be a fortnightly issue, and we will resume a weekly schedule with issue 1239 on 23 August.

Ticket offices worth fighting for

AARON SMITH
ENFIELD AND LEA VALLEY SOCIALIST PARTY

This July, the government and Train Operating Companies announced plans to close nearly 1,000 ticket offices by the end of 2024. A public consultation released alongside it, originally for only three weeks, has now been extended to September following backlash from rail trade unions and disability groups. Over 300,000 people have taken part in the consultation so far. If these plans go ahead as the bosses try to maintain their profits, jobs will be lost.

Ticket office and rail staff are invaluable for their help and advice. I use trains most days and always see them helping people with many different needs and can't imagine the service without them.

As an autistic person, accessibility is important for everything I interact with. Ticket offices help avoid confusion and unnecessary stress when there are cancellations, delays and strikes. Ticket machines are not a suitable replacement to staff as they are confusing to use and unreliable. Train tickets are incredibly complicated because of a range

of restrictions, classes, and valid routes. There can be hundreds of ticket options for any given journey. It is not possible for ticket machines to show every possible valid ticket option. The Sunday Times reported that an internal rail industry document states that nearly one in five tickets won't be available from the machines, often some of the cheapest! Ticket office closures will mean more people will be fined for having the wrong ticket, through no fault of their own.

These proposals are the latest round of cuts which will make trains less safe, reliable and welcoming. Services were cut during Covid lockdowns and many never restored. Stations have lost their staff already and facilities such as toilets and waiting rooms have closed. At a time of worsening climate change, we need to make public transport better and cheaper. All of the private companies making a profit from rail need to be nationalised, along with the buses. A programme of mass investment across the country as part of a democratic plan for transport would mean public transport could be fully integrated, high quality and free.



"Don't make us extinct too" placard at RMT picket line
PHOTO: BRUM SP

Socialist Party campaigning against the closures

Wakefield

On 21 July, Socialist Party members held a campaign stall in Wakefield precinct against ticket office closures. Wakefield Westgate rail station has the only staffed ticket office in the district and is threatened with closure. A public meeting organised by the RMT to oppose the plans had taken place at the town hall two days earlier.

A good number of those hearing our slogans looked stunned to find out the huge level of ticket office closures being proposed. People took RMT cards to register their views against the government proposals. Large numbers had no patience with being forced to book tickets online. People didn't trust that train companies would continue to pay staff to

help disabled or elderly passengers, if ticket offices disappeared.
JOHN VASEY, WAKEFIELD AND DISTRICT SOCIALIST PARTY

Hull

Over the past few weeks, Hull Socialist Party members have been consistently campaigning against the ticket office closure at Hull Interchange station. On two occasions we joined the RMT picket line and our solidarity has been warmly welcomed by the picket organiser giving us permission to set up our Socialist Party stall. One thing the vast majority of people we speak to agree on; people want the choice of personal contact when they purchase a ticket, ask advice or have a question about their journey.
PHIL CULSHAW, HULL SOCIALIST PARTY



Socialist Party members in Hull campaigning against ticket office closures

Tory plan to house asylum seekers on dangerous barge

Fight division - jobs and homes for all

AMANDA
WEST MIDLANDS-BASED ESOL TEACHER

Once again, the plight of asylum seekers has been turned into a game of political football, as the Tories propose to move them out of hotels and into barges. As we go to press, the Tories plan for the first 500 asylum seekers to be packed onto the Bibby Stockholm, a barge built to house less than half that number of people. This is a bid to cut costs and deter migrants supposedly lured to the UK by 'luxurious accommodation'.

These measures will likely go ahead, despite serious fire concerns raised by the Fire Brigades Union, the assistant general secretary describing the barge as "a potential death-trap". Migrants living in this confined space could also lead to widespread

infection if disease breaks out, according to the government's own internal documents. To make matters worse, there is a worrying presence of far-right groups, who have threatened asylum seekers, in the area around the Bibby Stockholm barge.

Disappointingly, Labour has said that it would continue to use the barges to house asylum seekers temporarily once in power. Yet again showing in practice they are like Tories with red ties on.

Fight scapegoating

This is not the first time that immigrants have been scapegoated as a cost to the taxpayer and a strain on ever-dwindling resources. The divisive rhetoric attempts to distract the public's attention from those at the top who really cost us the most - the politicians, both Labour and Tory,



Bibby Stockholm docked in Falmouth
PHOTO: ASHLEY SMITH/CC

who have cut public services to the bone for over a decade and lined the pockets of their rich mates.

Some struggling workers may buy into the lie that immigrants are worsening their situation by scrambling for the same piece of the pie when there is barely enough to go around. In reality, there is more than enough

wealth in the hands of the richest for everyone to have a secure job, access to decent public services and a roof over their head.

Wherever we come from, we are all exploited by the capitalist class. Asylum seekers being given the right to work and to join a union, fighting in solidarity with fellow workers, would

give enormous strength to the fight for better pay and conditions for all. But whatever gains we win will only be taken back by the capitalists if we do not also fight for the socialist transformation of society, seize the vast wealth of the 1% to improve society, and renationalise public services under democratic workers' control.

Wilko collapse: demand nationalisation

MIKE CLEVERLY
WALTHAM FOREST SOCIALIST PARTY

Many Wilko workers and shoppers will feel a nightmare repeating itself. Wilkinsons, the name until a re-branding in 2018, took over many of the stores left empty by the collapse of Woolworths, which went bust following the 2008 financial crisis. Now, Wilko staff face the nightmare of redundancy as the business prepares to enter administration if no buyer can be found.

Wilko staff know that the owners paid themselves £2.25 million in dividends in the year to the end of January, and took another £750,000 in February!

Last year Wilko closed fifteen stores and since 2021, 1,600 jobs have already gone, leaving about 12,400 potentially facing the dole queue.

I regularly shop at my local Wilko store in Walthamstow, east London. I've noticed big gaps on the shelves for many months. Today the atmosphere was sombre, gone were the friendly smiles after staff learned of the risk to their jobs on the news! An

enquiry as to how the staff are taking the news was met with a shrug: "We can only wait and see!"

I also noticed extra management drifting about and felt that staff were nervous about talking about their plight to customers like myself.

Wilko distribution workers are represented by the GMB union, they will also lose their jobs if the company goes under. Why should Wilko workers, whose hard work earned the payouts to the company's owners right up to February this year, be the ones to pay?

The Socialist Party campaigns, wherever bosses say they need to get rid of hard-working staff, for companies to open the books to trade union inspection. To see where the money has gone and how the networks and buildings could be put to use to save workers' jobs. If a buyer is found that demands shops are shut and workers lose their jobs, we support workers organising and fighting to save their livelihoods. And, if not, the company should be nationalised and put in the hands of workers themselves to be democratically run.



PHOTO: EDWARD HANDS/CC

'No fault' evictions: is it really a ban if there's no one to enforce it?

EVE MILLER
NUNEATON SOCIALIST PARTY

The Tories' Renters (Reform) Bill is supposed to allow tenants to appeal above-market rent increases; allow tenants the right to request a pet in their property without unreasonable refusal; require landlords to join a new ombudsman body and database; and abolish section 21 'no-fault' evictions and fixed-term tenancies.

Landlords who do not sign up to the new database to ensure that their properties meet requirements have been told they will be breaking the law, and subject to enforcement action by local authorities.

But the Local Government Association has admitted that councils are hard-pressed to enforce the new tenant rights, due to lack of staff and

funding. Environmental health officers, in particular, have huge vacancy gaps.

56% of local authorities report that they have vacancies in this area unfilled for over six months. 80% of local authorities use agency staff to cover environmental health services.



PHOTO: NEWHAM SP



British Gas's bumper profits: fight for renationalisation

ALI COOK
SALISBURY SOCIALIST PARTY

Coming as a surprise to no one, British Gas, the UK's biggest supplier of energy, has reported record profits of £969 million for the first half of the year. Around half of these profit's came from Ofgem's decision to alter the price cap that allowed it to recoup some of the costs of supplying its 10 million customers during the 'energy crisis'. Ofgem said these record profits are a "one off" but that's little relief to workers paying through the nose, or have gone into debt as a result of increased energy prices.

Correctly, Sharon Graham, general secretary of Unite the Union has stated that "we need to stop dancing around our handbags and grasp the nettle. The only way to end the chaos in our energy supply is starting us in the face: public ownership".

We know the Tories aren't going to stand up for working-class people

facing a cost-of-living crisis - it's them that have just allowed nearly a billion pounds destined for the back pockets of British Gas shareholders. We're not going to hear an announcement that Sunak is going to take control of British Gas and run it in the interests of us all.

