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the Socialist

Issue 1242

14-20 September 2023

formerly **Militant**

NHS real-terms pay cuts not 'accepted'

SAVE OUR NHS BACK THE STRIKES!

Tatyana Sarnecki, a doctor at the Royal London Hospital in Whitechapel, east London, says: "The NHS is crumbling in front of our eyes."

"And added to that pressure, doctors are affected by the cost-of-living crisis as well.

"The demand is simple. Pay us enough, so we can at least stay afloat, so we can give all we have to the NHS.

"We're more militant than before, we're more angry. Because people who know nothing about what we're going through are making the decisions, and are belittling us and treating us like children.

"Our demands are clear and they are possible. They can increase the budget without affecting working-class or middle-class people. The money is there, but the current government is refusing to do it because it goes against their ideals."

Junior doctors and consultants in the BMA are striking together for the first time on Wednesday 20 September. On 13 September, workers at four London NHS trusts in Unite the

Union will strike over fair pay and dangerous understaffing. Action will also take place on 14 September, and from 16-22 at Barts health trust (see page 7).

The fight for fully funded fair pay and decent services in the NHS is not over. The Tories' real-terms pay cut has not been 'accepted'. Of those who voted in the June strike ballot, 84% of Royal College of Nursing members voted to continue striking - stopped from doing so by the Tories' undemocratic anti-union laws.

The hated Tories are on their way out. Our NHS needs serious funds and an immediate end to privatisation sucking it dry - that is not on offer from 'fiscally responsible' pro-privatisation Labour. That's why the Socialist Party is fighting for a trade union-backed workers' list of candidates to contest the general election, as a step forward in the development of a new mass workers' party.

• *Consultants will also take strike action on 19 September, and junior doctors on 21 and 22. Unless a deal is made, both sets of workers will strike together again on 2,3 and 4 October.*



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

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

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The Socialist is the weekly newspaper of the Socialist Party, the England and Wales section of the Committee for a Workers' International socialistparty.org.uk socialistworld.net



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ISSN 1366-9621

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

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

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

Birmingham city council financial crisis- fight needed against cuts

A BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL WORKER

Birmingham City Council's state of "effective bankruptcy" hit the headlines this week, issuing a Section 114 notice on 5 September halting all new expenditure. On the surface, the financial 'black hole' comes primarily from a £750 million equal pay claim. Naturally, the council has been quick to pass the blame onto the primarily women workers who have fought for equal pay with male-dominated roles. However, these issues have been long in the making and could have been avoided - and certainly aren't the fault of workers in male-dominated roles such as the bin service, who have seen their pay and working practices come under attack by the Blairite council in recent years!

Equal pay claims have been an ongoing issue for the Labour-led council, with a total of £1.1 billion being paid out over the last decade. However, the council made it clear that their plan was to cover up the issues as quickly as possible when they arose to prevent further claims being made. In other words, the council knew other workers were being underpaid but would rather brush the issue under the carpet!

The further £100 million bill to fix a failing IT system, Oracle, could also have been avoided by listening to trade unions and frontline workers when they raised concerns about the new system. Yet, this value does not capture the true cost of the failed system as countless hours of staff labour time have been lost fighting to complete basic payments and recruitment tasks. And that's not to mention the £184m spent on the Commonwealth Games, while community sport and culture have been cut to the bone!

This crisis is also a result of a



Birmingham Council House PHOTO: ELLIOT BROWN/CC

decade of underfunding. Since 2010, Birmingham's funding from central government has been cut in half! When the Labour Party took control of the council in 2012, they could have set a no-cuts budget and started a mass campaign to demand more funding - much like the Liverpool Council in the 1980s under the leadership of Militant (the Socialist Party's predecessor). Instead, they implemented the Tory-imposed cuts at the expense of their residents.

Now Birmingham's residents, already living in one of England's most deprived cities, will face further cuts and potentially council tax rises, as the council announces a freeze on all payments it deems "unessential". Instead of demanding support from central government, council workers receive near-daily emails begging them to resign as part of the council's 'Mutually Agreed Resignation Scheme'. The council has so far refused to share the details of this settlement with unions, so it's fair to say it will likely be a rotten deal!

We need a mass campaign involving unions and community organisations to fight back against cuts to frontline services, to pay workers fairly, and to stop our city being run by unelected commissioners. The council still had £668.4m in reserves as of March this year, and extensive borrowing powers that could be used to buy time while fighting for the funding our city needs. Starmer is expecting to win the general election, and we demand he pledges now that an incoming Labour government will reimburse all councils that have had to use borrowing powers to prevent cuts to jobs and services.

This crisis has come from a council with a Labour super-majority. Therefore, it's clearer than ever that working-class people need a party of our own.

This is why Socialist Party members will continue to stand in elections as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition. We want to work with all genuine working-class forces to build the fightback against austerity in Birmingham, including standing as an alternative at the ballot box to capitalist parties that put profits before workers!

Unite Executive discusses Birmingham



PHOTO: PAUL MATTSOON

SUZANNE MUNA UNITE SOUTH WEST EC MEMBER

The Unite Executive Council (EC) met just days after the announcement was received that Birmingham City Council, one of the biggest in Europe, was declaring itself "effectively bankrupt".

A number of issues were raised in the EC discussion, including the fact that it was blaming equal pay claims as being among the reasons.

Other councils are likely to follow. These 'bankruptcies' will have industrial significance for our members working in local government, and in the supply chains of goods and services. Jobs will be at risk and councils will use the financial hardship to push back even harder against pay claims across the country. There will also be a massive impact on the communities within those local authorities.

Unite has a policy position of calling for legal no-cuts needs-based budgets; for councils to use their reserves and borrowing powers to stave off cuts, while building a campaign to win the necessary funding from government.

We called for an urgent meeting to be organised between Unite and Angela Rayner, who is now Labour's Shadow Secretary of State for Leveling Up, Housing, and Communities. The demand should be for a pledge from Labour that if it forms the next government, it will adequately fund councils and will underwrite any debt that Birmingham or other councils in that position have to take on, in order to prevent cuts and to deliver equal pay and good quality services.

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COUNCIL 'BANKRUPTCY' CRISIS: TAKE THE LIVERPOOL ROAD, MAKE NO CUTS

Socialist Party WHAT WE THINK

Forty years ago, a left Labour council was elected in Liverpool. Militant supporters (now the Socialist Party) played a key role. The lessons of the epic struggle that took place over the following four years are more relevant today than ever before.

The Liverpool councillors were faced with a Tory government led by the 'Iron Lady' Maggie Thatcher. The councillors adopted the slogan of the famous jailed Poplar councillors from over sixty years earlier - 'better to break the law than break the poor' - and led a mass campaign for the return to Liverpool of the £30 million of central government funding that had been slashed over the previous five years.

Just over a year later, in July 1984, the Tory government was forced to hand over the £30 million. The right-wing press foamed at the mouth. The Daily Mail attacked Tory Environment Secretary Patrick Jenkin, declaring: "The Trotskyites and others of the hard left who run Liverpool have had the best of the fight with him in their threat to defy the law on that city's overspending." The Express joined in: "Patrick Jenkin seems to have bought himself some peace from the Militant-led Liverpool City council. This is a shoddy and cowardly deal... Mr Jenkin has shown that defiance pays."

Mass struggle

While the capitalist press gnashed their teeth, there was jubilation in Liverpool when the councillors reported back to a 600-strong meeting of the District Labour Party. However, it was not the councillors' skill at negotiating with Tory ministers which was key to the victory, but rather the mass struggle that they led. In March 1984 a one-day strike took place, supported by 30,000 local authority workers. More than 50,000 people marched through the city that day in support of the council's proposed 'deficit budget'.

The money won from the government enabled the council to carry out its electoral programme, including the building of 5,000 council houses, the opening of six new sports centres, and the creation of 2,000 jobs on trade union rates of pay. As a result of those achievements the Labour vote surged to record highs in the city.

The Tories and the capitalist class were eventually able to defeat the fighting Liverpool councillors as a result of the rotten role played by right-wing Labour leader Neil Kinnock, combined with the retreat of



PHOTO: DAVE SINCLAIR

other left Labour councils which left Liverpool isolated. Nonetheless, the achievements of the council remain in bricks and mortar, and the lessons of the struggle are more relevant than ever today, when Birmingham has become the seventh council since 2020 to issue a Section 114 notice, effectively declaring itself 'bankrupt'.

Bankruptcy?

