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# the Socialist

Issue 1243

21-27 September 2023

formerly **Militant**

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- Resist minimum service levels attacks
- Labour doesn't fight for us, we need a new mass workers' party

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MANCHESTER, 3 OCTOBER**



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

# CAPITALIST CRISIS CONSUMES UNIVERSITIES FIGHT FOR SOCIALIST CHANGE



It seems simpler to list the things which work in Britain in 2023 than to list what's broken. Public services are literally crumbling. Prices everywhere for workers and young people continue to spiral above our wages and maintenance loans. Infrastructure is failing. The housing market is broken. Councils are going bust.

The profit-before-everything-else system of capitalism is at the root of all of these crises, as it is the multiple threats of global climate change, war, and the various forms of daily bigotry that millions face.

Anyone studying on British university campuses in the last decade would agree that universities haven't escaped the turmoil. "Unhappy students; angry lecturers; unmarked exams; poisonous industrial relations; cancelled courses; a lack of student housing and ballooning debt. As UK universities begin the academic year, the crises are piling up." These were the words of a professor at Oxford Brookes University writing in the Financial Times.

### Workers fight back

Constant attacks from management and the Tories, on university staff wages and conditions, have seen years of industrial unrest on the campuses as workers have mounted a fightback.

The coronavirus pandemic laid bare the effects of years of austerity and marketisation, as students were invited back to the campuses on the pretext of a 'business as usual' learning experience, only to find themselves locked down on the campuses and offered no support from management or the Tories. Years of overcrowding of lecture theatres and campus halls, and the gutting of student support and mental health services were all brought into sharp relief. Those were very difficult years for millions of students. But, left in the hands of university management and the Tories, virtually nothing has changed since.

And now, this year thousands of would-be graduates have still not received their final grades as a result of the UCU's marking and assessment boycott. Like elsewhere in society, this crisis gripping the university campuses is the result of the brutal austerity policies carried out by the



Socialist Students standing in solidarity with university workers in the UCU in Liverpool on strike PHOTO: SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Tories in service to the capitalist system. Tory cuts to government funding of our universities, accompanied by the growth of the market model for Higher Education funding, have brought our universities to a state of near paralysis.

That on its own would be enough to generate widespread anger. But this year students will also be worrying about the ongoing and worsening student cost-of-living crisis. In 2023, for the first time ever, the average annual student rent has now surpassed the maximum available student loan. While prices everywhere in society continue to rise, the Tories have only increased maintenance loans by 2.8% this year.

Near the start of 2023, it was reported that 40% of students were studying at home, most to save money. 18% of students have avoided buying educational resources needed for their courses. 28% reported skipping meals to save on food costs, 47% were going out less with friends, and 14% were travelling to campus for free energy use. 18% of students are now using food banks.

As prices continue to rise, this situation will increasingly become untenable for more and more students. Mass outbursts of anger on the campuses in the form of student protests are more than possible.



**In 2023, for the first time ever, the average annual student rent has now surpassed the maximum available student loan. While prices everywhere in society continue to rise, the Tories have only increased maintenance loans by 2.8% this year**

Rising costs, with no extra funding made up by the government, will also push universities further into financial crisis, posing further attacks on students and campus workers. Socialist Students, in which Socialist Party members play a leading role, demands that management take steps now to protect students and workers, including making access to student hardship funds readily available, ensuring no price increases on campus canteens and restaurants, keeping university spaces such as 24-hour libraries open, not limiting campus lighting or heating, and making no more cuts to jobs or courses. The money should be demanded from central government.

Off the bat this term, universities and students will have their first experience of industrial action as the University and College Union (UCU) has called five more days of national strike action between 25-29 September (see page 7). This coincides with a rebalot campaign by the UCU between 19 September and 3 November.

Socialist Students will be campaigning for the maximum possible support amongst students for the UCU strikes, including mobilising students to picket lines. This year's

strike wave has demonstrated that collective workers' struggle can force major concessions out of the crumbling Tory party. A mass student movement struggling alongside the UCU would act to hasten the resolution of the dispute on the terms of striking workers and students, who together face the brunt of marketisation and cuts.

September 2023 also marks one of the biggest government attacks on students' futures since the trebling of tuition fees back in 2010 by the 'condemn' coalition. Beginning this academic year, any undergraduates who take on tuition fee and maintenance loan debt will be forced to repay that debt starting from a lower annual income threshold - lowered from £27,500 a year to £25,000 - over the course of 40 years, up from 30 years.

This huge attack, which would act to trap millions of future graduates in a lifetime of debt repayment deductions from their wages, is driven by the pronounced character of the economic crisis of British capitalism. Stagnant, low-growth British capitalism can no longer indefinitely tolerate the growing mountain of state-owned student debt, which is currently valued at £206 billion. As in any capitalist economic crisis, the capitalist class and their political representatives are attempting to make us pay in order to protect their ability to make the maximum possible profits, no matter what that may mean for the wellbeing of wider society.

But a socialist alternative to the capitalist system can be fought for by students, workers, and young people. A socialist society, broken free from the straitjacket of the profit-driven capitalist system, would be based on the democratic planning of society's resources and the democratic public ownership of the banks, monopolies, and major industries - the commanding heights of the economy - harnessed to meet the needs of society.

With the profit motive removed, such a society would guarantee every one who wants one a high-quality, free university education on a permanent and lasting basis. A free education system would mean the scrapping of tuition fees, replacing maintenance loans with grants which increase with inflation, and the cancellation all outstanding student debt - and an education system democratically run by university workers and students, not by unaccountable managers and vice-chancellors.

All of which can be fought for now by building a mass movement uniting students and workers demanding, amongst other things, free education, and that the government fund it by taking the wealth off the super-rich.

### Get organised

A central task in the building of such a movement however, is the need for students to get organised on the university campuses. Right now, students - unlike their counterparts in the trade union movement - find themselves without the necessary organisations, on campuses and nationally, through which they can collectively and democratically discuss all of these attacks, and debate the programme and strategy needed to fight back in an organised and mass way.

But missing as well is a political party which will fight in Parliament and the council chambers

for the decent future that students and young people have been fighting for in the streets over the past two decades, from the 2011 student movement to the 2020 Black Lives Matter movement. Starmer's Labour has obliterated every last pledge included in Jeremy Corbyn's 2017 and 2019 manifestos, including Corbyn's pledge to scrap tuition fees.

That's why Socialist Students, at its 2023 national conference, voted to support the call for a new mass political party which represents the interests of the working class, students and young people, and to support any candidate in the upcoming local elections and general election standing on an anti-austerity and socialist platform.



**Socialist Students will be campaigning for the maximum possible support amongst students for the UCU strikes, including mobilising students to picket lines**

Vital would be the arming of such a party with a socialist programme which poses a complete break with the system of capitalism and the construction of a new kind of society and world.

For young and working-class people, such a society wouldn't stop at just providing a free education. Democratic planning of the economy would allow the majority to harness and mobilise the resources which currently exist but rot under capitalism - to provide everyone with decent and secure work, high-quality housing, an immediate transition to green energy and industry, and an end to all the destruction and misery that capitalism means for billions of people on a daily basis.

But achieving a socialist transformation of society would require a mass struggle, in the workplaces, local communities, university campuses and streets, to stand up to the inevitable resistance and sabotage that the capitalist class would attempt to protect their class rule. To discuss how students and young people can join the struggle for the socialist transformation of society in Britain and across the world, come to Socialism 2023.

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Workers striking in defence of pensions in 2011. PHOTO: SEAN



## London free school meals scheme step in right direction but nowhere near far enough

OSCAR PARRY  
SOUTH WEST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

London Labour mayor Sadiq Khan has unveiled a one-year scheme to make free school meals available to every primary school pupil in London. He has stated that the £135 million programme would save parents more than £440 per child.

Any support for struggling families impacted by the cost-of-living crisis will be welcomed; a quarter of UK households with children report experiencing food insecurity, and around a third of parents say they are 'financially struggling', including around one in six going without basic necessities or relying on loans to pay for them.

But the scheme could go much further. The mayor's initiative pays £2.65 per meal. Across London, meals can cost schools anything between £1.80 to more than £4. To make up the shortfall in costs, many councils are having to contribute additional six-figure sums or schools may be faced with cuts.

Free school meals should be available to all pupils across the country on a permanent basis. Free milk was provided to all primary school students until Margaret Thatcher 'milk snatcher' removed it for over 7's in 1971. The Scottish and Welsh governments have committed to expanding free school meals to cover all primary school children, which should be fully funded as well.

Free school meals for all could easily be funded, while families have been faced by a cost-of-living crisis – just look at the massive profits of the bosses.

Keir Starmer has refused to commit to free school meals if he wins the next general election, as he is concerned with proving his 'fiscal responsibility' to his big business backers. Expansions of free school meals are a step forward, but we can go much further, by nationalising under democratic workers' control big business and the banks, including catering and food companies. We would be able to provide every pupil with high-quality, free, nutritious food and pay the staff that make it a decent wage.

## Nationalise Tata Steel to save jobs

SOCIALIST PARTY WALES

The proposal by the Tory government and Tata Steel for the Port Talbot plant to shut down its two blast furnaces and replace them with 'greener' electric arc furnaces, requiring thousands fewer workers, have provoked anger and panic amongst the workforce, steel unions and the local community.

The electric arc furnaces would basically turn the works into a steel recycling plant rather than the primary steel-making operation (using basic raw materials and converting iron ore and coking coal into steel) as now exists, with high demand for its specialised steel.

Thousands of jobs are directly under threat, alongside thousands more subsidiary jobs if this cost-saving project is given the green light. It would devastate the already battered economies of Port Talbot, the Valleys and surrounding areas.

As is to be expected, the damage of big job losses to one of the poorest communities in the UK is of secondary importance to Tata and the Tories!

This proposal has nothing to do with Tata's so-called 'green' credentials but is all about retaining profits for their shareholders.

There have been no consultations with steel unions to consider other methods of de-carbonisation, such as hydrogen-based blast furnaces, which could maintain primary steelmaking alongside electric arc production.