£969 million

record profits British Gas received in the first half of the year

Or from Starmer's Labour Party. Last year, Labour's Rachael Reeves stated "within fiscal rules, to be spending billions of pounds on

nationalising things, that just doesn't stack up against our fiscal rules." Starmer himself has said his government will exercise "fiscal restraint" and "tough choices", we know what this means for working people.

This announcement of profits makes it clear: we need nationalisation, with compensation only on the basis of proven need. That means no more money to the fat cats that have been getting rich. And we need a new mass workers' party that is willing to fight for it. A workers' list of candidates in the next election, backed by the unions, would strengthen the fight for nationalisation. This would certainly light a fire under Starmer's incoming government.

Whether unions make these decisive steps, the Trade Union and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) will be putting forward this electoral challenge at the ballot box as the means to accelerate the fight back against the cost-of-living crisis.

genuinely affordable council homes. As well, we need to ensure proper funding of environmental, health and tenancy relations bodies in local authorities to help stop tenants being ripped off, taken advantage of, or subjected to sub-standard living conditions.

We must take back control of our broken housing system - nationalising the big housebuilders, banks and the land. If the working class took full democratic control of housing in elected bodies, it would allow us to properly plan and resolve the current housing crisis.

This is a drop in the ocean of housing issues. These problems will not be solved without real socialist policies. We need rental capping to prevent mass landlords profiteering from us. And the Socialist Party puts forward a programme to build masses of

WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?
editors@socialistparty.org.uk

Barts Health workers prepare to strike

CHRIS NEWBY
TOWER HAMLETS SOCIALIST PARTY

Unite the Union members at Barts Health Trust organised a lively protest outside the Royal London hospital in Whitechapel, East London, as part of their campaign for a 'Yes' vote in their ballot for strike action, which is running until 22 August.

The workers, including porters and domestics, are fighting for an inflation-proof pay rise. But they are also angry at the Trust for reneging on parts of a deal secured after their strike last year, when they won these formerly privatised workers being brought back into direct NHS employment. Trust bosses have not paid all the workers the lump-sum payment made to NHS staff in 2022-23.

Supporting Barts Unite members on the protest were local trade unions, community campaigners and Socialist Party members. Among the speakers were several members of the Unite branch taking part in the ballot, including branch secretary Len Hockey, and reps both long-standing and new. They all spoke of the importance of doing all they can to make sure there is the best possible 'Yes' vote in the ballot.

Len spoke of other successful Unite strike ballots that have taken place in other health trusts in London, including the mental health trust in East London, and the importance of linking up with the workers in those trusts for coordinated action. Socialist Party speakers also mentioned the importance of building an effective challenge to the Tories' minimum service level law, and for unions to back genuine anti-austerity candidates at the next general election.



Rep at the Royal London, Ebrima Sonko, said: "Thank you for your solidarity. This fight is just the beginning. Everything we are asking for, we deserve. We look after the patients and everybody. We were working during Covid. The lump sum has not been paid. They are trying to divide us by paying some and not others. But we refuse to be divided! This is a fight for all of us and we will make sure it is a fight we win!"

PHOTO: CHRIS NEWBY

NEU members vote to accept offer But prepare for future fights on pay, funding and workload

On 28 July, the National Education Union (NEU) announced the results of the strike ballot of teacher members in England, and the online consultations over the Tory government's pay offer of 6.5%.

Teachers voted 'yes' overwhelmingly, 95.36%, in the strike ballot, which began on 15 May. The reballoon turnout again overcame the undemocratic 50% threshold imposed by Tory anti-union laws, which meant that the NEU had a strike mandate to take action in the autumn.

Teachers' determination to fight for pay and funding, and their bold eight days of national strike action, forced the Tories to increase their pay offer twice over. In the online consultations that ran from 18-28 July, teachers voted 86% and support staff 85% to accept the latest offer.

Socialist Party members in the union campaigned to reject the 6.5%. The weak-and-divided Tories were under pressure and more could have been won, both on pay and funding. However, the leadership of the union campaigned for acceptance.

We understand why members voted to accept. However, as the increase is still below inflation and not fully funded, after a well-earned rest this summer, NEU members need to be prepared to fight again to defend education and fight on pay for next year.

WE CARRY BELOW AN EDITED VERSION OF THE INITIAL RESPONSE OF NEU NATIONAL EXECUTIVE AND SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBER SHEILA CAFFEY. SHE ARGUES THAT A KEY PART OF PREPARING TO FIGHT AGAIN IS BUILDING A NEW LEFT IN THE UNION.



London strike demo HELEN PATTISON



Sheila on the picket line (right) BRISTOL SOCIALIST PARTY

"Whether voting accept or reject, I know many union activists will be disappointed, after six months of fighting, to finish as we have. It's half what we were demanding. It's lack of funding is going to mean cuts to jobs and to the services our most vulnerable students need. And of course, every time there's a round of cuts, it has an impact on workload.

"6.5% for teachers, and the same paltry offer for support staff for the second year running, will not solve recruitment and retention issues. Last year, 40,000 teachers left the profession, the highest number since they started collecting figures. And teachers took 3 million sick days, 60% higher than before the pandemic. An extra £100 a month in pay packets is not going to turn around these figures.

"But we do live to fight another day. This ballot was 25% bigger than the previous ballot. Over 70,000 new members joined. We have more active, organised local structures, with education workers enthused with the idea that we can take action and that it is possible to win concessions.

"We could have won more! The government has given us three 'final' offers over the last six months, and we've doubled from their first suggestion. We have enormous power!

"And we've shown that striking works. We have shown that you stand up to the bullies, stating the need for pay and funding to cut across the race to the bottom and the government's desire to completely

decimate our education system, our arguments do resonate – with educators, with families and with the communities where we live and work.

"But I understand people are tired. We all desperately needed the summer break, and we are all desperately keen to return to normal – a normal where your work is focused on the children and young people that we all went into education for.

Get ready to fight on pay, funding and workload

"But we must show our pupils that it is worth fighting. That there will be an education system for the next generation that is fairly funded; accountable to local communities; that has a curriculum created by educators and that reflects the needs of children and young people, rather than changed on the whims of an out-of-touch government.

"So, although this battle is over – we haven't lost the war!

"We need to fight for a proper bargaining structure on pay and funding for teachers and support staff every year.

"We must also link it with workload.

Our policy is calling for a national negotiated contract on workload. This should include actual limits on hours worked, prevention of support staff doing work far above their pay grade, and a doubling of preparation time, among other demands. We need to start building a movement to fight for this.

"We need to work across unions. Joining with militants in unions such as the BMA, who rejected the offer for doctors and are continuing to fight. This includes the fight against all the anti-trade union laws, such as the minimum service levels, which are just another attack against us being able to fight. I will be joining the National Shop Stewards Network lobby of the TUC on 10 September.

"From the 'Educators Say No' group, we should organise a rank-and-file reps and activists conference in the autumn term, bringing together determined fighters to keep going, including fighting for a strong, democratic union. This could be the start of a creation of a genuine broad left in the union, built on the ideas of activism and a determination to win. We must keep the pressure on the leadership of the union."

PCS: TO CONTINUE THE PAY CAMPAIGN, YOU NEED TO VOTE 'NO'!

Vote Marion Lloyd for general secretary and John Moloney for AGS

Civil service trade union PCS is balloting its members on its response to a government pay offer. Socialist Party members in PCS are part of the Broad Left Network (BLN), campaigning for a fighting, democratic union.

LEAFLET PRODUCED BY SUPPORTERS OF THE PCS BROAD LEFT NETWORK

On 31 July a seven-page speakers' brief was enclosed in the national PCS branch bulletin, putting the view of the National Executive Committee (NEC) majority. The NEC is led by the 'Democracy Alliance', made up of two groups: Left Unity and PCS Democrats.

The bulletin misrepresents what the NEC has done, and what those of us who oppose the NEC have said.

The NEC claims "we have won significant concessions but the campaign must continue".

FIRST, WE DISAGREE THAT THE CONCESSIONS ARE AS SIGNIFICANT AS THE NEC MAJORITY MAKE OUT.

It is a £1,500 one-time, non-consolidated payment. This will get thinned down by tax, and those in receipt of Universal Credit will have their benefit entitlement reduced. For part-time staff, in the vast majority of civil service areas, the payment is pro-rata. It is below inflation.

SECOND, THE NEC DECLARING "THE CAMPAIGN MUST CONTINUE" IS COMPLETELY DISHONEST!

- They are calling off the strikes
- They are calling off the reballoon
- They are cancelling the strike fund levy

Once all that is done, what campaign is left?

When out-going general secretary Mark Serwotka moved his paper at the NEC on 5 June, he spoke about the possibility of a ballot to settle

the dispute, ie to accept the government's offer as sufficient to end the national campaign. All Left Unity supporters on the NEC voted for Serwotka's paper, although some voted against stopping the DWP reballoon. This demobilised the national campaign at a stroke.