A council cannot go bankrupt in the way that a private business can. Only an act of parliament can dissolve a local authority. Nonetheless, issuing a 114 notice means stopping all new expenditure. Other councils that have issued 114 notices have gone on to make savage cuts to services, huge job losses, and to carry out major council tax hikes. A 114 notice can also open the road to the government appointing commissioners, after a parliamentary vote, to take over aspects of the council if the councillors do not agree to sufficiently

savage cuts. Birmingham is not going to be the last to take route 114. At least 26 more councils are reported to be near to doing so.

Throughout the last thirteen years, local authorities have been cynically used by Tory-led governments to deliver austerity policies. Between 2010 and 2017, grant funding to local authorities was halved, with the poorest - and predominantly Labour - areas hit hardest. Although the squeeze then lessened, grant funding was still almost a third less in 2021 than it was in 2009. Throughout those thirteen years, the Socialist Party has urged councillors to take the Liverpool road and stand up and fight for the working-class communities they represent by refusing to implement Tory austerity. We have pointed to the potential power of Labour local authorities. For example, their combined budgets are larger than the state budgets of 16 EU countries! Again and again, Labour councillors

have responded by arguing that, whereas Poplar and Liverpool could fight the cuts in the 1920s and the 1980s, today councils do not have the power to do so.

This is nonsense! Actually, from a purely formal legal point of view, things are easier. There is no prospect now of imprisonment, as the Poplar councillors faced in 1921. Similarly, the power of surcharge, which was inflicted on the Liverpool and Lambeth councillors in the 1980s, has been abolished, except for cases of personal gain. But what enabled Poplar and Liverpool to win improvements was not primarily a legal question. They won because of the power of the movement of working-class people that they mobilised.

Any council today that took the Liverpool road would get an equally enthusiastic response from its electorate. But can anyone imagine 50,000 people marching through the streets of Birmingham in support of

the current crop of councillors? Of course not, because instead of fighting for Brummies, the Labour councillors have carried out the bidding of the Tory government and implemented austerity.

Labour councils have consistently taken the approach recommended by Kinnock, the so-called 'dented shield strategy' of Labour councils obeying Tory governments in the hope of protecting their populations from the worst of the Tory cuts. It never worked, and over the last thirteen years, as the Tories cut spending on an unprecedented scale, it has taken Labour councils down the road of slashing their workforces' pay and conditions, and cutting public services until they barely exist. Now it is leading to 114 notices - ironically one of the things they were claiming to be trying to avoid when they obeyed the 'Tory government and cut workers' jobs and services.

Not too late

Even now, however, it is not too late for councils to take a stand. The specific reason that Birmingham council has given for issuing the section 114 notice is the cost of a failed IT system and the ongoing cost of paying historic equal pay claims. But both can be legally categorised as capital expenditure, meaning the council is able to borrow in order to fund them. Birmingham, and other councils facing the same problem, should - as Unite the Union calls for - use their reserves and statutory borrowing powers to meet equal pay claims by levelling wages up, not making pay cuts, and to prevent any further cuts to jobs and services.

The general election is going to take place within the next fourteen months, and the Tories are clearly heading for defeat. Sir Keir Starmer has made no promises on how his government will come to the aid of cash-strapped councils. Labour councils should immediately demand that Angela Rayner, the newly appointed shadow levelling-up minister - hailed by the Guardian as the last "left-winger" in the shadow cabinet! - pledges that any that money councils borrow to protect jobs and services will be repaid by an incoming Labour government.

However, if Labour councillors continue to bow down and implement Tory austerity, even as the government enters its dying days, the workers' movement will need to make sure they are challenged at the ballot box by candidates who are prepared to take the fighting stance adopted in Liverpool four decades ago. Given that Starmer's New Labour is clearly intending to represent the interests of the capitalist elite, rather than the working-class majority, fighting councillors - in the tradition of Liverpool and Poplar - will be essential under the next government, just as they are desperately needed today.

BAME workers worse off - united working-class struggle against racism needed

Government reports published in April place the unemployment rate in October-December 2022 for people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds at 7.5%, compared to 3.1% for their white counterparts. This follows a 79% spike at the end of 2020, with BAME workers bearing a larger brunt of the Covid-19 pandemic's economic fallout.

Workers from BAME backgrounds regularly fall victim to a double oppression of racism and the exploitation of the working class. Not only do they face discrimination in the workplace, they also meet it in the interview room - or, their CVs end up in a manager's waste bin.

50% gap

Research into hiring trends in Britain and other countries has indicated that Black, Asian, and Hispanic applicants to a wide variety of jobs typically have to submit approximately 50% more applications per callback than white applicants, demonstrating the continued scourge of racism in the hiring process. In addition, BAME workers are often forced to take up lower-paying, precarious work; swathes of people are made to get by on unfeasible wages, themselves insecure thanks to their casual or contract positions.

Yet, as billionaires and the like see skyrocketing profits in the midst of our struggle, we are told by our government and media that our grievances must be laid at the feet of immigrants. The fires of discrimination remain stoked while the capitalist class comfortably leeches from the worth of our labour.

It is necessary for all workers to recognise the deserving object of their ire, and organise to properly direct it. For united working-class struggle for decent jobs with pay everyone can live on, and unions willing to fight - for workers' livelihoods and against racist discrimination.

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Where are all the offshore wind farms? Nationalise the energy industry!



PHOTO: ANDY DINGLEY/CC

ELEANOR DONNE
ESSEX SOCIALIST PARTY

"The biggest disaster for clean energy in almost a decade". This was how Greenpeace UK's policy director described the recent failure of the Tory government to secure any bids for offshore wind turbine construction contracts.

Offshore wind energy is vital to the government achieving its 'legally binding' target of net-zero carbon energy production by 2050. It offers a 'contracts for difference' subsidy system for renewable energy production in which potential developers are guaranteed a price per megawatt (MW) hour.

The UK was previously second only to China as a producer of power using offshore wind. However, based on this year's guaranteed price of £44 per MW hour, not one company put in a bid to develop offshore floating wind farms, blaming inflation and rising costs of construction. Swedish company Vattenfall has also halted an existing offshore wind project off the coast of Norfolk, due to surging costs and "challenging market conditions."

But major energy company SSE posted pre-tax profits of £2.18 billion for 2022-23 - nearly double the previous year. Its CEO stated in April 2023 that the results are "profit with a purpose. They enable us to deliver record investment - far in excess of our earnings - in vital low-carbon energy

infrastructure." Like offshore wind farms? Not this year apparently.

Offshore wind farms had been seen as the answer, partly because planning laws tightened under David Cameron's government in 2015 made it almost impossible to build land-based wind farms in spite of it being easier and cheaper than offshore. Ukraine has built more on-shore wind turbines than England since being attacked and partially occupied by Russia.

Tory MPs are split on this issue, and on climate change in general, and in the end the ban was only lifted this month after Tory MP and COP26 chair Sir Alok Sharma moved an amendment to the energy bill in parliament, supported by 21 'rebel' Tory MPs including Liz Truss!

Ed Miliband, Labour's shadow energy security and net-zero minister, has promised a windfall tax on energy companies if elected. If (and it's a big if) this pledge survives the policy culling and 'fiscal responsibility' rules of Starmer's Labour, it would be a start. But clearly we can't rely on privately owned firms, whose first duty is to their shareholders, to act in the best interests of society as a whole.

Given the climate emergency, it is essential that we take energy companies back into public ownership under democratic working-class control and management, with no compensation for their current fat owners.

Cut the crap - renationalise water

LINSEY MORGAN
BRISTOL SOUTH SOCIALIST PARTY

We've been up to our necks in crap all summer after water companies were given the go-ahead by the Tories and Labour to pump raw sewage into the waterways (see 'Privatisation and Profit combine to pollute our waterways' at socialistparty.org.uk). Many beaches have been closed and swimmers have gotten ill from E. coli, some seriously.

The law allows it when it is raining. But now to top it off, water companies have also been 'dry spilling', which is discharging sewage on days when it isn't raining at all, BBC research has found. Without rainwater, sewage is less diluted and causes build-ups of algae and toxins that can kill pets and endanger people.

Thames, Wessex and Southern Water 'dry spilled' last year for a total of 3,500 hours. This included the hottest day of the year when many people were trying to cool off in the waterways. Wessex Water covers from the Dorset coast to Bristol and includes some 68 sites where crap, baby wipes, condoms and whatever else has been flushed down the toilet has ended up in the waterways.

Unsurprisingly, the response from our elected politicians has been crap as well. Rishi Sunak has tried to shore up support by promising potentially unlimited fines to the companies that have broken the law. But this is after the Tories slashed the

Environment Agency's budget in half between 2010 and 2020. In many cases the government has had to rely on the 'honesty' of water companies to report their own breaches of the law!