Moving to electric arc furnaces will of course drastically cut Tata's wage bill by throwing steelworkers onto the unemployment scrapheap, with next to no chance of finding alternative employment.

The Tory government is claiming that their £500 million state aid is "an historic package of support" but it is really subsidising slashing jobs and devastating working-class communities.

Since the battle to save jobs and pensions in 2016-17, steelworkers have been served further job cuts as well as attacks on pensions and conditions. The promises back then to 'keep the furnaces firing' and further investment have been shown as a lie!

In assisting the successful struggles

of the steelworkers seven years ago, the Socialist Party and the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) pointed out that "the only secure future for the plant is nationalisation of steel under democratic workers' control and management."

That central demand in 2016-17 to 'Nationalise Tata to Save Steel' must be urgently put back on the agenda by steel unions, Wales Trades Union Congress, the Welsh Labour government and community campaigners in preparation for the struggle ahead!

Swansea and West Wales Socialist Party held a campaign stall in the town centre handing out our leaflet demanding the nationalisation of Tata Steel to save jobs and received a warm response, selling 50 copies of the Socialist.

There was widespread concern at what the loss of thousands of jobs would do to the town and disgust at the actions of the government. Many of those who came over to the stall were retired steelworkers.



Blast furnace at Port Talbot steel works. PHOTO: GRUBB/CC

## London NHS strikes: "We're here to work – but not for free!"

JAMES IVENS  
LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

NHS workers in London have burst onto the streets in a big, coordinated pay strike. Refuse workers in two boroughs and housing maintenance in another two are hot on their heels.

Staff, from cleaners to pathologists to nurses, in four London health trusts, walked out together on 13 September. The strike at one trust, Barts in east London, continues through to 22 September. They will be joined by consultants and junior doctors in the national BMA strike.

The unifying issue is the national pay offer. With the Tory government offering just 5% and inflation near twice that, general union Unite has coordinated eight London disputes for real increases.

Many local issues – some recent and some built up from years of cuts, privatisation and neglect – are in the mix too. There is a big mood of confidence, palpable on a hundreds-strong multi-trust march round the Royal London Hospital on 13 September.

### Strikes get results

Striking 'soft services' workers at Barts Trust (porters, domestics, caterers and more), led by porter and Socialist Party member Len Hockey, are especially bold. They beat the bosses last year, winning through strike action being brought back into the NHS, and are ready to do it again.

Kitchen assistant and Unite rep Maria Talaia led the picket line at Whipps Cross Hospital. "We're on strike to fight for our benefits. For example, the lump sum everyone else got, they didn't pay us."

"We also need respect and dignity from management. We are the ones on the front line. During Covid, we are the ones who caught Covid."

"Inside, the managers have not provided proper food for patients. They have had a lot of complaints."

"The strike's going very, very good. We went to the Royal London and had a massive demo – all the

supervisors came out and saw. We are absolutely going to win."

A shop steward at Guy's and St Thomas' Trust, Mirno Proppert, told us overtime pay is among the big issues. "I work in maintenance. There are lots of leaks because the structure is old and obsolete. I started being a rep very recently, just three months. We are here to work, but not to work for free! I normally work days but I have to work nights now too, because we need more people. They should pay a lot more when you're on a night shift."

Hugo Pierre reports from the Royal London in Whitechapel. A group of A&E nurses joined the picket lines. Some had joined Unite when the ballot result was announced, and others joined the day before the strike. They had been told by their former union, the Royal College of Nursing (RCN), that they couldn't strike.

One nurse said: "Hospital management stick to their staffing levels, which are too low considering how busy we get, but even then we are not fully staffed and have a lot of agency cover. The amount of money they give to the agencies could be used to increase our pay, which would help to retain staff. We do 12-hour shifts, but often work bank hours as well, to keep the department running."

"If we had more staff we could work safely with all our patients, which include major incident trauma, and high number of accidents from drug and alcohol dependency, because of all the homelessness and treatment centres locally."

"The RCN didn't support us but this Unite strike

has given us an opportunity to fight for better pay and proper staffing levels. We know more of our nursing colleagues will join us over the next week."



Junior doctors on strike at the Leicester Royal Infirmary

### STOP PRESS: Tories threaten the BMA

Rob Williams, chair of the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN), says: "The NSSN stands in solidarity with BMA consultants and junior doctors. The Tories have threatened them with the new minimum services anti-union law."

If the BMA are attacked, all unions must be prepared to take action together to defend them, the NHS and the right to strike.

The TUC must enact its motion agreed at its Congress, that stated "Congress pledges 100% solidarity with any trade unions attacked under these MSL laws."

- See 'A thunderstorm is coming' at [socialistparty.org.uk](https://socialistparty.org.uk)
- The full composite can be seen at [tuc.org.uk/Congress2023](https://tuc.org.uk/Congress2023)



Striking Unite members in East London have coordinated rallies with BMA consultants. PHOTO: JAMES IVENS

## Doctors pay strike is about the future of the NHS

Tatyana Sarnecki, junior doctor BMA rep at the Royal London Hospital, east London, spoke to Hugo Pierre in a personal capacity

Our main issue with pay is that for the last 15 years we've had sub-inflation pay rises. The pay for an F1, new out of university, is £32,398, despite being thousands or even tens of thousands of pounds in debt, and facing the same issues that everyone else in the country does with the cost-of-living crisis, ie housing shortages and rising food and energy prices. You'd expect that, over the years, doctors would get decent pay rises, but it's not as high or as quick as people imagine.

As an example, what changed with the 2016 contracts was that they took away completely the years of experience you have if you change specialities. If, for example, I was a surgeon for eight years and then maybe had children and my life changed and I changed to be a GP, I would go back down to the lowest level on the specialities pay scale again.

On top of the pay issues, we have to pay yearly fees, which are mandatory. Our GMC (General Medical Council) fee is £433 a year, and if you're a trainee, there's the Royal Colleges fees, which are also a few hundred pounds. And things that are mandatory to our training, such as our training portfolio, cost around £200 per year, or courses each costing £700-1000. All things that you

might expect would be free, but are not. On top of that, we have to pay for our own exams, which have a very high failure rate. If you want to become a specialist in a particular field, e.g. histopathology, the second exam costs £1,500 and the pass rate is only 40%.

And people are not aware how difficult the working situation is. Doctors work weekends, night shifts, plus all the extra work outside the normal hours, studying for exams, preparing their portfolio. All this extra work you're expected to do in your free time.

We have a 'rolling rota', meaning that it is set in stone for a year when you are working weekends and night shifts. It's then up to you to swap your shifts if you want a holiday. Irrespective of what the reasons are, it's dependent on the willingness of your colleagues to swap. It's something you'd think would be a managerial role. It's unnecessary and just ruins our lives.

### Hugo: What has been the impact of pay levels on recruitment to the NHS?

Tatyana: We see many doctors leaving the NHS. And the government is trying to plug the gap by bringing thousands of people from abroad, and by training non-doctors to take over clinical care. Which in the end will lead to a reduction in quality of healthcare. It's about how to retain doctors; pay and better working conditions are a key part of that.

**Hugo: Whenever NHS workers go on strike there's an almost automatic sense of solidarity from the rest of the working class. Have junior doctors felt that?**

Tatyana: Definitely. Especially on the pickets. 90% of people walking by support us, they say: "The government should pay you", "Save the NHS". The nurses are great at supporting us and other unions have asked: "How can we help you?"

We are showing that we as doctors stand together, by striking alongside the consultants, with a Christmas Day level of service. Then the junior doctors continue, with full walkouts. We are planning a joint strike again on 2,3 and 4 October, and on 3 October there will be a big demo in Manchester at the Tory party conference. We want everyone to join us on that day!

**Hugo: If the BMA were to put a call out to other unions, and if the TUC were to back that and call for it, it could make that a massive day. Other activists in other unions could push in our unions and on our executives to make that a massive demo in defence of the NHS.**

Tatyana: I would appreciate that! But these decisions are not mine to make. This and everything mentioned is my view, and not necessarily that of the rest of the BMA.

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## Pension triple lock under threat

## Fight for pensions we can live on

CLARE WILKINS  
SECRETARY EAST MIDLANDS NATIONAL PENSIONERS' CONVENTION (PERSONAL CAPACITY) AND SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBER

The triple lock introduced by the coalition Tory-Lib Dem government in 2010 meant the state pension should rise each year by 2.5%, CPI inflation, or the average increase in wages, whichever is highest. The state pension goes up in April, using figures from the previous September.

This year pensions went up 10.1%, in line with inflation. It was a hard fight to keep the pressure up to defend the triple lock and secure this increase. Various Tory prime ministers have threatened the triple lock as they have come in and out of the revolving door of 10 Downing Street. This has meant great uncertainty for poorer pensioners during the cost-of-living crisis, as they have faced decisions about eating or heating.

Wages have risen by an average of 8.5%, the result of workers fighting back and taking strike action. This should be the amount that pensions go up by, at the very least. Tory Minister Mel Stride said that the government was 'committed' to the triple lock, but the one-off public sector

payments striking workers won this year may not be included in the calculations.

Former Tory leader William Hague wrote in *The Times* that neither Tories nor Labour could commit "electoral suicide" by promising to scrap the triple lock alone, but "sometimes in politics, you have to help each other out a bit". Keir Starmer's Labour and the Tories have both refused to commit to the triple lock being in their election manifestos. Once again showing Starmer is appealing to big business and is not on the side of workers and pensioners.

Our state pension is already the lowest in Europe. Workers and older people have to come in and out of the trade unions to safeguard pensions and the triple lock. In the pro-capitalist media the triple lock is said to be unaffordable and unfair to workers. But workers are future pensioners. The Socialist Party fights for decent pensions we can live on and lower-back and taking strike action. The wealth is there but it is in the wrong hands. We need to nationalise the banks and big businesses to run society on a democratic basis – to provide a decent wage and pension for all.