Our hope is that members will see clearly that you can't "continue the campaign" by calling it off.

WHAT ABOUT DELEGATED PAY BARGAINING?

Central to the argument in the national bulletin is the view that we must pause our strikes while delegated pay bargaining begins. Yet this ignores a crucial fact – one that is not mentioned by the national bulletin at all – the Treasury Pay Remit cap of 4.5% (or 5% for low-waged) is still in place!

It is true that some staff in the Home Office are being offered 13%. But the bulletin doesn't say how many, relative to the entire 43,000 staff. The bulletin doesn't admit that the overall Home Office pay offer will be under the Treasury cap. It is robbing Peter to pay Paul, trading off inflation-proof pay rises for some against severe pay cuts for others.

OUR BATTLE IS NOT JUST WITH INDIVIDUAL CIVIL SERVICE EMPLOYERS. IT IS WITH THE GOVERNMENT.

If we don't bring the Treasury to the bargaining table to cough up more money for all civil service employees, then, as announced recently in the Ministry of Defence, job cuts will be imposed even to pay for a limited, sub-inflation pay award.



Marion Lloyd (3rd from right) supporting ACAS and Insolvency Service members on strike SOCIALIST PARTY

A strategy that can win!

The NEC argues that our call for the continuation of strike action "is made without any proposals on the tactics and strategy." This is not true. The Broad Left Network has clearly laid out what the strategy should have been, and what it should be now.

We must immediately launch a massive member-facing effort to organise the discontent over pay, the job cuts that are coming, the continued refusal to move on our pensions, and the continued threat to our redundancy rights.

This can be united with the battle over office closures, into a coherent campaign based on demands already agreed by PCS Annual Delegate Conference.

On pay that means a 10% consolidated increase with a £15-an-hour minimum wage for 2022-23, and an inflation-proof increase for 2023-24.

- National strike action, across all civil service employers with a mandate
- Targeted strike action in those areas where sustained action will resume pressure on the government
- Hardship support for all branches – we must target our limited financial resources to support those members in danger of defaulting on bills
- Reballoon in all areas where the mandate has lapsed or is lapsing, including the DWP and HMRC
- A serious discussion on the potential impact of action short of strike, in magnifying the impact of strikes

We need a change of leadership!

Marion Lloyd and the Broad Left Network stood on this platform of action in the May 2023 NEC elections. Unfortunately the Left Unity grouping won those elections. They must be ousted. We are calling for all branches to nominate Marion Lloyd for general secretary, and to re-nominate John Moloney for assistant general secretary.

Support the campaign:

- bln.org.uk
- Marion Lloyd for PCS general secretary; PCS Broad Left Network on Facebook
- @Marion4GS; @PCSBroadLeft on Twitter
- marion4pcsgs on Instagram

Coventry Amazon one year on: Victory to the workers!

MILA MATHARU
COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

Saturday 5 August. On the same date last year, Amazon workers at the Coventry BHX4 warehouse gathered to initially discuss the insulting 50p-an-hour pay rise with unions and protest against it.

Now, coaches from around the country came to support their leap into action over the last year. Over 200 attended the rally, including around 150 from outside Coventry.

It started off as a rainy morning, but a young shop steward said that this dispute is so important that "even if a tsunami came, we will be here!"

During the celebration of the anniversary there were several speakers showing solidarity and sharing their experiences.

One Amazon worker said: "No one was happy when they heard about the 50p pay rise and I

had to do something. I spend six days a week at work and I do not live a normal life, because I can't afford to pay bills. We do this to have a normal life. We are not asking for much.

"I cannot believe so many people are here, and we're not gonna stop!

"I feel the stark difference of a year later. From 48-50 of us walking out, now there are over 1,000 of us standing united against a corporate giant."

At 3pm, Amazon bosses sent home the day shift and contacted the night shift to say that they didn't need to report for work - but that they would be paid! The Amazon warehouse then closed down.

Jane Nellist spoke from Coventry Trades Council and raised the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) lobby of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and invited people to come on our coach. At least one Amazon worker has agreed to come along (see page 2).



Part of the crowd on the anniversary COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

Amazon strikes spread 'I earn in a year what the high-ups earn in six seconds'

GARETH KNOX
BLACK COUNTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

Amazon workers in the GMB union in Rugeley, Staffordshire, were out on strike on 3 and 4 August. The picket was 20-plus members strong, with a local RMT member joining them in solidarity.

Many workers spoke of how they were fighting for fair pay in the current economic situation. One said: "I just want to afford a house and raise a family." Workers were acutely aware of the vast wealth of their employer: "I earn in a year what some of the high-ups earn in six seconds. So they can afford to pay us a bit more!"

Amazon has already shown that they can pay their workers more as they all were paid £2-an-hour extra during the lockdowns, but bosses showed little gratitude for their efforts as they revoked this pay increase after the lockdowns ended.

Workers are also faced with the prospect of the site being closed down and having their jobs relocated, a decision that is allegedly being "consulted" on, but giving workers no say on this proposal.

DAVE REID
SOCIALIST PARTY WALES

The next UK government is likely to be a Labour government led by Keir Starmer. The huge lead that Starmer currently enjoys is not a vote of confidence in him, the current leadership of the Labour Party or their (non) policies. Rather it is a reflection of the disgust with the divided Tory party and the effects of its austerity policies of the last 13 years. There are not huge expectations from a Starmer government but there is a hope beyond hope that something will improve after 13 years of the Tories in government.

But in one nation of the UK it is Labour that has been the party in power throughout austerity - in Wales. The idea that a Labour government will significantly improve on the Tories is disproved by the experience in Wales. There has been a Labour or Labour-led government in Wales for 24 years. Devolution has allowed Labour to control the provision of health, education, social care, local government, housing and other services in Wales for quarter of a century.

25 years ago, in July 1998, the Welsh Assembly was brought into being by the Government of Wales Act. Since then, opinion polls have shown large majorities in favour of retaining the National Assembly for Wales and its successor, the Senedd, and two referenda have returned decisive majorities in favour of more powers for the assembly. Socialist Party supported those votes.

All six elections to the assembly have returned Labour governments (some in coalition with the Lib Dems and one with Plaid Cymru). An examination just of electoral statistics in the last 25 years would give the impression of growing support for devolution and consistently solid support for Welsh Labour governments.

However, purely electoral

statistics are a very poor indicator of social and political attitudes. They are snapshots of opinions at a particular time, and very distorted snapshots at that. Elections are arenas in which the electorate is presented with very limited choices, dominated by media coverage and a series of Hobson's choices that do not reflect the changing attitudes in society.

The election of austerity driven Tory governments at Westminster has led to an increase in support for Welsh self-government and increasing dissatisfaction with the devolved status quo in Wales, reflected in the increasing support for independence which has grown from averaging 10% in polls to over 20% in the last few years. And even among the majority that support devolution but still oppose separation, there is increasing dissatisfaction with the current arrangement.

Welsh austerity

Despite some early reforms, the majority of the existence of the Welsh Assembly/Senedd has been dominated by the implementation by Welsh Labour of austerity measures. Since 2010, the Welsh Labour governments led by Carwyn Jones and Mark Drakeford have obediently passed on the huge cuts demanded by the UK Tory governments and reorganised Welsh public services to suit the budgets imposed by the Tories.

In the 1979 referendum, just 21% had supported devolution but the searing experience of Thatcher's offensive and the brutal attacks on trade-union organisation, devastation of the coal and steel industries that dominated the Welsh economy, mass unemployment with all the social effects that went with it, and the cuts to the NHS and other public services, created a big groundswell of support for the idea of devolution. The Tories had just six MPs in Wales between 1992 and 1997, but Tory placemen and women were put in charge of Welsh public services through a series of quangos, a



Despite some early reforms, the majority of the existence of the Welsh Assembly/Senedd has been dominated by Welsh Labour austerity measures

WELSH DEVOLUTION A CASE STUDY OF LABOUR IN POWER



Nurses in Wales, members of the RCN, are currently voting on whether to accept the Welsh government's below-inflation pay offer PHOTO: SP WALES



The spending constraints that Welsh Labour has accepted from Westminster will be replicated by a Starmer government by the spending constraints demanded by the City of London and world capitalist markets



Welsh First Minister Mark Drakeford PHOTO: CONFERENCE OF PERIPHERAL MARITIME REGIONS/CC

"quangocracy" imposed on Wales from Westminster.

The crushing defeat of the Tories in the 1997 general election, when every Tory MP in Wales was defeated, and a hope beyond hope that the Blair government would restore Welsh public services, reduced the need in the eyes of Welsh workers for a Welsh assembly. Support for devolution had diminished by the time of the referendum in September that year - hence the wafer-thin majority for devolution.