Labour has called for "an immediate investigation into both the breach of the licence and the environmental damage caused". But how does that make profit-laden water companies, which can pay fines with relative ease, stop the practice immediately and ensure it never happens again? It won't. Profit always takes precedence over safety when it comes to capitalism.

The vast majority of people have had enough and are in favour of renationalisation of the water companies in the UK. More than 70% of the industry was owned by foreign investment firms, private equity, pensions and businesses based in tax havens, the Guardian newspaper recently revealed.

Water needs to be taken back into our hands and any compensation should only go to those with proven need. Nationalisation shouldn't be the kind of nationalisation we've had already where debt is passed to the taxpayer and profit still goes to the shareholders; we need it under democratic workers' control and management. Water can then be made safe for us to swim in, the workers themselves can decide where money is best spent, and we can finally start rising up above the tide of crap the rich are drenching us in.

Sewage pipe on the beach in Borth, Wales
PHOTO: STEVE SEA/CC



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Swindon social workers strike: New Labour council true to its promise of 'unprecedented cuts'



A previous GMB strike in Swindon MATT CAREY

SCOTT HUNTER
SWINDON SOCIALIST PARTY

When Labour won a majority on Swindon Borough Council in May 2023, for the first time in 20 years, the new council leader, Jim Robbins, warned that Labour would be making "an unprecedented amount of cuts" in the town. Perhaps the only positive thing I can say about Jim Robbins is that he's certainly been a man of his word.

Social workers in Swindon, organised in the GMB union, have taken two weeks of strike action. These workers make up the Emergency Duty Service, which provides 24-hour emergency care to vulnerable people. They face losing £700 a month due to removal of their unsocial hours payments. Who can afford to lose £700 a month?

Throughout this dispute, the council has displayed an alarming lack of urgency. When the social workers first offered to negotiate, the council said there would be no negotiations because all their negotiators were on holiday!

Since then, the council has employed "every trick in the union-busters' handbook" according to Andy Newman, GMB branch secretary, from threatening to bring in agency

staff during the strike, to threatening to dock workers' pay for periods they were not on strike.

With negotiators apparently back from holiday, Swindon council has now offered the strikers more money. Workers are concerned that the offer is not 'legally robust' and could be taken away again. But the council has declared the dispute 'over' and is refusing to negotiate further.

Meanwhile, GMB has evidence that, shockingly, the council is allowing emergency calls to go unanswered, despite GMB's offer of 'derogation' of its members to cover emergencies.

Regarding the change from a Conservative to Labour council, Andy Newman says: "Our members feel that it is like being in a bad restaurant, where the chef has been changed, but the food hasn't improved."

We need councillors who will stick up for workers – and who are workers themselves! Councillors who won't pass on cuts from Westminster but fight alongside workers to get the money off the government and back into our communities. The Socialist Party calls for needs-based, no-cuts budgets and fully funded public services. Stand with us under the banner of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition to fight for that!

Workers at the Apple store in Southampton have sent a formal request to their employer for union recognition. A number of the workers have organised under the United Tech and Allied Workers (UTAW) branch of the Communication Workers Union (CWU).

If successful, this will require Apple to engage in collective bargaining with staff over pay and working conditions.

Southampton could follow other stores in Glasgow and London, which have successfully achieved union recognition in the past year.

Cardiff bin workers strike against Labour council's poverty pay



Mass picket line of Cardiff bin strikers and supporters JOHN WILLIAMS

JOHN WILLIAMS
CARDIFF EAST SOCIALIST PARTY

Socialist Party members have been supporting Cardiff bin workers who started a two-week strike on 4 September. Bin workers in Unite are also striking in Wrexham and will soon be followed by Gwynedd.

However, there's a lot of anger that GMB members weren't even balloted for strike action in Wales, and while Unison members in Wales voted 81% in favour of strike action, they didn't meet the undemocratic 50% turnout threshold. But overall, union members have rejected the offer of a £1,925 rise.

Unite says this would mean a pay rise of between 4% and 9%. Over the past 12 years, these workers have had a real-terms pay cut of 24%. So in reality, that's a pay cut of 24% with

the offer not bridging that gap. All the unions involved are calling for a 12.5% pay increase.

Cardiff bin workers on strike are pledging to struggle on until a better offer is put forward. And there are some harrowing stories from the picket lines of the effect of poverty pay being implemented by a 'Labour' council. "I know someone who uses 45% of their pay packet on childcare. People with kids and a mortgage, it's not enough to live on... We've been told the bosses aren't backing down."

Struggling

"They've been saying we've been offered 9% but we haven't. I know someone who works here who didn't have any money for food. His mis-sus was laid off. I had to buy him a Greggs. Everything's going up, some people like me aren't struggling but I'm coming out for those who are."

A rally was also organised in conjunction with the residents' group to say "no to shit pay". At the rally, workers explained how elected representatives who are implementing poverty pay are "part of the problem" and whose actions are forcing workers to go to food banks.

Why should trade unions give political and financial backing to councillors who are members of their union but are using their elected positions to implement poverty pay?

Unite suspended Coventry Labour councillors for doing just that, and it's now union policy to not give backing to councillors who pass on cuts.

Cardiff socialists will continue to support these striking workers, and we will fight to build a political alternative so council workers get the pay they need, as well as deserve.

Flying socialist flag at Burston School Strike rally

ELEANOR DONNE
ESSEX SOCIALIST PARTY

The Burston School Strike rally, in Norfolk, is an annual trade union and workers' movement event commemorating 'the longest strike in history'.

Trade union councils sent coaches from Peterborough, Coventry, Ipswich, Southend and Norwich, with 300 attending in total. This is a lot smaller than the peak years, when Jeremy Corbyn was Labour Party leader. Then, 3,000 were there. And it was smaller than last year, when transport union RMT general secretary Mick Lynch addressed the rally near the start of the strike wave.

Platform speakers included a

representative from the doctors' union BMA, who vowed that their action will continue. The Labour Party stall played it safe on the other hand, with no politics – just cakes and a tombola!

Dave Nellist – Socialist Party member and chair of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) – raised the urgent need for the Trades Union Congress (TUC) to fight the 'minimum service level' laws that are a threat to the whole of the union movement.

He encouraged everyone to attend the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) lobby of the TUC which took place on Sunday 10 September in Liverpool (see pages 8-10).



Leeds City Council workers on strike earlier this year IAIN DALTON

Respect FE: Vote 'yes' in the UCU ballot

PLYMOUTH UCU MEMBER

As part of the 2023-24 'Respect Further Education' (FE) campaign, the University and College Union (UCU) has opened a ballot for strike action at several FE colleges, including at City College Plymouth. The ballot is for better pay and a more manageable workload. According to the 'Respect FE' campaign: "UCU research shows excessive and unmanageable workloads are all-too-prevalent in the sector. FE staff, on average, work two days for free each week."

Pay, too, is a chief concern. Real-terms FE pay has fallen even further behind teachers in schools, who recently accepted 6.5% - the UCU says pay has fallen 35% in recent years. The UCU claim is for a 15.4% pay rise as a starting point to reverse the decline in pay and keep pace with inflation.

The 'Respect FE' campaign also points out that the FE sector currently has the highest levels of income for many years, plus higher average reserves and cash in the bank. We know that some college managements claim they can't afford to pay a rise. That's why we also have to campaign for full funding from the government.

The fact that teachers won a higher offer than the Tories originally intended should be an encouragement to any City College staff still undecided. Barristers secured 15% last year.

Striking may be a risk, outcomes are uncertain, but time and time again industrial action has proved that it has the power to make the bosses sit up and pay attention. The last year has seen workers from many professions take to the picket lines: teachers, nurses, junior doctors, driving instructors, postal workers, train drivers and rail workers, etc.

United

It is also significant that more traditionally working-class professions, such as postal workers and train drivers, have been joined in strike action by more traditionally middle-class professions, such as university lecturers and lawyers. They have begun to unite in the face of the degradation of wages, the erosion of working conditions, and the ever-rising cost of living.

The inept and immoral Tory government has forced through more anti-strike legislation, as part of its wider campaign to try to clamp down on any opposition to their rapidly collapsing and dysfunctional regime. The National Shop Stewards Network convened in Liverpool on 10 September (see pages 8-10) to urge the Trades Union Congress to resist the latest Tory laws, that require minimum staffing levels during strikes. The fact that the government is pushing through these laws is evidence enough that Sunak and his cronies are running scared.

● Oxford Tesco depot strike Understaffed shifts with overstuffed job sheets

RAE COX
OXFORD SOCIALIST PARTY

In Didcot, Oxfordshire, Atalian Servest cleaners and caterers, members of Unite, have joined the strike wave.