## New democratic fighting left formed in Unite

KEVIN PARSLAW  
UNITE WALTHAM FOREST COUNCIL BRANCH  
SECRETARY

A meeting called to form a new, democratic, and fighting left organisation in Unite the Union took place on 17 September, with over 80 joining on Zoom. The new organisation is based upon those who supported the fighting industrial and social programme of Sharon Graham in her general secretary election campaign, but will fight for that militant policy to continue against attacks from outside and within the union.

Unite has seen over 900 strikes since Sharon became general secretary. But this new organisation is necessary because Sharon's policies have opponents in Unite, including the leadership of the so-called 'United Left'. The Executive Council has already become the scene for some of these battles, so this new organisation is vital to maintain Unite's forward progress.

Socialist Party members played a big role in organising and participating in this meeting, which followed a successful meeting at Unite conference this summer.

This meeting was called at an important time, with the possibility of a Labour government only months away, and the pressures that will

come on trade union leaders to back it by trimming the demands of their members.

### Aims

The aims of the new organisation, which has several Committee for a Workers' International (CWI – the international socialist organisation to which the Socialist Party is affiliated) members on its steering committee, include:

- Supporting workers in struggle and bringing our struggles together
- Supporting the organising model and collective bargaining approaches to trade unionism. Continuing to build a fighting, industrial programme
- Fighting the anti-union laws
- Fighting to reverse the privatisation of public services and ensure all are fully funded
- Supporting nationalisation of key industries, including utilities and pharmaceuticals
- Being prepared to take on any employer, including Labour councils when necessary

This new organisation will coordinate to campaign that supporters of the fighting strategy are elected to all Unite bodies and delegations in the future.

## Cardiff Council strikers: 'When I first started working here it was buzzing – now it's horrific'

JOHN WILLIAMS  
CARDIFF EAST SOCIALIST PARTY

Cardiff Council workers entered their second week of strike action, against the recent local authority pay offer for council workers, which would mean some of the lowest paid would gain just 50p a day!

The strikers remain determined to fight, and are talking to people who aren't on strike or in a union.

Some workers at the council have been on agency contracts for 15 years. The council promised to address this after a vote for strike action last year, but agency workers still have to wait four years before being taken onto permanent contracts. The council uses six agencies, some of which get over £1,000 a year per worker.

There is also anger regarding

bullying in the Cardiff waste department. We were told that a bin worker got stabbed several times on duty, and the manager told him to come into work on Monday otherwise he'd be put on a Stage One disciplinary. We also learned about a rep who has worked there for 33 years, who was removed a dangerous lock and was sacked by a supervisor who said: "I haven't got time for unions".

Managers have tried to undermine the strike, ringing up strikers' partners, and trying to convince some workers they couldn't go on strike as they haven't been working at the council long enough. We were told that the council leader had tried to say they couldn't use the toilet on site, but soon backed down when an organiser said they would tell the media.

"When I first started working here, it was buzzing, now it's horrific", one rep told us.

Another said: "They're still using agency staff, promising them a long-term contract. They're using them. They don't know what's round the corner".

Around 100 people, including Socialist Party members and Cardiff Trades Council activists, marched to the Labour-led Welsh parliament to demand Welsh councils act now.

Three more weeks of action start on 25 September. Socialist Party members and Cardiff Trades Council delegates are discussing with workers about supporting them in any way we can, including demanding that Labour authorities stop implementing austerity, privatisation, and way-below-inflation pay offers.



Discussion on the picket line JOHN WILLIAMS

Tower Hamlets bin strike - on their first day workers turned back a wagon ROB WILLIAMS



## Rail Gourmet workers stand strong in their fight for fair pay and conditions

SOUTH TYNE AND WEARSIDE SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS

In a display of unwavering determination, members of the RMT rail union employed by the Rail Gourmet company have, for the sixth time, taken to the picket lines to demand better pay and improved working conditions.

Rail Gourmet is part of Select Services Partners group and is sub-contracted by TransPennine Express.

The dispute covers pay, conditions and pensions. In all three areas, the workers have inferior terms to those in other rail operators.

Primary issues are the sub-pension contributions and the lack of sick pay. Workers have voiced their concerns about inadequate support for their retirement, and during illness and incapacity. Additionally, TransPennine Express offers free travel cards for its workers and their family members – but not Rail Gourmet.

Rail Gourmet's initial offer was a 35p-an-hour increase. In response to the strikes, so far, an extra 7p has been offered. This paltry offer falls far short of addressing the legitimate concerns of workers who dedicate their time and effort to serving passengers on TransPennine Express trains.

Managers have been paid £25 an hour plus hotel accommodation to cover the work, in a blatant attempt to break the strikes. Non-union workers have been offered 12-hour shifts and £25 Amazon vouchers

The strikes are a testament to the resilience of workers who are willing to stand up for their rights. Their demands for fair pay, better working conditions, and a secure retirement must be met.

- If you would like to donate or show support please visit: [rmt.org.uk/about/branch-directory/newcastle-rail-and-catering-branch-hardship-fund](http://rmt.org.uk/about/branch-directory/newcastle-rail-and-catering-branch-hardship-fund).

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## PCS NEC votes to extend the pay campaign 'pause' To rebuild the campaign, elect a fighting general secretary! Nominate Marion Lloyd for general secretary and John Moloney for AGS

PCS MEMBER

On 6-7 September, the National Executive Committee (NEC) of the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) voted to extend indefinitely the 'pause' of the union's national campaign on pay, jobs, pensions, and redundancy rights.

Suspension of the campaign followed a membership ballot, which closed on 31 August. The ballot asked members to support the PCS "strategy to continue our campaign" and 90.3% of those voting, on a strong 47% turnout, voted for exactly that – to continue the campaign.

This has been dishonestly used by a majority of the NEC. The leading group on the NEC is made up of two political groupings within PCS, one called Left Unity, the other called the Democrats – together referred to as the Democracy Alliance.

Instead of continuing the union's national campaign, the NEC has now added to its previous decrees, which cancelled strike action in June and cancelled rebalots in major government departments, by cancelling the union's strike levy, which members had been paying since February, and which had funded targeted strike action.

Two justifications have been put forward for the 'pause'.

President Fran Heathcote and

Deputy President Martin Cavanagh have argued that the NEC needs time to consider the pay situation in the aftermath of a round of pay negotiations. These negotiations began in mid-June, as government departments, one by one, agreed to pay a £1,500 one-time, non-consolidated lump sum that the Tories conceded on 2 June.

Despite the concession, the pay talks were still constrained by the Treasury pay remit established in March 2023; this capped average pay rises to 4.5-5%. The total pay package for the vast majority of UK civil servants, therefore, could not reach the level of inflation and represented a continuing pay cut.

On top of the insulting 2-3% average wage increases offered for 2022-23 (against price rises in excess of 10% for the year!), this further pay cut needs to be added to the deafening silence of the government on the rest of our demands – on job security, pensions and our redundancy rights, which are all still very much in the firing line.

Moreover, the concession of £1,500 was considerably watered down for the 11% of civil servants estimated to be in receipt of Universal Credit (UC), whose payment would sharply reduce their UC payments, and for part-time staff, whose payment would be pro-rated.



Marion supporting PCS members in the BEIS business department, striking against private company employer ISS HELEN PATTISON

Calling for a pause, in these circumstances, is to disorient and demobilise members, and to squander the momentum built up in the campaign.

The second justification for a pause, again put forward by Heathcote and others, was that the NEC must "consider the national talks on pay with the Cabinet Office".

These talks are not formal dispute resolution talks, aimed at bumping up the pay offer. Currently they are talks about holding a further round of talks. These talks will focus on how pay bargaining is conducted in the future.

Negotiators may hope that they'll be able to squeeze something else out of the Cabinet Office, but they've given away their greatest source of leverage by demobilising tens of thousands of members who still have a live strike mandate till November.

### To win a serious strategy requires a fighting leadership

Socialist Party members and members of the PCS Broad Left Network, in which the Socialist Party participates, have called at all levels of the union for the restoration of the union's national campaign, for rebalots to begin in major departments that just missed the Tory undemocratic threshold, for further strike action to be called where we have a mandate, and for a clear programme to "continue our campaign" to be put forward to members. BLN supporters argued for this at the NEC.

It is clear that only a fighting, democratic leadership will do that – and equally clear that the current NEC majority are not likely to develop a spine from thin air. For this reason, we call on all PCS members, reps and branches to nominate Marion Lloyd for general secretary and John Moloney for assistant general secretary; nominations are open until 16 October.

## UCU university strikes: We need a serious strategy to win

BEA GARDNER  
UCU MEMBER

The long-running University and College Union (UCU) dispute over pay and conditions in universities – now entering its fourth academic year – is at a critical juncture.

As demanded by Tory anti-union laws, a rebalot is taking place, running from 19 September until 3 November, despite conference having mandated the union's leadership to organise a strike rebalot to run through the summer period.

National strike dates are set to begin on 25 September for five days, immediately before the current mandate expires on 30 September. However, with some branch leaderships outwardly stating they would not be participating, the union's Higher Education Committee (HEC) voted to permit branches to opt out of the action. This has effectively triggered a collapse of the nationwide character of the strike action.

In addition, earlier this month, the marking and assessment boycott (MAB) was ended, with 60% of members voting to end it.

This does not mean that members aren't prepared to fight on the issues of pay, casualisation and workload.



YORK SOCIALIST PARTY

There is a deep anger among university workers, reflected in the extensive action that has been taken in the last year. Action which has been spearheaded by determined branch activists overcoming Tory anti-trade union laws, even without a fighting lead from the union's general secretary Jo Grady.

Instead, as the MAB progressed, there was a feeling among some members of "why would I expose myself to more pay deductions when the mandate is set to run out and I will have to mark the work anyway". The imminent end to the strike mandate with no clear plan ahead has

similarly risked members being unclear where the dispute is going.

Member experiences of the MAB vary, reflecting differences in university responses to the boycott as well as varying degrees of organisation across branches. Outrageously, thousands of members faced significant pay deductions since the MAB began in April, despite continuing to carry out other work duties. Punitive deductions varied by institution – some were deducted one month's pay, and others 50% for a period of five months.