But by the time the Assembly was actually sworn in in 1999, Blair and Blairism had lost their shine as his Tory-lite policies of privatisation became clearer. The crude attempt to impose a Blairite first minister in the shape of Alun Michael (now the infamous South Wales Police commissioner) backfired, Labour Assembly Members (AMs) rebelled and Michael was

forced to resign to be replaced by Rhodri Morgan, who created the 'Welsh Labour' brand.

According to Morgan, Welsh Labour was distinctive from Blair's New Labour in Westminster. It opposed private finance profiting from public services through PFI and did not introduce academy schools and foundation hospitals. "Clear, red water" separated Welsh Labour from Blairism, according to Morgan.

However, the reality was that the temporary boom in the UK economy at the beginning of the 2000s allowed a certain expansion in public spending and room for the Morgan government to pursue a more social democratic agenda. When the boom crashed in 2007-08 and the first big cuts to public spending were carried out by the Tory-Lib Dem coalition at Westminster, Welsh Labour obediently cut Welsh budgets to public services.

In many service areas, Welsh Labour was more adept at cutting public services than the Tories in England. Hospital reorganisation was carried out more comprehensively in Wales by the then health minister Mark Drakeford - with A&E provision cut to just six hospitals in South Wales - so that when the Covid crisis hit in 2020 Wales had the lowest number of ICU beds per head in western Europe.

Shamefully, in the nation that celebrates the birthplace of Aneurin Bevan's dream of the NHS, the NHS is in an even deeper crisis than in the rest of the UK, partly as a result of Welsh Labour government policies. Wales has the longest waiting lists in the UK - 576,000 individuals, 19% of the population, are on hospital waiting lists and 30,000 wait more than two years for treatment. NHS dental treatment is in practice denied to thousands of patients including children.

Even prior to austerity, Welsh public services were under-resourced compared to the rest of the UK. The Barnett formula from the 1970s gave Welsh public services the same per-capita funding as England, but did not take into account the greater social needs of a poorer and older population that required more health and social care spending.

This gap widened in the 21st Century. The Holtham Commission in 2009 estimated that Wales was underfunded by £300 million. The spending gap is even greater in transport and other services. For example, rail transport is only partially devolved so that spending is not subject to the Barnett formula and, unlike Scotland, spending on rail infrastructure is lumped in with England's. The Tory UK government has starved the Welsh rail network of investment while spending £130 billion on the HS2 project that has

sucked in most of the funding for rail investment for England and Wales, while Scotland received a 'consequential' subvention from HS2. This has forced the Welsh government to dip into other funding to electrify Wales's Victorian local railways, while only electrification of part of the line from England into South Wales is funded by the UK government.

But the passive approach of successive Welsh governments has allowed Tory cuts and attacks to be implemented with scarcely a whimper of protest. Despite in words opposing spending cuts, Welsh governments have implemented all the cuts imposed by the Tories and put a Welsh spin on them - in effect they have acted as the Welsh PR department for austerity - the Tories have achieved all their spending cuts in Wales with the minimum of fuss. The social effects have been devastating - close to half of Welsh children in poverty, the highest proportion of people in prison in western Europe, the longest NHS waiting lists and lowest number of hospital beds per capita in the UK.

Make Westminster pay

A socialist Welsh government would have refused to carry out the cuts, drawn on the hundreds of millions of pounds it and Welsh local authorities hold in reserves, maintained services while launching a mass campaign of resistance to the Westminster cuts. The militant-led Liverpool council extracted millions of pounds from the vicious Tory government of "Iron Lady" Thatcher in the 1980s. If they could achieve that by campaigning from one city, imagine what a Welsh socialist government could achieve if it mobilised a nation!

Instead, the Welsh government has built up over £500 million in reserves while holding back public spending - so much that £155 million was clawed back this year by the UK government, because the Welsh government exceeded its reserves limit! Welsh Labour is silent on demanding that a future Starmer government gives the necessary funding to implement even the limited recommendations of the Holtham Commission.

Scandalously, the Welsh government has steadfastly refused to maintain free school meals through the school summer holidays to children on Universal Credit. Welsh Labour only conceded free school meals to all primary school children in the first place when forced under pressure as part of the agreement with Plaid Cymru.

Also this July, Welsh health minister Eluned Morgan celebrated the 75th anniversary of the foundation of the NHS by repeating the Tory line that people should "look after their own health and wellbeing". She accepts the lowest spending on health in western Europe - "There is only one cake, and my responsibility as the minister is to determine how that is cut up," she said. She doesn't want to train more doctors and nurses because they will move to England or abroad to practice, rather than an imaginative programme to encourage newly trained medical professionals to commit to the NHS in Wales.

And Welsh Labour claims to be to the left of UK Labour.

If this is the experience of Labour administrations that have at least started out with worthy intentions then what can we expect from a Starmer government that has boasted to big business that it has no intention of expanding public services?

Labour kowtow to markets

True, in theory a Starmer government has much more control over its own finances. The Welsh government relies for the bulk of its revenue on the UK Treasury. But Starmer and shadow chancellor Rachel Reeves have made it clear that they will accept completely the dictates of the corporate boardrooms and continue with Tory spending levels. The spending constraints that Welsh Labour has accepted from Westminster will be replicated by a Starmer government by the spending constraints demanded by the City of London and world capitalist markets.

Given the dire state of British capitalism, even though they will slavishly hold down spending, a run on the pound or in the bond markets is still entirely possible. A Starmer government would then attack public spending even further.

In 1931, following a run on the pound, the only way that Labour prime minister Ramsey Macdonald could force through savage austerity was by leaving the party, taking a small rump of Labour MPs and joining with the Tories in the National government. Today, Starmer will not need to significantly split the Labour Party - he can rely on most of the MPs in the Parliamentary Labour Party to toe the line. Even the mildest critics are weeded out by Stalinistic manipulation of the Labour candidate selection process. Figures on the left of Labour, like Beth Winter, MP for Cynon Valley, are cast aside - the Starmer leadership attempting to remove MPs it worries would be particularly susceptible to working-class pressure.

Unlike in 1931, Labour MPs are largely immune from pressure from the rank-and-file of the party and the trade unions, as Labour has transformed to an openly pro-capitalist party. Labour's majority would more likely be wiped out by the anger to its attacks on working people - especially if a new mass party of the working class confronts it on the electoral field.

Any residual hopes that Starmer is a wolf in sheep's clothing - talking down expectations of reforms to placate the media, then carrying out reforms when elected - will be removed rapidly when in power. Conditions in which a new mass workers' party can develop rapidly, to provide a genuine alternative to angry and disillusioned working people, especially if left unions were to take the lead. This could be accelerated if a significant trade union-based electoral challenge to Labour was mounted at the election, as well as after it.

Review: Barbie - a fun, weird, lighthearted film about women and feminism (sort of)

MARY FINCH

Barbie sold more than \$1 billion worth of tickets worldwide just weeks after its release - and with good reason. It's hilarious, touching and (albeit simplistically) very feminist. It starts in *Barbieland*, a place which is separate from, but connected to, the real world, and where Barbies run everything. A black woman is the president, women hold every other position of power, and they win every Nobel Prize. An existential crisis forces Barbie (played by Margot Robbie) into the real world, where she encounters sexism for the first time.

Barbie was produced by one of the biggest studios in the world, with heavy involvement from Barbie manufacturer Mattel, one of the biggest and most successful corporations in the world. Obviously, it doesn't offer a strategy for fighting women's oppression, and even its exploration of the real-world impact of sexism is limited.

The film mainly focuses on the double standards forced on women: "You have to be thin, but you can't say you want to be thin, you have to say you want to be healthy". It doesn't go far beyond this, but then again, perhaps it doesn't need to. It's Barbie - more than anything, it's meant to be fun.

What Barbie does extremely well, though, is its exploration of women's relationships with themselves. In *Barbieland*, every Barbie is effortlessly perfect - so Margot Robbie's Barbie is horrified when she sees cellulite on her leg for the first time.

That scene captures the experience of a lot of women, who face overwhelming pressure to never show any signs of physical imperfection or, god forbid, ageing. The difference is that when Barbie goes to the real world, and sees an elderly, wrinkled woman - the 'imperfection' we're supposed to desperately

avoid - she tells her how beautiful she is. Probably very few women would feel able to say the same when faced with their own future selves.

Barbie is not just a film about women, though. Ultimately it's about gender and how everyone suffers under a sexist system - which is where Ken (played by Ryan Gosling) comes in.