Atalian Servest is a subcontractor of Tesco that runs the depots, and in the process raked in a cool £84 million in profits in 2021. But despite this, cleaners and caterers are paid as little as £11-an-hour

Barts NHS strike: 'We fight together, no matter what'



Barts Unite activists at the NSSN Lobby of TUC on 10 September SOCIALIST PARTY



Chris speaking LOUIE FULTON

CHRIS MOE-LEOMBE
SENIOR UNITE REP AT NEWHAM GENERAL

We voted to strike because our terms and conditions of employment have been messed up by the Barts NHS Trust.

There's the issue of the lump sum. We transferred over from the private employer Serco into the NHS. Porters, security, domestics, catering, ward hosts. Some of the departments have been given the £1,655 lump sum that was paid to NHS staff, but not all. They say it's because of the 1 May 2023 date we transferred over, but we were all supposed to go over on the same date. The bosses decided to spread it out department by department. So departments that transferred earlier got the lump sum,

but not domestics or catering as our transfer date was later.

That was their decision to do it departmentally, it shouldn't affect anyone in their pay. In Covid, we worked our socks off, flat out, so that society could be taken care of. But now that's been forgotten and we're neglected. Covid didn't select any department!

Unite has recruited a lot of new members, because in the Trust it's the fighting union. Unite is growing at Newham, where we didn't have so many members before. People are joining who were in another union that wasn't fighting. Unite has a long record of fighting and won't stop till we get what members deserve.

They try to divide and conquer, but we fight altogether, no matter what.

They try to divide and conquer, but we fight altogether, no matter what.

GIDEON BOATENG
PORTERS UNITE REP AT THE ROYAL LONDON

We're still fighting on the 5% national pay offer. So there's issues that affect all of us, and issues that affect some of us, but we're all standing together.

All aspects of the contract we had with Serco have been turned upside

down by the Trust management. So, for example, all staff, no matter how long their service, have been put on entry-level. Another issue is bank staff – they're almost £5 an hour down on overtime. And there's enhancements to pay that should be part of your sick pay and holiday pay, but are not being paid.

But with a solid base of support, a plan for escalation, and solidarity from other depot workers, the mood by the end of the first day was high.

The solution is clear: the workers should get an inflation-beating pay rise, rather than that money going to Atalian Servest and Tesco shareholders. The sooner unions can coordinate action and fight as one, the sooner many more workers can get a fair share.

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Fund the fightback

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- Visit socialistparty.org.uk/donate
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'THERE'S A THUNDERSTORM COMING!'

NSSN lobby of TUC

Fight 'the most serious threat yet to the right to strike'

ALISTAIR TICE
YORKSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY

Using the weather forecast as an analogy for impending trade union battles, Rob Williams, chair of the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN), opened the NSSN rally at Trades Union Congress (TUC) saying: "There is a thunderstorm coming! Isn't that why we're all here?"

The NSSN meeting room on Liverpool's Albert Dock was packed to overflowing on Sunday 10 September as delegates assembled for a Congress facing the most serious threat yet to the right to strike, in the form of the Tory government's 'Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act' (MSL).

Rob stressed: "It is on the statute books. It is law. Any one of you in six sectors (including emergency services, education and transport) could get a work notice telling you to organise a strike-breaking operation! And the minister 'may' extend the sectors covered by the Act, 'if the need arises'."

"Why? The Tories are hanging on. And despite all the previous anti-union laws, they haven't stopped the biggest strike wave for 30 years."

"Workers could be sacked and trade unions could be fined up to £1 million! This TUC must be a council of war - class war. Motions from the Fire Brigades Union, the RMT rail union and Unite, if passed, would set out a programme of coordinated trade union action and demand Labour authorities not implement the law."

"If the TUC doesn't pass, or doesn't act on, such motions, then the NSSN calls for 'a coalition of the willing' - fighting trade unions to take the lead. We can't leave Liverpool this week without such a programme of action!"

The city that dared to fight

Dave Walsh, president of Liverpool Trades Council (the oldest in the country) and Unite convenor for the council workers, welcomed us to the "City that dared to fight", reminding us of the 1911 transport general strike.

He offered solidarity to the workers of Birmingham City Council facing potentially huge cuts due to the council being 'bankrupt', and highlighted the example of the socialist Liverpool city council that defied Tory prime minister Margaret Thatcher's cuts in the 1980s.



A serious fight needed - against the anti-union laws, for real pay rises, and against cuts

Onay Kasab, National Lead Officer for Unite, brought solidarity greetings from general secretary Sharon Graham. After highlighting where the 'magic money tree' really is, in the excess salaries, bonuses and profits of the big corporations, whilst the working class faces excess deaths from hypothermia and NHS cuts, he declared: "Trade unions - we are the opposition. Where we are organised, where we are fighting, where we are winning, we don't limit ourselves to the courts (the TUC is reporting the government to the International Labour Organisation), that's their ground. We must fight these laws on our ground - the picket line."

He said that Unite had conducted 900 disputes, winning 80% of them, gaining £400 million in extra earnings for members. "Truth is concrete - not crumbling RAAC concrete, but real levelling up."

Onay highlighted the St Mungo's housing workers' victory, which Unite rep David Oladele spoke about, and the ongoing Hull and East Riding Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) strike, the first in 25 years at a CAB, about which Unite rep Ray Davies said: "We're on strike, keep fighting, we're going to win!"

Onay reminded us that Unite had not accepted the NHS pay deal, and next week members in four London Trusts would be starting strike action,

not just for pay, but for safe staffing levels as well. He ridiculed the Tory hypocrisy about minimum service levels on strike days, saying: "What about every single day? Every year? Many times, union emergency cover staffing is better than on non-strike days." One of those trusts is Barts - Len Hockey, the Unite branch secretary, with six of his fellow stewards in attendance, reported that they got a 95% yes vote to strike on a 58% turnout.

Onay concluded by demanding that Labour councils refuse to implement the MSL laws. He demanded that a Labour government should repeal not just the MSL Act but all anti-trade union laws, and reimburse any trade unions fined by the Tory courts.

'Bankrupt' Birmingham

In reference to Birmingham Labour council, he demanded equality with no cuts, no privatisation, and no levelling down to achieve equality. "Maybe if they'd taken Unite's advice, of no-cuts, needs-based budgets, using reserves and borrowing powers, and building a mass campaign, they wouldn't be in this mess!" He called on Starmer to pledge to reimburse Labour councils using borrowing and reserves to stop cuts.

This was a point Dave Nellist, the national chair of the Trade Unionist

and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), emphasised from the floor. Commenting on reports that £2,500-a-seat places for business leaders at an event at next month's Labour Party conference are oversubscribed, highlighting Starmer's pro-bosses' agenda, he said that trade unions need their own political representation. As a first step towards that, TUSC is calling for a list of 100 trade union-backed candidates in the general election. "It's time the working class had a party it could genuinely call its own."

Amongst the many other strikers and activists who had their say, young workers also spoke. Luis, a young University and College Union member and Socialist Party member from Birmingham, spoke about the bold fight of his university colleagues, and appealed to attendees to link their trade union fight to the struggle for socialist policies. Mila, Coventry Socialist Party member, spoke about increasing numbers of young people organising and joining trade unions to fight the cost-of-living crisis.

March

Later, in defiance of camera-happy private security guards who were under instruction from their bosses to try to stop any leafleting or gathering outside, we all marched round to the conference centre and lobbied TUC delegates as they went in.



ALL PHOTOS: LOUIE FULTON, AND SOCIALIST PARTY

Why I came to lobby the TUC



Joe Gibbins, Secretary of Hull Trades Council, which brought a coach to the lobby: "We've got to fight [the MSL law] with everything in our arsenal. We've been hamstrung by years of anti-union legislation which Labour didn't repeal. We've got to not just fight the Tory government but put a shot across the bows of an incoming Labour government. And if they don't repeal it, then the TUC organises to break it. It's an unjust law, if it restricts our freedom to strike then we'll have to break the law."

Tracey McAllister, GMB shop steward at Asda, Hull: "We've had the legal right to strike since the 19th century. Why are the Tories taking it away? What are they scared of? Are they scared of our voice, our strength, overpowering theirs? Hopefully today we'll prove that we can beat them if we all stand together."

Holly Johnston, Royal College of Nursing rep in Sheffield, and NHS Workers Say No: "It is ironic that the government is now focusing on minimum staffing levels as a reason to curtail strike action, when protecting the NHS goes to the very heart of why all healthcare workers are striking. We are working on minimum staffing levels and below on days we aren't on strike! We need to build confidence to a point where workers feel strong enough to defy elements of the law, and if any union is taken to court or worker threatened with dismissal, an emergency demonstration is called, and the TUC should organise mass coordinated industrial action, including a 24-hour general strike."