Different UCU branches responded with action on an individual basis,

but this was not planned and coordinated by the union's leadership nationally. Workers at Leeds University ended three weeks of indefinite action in June after bosses reduced the severity of sanctions, for example.

The deliberate delays and inaction by Grady and a layer of full-time officers have jeopardised the action throughout. For example, Grady 'paused' the dispute in February and undemocratically suspended a whole calendar of significant escalating strikes without consultation with the elected lay leadership and negotiators. Ultimately, the pressure from members has kept the dispute alive.

An escalating programme of action, which puts significant pressure on university bosses – together with confidence that the union's leadership will follow through with action – is needed to win a renewed strike mandate. It also needs thorough preparation, including a comprehensive strike fund to assist those who have faced significant hardship through previous action and bosses' punitive sanctions.

The union's industrial campaign also has to have with it a political campaign to address the crisis in university funding. A small number of institutions hold vast reserves, and others face severe financial insecurity. Across the board, as workers' pay and conditions are squeezed, larger and larger student numbers are crammed into lecture theatres to bring in cash.

Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer has ditched his 2020 election pledge, carried over from Jeremy Corbyn's time as leader, to scrap tuition fees. A general election is around the corner. What force is going to be standing for fully funded free education?

Why isn't UCU demanding of Starmer a commitment to end marketisation and fully fund higher education? UCU, with other unions, could prepare and back a union-backed list of candidates who do stand for that and other socialist policies in the interests of their members.

# WAS BLAIR'S NEW LABOUR REALLY GOOD FOR PUBLIC SERVICES?

JANE NELLIST  
COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

When Tony Blair and the Labour Party swept into power in 1997, there was a tangible wave of optimism - 'Things Can Only Get Better' was the theme tune!

For many workers, the election of the Blair government on 1 May 1997 felt like a new dawn, with the hope that the damage of 18 years of a Tory government, under Margaret Thatcher and then John Major, would begin to be reversed.

The working class had suffered years of underfunded and neglected public services under the Tories, along with recessions and mass unemployment. The NHS and education had been particularly hard hit, along with attacks on council housing, benefits and the massive privatisation of public utilities.

Today we are still suffering from the impact of privatisation, which Labour refused to reverse. Energy and water companies rake in huge profits for shareholders, while we pay excessive prices for a less reliable service.

In education, the Tories' 1988 Education Reform Act saw the National Curriculum and statutory testing introduced, and Local Management of Schools, which had huge funding implications for schools, especially those in more deprived areas. And of course later, they introduced what would become Ofsted!

New Labour's 1997 manifesto placed a strong emphasis on education, promising to prioritise investment in schools, reduce class sizes, and enhance teacher training and support. Teachers who had endured the years of Tory underfunding hoped that these promises would offer a brighter future for education and the workforce.

But the Socialist cautioned at the time that any such expectations would be misleading: a Blair government would not be anything like previous Labour governments. The Labour Party no longer had mass participation of the working class at its base, and would not be pressured to act in the interests of workers; instead it would be a government more aligned to big business interests.

The editorial commented: "With the dust still settling there may be a feeling that Labour can bring change [but] Labour will continue the Tory agenda of privatisation... The remnants of the welfare state will continue to be eroded under Labour." (*The Socialist issue 14*)

How true that proved to be!

### Thatcher's greatest achievement

In 2002, twelve years after Margaret Thatcher left office, she was asked at a dinner, what was her greatest achievement. Thatcher replied: "Tony Blair and New Labour!"

As a primary teacher in Coventry and a National Union of Teachers (NUT, now part of NEU) activist during the period of the Labour government from 1997 to 2010 under Tony Blair and then Gordon Brown, I certainly do not look back on those times

with any joy - far from it! It was a time of relentless attacks right from the start, and which the union leadership failed to mobilise a strong enough campaign to challenge, despite the impact on the workforce and on our whole education system, affecting the education of our pupils and our communities.

Looking back on the bulletins and material that Socialist Party educators produced in those 13 years, the attacks came thick and fast.

One year after the election of a New Labour government, we wrote:

"Just a year ago, many teachers would have sung along to the music coming out of Blair's battle bus, believing that things were going to get better. After years of being ground down by Tory policies, here was a government claiming to make education its top priority.

"The reality has been a bitter disappointment. This is a government that ignores the real issues of cuts, poverty and the divisive effects of forcing market policies on schools." *Socialist Party, National Union of Teachers Conference bulletin 1998*

Just a year into a Labour government, it was clear, that although 'Education, Education, Education!' had been prime minister Tony Blair's mantra, it translated into a whirlwind of attacks on staff working in schools supporting pupils; impacting on their pay, workload, working conditions, and their professional role that they had trained for. And what's more, syphoning public money into private businesses.

### PFI

Blair's education secretary of state, David Blunkett (who incidentally had angered teachers at an NUT Conference even before Labour were elected for saying he'd sack incompetent teachers and close failing schools), and chancellor Gordon Brown pushed through a raft of education policies that included the Private Finance Initiative (PFI).

This allowed schools to be rebuilt and run by businesses. The cost to the public purse was 40% greater than the normal procurement methods, which many cash-strapped schools are still paying for today.

By wiping those debts across the public sector, the money could instead go towards making a big start repairing our crumbling schools and hospitals.

Whilst millions of pounds were squandered on the war in Iraq, schools were being forced into accepting 'teaching-on-the-cheap' because of the lack of funding for 'planning, preparation and assessment' time which aimed to reduce teacher workload. Rather than investing the funding to recruit more teachers, there was an expectation that support staff would cover lessons.

The pace of attacks on the state education system accelerated. Academies, Foundation schools, the continuing use of SATs and league tables and increased privatisation were just some of the issues that we faced.

In 1998, Blair put forward a Green Paper called 'Teachers: Meeting the



Tony Blair  
PHOTO: WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM/CC

Challenge of Change' which proposed performance-related pay for teachers, a new qualification for headteachers, and fast-tracking teachers into senior leadership positions, as well as a raft of other proposals which caused huge anger and worry amongst teachers.

Meetings were organised by left-wing activists in the teaching unions to discuss strategies to defeat these proposals, which included calling for the unions to mobilise for strike action.

The academisation programme was pushed. This allowed schools to be taken out of the control of local authorities and instead be run by businesses and religious organisations, giving them greater 'freedoms' which led to further attacks on education. Meanwhile, academy bosses paid themselves huge salaries.

Education Action Zones were also introduced by Labour, which were supposed to attract funding from the private sector to support schools but failed to attract the funding. Much of the public funding that was given was simply spent on admin and management costs.

Curriculum changes put more focus on maths and literacy, especially the introduction of the hour-long Literacy and Numeracy lessons, with a strict format that had to be followed.



Socialist Party protest against NHS privatisation under Blair's New Labour in 2007  
PHOTO: SOCIALIST PARTY



Firefighters on strike in 2002 over pay  
PHOTO: PAUL MATTSOON

Schools in more deprived areas, such as the school I taught in, with more testing for pupils, led to a narrower curriculum, reducing the time for music and the arts.

This was an incredibly prescribed way of teaching and, in order to reduce the time in preparation of lessons, teachers were paying out of their own pocket for resources to support these new ways of teaching.

Throughout this period, Socialist Party members tried to build alliances with communities, groups and other trade union members in order to build the biggest-possible opposition - producing leaflets and pamphlets explaining the dangers. Unfortunately, there were others on the left who tried to close that down.

We used opportunities at NUT Conference to put forward motions and amendments and speak in debates to raise the issues of an alternative fighting strategy, producing leaflets and pamphlets, receiving a good response from members. We didn't always win the votes but we planted the seeds!

A group was formed called STOPP - School Teachers Opposed to Performance Pay, which we played a major role in - organising a demonstration and rally in London, and producing information for members.

Socialist Party members and

supporters organised groups of teachers to lobby the Department for Education 'roadshows'.

We also identified that, in order to protect teaching staff from workload and the break-up of our conditions, we needed to fight for a national contract - not just on pay but on working hours, as workload was increasing rapidly, as well as victimisation and bullying.

Pensions started to become a much bigger issue for workers as New Labour started attacking other sections of the public sector. Under pressure from members and activists - and backed up by Linda Taaffe, Socialist Party member on the NUT national executive - the NUT leadership agreed to a consultative strike ballot. The government was temporarily forced to back down.

One of the few policies that New Labour introduced which did have some benefits was the Sure Start programme, with the aim of "giving children the best possible start in life" through improvement of childcare, early education, health and family support, with an emphasis on outreach and community development. It never had time to embed itself and has faced the axe under the Tories.

### NHS

Education was not the only area to be impacted by New Labour. The NHS and council services also suffered from a barrage of neo-liberal attacks which laid the foundations for the continuing assault by the Tory-led governments since 2010.

As we move closer to a general election which must be called before December 2024, workers across all sectors are desperate for change. Our public services have been run into the ground, and millions driven into low-paid and precarious work. The cost-of-living crisis has created increased poverty levels for millions, yet the rich have got richer!

Many younger workers have never experienced living or working under anything other than a Tory government. Understandably, workers are crying out for change.

Young teachers and support staff could be forgiven for grasping at the hope that things would be better under a Keir Starmer-led government.

The same workers have taken part in the strike wave of a generation, forcing more money from a government that initially refused to even talk about pay.

Unlike Blair, ahead of the general election, Starmer's mantra is not 'Education, Education, Education', but 'fiscal responsibility'. In other words, definitely not addressing the needs of those thousands of striking education workers with huge investment in our education system. And definitely not a substantial fully funded pay rise for education workers.

And, unlike Blair, Starmer won't be coming into office after a five-year period of economic growth, but in the midst of a global capitalist crisis with British capitalism performing worse than its peers. There will be no 'honeymoon' of substance for Starmer's New Labour.

When previous Labour leader

Jeremy Corbyn addressed the NEU conference in 2019, he was given a very long standing ovation by educators when he outlined how his plans for a National Education Service would begin to address many of the issues facing schools, and repair the damage of years of Tory and New Labour attacks and cuts.