In a lighthearted and silly way, Barbie manages to point to how men suffer under sexism as well. Men need space to express their emotions, to have deep and meaningful relationships with each other, and to feel respected. Ken is missing all these things in *Barbieland*, and this feeling of powerlessness is part of what pushes him towards sexism.

In *Barbieland*, Kens are literally homeless (every house is Barbie's dreamhouse), and they exist only as Barbie's companions. Ryan Gosling's Ken is desperately in love with Margot Robbie's Barbie - technically, they're boyfriend-girlfriend, but only because Mattel made them that way. They can't escape the gendered roles which have been forced on them.

There are so many other miscellaneous things that come together to make Barbie a fantastic film. Ryan Gosling's Ken stands head and shoulders above the rest of the cast, but there are also incredible performances from Will Ferrell as the president of Mattel, and Michael Cera as Allan (a discontinued doll labelled Ken's 'buddy', who fits into all of his clothes.) There are several other jokes about discontinued Barbie and Ken dolls, such as 'Magic Earring Ken' and 'Sugar Daddy Ken', so called because he is the 'daddy' of a dog called Sugar.

If you want socialist analysis and a programme for women's liberation, read the Socialist. If you want to see a weird, wonderful and (mostly) lighthearted film about women, go to see Barbie.

● **Barbie, distributed by Warner Bros Pictures is in cinemas now**



Film review: Oppenheimer - a skilful, poignant indictment of nuclear weapons, capitalism and imperialism

LYNDA MCEWAN

Christopher Nolan's epic blockbuster movie *Oppenheimer* charts the career of Robert Oppenheimer, a Jewish American, theoretical physicist from university to his involvement in the Manhattan Project and the building of his Los Alamos laboratory during World War Two. It then shows how McCarthyism in the 1950s witch-hunted him and destroyed his life.

Set against the backdrop of the rise of the Nazis, total war and then the Cold War, Cillian Murphy plays the eponymous character, Robert Oppenheimer, a conflicted and somewhat troubled man with socialist sympathies, including association with the American Communist Party and supporting the Spanish Civil War effort, sending aid to refugees of fascism.

Oppenheimer's brilliance in the field of quantum physics is quickly recognised despite his frustrations within a laboratory setting, but his involvement in attempting to unionise professors in the radiation lab sees him being excluded initially from talks around developing nuclear weapons.

The film deals with a number of themes, one being the rise of communism and possible revolution across the world, and the capitalist classes' brutal methods of quashing any such movements. The atomic bomb that Oppenheimer was instrumental in creating may have originally been intended for use in Germany, but the defeat of Hitler meant it was used instead on the Japanese. This was done, not to end the conflict, as the Japanese war effort was collapsing, but as a warning to the Soviet

Union and the Stalinist bureaucracy to limit their plans of geopolitical dominance.

Another theme which Nolan tackles quite skilfully is the question of morals. Since the first splitting of the atom, the dropping of thousands of pounds of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan, and until this very day people have opposed nuclear weapons, including most of the scientists who worked on developing them at Alamos, who signed a petition against them.

The scientists, including Oppenheimer, faced the dilemma of their desire to advance their research and test their theories on the one hand, and the utter destruction that is caused by the results on the other. This is played out beautifully in the film in the interactions between Oppenheimer and Albert Einstein and the rivalry between Oppenheimer and fellow physicist Edward Teller.

Moral dilemma

The weaving of this moral dilemma throughout is given a sombre perspective with the use of effects as a vehicle to show Oppenheimer's inner doubts and fears. When he addresses the community at Los Alamos after the first bomb has been dropped, he makes crude jokes about having won, and how the Japanese won't have liked it. However, he can't stop imagining the full horror of its consequences which are shown cleverly by the people in the crowd being stripped of their skin and vomiting due to radiation poisoning.

It is raised again through the hearing Oppenheimer is subsequently subjected to when he voices his objection to atomic bombs becoming part of US policy and against the

hydrogen bomb suggested by Teller.

The film's drama switches often to the issues surrounding his security clearance hearing in 1954. There, his opponents use his links to the US Communist Party - including his wife Kitty who was an ex-party member and whose union organiser ex-husband was killed fighting fascism in Spain, and the affair he had with Jean Tatlock, a full party member - as evidence of his threat to national security. His security clearance is rescinded meaning he could no longer influence policy during the Cold War and arms race that subsequently developed between the US and Soviet Union. They claimed the Soviets got the atomic bomb technology from a spy at Los Alamos.

The ensemble cast of Matt Damon as the colonel in charge of Los Alamos, Robert Downey Junior as Lewis Strauss the man behind the downfall of Oppenheimer, and Emily Blunt as his wife, Kitty, lends itself to the magnificence of the film alongside the beautiful and haunting score by Ludvig Göransson.

The film closes poignantly with Oppenheimer recalling his discussion with Einstein over whether there was a possibility of a never-ending chain reaction being sparked which could ignite the atmosphere and destroy the world, juxtaposed with the reality of a metaphorical chain reaction of continued war and human destruction.

Oppenheimer is a useful indictment of how capitalism and imperialism uses advances in technology for their own gains and why we should organise to stop them.

● **Oppenheimer, distributed by Universal Pictures, is in cinemas now**



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

DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

- For united working-class struggle to end discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, disability, sexuality, age, and all other forms of prejudice and oppression.
- Repeal the anti-trade union laws and all others that trample over civil liberties. For the right to protest and to strike! End police harassment. For the police to be accountable to local committees, made up of democratically elected representatives of trade unions, local community organisations and local authorities.
- For the right to choose when and whether to have children - for the right to access abortion, contraception and fertility treatment for all who need it.

- For the right to asylum - with democratic community control and oversight of emergency funding resources. No to racist immigration laws.
- Expand democracy. For the abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords. For all MPs to be subject to the right of recall by their constituents at any time, and to only receive a worker's wage. For 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.

Do you agree? Join the fightback!

JOIN THE SOCIALISTS

- Visit socialistparty.org.uk/join
- or call 020 8988 8777
- or text your name and postcode to 07761 818 206 to find out more today!



St Mungo's strike: Bosses act like an outsourcing corporation rather than a charity

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN UNITE HOUSING BRANCH

St Mungo's homelessness charity workers have been on continuous strike since 30 May.

At the beginning of the strike, Unite general secretary Sharon Graham commented on the "astonishing management indifference" to the hardship faced by workers in the cost-of-living crisis on the part of the executive of the charity.

At strike rallies, frontline service managers have explained that one of their reasons for joining the strike has been the task of directing their staff to foodbanks.

The executive has made extensive use of agencies during the strike, to replace permanent employees. This has been deeply damaging to services for clients, but that has not been the priority for members of the executive, who have irresponsibly dragged out the dispute.

A recent High Court ruling, taking effect from 10 August, means that management will no longer be able to directly replace their staff with agency workers.

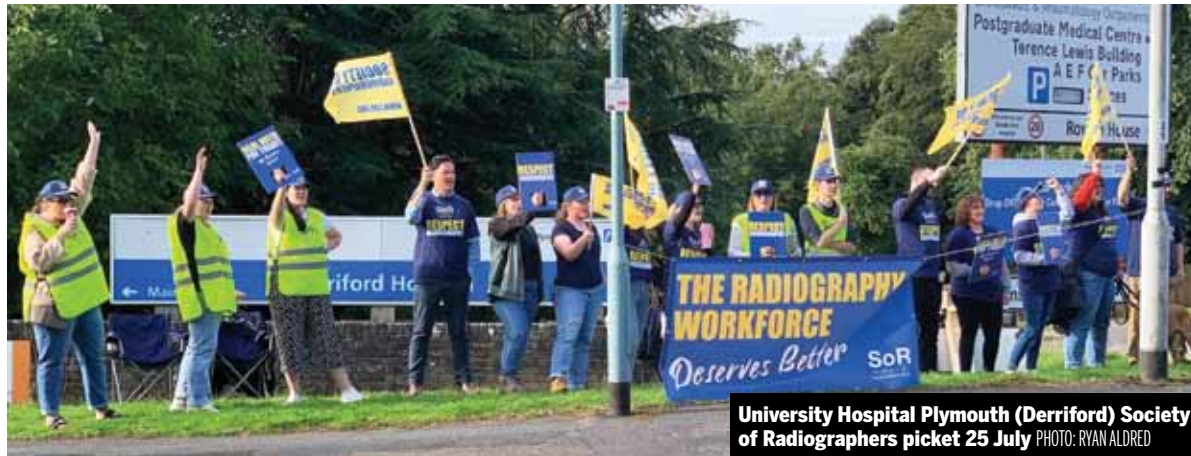
But instead of putting energy into settling the dispute, the executive has expended huge energy working out ways round the legal change, to continue services on an even more limited basis. Accelerating recruitment processes and the use of security staff represent real threats to service quality.