Pete March, RMT delegate: "The railway unions could be the first industry that the MSL laws are used against. Employers will be able to pick who they want to work, to scab, on strike days. The Tories say it's a matter of life and death - it's not, if no trains are running then there's no danger! The TUC must be dead set against it, maybe calling a general strike on it, that's my opinion anyway."

Trade unions fighting back

Steve Gillan, general secretary of the Prison Officers Association said: "The POA knows more than most about anti-union laws. Prison officers had their right to strike removed in 1994 under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act. But that hasn't stopped us from fighting". Indeed the POA 'struck' in 2016 by holding 'protest meetings' outside prison gates.

Steve said: "We must be as critical of Labour as the Tories. Blair boasted about having the most restrictive trade union laws in western Europe. We demand an incoming Starmer government repeal not just some anti-union laws but ALL anti-union laws."

Mick Whelan, general secretary of the train drivers' union Aslef, emphasised the same point. "This legislation will make us 'indentured workers' once the right to strike is removed. All Maggie's (Thatcher's) laws and the anti-protest Police and Crime Act must be repealed." Rail workers are

still fighting for a pay rise. He said: "The government isn't listening - but a lot of politicians aren't listening. I'd like to know what our offer is if Labour get in power - and I'm on the NEC!"

Ian Lawrence, general secretary of Napo, the probation officers' union, said he was enthused by the number of young people at the rally, a point repeated by several speakers. And how the last year had been "pivotal" in the number of first-time strikers. He was applauded when he said that Napo had reversed probation service privatisation.

Sarah Woolley, general secretary of the bakers' union BAFWU, also commented that "Getting so many workers standing together regardless of the result is a massive achievement". Sarah explained how the cost-of-living crisis was reflected in her union's survey 'Food workers on the breadline', revealing that there are now more foodbanks in the UK than Greggs food!

Matt Wrack, general secretary of the Fire Brigades Union, spoke to NSSN supporters outside the TUC venue:

"This latest legislation is an unprecedented attack on workers' right to strike. The FBU have raised the call to build a mass movement against it, including non-cooperation, non-compliance and non-implementation. Initially this was quite controversial, but the composite motion agreed, that the FBU is supporting, includes those points, has won General Council support, and I expect it to be carried at congress.

"It doesn't address what action should be taken if any worker or union is victimised by it, but it does take the debate forward from the alternative, which would be endless compliance, grinding down our rights.

"But, as I told the General Council, unions may have no choice but to break the law. Or maybe find ourselves breaking the law without intent. Clearly the movement would have to mobilise to support any unions in that position."



Get all the latest union news...



TUC agrees motion to fight anti-union laws

REPORT CONTINUED ON P10

TUC agrees to call a national demo and special congress against anti-trade union laws

Name the dates now

ROB WILLIAMS
SOCIALIST PARTY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The main motion on the anti-trade union laws was a composed motion, of which the strongest parts came from the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) and the RMT rail union.

The motion was moved by the NASUWT teachers' union, which is taking national action short of strike action next week. General secretary Patrick Roache said: "Our movement is built on resistance."

In seconding the motion, Mick Lynch from the RMT reminded everyone of 40 years of anti-trade union laws, but stressed that Congress needs to concentrate on the content of this motion, which is non-compliance and non-cooperation. "And that means there needs to be a special Congress called, there needs to be a national demonstration. Because compliance is the road to oblivion for the trade union movement".

He said: "The reason why people remember the Tolpuddle Martyrs, the 1926 general strike and the miners' strike, is because they fought and they didn't give in. We need a serious mobilisation of the working class, led by the TUC."

"Strike ban"

Matt Wrack, general secretary of the FBU, spoke in the debate and said it was the most important strategic debate of the week. "We want to see

the back of all the trade union laws, and that's the message we send to the Labour Party. And we send a warning to Labour: no backsliding from their promise to repeal the MSL and 2016 Trade Union Act within the first 100 days. And we send them a warning that we will defeat and smash this legislation." The FBU's original motion specifically called on "Labour-led local authorities, mayors, fire authorities and other public bodies to refuse to implement the MSL laws". That reference was taken out of the final composite, but it does put demands on employers.

90%

Matt also made the point that in the Tory government consultation, they had different options on what was a minimum service level for the fire and rescue service. The high level was 90%, and the middle level was 77%. "That is effectively a strike ban," he said. And in the control rooms, the MSL they've proposed is 100%!

The General Council of the TUC recommended that the composite motion be accepted. However, Usdaw general secretary Paddy Lillis, speaking on behalf of the General Council, said that the government hadn't come forward yet with the definite MSL, and so a special Congress would be called after that has happened. It would be that special Congress that would call a national demonstration.

The congress debate did reflect what many workers will feel,

coming as it does during the strike wave against the cost-of-living crisis. But all those union members and activists will not be satisfied with that plan to wait.

Workers want plans made now, for the agreed position of a national demonstration to be called now. Workers will expect that policy to be carried out without delay.

KEY EXTRACTS FROM THE AGREED COMPOSITE MOTION:

- Congress agrees that we have no choice but to build mass opposition to the MSL laws, up to and including a strategy of non-compliance and non-cooperation to make them unworkable, including industrial action.

- Congress calls on the next Labour government to immediately repeal MSL, the Trade Union Act 2016 and take urgent steps to remove other anti-union laws.

- Congress pledges 100% solidarity with any trade unions attacked under these MSL laws.

- Congress agrees we must use all means necessary to defeat the unjust MSLs laws and calls on the General Council to proactively seek to:

- resist any further restrictive trade union legislation and demand:

- the repeal of the Trade Union Act 2016 and all other anti-trade union legislation;

- stronger rights for unions to access workplaces, win recognition, and establish collective bargaining rights; and

- the right for trade union members to vote online during industrial action ballots, and statutory elections for executive committees and general secretaries.

- build an appropriate industrial

Fire Brigades Union (FBU) protesting Tories' new anti-strike laws with other trade unionists in May. IAN PATTISON



response to defend workers' right to strike;

- legally challenge the Minimum Service Levels (MSL) legislation;

- stronger rights for unions to access workplaces, win recognition, and establish collective bargaining rights; and

- the right for trade union members to vote online during industrial action ballots, and statutory elections for executive committees and general secretaries.

- build an appropriate industrial

hold a national march opposing the legislation and calling for repeal of the anti-union laws;

- mobilise support for any affiliate seeking assistance, whose union and members are sanctioned for non-compliance;

- organise a Special Congress, size to be determined, to explore options for non-compliance and resistance.

- The full composite can be seen at tuc.org.uk/Congress2023

Donate to fund the fight back

CHRIS NEWBY
SOCIALIST PARTY FIGHTING FUND ORGANISER

The funding crisis in Birmingham City Council (see pages 2-3), schools and hospitals falling apart, and workers having to take strike action to win pay rises so they can afford spiralling bills. This all shows how capitalism is failing the vast majority of people.

Each week in the pages of the Socialist, there are many reports of workers and communities fighting back. But the pages of the Socialist also provide an opportunity for Socialist Party members, and other activists, to put forward a strategy to fight back too.

Workers and youth

Whether it's calling for mass action against anti-union attacks, which we were calling for at the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) lobby of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) on 10 September (see pages 8-9). Or supporting Socialist Students campaigning at freshers fairs with the demand to cancel student debt, and replace maintenance loans with free

education and real grants that young people can actually live on (see back page).

To get our socialist programme out to as many people as possible, we need the resources to produce hundreds of thousands of leaflets, and thousands of posters and placards.

There are less than three weeks to go before this fighting fund quarter closes. So we are asking all our readers and supporters to do all you can to make sure that we smash through our £25,000 target.

Out campaigning

Could you make a donation? Or could you help out on one of our many Socialist Party campaign stalls held every week across England and Wales?

Could you raise funds by selling items on Vinted or Ebay? One of our members in Enfield and Lea Valley branch raised £50 like this. Or could you do what our members in Tower Hamlets are doing, and organise a car boot sale?

If all our readers and supporters do what they can, we are sure that we can smash through this quarter's target.