It wasn't perfect, but the manifesto offered real hope of a plan to begin to rebuild our public services, especially education, health and social care.

But Starmer has already sacked off nearly every commitment he made when he was elected leader in 2020, and is using every opportunity to try to demonstrate to the bosses that he will govern in their interests.

His latest, extremely wordy, policy statement on education offers very little substance and even less hope for educators. While Jeremy Corbyn pledged to get rid of Ofsted and replace it with a system that supports schools, Starmer's response is to tinker about with the wording of the gradings!

In fact, when Bridget Phillipson, Labour's shadow education minister, addressed the NEU conference in 2022, she was heckled, with many delegates walking out when she tried to defend Labour's plan to retain Ofsted.

The next period is crucial for education unions. We must start to prepare for the huge battles that we will inevitably face, including the possibility of education workers' strikes being hit by the Tories' new anti-union minimum service levels legislation.

The Socialist Party fights to arm the trade unions with a clear strategy of how we can win for members and for the working class. That includes addressing the chronic underfunding of education and a reduction of educators' workload; restoring proper levels of pay and ending the toxic culture of Ofsted once and for all; reducing class sizes to enable teachers to teach more effectively with a huge investment in school facilities; providing a supportive environment and training which will keep staff in the classroom and stop the haemorrhage of our skilled educators.

It also means fighting for a political voice for the working class, to challenge Tories and Labour acting in big-business interests.

Blair's New Labour claimed its priority was 'education, education, education', but when it came into office, the reality was shown to be 'privatisation, cuts and testing'.

'Was Blair's New Labour really good for public services? Absolutely not! And under a 'new' New Labour government led by Starmer, we are going to have to fight like hell to protect our services, jobs, pensions and communities. Linked to that is the need to fight for socialist change - so that rather than ever-larger sums of money going the way of the super-rich capitalists, instead it goes into meeting our needs and funding our services, including free, high-quality education for all.

● Jane is the President of Coventry Trades Union Council and served on the NUT Executive Committee between 2014-2018

# Plymouth climate protest

## Socialist nationalisation popular, but capitalist 'green' initiatives not



Socialist Party at the protest PLYMOUTH SOCIALIST PARTY

ALEX SAMPSON  
PLYMOUTH SOCIALIST PARTY

Socialist Party members joined a rally by Climate Action Plymouth, in coordination with other protests. Many attendees were keen to speak with us. Those who approached our Socialist Party campaign stall for more information about our solutions to the climate crisis unanimously agreed that the capitalist system has no interest in solving the crisis – there is profit to be made from the status quo, for example.

**Our call**  
Our call for a socialist approach to the climate crisis – nationalisation of electricity, gas, water, and transport companies, and strong investment in green initiatives – was seen as a welcome change to the usual solutions of barely punitive fines and weak regulation under capitalism.

Unfortunately, the turnout for the protest was relatively low for such an important issue. And, in contrast to the welcome we received from protesters, some members of the public were more apathetic and hostile to the march.

While this negativity could be disheartening, it is also understandable, within the context of the current debate. Hugely polluting companies, such as BP, are given multimillion-pound subsidies, and pay almost no UK tax, while making record profits. Meanwhile, ordinary workers are expected to pay the price for capitalist pollution and climate change, via 'ultra-low emission zone' (Ulez) traffic schemes.

**Class**  
It is imperative, therefore, for Socialist Party members to reframe discussion around climate change, as it is undoubtedly a class issue. It will continue to effect workers as temperatures rise to unsafe levels in communities and workplaces.

We must encourage workers to unite to create a socialist future. Only then will we have decent, safe working conditions, and a sustainably run planet for us all.



# Socialist Students at freshers – Tories and capitalism offer youth nothing

## Starmer tells Liverpool students 'free education is impossible'

Labour leader Keir Starmer was recently asked in a Q&A by a sixth-form student, presumably preparing to go to university in the near future, whether he would consider abolishing tuition fees or student loans. After all, this was one of Starmer's ten pledges, when he ran for Labour leader, therefore it is a rational question.

Starmer's response won't surprise you. "It is impossible", and "we cannot afford it". By 'we', Starmer is taking about the capitalist class, who quite enjoy the benefits of the marketisation of higher education.

The Conservative Party and the capitalist system offer nothing for young people. And Starmer is showing that Labour doesn't either.

It is worth remembering that it was the Labour government, under Tony Blair, who Starmer models his philosophy on, that first introduced tuition fees in 1997.

Students that get lower-paid jobs after attending university, can expect to be in debt until at least their mid-50s.

Socialist Students is building on our growth and success from last year. At the University of Liverpool, student walkouts and

'solidarity pickets' were important in supporting ongoing strike action by the University and College Union (UCU).

Our 'night bus' campaign has now been official adopted by the University of Liverpool guild (student union) – see 'Bus services under threat' at socialistparty.org.uk.

In both Socialist Students and the Socialist Party, we fight for free education and the rights of working-class students.

And at Socialist Students meetings, we'll also be discussing the revolutionary ideas of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky.

DEAN YOUNG AND CONOR O'NEILL

## Salford – loans barely scratch surface

After the historic strike wave, this year's freshers seemed more political than previous. A popular topic of conversation was maintenance loans, barely meeting the cost of rents, if at all.

Most students I spoke with were having to work alongside their studies. When I asked one if they think it will affect their university work, they responded: "I don't really have much choice".

I was impressed by the number of students who came up to our campaign stall that had an understanding of socialism already in their mind. This provided us with a great opportunity to speak about our programme and what we stand for.

Our next student meeting is on capitalism and the climate emergency, a subject highlighted by the students as something they care about.

SAM HEY

Salford Socialist Students meeting – Thursday 28 September, 5pm, The Old Pint Pot

## Dundee – defying undemocratic order, with support from workers

A big thank you to Unite the Union members at Dundee University for refusing to comply with requests to remove Socialist Students from campus during the freshers fair.

We were out campaigning in support of striking staff. But student union management tried to get us removed, and called security, after we refused on democratic grounds.

I know the security guard a bit from previous picket lines. I explained that we were leafletting students, trying to get them to support the strike, and join their staff on the picket lines, as well as encouraging young people to join Unite.

He told the student union management that he wasn't prepared to remove us from campus, telling other security guards to stand down. In the end, all we had to do was move our table slightly.

WANDO FRANK

## Coventry and Birmingham City – students want Tories out

At Coventry and Birmingham City universities, Socialist Students collected almost 100 names on lively stalls, meeting those who seek a socialist way forward. Students are worried about the loan repayment threshold being lowered, and that rent and living costs outstrip loans.

Students in insecure work, others living precariously one research grant to the next, and lecturers in the University and College Union (UCU) all signed the petitions on our stall. They all commented on the 'race to the bottom' that had chased them since starting work as young teenagers.

One student agreed that working while studying impacts on results in the short term, and long-term life quality. Another student said that he was concerned about the devaluing of degrees through student debt, that he and many others had considered dropping out, or taking apprenticeships instead.

Socialist Students campaign stalls and meetings are just some of the things we do. We're building Socialist Students groups on campuses. And going down to support striking workers on picket lines too.

Students want the Tories out. But many have no faith in the pro-austerity Labour Party, having already reneged on its commitments on free education and climate action.

Many students feel drained from poor-quality privatised education, and are seething from the audacity of board members raking in salaries of over £200,000, while students suffer black-mould accommodation. And their teachers are not much better off.

In Birmingham, the Labour council has been declared bankrupt after spending years trying to break workers' strikes and cut local services. We say students and workers should link up to coordinate action against the bosses.

MAX MCGEE



Coventry

## Birmingham City – weight of uni fees and lack of housing

We worked hard to put the word out about Socialist Students. 71 students expressed their interest in Socialist Students across the week, with 14 people coming to our first meetings.

Common grievances discussed at our campaign stalls included the exponential weight of university fees, the availability of student housing, or rather lack of it, and worries about lack of security and agency in future workplaces.

A dozen students left their contact details to find out more about Socialist Students, before it started raining. While more students took our leaflets, asked us to explain what we mean by socialism, or how we can drive all the Tories from power – blue and red. And a Socialist Students supporter, who'd helped on the campaign stall, joined the Socialist Party afterwards.

IAIN DALTON

strengthening the fight against exploitation by the vicious market that education has been allowed to become.

U'SEMU MAKAYA

## Leeds Met – how can we drive Tories out?

A dozen students left their contact details to find out more about Socialist Students, before it started raining. While more students took our leaflets, asked us to explain what we mean by socialism, or how we can drive all the Tories from power – blue and red. And a Socialist Students supporter, who'd helped on the campaign stall, joined the Socialist Party afterwards.

IAIN DALTON

Get involved, visit socialiststudents.org.uk



The magazine of Socialist Students

It doesn't have to be like this - we need a socialist world

Available at socialiststudents.org.uk

and at freshers' fairs - £2

# Northampton youth – despair is turning into anger and action

BEN EDGE  
NORTHAMPTON SOCIALIST PARTY

The cost-of-living crisis is taking its toll on us all. Young people are among some of the worst affected.

As capitalism slumps further into its perennial crisis, prospects are bleak for many young workers. We face a future of insecure employment, unaffordable housing, deteriorating public services, and an education system that increasingly only the rich can access.

The situation is dire. But in Northampton, as in many towns and cities across the country, the Socialist Party is fighting back. Members and supporters are taking to the streets, holding regular Young Socialist stalls in the town centre.

Our demands are key: more jobs, decent pay, free education, and affordable housing.

The mood in this deindustrialised Midlands town is mixed. Over a decade of austerity has left many workers feeling isolated and hopeless. But the gains of the recent strike wave bring us hope.

Every Saturday, we speak to young workers. Some are students, juggling education with gig-economy jobs to get by.

Others work precarious jobs in the public sector, and have recently joined the trade union movement for the first time. We also see plenty of interest from parents and other family members, worried about the future that awaits their children and loved ones.

Slowly but surely, people's despair at the cost of living is turning into anger at the ruling class. And for growing numbers of young workers, that anger is turning into action.