The executive members are behaving as if they are managers of an outsourcing corporation such as Serco, rather than a charity.

Many local authorities that fund their services have called on St Mungo's to settle. They need to be prepared to use contract scrutiny powers to hold St Mungo's to account.

Unite has given the strike total support nationally, and is committed to escalating its support.

Radiographers speak to the Socialist: Understaffed, underpaid and overstretched



University Hospital Plymouth (Derriford) Society of Radiographers picket 25 July PHOTO: RYAN ALDRED

Radiographers took 48 hours of strike action from 25-27 July. A number of strikers at a South West hospital spoke to the Socialist.

"Currently, one in ten radiography positions goes unfilled. We would need a 26.7% increase in staff just to keep up with demand and get through the backlog, with over a million on waiting lists."

"Britain has the lowest number of scanners per 1,000 people in Western Europe, and many of these are coming to the end of their shelf life. But the government won't even meet with us to discuss it."

"Three in five patients with cancer are treated by a therapeutic radiographer. Our department is short-staffed and it is hard to recruit with the low pay compared to other countries. I can't do my actual job of training other radiographers a lot of the time, because either we don't have the new recruits coming through, or I'm tasked with plugging the gaps."

"Bankers get exorbitant pay and bonuses 'to attract the best' - why don't they have that same mentality with health staff? Don't they want the best radiographers, doctors, nurses

or paramedics?"

"We're not even asking for a proper pay rise, we're asking that our pay not be effectively cut due to inflation. Are we less valuable than we were ten years ago? I would certainly argue not! Besides, we're not the ones causing inflation."

"We have been consistently undervalued and it has really taken its toll. I wouldn't even be here if it weren't for my team helping to pull me through. I'm prepared to strike again because our NHS needs defending. This is about so much more than pay."

THANKS TO RYAN ALDRED

Only one Wakefield councillor backs taxi drivers' strike protest

JOHN VASEY WAKEFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

Wakefield council is threatening to remove licences for vehicles over ten years old. Not being on the country's rich list, fully upgrading to the now-required vehicles is unaffordable to the Wakefield taxi drivers.

This is a shorter timeframe than surrounding authorities. This isn't the only long-standing issue drivers have with the council.

There is the six-month compliance test. And the council is withholding restitution due from a case it lost five years ago, which amounts to about

£500 per driver.

So 120 took part in the latest strike protest by the taxi drivers' union on 26 July.

To cap it all, trade meetings between the parties, which should be held regularly, have also been ditched, cutting off that avenue for discussion too.

For years, unelected council officers have also denied drivers direct access to the elected council body. But only one elected councillor, independent Akef Akbar, broke ranks with the heavily Labour-controlled council, by speaking to the crowd with his support. Another councillor,

Nadiah Sharp, was kicked out of Labour for backing the taxi drivers.

A sizeable delegation from the protest filled the council chamber gallery. Akef Akbar criticised the double standards of the council which, on the one hand expresses solidarity with RMT rail strikers, and on the other fights the taxi drivers' union.

Half an hour into the council meeting, a protester's shout signalled a walkout from the gallery, in disgust at the council's refusal to allow discussion on these issues.

We need councillors that will stand up for all working people in struggle, and our own new mass party too.

Trelleborg workers win improved pay

Over 100 Unite members at Trelleborg Vibration Solutions in Leicester, who took continuous strike action from 11 July, have settled after winning an improved pay offer. Yet again, determined action by a group of workers shows that by fighting you can make gains you wouldn't have

done otherwise.

Although it didn't match the 10% pay claim, it was the third offer forced out of the bosses.

One came after the threat of strike action and another after they had been out for ten days. The deal, accepted by a vote of 79-33, means 8% in the first year, plus a £750 cash payment. The second year of the deal is provisionally only 3%, but with a get-out if CPI inflation is higher than 5%.

Coventry bin workers ballot for strike action again

In 2022, Coventry bin workers in Unite the Union waged a six-month strike against a ruthless Labour council to win a decent pay rise.

Despite wasting over £9 million fighting their HGV drivers last year - much more than it would have cost to settle the dispute - the cutting council is now seeking to impose an end to the industry-standard 'task and finish' operating system.

Workers will not accept this further attack and have successfully balloted for industrial action.



Camden parking wardens strike march

Camden Unison members who work for NSL parking enforcement services started indefinite strike action on 24 July and Socialist Party members marched with them on 5 August. PHOTO: JAMES IVENS



Yorkshire Citizens Advice workers strike

Over 60 Hull and East Riding Citizens Advice workers took strike action for the first time on 31 July. The members of Unite voted for strike action after the charity refused to increase pay in line with National Joint Council (NJC) scales operated by local authorities, as has been the norm for the last 20 years. The NJC has recommended a consolidated payment of £1,925 for all grades for 2022. PHOTO: IAIN DALTON

Get all the latest union news...



with the
NSSN bulletin
shopstewards.net

By-elections: Back the TUSC challenge

● Spelthorne – council services are failing

PAUL COUCHMAN

TUSC CANDIDATE IN ASHFORD TOWN ON 6 SEPTEMBER

An 'Independent Green' councillor has resigned from his seat, saying that "you can't change anything here". Many residents voted Green here for the first time in May, looking for an alternative to Tories and Labour. They will be disappointed by the lack of resolve shown by this councillor.

Local government in Surrey is failing. Woking Borough Council has been taken over by government commissioners, and is threatening wholesale cuts and redundancies. Its likely Guildford will follow suit. And Spelthorne has massive debts, made worse by irresponsible historical Tory gambling on the property market.

Spelthorne was Tory-led for many years. But numerous Tory splits mean now no party has overall control. Many people have been looking for an alternative to the Tories, but have been let down by all other capitalist parties.

The Socialist Party in Surrey has tripled in size in the past few months, and is still growing. We have regular meetings of 15-20, mostly young workers. We regularly campaign in Guildford too.

Our last meeting (see below) agreed unanimously to put me forward as a Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidate. No other candidate in this by-election is putting forward a position against

Amy and the Socialist Party campaigning in the Bristol by-election BRISTOL SOCIALIST PARTY



all cuts or for a massive investment in sustainable and affordable council housing.

I will be standing on a bold socialist programme, offering workers and residents the opportunity to join with us in a fight for the resources and services we need locally. As well as opposing Ulez, which makes workers pay for the capitalist's economic and pollution crisis.

● Bristol – sick of politicians that stand up for rich

AMY SAGE

TUSC CANDIDATE IN BISHOPSTON AND ASHLEY DOWN ON 24 AUGUST

The Labour Party and the Greens are 'battling' in Bristol. Whoever wins this by-election is likely to control the city council.

But after both parties have carried through cut after cut to vital

public services across the city, does it really matter which of them is in power? That is why I am standing as the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidate, to show people that there is an alternative to the pro-capitalist, pro-establishment politicians currently on offer.

Our demands include building a mass campaign to stop and reverse council cuts, and an end to above-inflation rises in council tax, rent and charges. The cost of privately renting in Bristol has risen by more than 50% in a decade. So we are campaigning for the launch of a mass building scheme of affordable, eco-friendly council houses, and for capping of rents to genuinely affordable rates.

Many people agree with us on the need for a genuine political voice for working-class people. On one campaign stall, the mood wasn't just anti-Tory, but also anti-Labour too.

People are sick and tired of the main political parties that only stand for the super-rich. We need a political party that allows us to stand up for ourselves.

RYAN LIDDLE

SURREY SOCIALIST PARTY

Surrey Socialist Party held a public meeting, 'Why capitalism can't prevent the climate crisis', on 6 August. 20 people came, 21 if you count 'canine' socialists.

I introduced the discussion, explaining that we already have the technology to prevent the situation getting worse. But the interests of the capitalist ruling class mean we aren't using it.

"We don't need to find solutions, as they have already been found. They just aren't being implemented."

After I spoke, there were lengthy discussions about nuclear energy and other topics too – private ownership by rich individuals of the wealth and resources in society, the competition between different capitalist nation states, and right-wing distortions about climate change trying to divide the working class. That's why a working-class party like the Socialist Party anchors our campaigns within working-class communities.

One person asked what they could do as an individual. Another answered them: "The best thing you can do is join the Socialist Party".

If you are serious about tackling climate change, we must tackle capitalism too.

Young Surrey socialists discuss capitalist climate change



The Socialist Party at Plymouth Pride PLYMOUTH SOCIALIST PARTY

Pride: Tories out and fight for our rights

The Socialist Party has had a great response bringing our socialist message to LGBTQ+ Pride events.