AREA	£ RECEIVED	£ TARGET	Q3: JULY-SEPTEMBER 2023	DEADLINE: 1 OCTOBER 2023
South West	2,263	2,100		108%
Southern & SE	2,501	2,400		104%
Eastern	1,043	1,300		80%
Wales	1,653	2,400		69%
North	489	800		61%
East Midlands	1,214	2,050		59%
North West	643	1,200		54%
London	2,544	5,000		51%
Yorkshire	908	2,650		34%
West Midlands	915	2,700		34%
Other	877	2,400		37%
TOTAL	15,050	25,000		60%

Fund the fightback DONATE TODAY

- Visit socialistparty.org.uk/donate or call 020 8988 8777
- or make cheques payable to Socialist Party, PO Box 1398, Enfield EN1 9GT



Salisbury – socialists join alternative Pride

After the main Pride event in Salisbury was cancelled due to a "lack of funds", local Pride organisers set up a 'mini-Pride' event in its place in a local pub on 9 September. Linking up with one of the organisers, the Socialist Party was invited to come and participate.

It started slowly, but quickly gathered steam as more people arrived.

Our Socialist Party leaflets – 'Build a mass movement for LGBTQ+ liberation' – were hoovered up.

The people spoken to were often young, and very receptive to the socialist message. Many were sick of the Labour Party under Keir Starmer. So the idea of a new mass workers' party was well received.

People were also happy to see a Socialist Party presence there, given Salisbury's perception as being 'Toryville'. And six people filled out 'I want to join the Socialist Party' cards.

ALI COOK
DORSET SOCIALIST PARTY

Leeds college – as capitalism fails, youth look to socialism

JOHN VITAL
LEEDS SOCIALIST PARTY

The Socialist Students campaign stall in front of Leeds City College was invigorating. Many students expressed their interest in socialism, and in joining Socialist Students and the Socialist Party.

A few students from the Caribbean stated their interest immediately peaked upon hearing the word 'socialism'. This should be unsurprising, given the effects of capitalist imperialism throughout the Caribbean.

We encouraged students to attend our subsequent park meeting. The



interest garnered from other students prove that socialism is a system that the younger generation believes

Gloucester Pride – corporate sponsors not welcome

The Socialist Party message of 'Pride not profit' was well received. And many people expressed discomfort with the strong corporate presence at the event.

This included cost-of-living profiteers Tesco, as well as military jet engine supplier General Electric Aerospace.

Their representatives wore t-shirts featuring rainbow-coloured fighter jets. Weapons companies BAE Systems and Northrop Grumman were also sponsors.

In contrast to this was the Socialist Party campaign stall at the entrance to the park, with a large 'Pride not Profit' banner clearly visible. We handed out hundreds of leaflets.

We took every opportunity to speak with participants about how the struggle for LGBTQ+ rights could be won through mass action and revolutionary socialist change. And we now aim to get as many of them as possible to our Socialist Party public meeting on Pride.

JOE WATERS
GLOUCESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

in. Amongst the youth, socialism is deemed a potential future, given the failures of capitalism.



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.

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Do you agree? Join the fightback!

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



Selling the Socialist

Just some of the places where the Socialist newspaper was sold in the past week...

Southampton – other parties don't do what we do

CATHERINE CLARKE

On the Socialist Party campaign stall, we were trying to persuade people of the need for free school meals for all pupils, to kick private companies out of the NHS, and a proper living wage for workers. However, the people we were talking to were already converted.

Two young nurses spoke to us. They live this reality.

They were disappointed with their union – the Royal College of Nursing – agreeing to the pay deal, and not fighting for something much better. They said they barely noticed the increase in their salaries.

We spoke about staying in our unions to campaign for a leadership that will fight for the working class. They liked this approach, and left their contact details with us to find

out more. They hope to attend a Socialist Party meeting.

At least one in three children in Southampton live in poverty. If all children received a warm free school meal, then pupils could concentrate, and not feel marginalised due to being poor and hungry.

£15 an hour

We need a £15-an-hour minimum wage, and our council should be paying this, and encouraging local employers to pay this. An inflation-proof pay rise each year would ensure families could feed their children, pay their bills, and enjoy life. Rather than just surviving.

One woman found it infuriating that some people are now proud of just surviving, rather than demanding that they and their families thrive.

She wants to shake these people into activity to fight for their future. She is homeless. And understands what to survive and struggle for a better life means. She is hoping to attend our next Socialist Party meeting this week.

A computer analyst approached our stall. He is renting and finding it very hard to pay his bills. He also left his details, and hopes to attend our meetings.

We met five people in one hour who want to learn more about our party. Many people thanked us for what we were doing, since they do not see any other political party speaking in clear terms about the struggles of the working class, and how to solve these issues.

Lancashire – angry about housing and becoming socialists

MARTIN POWELL-DAVIES

Lancashire Socialist Party covers a wide area. But, we are confident that, across our many towns, colleges and workplaces, there are workers and youth looking for socialist ideas. That's why we've made a plan to hold regular Socialist Party campaign stalls, at different locations, to see who we can meet.

We started in Lancaster Market Square, making sure our stall stood out with a range of Socialist Party posters and material (see picture). Our petition called for council homes and rent controls. We used this alongside the demands on the back page of that issue of the Socialist – see 'Youth fight for council homes and rent controls' at socialist-party.org.uk

Sure enough. As well as locals angry about the housing crisis, we also met an encouraging number of people describing themselves as 'socialists' and people who want to know more about the Socialist Party.

These included youth gathered in the town centre, and older workers too. Our stall will definitely be back in Lancaster – and other local towns – soon.

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Worcester – standing room only for socialist meeting on Palestine

STUART DAVIES

WORCESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

All seats were taken at the local community centre room we hired for our Socialist Party public meeting about the situation in Palestine. And it was great to welcome five brand new people too.

The focus was Israeli state terror, and this summer's invasion in Jenin. The meeting location was in 'Cathedral' ward, where we have grown support for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidates over recent years.

To publicise the event, we visited local shops and community centres. And a number agreed to display our Socialist Party poster for the event. We then had different teams from Worcester Socialist Party help with leafleting the area over the weekend building up to the meeting.

As a result of our meeting and discussion – which continued outside long after the community centre was locked up – we have commitments from new people, and some of their friends, to joining our next weekly meeting.

Read more – 'Jenin invasion: End Israeli state terror' at socialistparty.org.uk

Islington occupation says: 'Fill empty homes'

ALEX FORBES

LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Housing activists in north London occupied 28 empty flats next to Pentonville Prison on 26 August. The activists in Islington say that the Ministry of Justice has failed to allow the flats to be retrofitted for the spiralling number of homeless people in the borough.

One activist said: "So many homeless families would love to live here. And we don't need any more luxury flats here".

Activists unfurled banners from the balconies with messages like "fill empty homes", and more. A large number of police arrived to extract activists from inside, leaving two on the balcony.

Islington has a Labour council. But 1,000 local children are still waiting for secure accommodation. And the number is rising. Often, families are placed in bed and breakfast and hotel rooms, with a whole family sometimes put in one room.

Rent control, building council homes and putting families in need in empty properties would help solve this crisis.

Come to Socialism 2023 to discuss with hundreds of students, young socialists, workers, and trade union activists how to organise and fight back!

Get your £10 a day student offer – Saturday includes the evening 'Rally for Socialism' and Sunday includes the afternoon 'Socialist Student Fightback Rally'.

You can upgrade later to a 'Golden ticket' – includes Saturday night hostel accommodation.

For more info and tickets: socialism.org.uk

socialist students

Hosted by the

Socialist Party



No one priced out – ticket prices stay same!

Cuts, closures, privatisation or crumbling concrete. The Tories have no answers. And Socialism 2023 will be the place for workers and young people to discuss the ideas that can bring them down – but not leave it at replacing them with Keir Starmer's Tory-lite offer.

But with wages leaving us short, working-class people have become used to being stopped at the door. Being priced out of music gigs, football and other sports events, is now taken for a given that most people don't even bother trying. We don't get the complimentary tickets like Wes Streeting.

For Socialism 2023, we are determined no one will be priced out, and want to do what we can to help everyone who wants to fight the Tories to attend on 25 and 26 November.

So, we have worked hard to make sure we can now keep our prices the same as last year. No inflation here. Just ideas about how to fight for inflation-proof pay.

That means it's even easier to

ask and convince your workmates, friends, striking workers you have met on the picket line, and anyone you meet out campaigning or at freshers, that there is no better place to be the weekend of Socialism 2023.

Join hundreds of other working-class fighters and socialist activists in London, coming together to draw on shared experiences, and hammer out how best to organise and fight for every possible gain for the working class, and struggle for socialist change worldwide.

New student offer!

And, we have introduced a new student offer. For a tenner a day, a student can get a ticket to Socialism 2023.

Saturday includes the evening 'Rally for socialism'. And Sunday will include the afternoon 'Socialist Student fightback' rally. You can also upgrade to a 'Golden ticket' – which includes Saturday night hostel accommodation.

Don't miss out on the best opportunity to discuss how to change the world this year.