## WHAT WE STAND FOR

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

The Socialist Party organises working-class people to fight against the attacks from this rotten system on our lives and livelihoods, and for a socialist alternative: a society which takes the

wealth out of the hands of the super-rich and is democratically run by working-class people to meet the needs of all not the profits of a few.

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

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



across the world. Our demands include:

### WORK, PENSIONS AND BENEFITS

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

where genuinely needed, for socially-useful small businesses.

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

### PUBLIC SERVICES

- A massive expansion of public services including the NHS and council services. Reverse all the cuts, kick out the privateers. Bring private social care and childcare facilities into public ownership under democratic control, in order to provide free, high-quality services for all who need them. Expand services for all women suffering violence.
- For local councillors who are committed to opposing austerity and

all cuts to local services, jobs, pay and conditions.

- For a socialist NHS to provide for everyone's health needs, including dental and eye care – free at the point of use and under democratic control. Kick out the private companies! Nationalise the pharmaceutical industry under democratic workers' control and management.
- Renationalise privatised utilities – including rail, mail, water, telecoms and power – under democratic workers' control and management.
- Free, publicly funded and democratically run, good-quality education, available to all at any age. Abolish university tuition fees and write off student debt, end marketisation, and introduce a living grant. No to academisation. For all schools to be under the genuine democratic control of local education authorities, school staff, parents and student organisations.
- The right to a safe secure home for all. For the mass building of genuinely affordable, high-quality, carbon-neutral council housing. For rent controls that cap

the level of rent. Fair rent decisions should be made by elected bodies of tenants, housing workers and representatives of trade unions. For cheap low-interest mortgages for home buyers. Nationalise the privately owned large building companies, land banks and estates.

### ENVIRONMENT

- Prioritising major research and investment into replacing fossil fuels and nuclear power with renewable energy, and ending the problems of early obsolescence – where products are designed to 'wear out' and be replaced – and unrecycled waste.
- Nationalisation of the energy companies, under democratic workers' control and management, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need, in order to carry out a major switch to clean, green energy, without any loss of jobs, pay or conditions.
- A democratically planned, massively expanded, free to use, publicly owned transport system, as part of an overall plan against environmental pollution.
- For a major, publicly funded,

insulation and energy transition plan for existing housing stock.

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

### DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

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

- For the right to asylum – with democratic community control and oversight of emergency funding resources. No to racist immigration laws.
- Expand democracy. For the abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords. For all MPs to be subject to the right of recall by their constituents at any time, and to only receive a worker's wage. For proportional representation and the right to vote at 16.
- For the right of nations to self-determination. For an independent socialist Scotland and for a socialist Wales, both part of a voluntary socialist confederation of Wales, England, Scotland and Ireland.
- Oppose the dictatorship of the billionaire owners of the media. For the nationalisation of newspaper printing facilities, radio, TV and social media platforms. Access to these facilities should be under democratic control, with political parties' coverage being allocated in proportion to the popular vote at elections.
- For a new mass workers' party, based on the trade unions, and drawing together workers, young people

and activists from workplaces, and community, environmental, anti-racist and anti-cuts campaigns, to provide a fighting, socialist political alternative to the pro-big business parties.

### SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

- No to imperialist wars and occupations!
- Take the wealth off the super-rich! For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and the banking system that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working-class control and

Do you agree? Join the fightback!

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- or text your name and postcode to 07761 818 206 to find out more today!



# Scottish TUSC stands socialist trade unionist in by-election



Chris (centre) on the campaign trail PHOTO: SCOTTISH TUSC

The candidates have been officially confirmed for the Rutherglen and Hamilton West UK parliamentary by-election being held on 5 October. Against the backdrop of a continuing trade union fightback against the cost-of-living crisis, the Scottish Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is standing local union leader and member of Socialist Party Scotland Chris Sermanni.

Although a new offer has now been tabled by the employers, the present situation is that more than three-quarters of Scotland's schools will face closure just a week before the by-election, as over 21,000 members of Unison plan strike action over three days from 26-28 September. In a separate dispute, Unison members at South Lanarkshire and City of Glasgow Colleges will be taking part in rolling strike action during the by-election period.

When Unison members in 24 council areas in Scotland voted in favour of strike action, Chris said:

"The vote by Unison members in schools and early years in council areas across Scotland are phenomenal. Twenty-four of the 32 council areas have exceeded the Tory anti-union thresholds, with most showing over 90% of members voting to strike for a decent pay rise. They are joining members of GMB and Unite who have also strike mandates in ten council areas each.

"This sends a clear and

unequivocal message to our employers that they had better increase their unacceptable pay offer or face strike action in schools in two-thirds of Scottish councils.

"As a council worker myself, I congratulate South Lanarkshire Unison members on their determination to fight for pay justice. Whenever action is called, Scottish TUSC will be on the picket lines supporting council workers".

## A voice of workers' protest

Chris Sermanni, a resident of Cambuslang, in the Rutherglen and Hamilton West constituency, is also a Unison shop stewards convenor at Glasgow City Council. He is ideally placed to be the voice of workers' protest in the by-election contest against the establishment parties: from the SNP and their allies in the Scottish government, the Scottish Greens, to the Tories, Lib Dems and Scottish Labour.

- Donations to Chris Sermanni's campaign can be made via the TUSC website at [tusc.org.uk/donations/by-election](https://tusc.org.uk/donations/by-election)

- To read about attempts to stand a single socialist candidate visit [tusc.org.uk](https://tusc.org.uk)

- To read in his own words why Chris is standing, see 'Support the trade union and socialist candidate in Rutherglen and Hamilton West' on [socialistpartyscotland.org.uk](https://socialistpartyscotland.org.uk)

## Why I joined the Socialist Party

# Corbyn's defeat made me look for alternatives

DARA FITZGERALD  
WEST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

I never understood wealth. The family I grew up in weren't in poverty, but not exactly loaded either.

After leaving school, I had no designs on amassing wealth. As long as I could live a comfortable life, and go to the pub now and again, I was content.

After being on the dole a few years, I went back to university. Towards the end of that, Jeremy Corbyn was elected leader of the Labour Party.

After years of a mostly indifferent view of politics, here was someone who was speaking in plain terms about the inequality in society. He was also putting forward a programme to help make this happen.

No more foreign military intervention! No to austerity! Where do I sign up?!

Sign up I did in 2017, after following the fortunes of the Labour Party since his election. But while I was optimistic about the chance to win an election and affect change, I wasn't oblivious to the pushback within and without the party, of which there were legion.

The Parliamentary Labour Party was dead set against him from the start, organising mass resignations

and a leadership challenge. The mainstream press savaged him relentlessly. And a serving army general remarked that the armed forces would "mutiny" if Corbyn enacted some of the changes he had mentioned.

Even through this, Labour under Corbyn managed to gain seats in the 2017 election! In a way, though, this was the beginning of the end, as now the backlash went into high gear.

This allowed Boris Johnson, who the capitalist press treated with kid gloves, to reach 10 Downing Street. Corbyn wasn't decisive enough to deal with the right-wing Blairites sabotaging his leadership, including his successor Keir Starmer.

Demoralised after the 2019 election defeat, and having lost my faith in permanent change through solely parliamentary methods, I started looking for alternatives. Time at home during the Covid pandemic meant time for reading, and I began my journey to Marxism.

A friend of mine had a similar political arc, and found the Socialist Party website after some googling. I read the Socialist Party's 'What we stand for' section (see [socialistparty.org.uk](https://socialistparty.org.uk)), and agreed with it broadly.

So I eventually turned up at the

West London Socialist Party branch meeting, and joined straight after. I was hugely impressed by the regular political discussion, the filtering down of the goals into weekly tasks, and the requirement for internal and external democracy, in opposition to both capitalist free-market 'democracy', and Stalinist top-down bureaucracy.

A year on, and being in the Socialist Party has given me renewed hope in the creation of a better society, and a worldwide socialist revolution. That way we can get to the root of climate change, poverty, racism, sexism, transphobia, and other blights on our society and the world to truly liberate people to fulfil their true potential.

Join the fightback  
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to find out more today!



Dara (left) PHOTO: MARK BEST



**Campaigning against council cuts and tax hikes in Birmingham**

# Birmingham unions protest Labour council cuts and job losses



**Trade union lobby of Birmingham council** PHOTO: BRUM SP

## Welsh Socialist Party branches determined to hit fighting fund target

**ROGER BUTLER**  
SWANSEA AND WEST WALES SOCIALIST PARTY

Socialist Party members in Wales are doing all we can to hit our 'fighting fund' target, to fund the important work of the party. Even in the wind and rain, earlier in the summer on a Socialist Party campaign stall in Swansea city centre, people donated £35 to support our campaign to defend the NHS.

The next day our car boot sale raised £250. Our policy of keeping prices low to sell more items certainly bore fruit.

When it was announced that 3,000 jobs could go at Tata Steel in Port Talbot, our Socialist Party branch responded promptly with a leaflet calling for the nationalisation of Tata Steel (see page 4). From our campaign stall in Port Talbot town centre, 50 people bought a copy of the Socialist, and another £40 was donated to our fighting fund.

We are also backing the union campaign to defend jobs and steelmaking.

We have continued our fundraising through selling books at meetings, and selling badges too. The combined efforts have set us on course to pass our £875 target just in Swansea and West Wales.

The Socialist Party in south east Wales set up a Rugby World Cup sweepstake, and inspired us to do the same.

Caerphilly Socialist Party members say the generous support of people in the Valleys meant that almost all of the branch's fighting fund was raised through campaigning stalls. This was supplemented by contributions at big events and other donations too.

Meanwhile, alongside campaign stalls, Cardiff Socialist Party members have been selling unwanted clothes on the Vinted app. And they also have plans for a cake sale and a pub quiz.

Help fund the fightback  
**DONATE**  
socialistparty.org.uk/donate

**CLIVE WALDER**  
BIRMINGHAM SOUTH SOCIALIST PARTY

**50** angry members of Unison, Unite and GMB – the trade unions representing council workers – demonstrated outside a meeting of Birmingham City Council on 12 September. They sent a loud and clear message that they won't pay for the council's mismanagement with their jobs or working conditions.