Nottingham – Pride is political

DENISE TOOLEY-OKONKWO AND GARY FREEMAN
EAST MIDLANDS SOCIALIST PARTY

Lots of people were coming up to our Socialist Party campaign stall. They were signing our petitions on 'Tories out', building a mass movement for LGBTQ+ rights, defending the NHS from Tory cuts and privatisation, and supporting the right to self-identification.

Our message, that "Pride is political" resonated. Over 80 people agreed to be contacted with more information about the Socialist Party.

Many said the event on 29 July felt like a safe space. But some also said that negative and derogatory comments by politicians and others would cancel out the positivity they felt on the day. That would bring them back to the reality of anxiety and fear they had from cuts to services and support.

This class war means we must fight against all oppression with resilience, solidarity and a socialist message.

We raised £110 for the Socialist Party. Around 25 Pride-goers bought a copy of the Socialist, and a similar number left buying our Socialist Party LGBTQ+ charter. We also told everyone about a special Socialist Party open meeting on these issues on 7 August.

Liverpool – what we face then and now

NIVEN DAY
LIVERPOOL SOCIALIST PARTY

After the Socialist Party participated in Pride on 29 July, we hosted a public meeting on 1 August to discuss the issues that LGBTQ+ people face, and why we need a socialist alternative.

Me and Dean Young from Liverpool Socialist Party introduced the discussion about the challenges LGBTQ+ people faced both past and present. The Stonewall Riots, Section 28, and the Aids epidemic that was shamefully ignored for half a decade by US president Ronald Reagan, were all mentioned. The struggle for the liberation of LGBTQ+ people is linked to class struggle.

As it was a public meeting, members of the public and other groups not yet in the Socialist Party also joined to converse about these issues. It was a productive meeting.

Plymouth – Labour's awful U-turn

DUNCAN MOORE
PLYMOUTH SOCIALIST PARTY

The Socialist Party had intense conversations with many young people who signed our petition, supporting gender recognition reform to allow trans and non-binary people to self-identify.

This was one issue that differentiated us from the Labour Party, who have U-turned on this.

The Socialist Party handed out hundreds of our leaflets and sold the Socialist paper too. We also advertised the Socialist Party public meeting on LGBTQ+ liberation.

Come to a Socialist Party meeting near you

The Socialist Party has regular meetings in towns and cities across the country.

If you would like to participate:

- Go to socialistparty.org.uk
- Or text 07761 818206 with your name and postcode.

Court cases mount for Donald Trump as he faces charges relating to storming of the capital

DAVE MURRAY
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

Donald Trump attended a federal court in Washington DC on 3 August in which he faced a 45-page criminal indictment accusing him of conspiracy to overturn the democratic outcome of the 2020 US presidential election.

This follows his indictment in the state of New York over the alleged use of campaign funds to pay hush money to Stormy Daniels, a porn actress who was reported to be preparing to tell all about her relationship with Trump, and a federal indictment in a Florida court accusing him of stealing classified documents obtained during his time as the most powerful man in the world.

Outside the courtroom he joked that “I need one more indictment to ensure my election” - he is, of course, the front runner for the Republican Party’s nomination for the presidential election in 2024. He is likely to get his wish, as the state of Georgia is investigating his attempt to pressurise electoral officials to declare the state in his favour in the 2020 election. Any one of these charges could land the 77-year-old in jail - some of them for up to 20 years.

These criminal investigations and prosecutions follow two separate attempts to impeach (remove) Trump during his presidency, and will play out at the same time as the process which will culminate in a presidential election on 5 November next year.

Trump is very likely to be the Republican candidate in that election, but because of the drawn-out nature of the legal process, unlikely to be campaigning from prison. Despite the fact that the majority of the permanent state officialdom, and

the majority of the tech and finance-based US ruling class opposes the re-election of Trump, it is entirely possible that Trump will win the 2024 election - making the indictments a positive selling point for his candidacy: “Every time the radical left Democrats, Marxists, communists and fascists indict me, I consider it actually a great badge of honour ... Because I’m being indicted for you,” as he put it to a recent rally in Pennsylvania.

Real Marxists (as opposed to the fascist Marxists who live rent free in Donald Trump’s head) will understand that this Shakespearean comedy shows that the USA, the pre-eminent capitalist power of the last 80 years is dysfunctional and divided and is experiencing a deep, profound crisis. As in other nations, the success of right-wing populists reflects the difficulty that the ruling class has in persuading a majority of the population to support their social and economic programme of austerity, precarious employment and the impoverishment of the majority in order to enable the enrichment of a tiny minority.

In some European countries this has resulted in the ruin of conservative and social democratic parties alike, something which has yet to play out completely in the US (or the UK). What could bring the curtain down on this show, though, is what the ruling classes of all countries fear the most - the entry of the organised working class onto the political scene. Already we have seen

a taste of this with several big strikes. In reality, the establishment Republicans and Democrats are no more attached to democracy than the insurrectionist Trump - but they do fear that another round of a Trump presidency could provoke just such a development.



Donald Trump PHOTO: GAGE SKIDMORE/CC

CWI international rally in Berlin

“When workers stand together we are strong!”



SCOTT JONES

Internationalism in the 21st century and why only the working class can defeat the capitalist system and its wars, exploitation and other horrors, was the theme of a public rally hosted by the Committee for a Workers’ International in Berlin on 31 July.

Opening the rally, Sascha Stanic, Sol (CWI Germany) spokesperson, pointed out that the “working class has not disappeared and when we stand together we are strong.”

This was a thread that ran throughout the rally, as speaker after speaker described the historic strike waves sweeping across Britain, France and Germany. Anja Voigt, a Berlin nurse and one of the organisers of a 30-day strike for more staff in 2022, said: “The strike is one of the most successful struggles of working-class people in Germany. It was started by five colleagues sat at a kitchen table, but from there we went to all hospital departments and elected strike delegates, and built from there.”

Ending her rousing speech, Anja told the hundreds in attendance: “The conclusion is you have to fight.” And workers and young people are fighting all over the world.

Leila Messaoudi, a socialist councillor from France, and a member of Gauche Révolutionnaire (CWI), described the explosive events there where mass strikes have taken place against the government, and a huge youth revolt has erupted against police repression and austerity.

Prasad Welikumbura, a socialist

activist from the USP in Sri Lanka (CWI), thrilled the attendees with his eyewitness account of the revolutionary movement that overthrew “the most powerful president we’ve ever seen” in Rajapaksa when a million people descended on the capital, confronting armed guards and barricades, sweeping them aside to storm the presidential palace.

In other fields too, the working class has challenged the system. Rouzbeh Taheri, a Berlin tenant activist, told the rally about the campaign for the expropriation of housing companies which won a referendum. However, the fight is now on to force the Berlin city government to implement the result of the referendum.

But it was the strike wave that the rally returned to again and again.

Another Berlin activist, Chiara Stenger, from Jugend für Sozialismus (Youth for Socialism), said: “Crisis is part of our everyday lives”. As a research assistant at a university, Chiara said she was looking forward to going on strike for the first time in the autumn, and described how students will be taking action alongside them.

Hannah Sell, the general secretary of the Socialist Party in England and Wales, described the strike wave in Britain: “Working-class power seemed more distant than ever, but that is changing, and the working class is back. We’ve had the highest level of strikes for decades. Most of those striking have never done so before but by winning higher offers than initially offered, they have shown that striking works, and they are supported by the majority

watching on.”

“The working class is the force capable of ending all the horrors of capitalism,” as Hannah said. But she also pointed out that the workers’ movement needs to step into the political arena. And this was the other key theme of the rally.

Leila described how “the battle for a workers’ party is the main question” for the movement in France. Prasad explained the need for a leadership of the movement in Sri Lanka. And Hannah reported on our call for a workers’ list in the upcoming general election in Britain. The rally also heard video message by Ferat Koçak, a member of the city parliament for Die Linke (Left Party) in Berlin. He explained how he is using the platform to support workers’ struggles.

The central and crucial role that the Committee for a Workers’ International can and will play in these events shone through, and the battle for socialism is more important than ever. Tony Saunio, secretary of the Committee for a Workers’ International, closed the rally laying bare the situation: “Unparalleled inequality and war.” Tony explained how an independent class position is vital on these issues, particularly war. As Hannah said: “We fight for every step forward for our class but know that we have to overthrow the rotten capitalist system and fight for socialism.”

And we want to build our forces to do that. Prasad ended his contribution by saying: “Join the CWI and let’s fight this battle together.”