LENNY SHAIL, SOCIALISM 2023 ORGANISER

CHILE COUP 50 YEARS ON



Computer-generated image of Project Cybersyn operations room PHOTO: RAMA/CC

Project Cybersyn: Allende's cybernetic plan



JOE FATALLAH
CARDIFF WEST SOCIALIST PARTY

September marks the 50th anniversary of the 1973 coup in Chile led by General Pinochet, which overthrew the democratically elected left-wing government of Salvador Allende, and ushered in 17 years of brutal military dictatorship. On 4 September 1970, Allende was elected Chile's president as the leader of the Popular Unity (UP) coalition. Allende's government was headed by the Socialist Party of Chile and the Communist Party.

Allende was elected on a radical platform and set about implementing reforms such as an increase in the minimum wage, a free school meals programme, and redistribution of agricultural land. Following this, the new government embarked on a programme of nationalisation. The US-owned copper industry and a large part of the banking sector were brought into state ownership. By the start of 1972, all the mining companies and 68 other firms had been brought over into the public sector. Huge enthusiasm existed among the Chilean working class for Allende's government, which had, in a short period of time, overseen a significant increase in living standards.

Allende appointed Fernando Flores as General Technical Manager of CORFO, the government department in charge of the nationalisation programme. Flores, a 28-year-old engineer, was enthusiastic about the potential use of computer technology for planning the nationalised industries.

In mid-1971, he contacted Stafford Beer, a British management consultant who was a pioneer in the field of management cybernetics - the science of processing feedback and utilising information within the context of closed systems. Flores initially asked Beer for advice on incorporating his theories into a potential computerised economic planning system. Beer, enthused by the idea's potential, abandoned his other consulting work to commit to the project known as Cybersyn in English, or Synco in Spanish - an information support system designed to assist decision making in the nationalised

industries, emphasising workers' control and management on the factory and shop floor. Beer travelled to the Chilean capital Santiago to meet with Allende and convinced him of the value of investing in Cybersyn.

Cybersyn was a significant innovation, as one of the first operational large-scale computer systems outside the military and scientific fields. In some ways, it was a great-grandparent of modern 'big data', but using that data in a socially useful way, instead of for capitalist profit interests.

Component parts

The design for Cybersyn consisted of four component parts. Part one was Cybernet. This involved the installation of Telex machines into every state-owned company premises, creating a single near-real-time communication network between these industries and the government. This sounds natural in 2023, but in 1971 was a substantial step forward. This was the first part of the project to become operational, and the only one regularly used by the government before its overthrow in 1973.

Part two was Cyberstride. These were the programs to collect, process and distribute data in a useful format across the network.

Part three was CHECO. This was the most ambitious undertaking and ultimately fell short of seeing the light of day. It was intended to be a real-time model of the Chilean economy, providing data to be able to predict likely future economic perspectives stemming from potential government actions.

Finally, part four was the Opsroom. This futuristic-looking room consisted of seven swivel chairs in a circle, surrounded by screens displaying data collected and aggregated from the shops and factories. One wall was reserved for an unrelated, unfinished project called Cyberfolk, which Beer had designed as a way for Chilean citizens to provide direct feedback to the government on their level of life satisfaction and happiness.

The Opsroom had access to the Telex network to transmit advice and instructions back to the workplaces. It was built, but never used by Allende. Just three days before the coup

which put an end to his government and his life, he had given the go-ahead for the Opsroom to be transferred to the presidential palace.

The first planning of an economy under the control of the working class took place in Russia, after the revolution of October 1917 had overthrown capitalism and feudalism, and brought into being the world's first workers' state, under the leadership of Lenin and the Bolshevik party. Lenin himself commented that many of the processes of keeping track of stock levels and movements of goods using pen and paper were slow and tedious, and was always on the lookout for potential ways to improve efficiency.

By the second half of the 20th century, the development of information technology offered a possible solution to these problems. Beer was very keen on the idea of delegating control and management to the factory floor, and the original design of Cybersyn had this to the forefront.

However, some within the UP government attempted to use the system as a top-down management tool, resulting in some opposition politicians and newspapers striving to present it as a means for Orwellian-style spying on society.

Truck drivers' strike

Nevertheless, Cybersyn was put to good use, even in its partially completed form. In October 1972, 40,000 truck drivers took strike action against the government, egged on by the right-wing opposition and, lurking in the shadows behind them, the CIA. This threatened to grind the economy to a standstill. Using Cybersyn, Allende was able to use real-time data to plan and respond to the situation. In direct communication with around 200 truck drivers who remained loyal, the government was able to ensure that essential goods could be moved to the points of greatest need. Cybersyn also assisted the actions of the people's supply committees, which had been formed in working-class neighbourhoods in response to the economic sabotage of the capitalists, in organising food distribution on the ground. The strike was successfully undermined

through the active participation of the working class, aided by Cybersyn.

Following this, the government was also able to use Cybersyn to generate daily reports on national goods production and transportation, and be ready to respond to points of crisis or sabotage. Previously, collating and processing this amount of data would have taken around six months. Imagine what the Bolsheviks and the Russian workers could have achieved using Cybersyn!

In Chile, this was never the case. By the time of his overthrow on 11 September 1973, Allende had nationalised around 40% of the economy. The Chilean capitalist class remained largely in control of the means of production and distribution. Of this state-owned 40%, around 27% was using Cybersyn. Although the installation engineers had received instructions to work with the factory committees, sometimes this was ignored and they treated workers with condescension, meaning that not everyone learned how to use the system properly.

It wasn't possible to force private-sector companies to use it, or to prevent them from abusing it for their own profit interests if they did. Even more crucially, Allende left control of the state forces in the hands of the capitalist class. After the truckers' strike, he attempted to pacify the

opposition by offering Pinochet a position in his cabinet - literally inviting the wolf into the den!

Computer systems can assist in economic planning, but they are the how and not the what. Ultimately, Project Cybersyn failed because you can't plan an economy that you don't own. The socialist revolution still needs to be completed by and with active participation of the working class, with it taking control of the economy and creating its own state institutions. Allende failed to take these processes to their conclusion, and ultimately paid with his own life and those of thousands of his supporters.

A million workers demonstrated in the streets of Santiago demanding weapons to fight the coup - Allende simply told them to go home. Meanwhile on the factory floor, the working class had been taking matters into its own hands. Of the companies nationalised during the first year of the Allende presidency, less than 25% of them were on the list that the UP government had initially marked for transferring into the public sector! In many factories, workers committees had run ahead of the government and taken over running of the workplaces.

Information technology has come a long way in the 50 years since these events! A modern economic planning computer system, operating in the context of a workers' state with a nationalised, democratically controlled, planned economy, would open up unimaginable possibilities.

There would be the potential for such a system to integrate with hardware such as manufacturing robots and delivery drones, to further streamline economic processes. It could integrate with every aspect of the economy - one of the weaknesses of Project Cybersyn was that it was designed specifically for manufacturing and goods transport, and wasn't used in the clerical and other sectors. In the last few years, tech workers have started to get organised, joined trade unions, and taken action against the irresponsible actions of the Silicon Valley capitalists. These skills will be vital in the coming period for developing technology, standing on the shoulders of the Cybersyn project, capable of streamlining production processes and helping humanity to reach its full potential on the basis of socialism.

• See socialistparty.org.uk for more on Chile 1973



A modern economic planning computer system, operating in the context of a workers' state with a nationalised, democratically controlled, planned economy, would open up unimaginable possibilities

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AND DECLINING FAITH IN CAPITALIST DEMOCRACY

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FIGHTING FOR A
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socialistworld.net

PELUOLA ADEWALE
DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST MOVEMENT (CWI IN
NIGERIA)

In the name of the Gabonese people", on 30 August, the military coup leaders declared that they had put "end to the current regime". There was no open forum where the military leaders had secured the mandate of the Gabonese people.

But the announcement enjoyed popular support. Jubilant crowds trooped onto the streets.

Jules Lebigui, a jobless 27-year-old, joined crowds in Libreville, the capital. He aptly captured the prevailing mood: "I am marching today because I am joyful. After almost 60 years, the Bongos are out of power."

The coup has ended Ali Bongo's political dynasty. It came a few hours after the official declaration of Bongo as the winner of the 26 August presidential election. Despite his poor health, he was about to begin his third term.

Ali Bongo came to power in 2009, to replace his father Omar, who had ruled the country from 1967 until his death. Between father and son, the Bongo dynasty had ruled the oil-rich, but poverty-stricken, central African country for over half a century.

Bongo supposedly won with 64% of votes cast. That election has been described as lacking transparency. In the real sense, however, it was by all means farcical.