The council is blaming accumulated equal pay claims for women workers for the financial shortfall, which led to the council declaring itself bankrupt. They fail to mention the £200 million it spent on the 2022 Commonwealth Games, the £100 million wasted on an IT system they were told wouldn't work, or the major reason – the Tory government's brutal austerity.

The council is desperately trying to persuade workers to apply for redundancy, rather than use any of the council's £688 million reserves, or their borrowing powers, to make no cuts and buy time to campaign to demand the funding from central government.

The council is refusing to share the detail of its 'mutually-agreed resignation scheme', effectively redundancy on the cheap, with the unions. So it's a fair bet that it's not a good offer!

Mandy Buckley, Unison senior steward, helped to lead the victorious homecare workers strike. She spoke at the protest:

"It's time for us to stand together, and stand up to this council, and show them up for what they really are. We are working-class people, who strive and give this city everything, every day of our lives. We are not going to take any more rubbish, and we are going to stop them in their tracks."

The right-wing Labour council has proved that workers can't rely on it to protect them from Tory austerity. We need a working-class political alternative, alongside union action.

Socialist Party members are campaigning against any further cuts or redundancies. **We are holding a public meeting to discuss how support can be built for the council workers' campaign.**

**Monday 2 October, 7.30pm, top floor of The Wellington, Bennett's Hill, Birmingham city centre B2 5SN**

## Tory Gove appoints cuts commissioners

Cabinet minister responsible for local government, Michael Gove, has appointed commissioners to oversee the running of Birmingham City Council.

You can read a statement about this by Birmingham Socialist Party members at [birminghamsocialist-party.wordpress.com](http://birminghamsocialist-party.wordpress.com)

And go to [socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk) to read:

- 'Birmingham City Council financial crisis – fight needed against cuts'
- 'Council 'bankruptcy' crisis: Take the Liverpool road, make no cuts'
- 'Home carers victory' for more about the successful strike

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AREA	£ RECEIVED	£ TARGET	Q3: JULY-SEPTEMBER 2023	DEADLINE: 30 SEPTEMBER 2023
South West	2,354	2,100		112%
Southern & SE	2,617	2,400		109%
Eastern	1,053	1,300		81%
Wales	1,804	2,400		75%
East Midlands	1,314	2,050		64%
Northern	489	800		61%
North West	717	1,200		61%
London	2,899	5,000		58%
Yorkshire	1,163	2,650		44%
West Midlands	1,123	2,700		42%
Other	832	2,400	35%	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>16,366</b>	<b>25,000</b>		<b>65%</b>



**Campaigning in Guildford for a £15-an-hour minimum wage**

## Derbyshire on the verge of 'bankruptcy'

**CHESTERFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY**

Hardly a week goes by without another council announcing dire financial straits or looming 'bankruptcy'. Thurrock, Woking, Peterborough, Croydon, Slough, Guildford and Hastings have hit the headlines in recent months. The county council covering the highest number of inhabitants – Kent – has also declared major difficulties.

Birmingham City Council's declaration of "effective bankruptcy", by issuing a Section 114 notice, rocked the local government world because of the scale of the deficit and the size of the council. Now, the second-largest council employer in England, Derbyshire County Council, has announced a £46 million budget black hole, despite making £300 million 'savings' in the past 13 years, and

£63 million more planned over the next five. For savings, read 'cuts in services!'

The common theme is the councils don't lay the blame where it's due – on the national Tory government for cutting funding in the first place, then local councillors for not launching campaigns to win the money back. Birmingham's Labour-led authority blamed the primarily women workers demanding equal pay. Derbyshire's Tories say "inflationary and demand pressures, particularly in adults and children's social care" are the fault.

Recently, the Tory leadership implemented a huge 40% increase in the price of school meals in Derbyshire primary schools, showing the poorest in society get hit first and hardest. There are mounting grievances against sub-standard bus services,

which the council subsidises, from social care workers in independent sector employers about wages, which rely on county council funding, and from its own 30,000+ council workers because they refused to implement the 2022 national pay deal in full.

As elsewhere, people in Derbyshire are crying out for councillors who will fight for them, not kowtow to every cut demanded by Sunak's government. For the past fifteen years, political control has bounced back and forth from Labour to Conservative with minimal change. We don't want just another round of deckchair shuffling on the Titanic. Socialist Party members and others are planning a campaign under the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) banner to provide a real alternative for the people of Derbyshire in the 2025 local elections.

# Interview: Fighting the Chilean dictatorship after 1973

During this summer's Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) event in Berlin, we spoke to **Hugo Rodríguez**, a member of Socialismo Revolucionario (previously Workers' Democracy), the Chilean section of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) about the struggle against the Pinochet dictatorship which followed the 1973 coup, and his activities as a member of the CWI through that period. For more on Chile in 1973 and of what Hugo had to say, see [socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk) and [socialistworld.net](http://socialistworld.net)

## CAN YOU GIVE AN OVERVIEW OF WHAT BROUGHT YOU INTO POLITICAL ACTIVITY, AND INTO THE CWI, AND AT WHAT STAGE OF THE REVOLUTIONARY AND COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARY EVENTS WAS THIS?

My introduction to politics was in the 1980s. I was young and my family was always sympathetic to Salvador Allende. A friend who was the leader of my sports club invited me to participate. He said: "They're rebuilding the Socialist Party, would you like to join?" We're talking about the years when the government was a full dictatorship with secret police and the party was underground; the truth is it seemed like an adventure. Basically the first thing I thought was: 'Oh, I'm going to be in dangerous things'. And I began to help with meetings with people who had been militants in the Socialist Party and rebuilding.

A year or so later, I met someone who belonged to Workers' Democracy which was the original section of the CWI in Chile. We discussed and I read documents, and within a month I belonged to the CWI.

## YOU CAME INTO POLITICAL ACTIVITY DURING THE PERIOD OF MILITARY DICTATORSHIP, WHAT WERE THE POLITICAL TASKS THAT YOU FACED?

At that time the technology didn't exist for the internet, for cell phones, neither did we have phones in our houses. The first task was basically to secure a place to meet. I started to help with branch meetings. One of the important things we did during that time was to create a youth group to do political activity, discuss politics, but because it was dangerous and the place that we found to meet was managed by people

who belonged to the dictatorship. The place where we met was like a community centre with a stage and we pretended to meet for cultural reasons.

We also produced a newspaper. The truth is it was a very DIY newspaper, done by hand. We made the first ones without even a typewriter, but handwritten. We used a stencil.

## CAN YOU EXPLAIN THE MAIN FEATURES OF THE STRUGGLE TO END THE DICTATORSHIP. HOW DID THE CWI ORGANISE AND WHAT WERE YOU CALLING FOR?

The first protests began in the early 1980s. The repression had kind of decreased, there were small opportunities, very small opportunities. But it began with the first call for national protests which arose from the copper industry workers. We as the CWI

supported the protests with slogans like "No mas altas los precios de los alimentos" ("No to higher food prices") and "Liberty", "Democracy".

It was a complicated year because people continued to die each time protests were called. We participated in the protests and mobilisations, but our emphasis was political education. Throughout the 80s, the class struggle was intensifying. By the late 80s, it was a massive movement.

A plebiscite was called to ask the people if we wanted eight more years of the Pinochet dictatorship or if we wanted elections to elect a new president. We called for a no vote and no campaign, saying that we do not want the dictatorship to continue. This campaign mobilised over a million people in Santiago.

We, the CWI, called for a no vote and for workers to defend the vote against the dictatorship in the streets, calling for strikes. After the plebiscite, the dictatorship continued along for two more years until the presidential elections when it was definitively ended.

After the dictatorship, we simply had an 'elected' president, from the Christian Democratic Party, but the dictator continued to have a position in Congress as a senator. The constitution of the dictatorship was left in place.

● Read also 'New Chilean constitution rejected - but a new social revolt is brewing' at [socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk)

## Harlow Council erases memory of Salvador Allende

11 September was the 50th anniversary of the death of President Salvador Allende in a military coup in Chile. Until last year that was commemorated in Harlow by the addition of Allende's name to Fifth Avenue.

The military coup that overthrew the democratically elected socialist government of Salvador Allende brought to power the regime of General Pinochet, which was responsible for murdering 3,000 political opponents, torturing 40,000, and forcing 200,000 people into exile.

Last year, a meeting of Harlow District Council decided to remove the name of Allende from Fifth Avenue. The chair of the meeting stated: "I am not hearing any voices of dissent", and thus there was no formal vote on this piece of historical denialism.

The Conservative majority on Harlow Council wanted the memory of Allende to be 'disappeared' like the corpses of the trades unionists buried in the Atacama Desert by the Chilean armed forces, and the 'opposition' Labour councillors on Harlow Council did not oppose their motion.

The predominant trend in the modern Conservative Party likes the fact that Pinochet pioneered the neoliberal monetarist policies that Thatcher adopted. It was only under the iron heel of military rule that such policies could be fully applied.

Infant mortality in Chile had reduced significantly during Allende's presidency, but it increased by 18% during the first year of the military government.

The economy of Chile contracted by an unprecedented 12.9% in one year and the annual rate of inflation topped 500%.

Before the coup, unemployment in Chile was 3.1%, one of the lowest in the western hemisphere. By July 1976 approximately a quarter of the population had no income at all, and depended on food and clothing distributed by humanitarian organisations.

It was estimated that by the end of 1975, the real income of the poorest urban workers had declined to one-third of what it was in 1972.

It is a disgrace that Harlow's Labour councillors aligned themselves with the local Thatcherite right-wing of the Conservative Party last year, as it spat on the memory of those who suffered under 17 years of Pinochet's brutal rule.

JOHN WAKE  
MEMBER, HARLOW CONSTITUENCY LABOUR PARTY

## SOCIALISM the podcast

Episode 126: Chile 50 years on - socialism is possible but heroism is not enough

The Marxist podcast from the Socialist Party

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[socialistparty.org.uk/podcast](http://socialistparty.org.uk/podcast)



## Libyan floods: An avoidable catastrophe

SCOTT JONES

"I have lived through two civil wars and a revolution. I work in a hospital, I see people die from the armed conflicts but nothing like this. This is overwhelming." This is how one doctor working in Benghazi described the devastating floods in Libya on BBC Radio.