More reports from the CWI’s summer school at socialistworld.net

THE NIGERIEN COUP AND THE POTENTIAL FOR REGIONAL WAR AND INSTABILITY

• Workers and poor masses must reject the coup and foreign military intervention

• For a constituent assembly based on a socialist programme linked with regional working class solidarity

CHINEDU BOSAH

NEC MEMBER, DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST MOVEMENT
(CWI IN NIGERIA)

Niger has become a focus of international interest and discussion since the military elite presidential guard seized power from Mohamed Bazoum and placed him under house arrest on 26 July. General Abdourahmane Tchiani, the head of the Niger’s presidential guard has declared himself the leader of the country. There have been massive protests in Niger, showing anger against the long years of French domination and pillage, but some have illusions in Russia and Russian flags were waved amid anti-French slogans outside the French embassy in Niamey. Although General Tchiani cited “deteriorating security” and Bazoum’s handling of the “war on terrorism”, in reality the coup was a response to the president’s threat to remove him as the head of the presidential guard. The real reason for the power struggle within elite circles remains unclear.

Working people and youth must condemn the coup and also oppose any foreign aggression, be it the Nigeria-led Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) or the imperialist powers.

ECOWAS has rejected the coup and demanded a return to civilian rule and the reinstatement of Mohamed Bazoum on or before 25 August or face military intervention. Already, a number of sanctions have been imposed on Niger. For instance, land borders in the south have been closed and the Nigerian government has cut off electricity supply. The country depends on Nigeria for 70% of its electricity.

ECOWAS sanctions have led to sharp increases in food and commodity prices with dire consequences for the country’s working class and poor. Already, France has suspended all aid and other donor countries like Germany and the USA have suspended some of their aid packages, actions that will worsen living standards in Niger. However, a chunk of the aid is corruptly looted by the capitalist ruling elite and its military wing.

Just like many African countries, Niger has had four successful coups and several other failed attempts since its independence from France in 1960. ECOWAS leaders fear the spread of coups in West Africa as witnessed in Mali, Guinea and Burkina Faso in the last three years, and could



be replicated in some other countries in the unstable region.

The economic crisis in Niger is huge despite being rich in uranium, coal and gold. It has a population of 25 million people and is ranked by the United Nations as the second least developed country out of 188 countries. Three million people face acute poverty and hunger, the illiteracy rate is 37%. French imperialism and some other European countries rely on Niger for uranium, it is the 7th largest producer in the world and France needs it for its nuclear industry.

In order to sustain the plundering of Niger’s mineral resources and to limit migration to Europe, French imperialism stationed 1,500 troops as well as an air force base in Niger and has strong financial control. This huge force in a small country is simply a reminder of the bloody and plundering period of colonisation. It is a force ready to be unleashed in order to sustain neocolonialism and the continuous defence of powerful

interests at the expense of the ordinary Nigerien people. These foreign powers, in collaboration with the Nigerien capitalist ruling elite, have so ruined it such that the country has been dependent on foreign economic and security aid - about 45% of the budget comes from this aid, which is over \$1 billion yearly.

Growing discontent

A growing disagreement between rogue capitalist ruling and military elites and the French imperialists over resources is what is playing out in the region, and the Russian and Chinese elites are exploiting it. Many people in these countries do not see any hope of improvement in their lives under French domination and have become resentful of the continuous foreign intervention. Putin opposed the coup in Niger through a foreign ministry statement but Prigozhin, the leader of the Wagner Group, the Russian private mercenary force with close ties to the Kremlin regime, praised the coup.

France has backed the ECOWAS’s resolve to reinstate civilian rule while on the other hand, Mali and Burkina Faso have declared support for the coup and have pledged to deploy military support. This is a recipe for dangerous regional war.

The Niger military may want to enter into a deal with ECOWAS to pledge a return to civilian rule sometime in future, just like the promises made by Mali and Burkina Faso coupists, which they never kept. In doing so it could try to buy time to consolidate power and manoeuvre, or dare it and go into confrontation hoping for support from Mali and Burkina Faso to resist ECOWAS forces.

Nigeria, which will supply the most funding, equipment and men if an invasion is decided, is hobbled by opposition at home, reflected in the refusal of the senate to approve military intervention. The foreign borders imposed by the European imperialists when they carved up

Wagner forces are already in Mali. France has backed the ECOWAS’s resolve to reinstate civilian rule while on the other hand, Mali and Burkina Faso have declared support for the coup and have pledged to deploy military support. This is a recipe for dangerous regional war.

Africa between themselves cut across tribes and nations. Fighting in Niger would inevitably have an impact in northern Nigeria as a big portion of Nigeria’s northern population is Hausa who are also the second biggest ethnic group in Niger.

Unfortunately, the trade union movement is divided over the crises in Niger. The working population organised in the trade unions total 60,000, just 5% of the total working population. The Democratic Confederation of Workers of Niger, the country’s largest trade union centre, condemned the coup and demanded reinstatement of civilian constitutional order while the Trade Union Action Unit (UAS Niger) made up of smaller trade union centres issued a statement supporting the coup and called on Nigeriens and workers to rise up to defend the country against any foreign aggression.

The once- united trade union confederations - that responded to the former president Mamadou Tandja’s tenure extension plan and sweeping constitutional review that concentrated more power to the president with a 24-hour general strike in 2009 - are now in disarray.

The Democratic Socialist Movement (DSM, CWI in Nigeria) calls on the trade unions and working masses to unite to reject the military coup, defend democratic rights, and reject foreign aggression and intervention. The workers’ movement should demand and mobilise for a constituent assembly dominated by elected representatives of working people to bring about a constitution that puts the country’s resources under democratic control of the working people of Niger.

The working people and poor need to organise themselves, their future cannot be decided either by military leaders or foreign intervention. Peoples’ defence committees should be formed in workplaces and communities that can be the basis for a popular government led by the working class and oppressed. Alongside appeals to the rank and file of the Nigerien armed forces to support such a government, there should be an appeal to workers in the region to give active solidarity to the working people of Niger, including where necessary coordinated protests and general strikes against their respective aggressive countries.

While we agree with Nigerien protesters’ demands for France to leave Niger, however, we must say that accepting another imperialist power in the form of Russia is not the way out.

What is needed in Niger, as well as in Nigeria and the entire continent of Africa, is a socialist revolution that enthrones a workers’ and poor peoples’ government armed with socialist policies to end landlordism and capitalism. Such a revolution will probably start from one country but can quickly spread becoming a regional and continental mass movement for a real change in the way society is run. A workers’ and poor peoples’ government will take into public ownership the commanding heights of the economy like the banks, industries, oil and gas, mines, and put them under workers’ democratic control and management in order to ensure the economy works for the interest of the mass majority, instead of profit for a few.

Read the full article at socialistnigeria.org

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socialistparty.org.uk



the Socialist

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formerly **Militant**

YOUTH FIGHT FOR

COUNCIL HOMES

AND

RENT CONTROLS



Rents in London have increased by a staggering 18%. Rent arrears have now risen to higher levels than during the pandemic. Most of our rip-off homes are overcrowded, mouldy and in poor repair - with landlords doing nothing to fix them.

Why should young people pay for the failings of the capitalist system while rouge landlords and bosses get richer and richer at our expense?

13 years of Tory governments have seen the housing crisis grow. Their 'Help to Buy' scheme cost £29 billion, but helped just 300,000 people buy a house. Research has showed its main impact was inflating house prices. That money could have been used to invest in council house building.

None of the mainstream, pro-capitalist

parties, including Keir Starmer's Labour, have a solution to the housing crisis. Shamefully, Lisa Nandy, Labour's housing spokesperson, has said a Labour government will not bring in rent controls.

Super-rich hoarders

Rather than building the tens of thousands of decent council homes needed, Labour councils have been busy giving contracts to private property developers. These new private homes are unaffordable for us. While young people dream of living in their own places, there are thousands of properties in London that lie empty as investment portfolios for the super-rich.

We say enough is enough! Young people need to get organised and fight for a decent future - a socialist future. Socialist

Party members have led and won campaigns against unfair rental debts, evictions, and services charges. Trade unions are showing that collective action gets results in the workplace. We need to link those struggles to a political alternative in working-class interests.

Starmer has cleared out the Labour manifesto of all the radical policies of his predecessor Jeremy Corbyn. We call on Corbyn and other socialists to be part of a workers' list standing at the general election - as a step towards the new mass workers' party we need.

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



Socialist Party fights for

- Rent controls now
- Compulsory licensing of all landlords to force decent housing standards
- A mass programme of council house building
- Support the strikes! End low pay - scrap youth rates and zero-hour contracts. A £15-an-hour minimum wage for all now
- Councils must set no-cuts budgets. Restore services, reopen libraries, reverse cuts and re-employ sacked council workers
- For free education and scrapping of student debt
- Kick out the Tories, but Starmer's Labour won't fight for us. Build a new workers' party with a socialist programme
- Fight for a socialist world. Take the banks, monopolies and major industries into democratic public ownership to provide us with a future

WHAT WE STAND FOR: THE SOCIALIST PARTY'S MAIN DEMANDS >>> see column on p10&11