The death toll could hit a horrifying 20,000. The official total is already over 10,000, with at least the same again believed missing or dead as the sea 'constantly dumps' bodies.

The epicentre is the eastern port city of Derna, swathes of which were wiped out by a gigantic flood, unleashed after rains from a large storm burst dams above the city on the night of the 10 September. Most were asleep as buildings were simply swept away.

Since the Western-backed overthrow of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, Derna, like much of the North African country, has been fought over relentlessly, changing hands between warlords, Islamic jihadis and the government. It is now under the de facto military rule of Khalifa Haftar.

Floods here, even given the increasing ferocity of climate change-induced weather, are not unprecedented. Disastrous floods hit in 1945 and 1986 for example. Libyan academics warned only last year that the area "has a high potential for flood risk. Therefore, dams of Wadi Derna basin needed periodic maintenance."

Combine this with a refusal from authorities to a request to evacuate ahead of the latest storm - the same authorities which have not carried out maintenance work on the dams - it's clear that this catastrophe could have been mitigated against or avoided altogether.

The headline of Patrick Coburn's column in the 'i' newspaper labelled this "a man-made disaster enabled

by gangster governments". And he is right. The military intervention of France and Britain backed by the US, that overthrew Gaddafi in 2011, effectively cut across any development of a movement by the Libyan working people to establish their control over the country. This imperialist intervention has led to chaos and war in the country, with oil wealth looted and terrorist and criminal organisations in control of different parts of the state and the nation. A result has been Libya's effective break-up back into fundamentally the three regions which Mussolini forcibly amalgamated into one colony in 1934. Now the chaos and lack of infrastructure damaged by war and now flooding will make recovery and the distribution of aid difficult.

## Socialism

In the Socialist in 2021, marking ten years after the overthrow and invasion, we wrote: "Only through self-organisation can workers and poor people take control of their own lives. This means building independent workers' organisations and a party with a socialist programme - including calls for international solidarity - that can actually deliver on their aspirations." Libyan revolutionaries themselves at the time put up posters saying: "No to foreign intervention - Libyans can do it by themselves".

The Arab Spring which swept across North Africa and the Middle East in the early 2010s, like other uprisings and movements since, shows that this is possible and more needed than ever to chart a way out of the capitalist and imperialist barbarism of war, poverty, and climate chaos. Only with independent working-class parties with a socialist programme, nationalising the oil wealth of Libya, can this be achieved.

● Read 'Libya - ten years after Gaddafi's overthrow' for more

# Car workers strike in US-wide dispute

INDEPENDENT SOCIALIST GROUP (CWI CO-THINKERS IN THE US) MEMBERS

On 15 September, members of the Independent Socialist Group (ISG) joined with United Auto Workers (UAW) members and other supporters at a practice picket in Mansfield, MA, to show support for a strike.

Following the expiration of their contracts the night before, 13,000 UAW members at assembly plants in Michigan, Missouri, and Ohio who work at the 'Big 3' auto companies (General Motors, Ford, Stellantis) walked out.

A UAW shop steward at the picket spoke with ISG members about how workers have been "getting the short end of the stick for decades while the company makes money hand over fist."

UAW members have taken concessionary contracts for years, while the Big 3 car manufacturers have raked in \$250 billion in the last decade. The two corporate political parties, Democrat and Republican, handed out massive bailouts and loans to the big car companies, including \$80 billion in bailouts in 2008-09 from both the Bush and Obama administrations, and \$9 billion in June from the Biden administration for building non-unionised electric vehicle battery plants in Kentucky and Tennessee.

In the past year, the CEOs of the Big 3 have refused to invest billions in production, choosing to dole out \$5 billion to rich shareholders through stock buybacks instead. In the first six months of 2023, the Big 3 also

reported profits of \$21 billion. This doesn't stop the corporate media from echoing the propaganda of the CEOs when they label the UAW wage demands as "unrealistic."

Union auto workers' demands include a 36% wage increase over four years, a 32-hour work week with no reduction in pay, the elimination of the two-tier wage system where new hires receive less in pay and benefits, a progression of 90 days - not eight years - to reach the top of the wage scale (\$32 an hour), and the restoration of cost-of-living adjustments, which the union lost in 2009. The UAW also wants increased profit-sharing for workers, the right to strike over plant closures, and guaranteed full-time benefited positions for temporary workers after 90 days.

Since the start of the strike on 15 September, Ford has laid off 600 workers in Wayne, Michigan, and General Motors is threatening to lay off 2,000 workers in Kansas City.

Workers whose plants have not been called out on strike report being afraid of a 'reign of terror' from management looking to get revenge for the strike with increased harassment of workers, discipline, forced overtime, speed-ups, and lockouts.

UAW President Shawn Fain said during an online announcement: "We fight not only for the good of our union or for the good of our members and our families. We fight for the good of the entire working class and the poor."

As the union continues to bargain, ISG calls on the labour movement to unify and lead in organising active solidarity with the UAW in its battle

against some of the world's largest and most powerful companies. Unions need to rediscover organising actions like solidarity strikes in support of other unions like the UAW. The UAW leadership calls its tactic of limiting the strike to only three factories a 'Stand Up Strike'. Not only does the strike need to be extended to all the companies' facilities, but the UAW and other unions need to bring back the 'Sit-Down Strike' - the workplace occupations through which the UAW and other unions were built during the biggest upsurge of U.S. labor from 1936-38. Workplace occupations could stop lockouts, stop scabs, and stop a war of attrition by the corporations.

The UAW and other unions should also form solidarity committees to organise non-union workers and pro-strike community and political organisations to support the strike actively. Solidarity committees could bring additional supporters to mass pickets and rallies, raise money for strikers and their families, and help defend workplace occupations. Solidarity committees could also form the basis for future union organising at non-union workplaces, including at the big car plants and companies that aren't unionised.

ISG stands in solidarity with the UAW strikers and calls for all working people to support the strike. UAW workers winning their demands will build on the growing popularity of unions, bring union organising more energy, and help improve living standards for the working class.

● This strike comes just months after railroad and UPS workers came within a whisker of national strikes. UAW leader Shawn Fain is the first president directly elected by members. His election reflects a process, reflected in other unions too, of workers seeking democratic fighting union leaderships. Read more: 'US: fissures prepare eruption of political crisis and working-class struggle' at [socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk)



ISG members stand in solidarity with auto workers PHOTO: ISG

## SOCIALISM TODAY

Monthly magazine of the Socialist Party

September issue includes...

● Socialism is possible but heroism is not enough - the tragedy of Chile 1973

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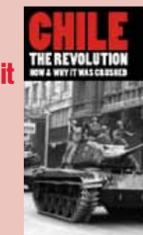
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Women from the Group of Missing Relatives demonstrate in front of the government palace during the Pinochet military regime PHOTO: KENA LORENZINI/CC



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# the Socialist

Issue 1243

21-27 September 2023

formerly **Militant**

# STUDENTS: JOIN THE FIGHT FOR SOCIALIST CHANGE!

**SCOTT HUNTER**  
SWINDON SOCIALIST PARTY

**P**rices going up, wages staying the same, public services gutted, and, behind these, the spectre of climate change and war. As we've grown up, we've seen living conditions driven down and the world descend further into crisis.

University education, once a path to a better life, is now a grim necessity for many to even start a career. Overcrowded classes, dilapidated accommodation, rents we can't afford, and tens of thousands in debt, knowing that whatever job you get after graduation, the wages will be worth less than they were when you started the course!

No wonder the majority of young people in Britain say they want to

live in a socialist system. More than 75% of under-35s agree that climate change is a specifically capitalist problem; that capitalism is to blame for Britain's housing crisis; they support the renationalisation of energy, water, and railways; and want the private sector out of the NHS, according to capitalist thinktank the Institute of Economic Affairs.

So what do we do? The Jeremy Corbyn experience showed the hard limits of trying to reform the system. His soft approach was met with a hard and immediate pushback from the capitalist class, who utilised all the weapons at their disposal - including within the Labour Party - to keep him and his policies out of Downing Street.

Do we need to be even softer next time, to avoid angering the capitalists? No! We should learn

the lessons from the left-wing Allende government in Chile - overthrown in a bloody coup 50 years ago this month (see 'Chile coup 50 years on' at [socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk)) - that the capitalist class will never compromise when their control of society and the economy is on the line. They will destroy anything and everything - the economy, the country, our lives and even our planet - whatever it takes for them to keep their hands on their wealth.

### Scale of capitalist crisis

That is the scale of the crisis of capitalism now before us, and the urgency of the battles working class and youth must fight - in Britain and throughout the world.

This means that we need a strong trade union movement - to fight for our immediate livelihoods and

conditions in the workplaces. The strike wave of the past year has shown the way, forcing the bosses to give concessions.

We also need a militant and organised student movement to fight alongside the trade unions for fully funded free education for all, with guaranteed, well-paid jobs at the end, whatever your level of qualification.

Those movements would be strengthened further by a mass party of workers and youth, fighting in our interests in parliament, and in our communities and workplaces.

Above all, we need those young people, workers and students, who see the need for the socialist transformation of society, to join the Socialist Party. Fight with us to win these movements to a socialist programme - to take the vast wealth,

big businesses and the banks into democratic public ownership, with no compensation for the fat cats, so things can be run to meet the needs of all, not for profit.

We can have a socialist future - a future without poverty, exploitation, injustice, and war. Join us in that fight.

**Join the fightback**

**JOIN THE SOCIALISTS**

- Visit [socialistparty.org.uk/join](http://socialistparty.org.uk/join)
- or call **020 8988 8777**
- or text your name and postcode to **07761 818 206**

to find out more today!



WHAT WE STAND FOR: THE SOCIALIST PARTY'S MAIN DEMANDS >>> see column on page 12



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