International observers were not allowed to monitor the poll, while some foreign broadcast media were suspended. Gabonese authorities cut the internet, and imposed a night-time curfew nationwide after the poll.

Bongo's previous two elections in 2009 and 2016 were also widely disputed and considered fraudulent.

This triggered protests which resulted in repression, and claimed many lives.

There is no significant support amongst the mass of the Gabonese people for Bongo. In a video done while under house arrest, Bongo called on his friends all over the world to make noise. This viral video has become the butt of a joke on social media.

Understandably, to many Gabonese, there is no difference between a military coup and perennial rigged election, which has put the same family in power for decades. Besides, the majority of the 2.5 million population have not benefited from the enormous wealth of the country in the 55 years the Bongos were in power.

The country is rich in oil, cocoa, and has the second largest manganese deposit in the world – a mineral used in steel making and batteries.

Looting rulers

During his presidency, Bongo senior, had the reputation as a kleptocrat – one of the richest men in the world, with a fortune stolen from Gabon's oil wealth. His son, Ali, was also implicated in many reports as patently corrupt.

French investigators once charged four of Bongo's siblings with embezzlement and corruption. Omar and Ali may have benefited from a fraudulently acquired real estate empire worth at least €85 million, according to France 24.

Despite their pillage of Gabon's wealth, the Bongos continued to enjoy the patronage and backing of French imperialism. Omar was regarded a pillar of 'Françafrique' – France's economic and military grip on its ex-colonies. Ali was recently feted by French president, Emmanuel Macron, while on a state visit to Paris.

Beyond Bongo's family, the country's wealth is appropriated by a few thieving elites. Despite having one of sub-Saharan Africa's highest average yearly incomes per head – almost



Previous president Omar Bongo, Ali's father, thanking the US military. US NATIONAL ARCHIVES/CC

\$9,000 – over a third of its population live in poverty.

Support for the coup is a reflection of the failure of capitalism in a neocolonial country with a corrupt ruling elite, as well as growing disillusionment in capitalist 'democracy' to guarantee basic needs for the vast majority, despite huge mineral resources.

One jubilant Gabonese told Associated Press: "It is an expression of the popular dissatisfaction... The country has been experiencing a deep crisis on all levels, due to bad governance, the rising cost of food, the high cost of living."

But this is not peculiar to Gabon, as evidenced by the resurgence of military coups in Africa, especially in the west and central regions, where there have been eight military takeovers in the three years.

Associated Press revealed: "At least 27, or half, of the 54 countries in Africa are among the 30 least developed in the world... Most are in west and central Africa, often endowed with

natural resources whose rich profits are little seen by everyday citizens."

So, it is not accidental that the research network Afrobarometer found that the number of people supporting democracy and elections in Africa has fallen. Only 68%, across 34 countries, preferred democracy to any other system of government, down from 73% a decade ago.

While the decline is relatively small, it underscores the reversal of a past trend towards civilian rule. But in Mali, one of the countries that set the path for the recent domino effect of coups in west and central Africa, the figure is striking. 82% of people trust the military "somewhat" or "a lot".

This result reflects the more complicated situation in Francophone west Africa. Palpable grievances over the inefficiency of the local corrupt capitalist leaders, amidst the growing wave of jihadist insurgency in the region, intersect with historical resentment at the role of ex-colonial master, France, which backs the

crooked leaders. All this produces a powerful anti-colonial mood that local military adventurers are exploiting for their own goals.

In their tow is Putin's Russia, which is trying to take advantage of the situation to establish a footprint in the region. Previously it acted through Wagner mercenaries.

"Contagion of autocracy"

In many countries, like Nigeria, there has been progressive decline in the voter turnout. Only 27% of eligible voters cast ballots in the last presidential election – a massive lack of faith in capitalist democracy.

In the absence of a genuine mass working people alternative, amidst mass discontent, the possibility of a coup in Nigeria, while it is low at present, cannot be ruled out in the future.

However, a coup in Nigeria has high potential of plunging the country into civil war and disintegration, given the degeneration of the unresolved national question, and the



Anti-Bongo protesters from Gabon in Paris in 2018. JEANNE MENOULET/CC

escalation of ethnic identity politics in recent times (See 'Nigeria could erupt following post-election crisis' at socialistparty.org.uk).

Meanwhile, in reaction to the situation in Gabon, Nigeria president Bola Tinubu, whose election was characterised by rigging and manipulation, and where his official victory is currently being challenged by opponents in court, talked about a "contagion of autocracy" spreading across Africa.

By 'contagion of autocracy', Tinubu meant the current coup epidemic in Africa. But many of the African leaders that Tinubu sits with at the Eco-was and African Union regional blocs are autocrats.

They have rewritten the constitutions of their respective countries. And periodically conduct farces described as elections to perpetuate themselves in power. Therefore, beyond the façade of elections, they are not fundamentally different from military juntas.

Already, some of these autocrats are now living in mortal dread of a military coup that could chase them out of power. For instance, hours after the coup in Gabon, president of neighbouring Cameroon, Paul Biya – who's been in power for 40 years – shuffled his military leadership.

And, Rwandan president Paul Kagame "accepted the resignation" of a dozen generals, and more than 80 other senior military officers. Kagame has been in power since 2000, and has changed the constitution so he can remain in power at least until 2034.

Anti-French sentiment

However, a major element in the recent spate of coups in Africa is a strident sentiment against French imperialism. It is not boldly seen at present in the coup in Gabon – unlike Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. But, this is another coup in a former French colony, and just over a month after Niger's.

These coups have been described as the 'Francophone Spring'. This is a series of military conspiratorial actions, and not like the 2011 'Arab

Spring' – a wave of independent mass uprising of the people against different authoritarian regimes in the Middle East and north Africa. Nonetheless, these coups have been enjoying mass support and acceptance.

France is seen as the prop for corrupt leaders, who enjoy its protection in exchange for allowing the continued economic exploitation and political control, including direct military intervention in domestic affairs.

This post-colonial arrangement was put in place by France to protect its sphere of influence in resource-rich African countries, against competing interest from rival imperialist powers. As a result, the economy, including exploitation of mineral resources, is dominated by French businesses and multinationals. Therefore, France is directly linked to the economic failures of these African leaders.

Another element of the arrangement is that the currency of 14 Francophone countries in west and central Africa, the CFA franc, is pegged to the euro. This reportedly requires these countries to deposit half their foreign exchange reserves with the French treasury.

This, together with the existence of French and other Western military bases, is seen a colonial relic. Therefore, a source of growing mass anger in many francophone countries, especially among the young people.

Opportunist coup

Apparently, there is an internal conflict within the capitalist ruling elite, including top military brass. But it is the mass discontent with political leaderships that the opportunistic military officers, some of whom are true blue members of the robber elite, are riding on to power.

For instance, General Oligui Ngouma – the Gabonese coup leader – was head of the Republican Guard, an elite military unit responsible for many of the repressive actions of Ali Bongo. He is first cousin of Ali Bongo, and served Omar Bongo closely. The story is similar for Niger coup leader Abdourahmane Tchiani.

Implicated in a 2020 investigation

into the Bongo family's assets in the United States, Nguema was said to have invested in real estate, paying over \$1 million. He was unabashed when journalists questioned him about the properties: "A private life is a private life that [should be] respected."

Socialist alternative

In Gabon, there is not likely to be any improvement in the quality of life of the vast majority. The new military government will implement fundamentally the same capitalist policies and arrangements that worsen the economic woes of the country, despite its huge mineral resources.

It is not likely the military rulers will undermine the interests of French multinationals and businesses, which dominate mineral resources. It will continue the tradition of a few local elites appropriating wealth for themselves.

But even if the junta leaders decide to break with France, this would not necessarily be cause for celebration, as they are likely to simply embrace another imperialist master. Perhaps Russia or China, as we already see in Burkina Faso and Mali.

African leaders have a history of jostling among different imperialist masters hoping to get the best available deal. Ali Bongo himself took

Gabon, a French-speaking country, into the British-dominated Commonwealth last year.

It will require mass struggles, like the 2019 mass protest of students that forced Bongo to suspend a planned attack on access to university education, to extract any concessions from the new military junta.

Socialists understand why such coups can have initial support, as was the case in Nigeria in the 1980s. But we will support any pro-democracy movement for full democratic rights, opposing military rule, while striving to build independent organisations of the working class and especially inside the imperialist countries.

In Gabon, at present, there is no such mass socialist consciousness or movement. But, as the military proves not to be different from the civilian section of the ruining capitalist elite, the quest for change and better quality of life that prompted the support for military coup in the first instance, will most definitely propel the mass of Gabonese working people and youth on the path of searching for a better political and economic alternative.

This could open possibilities for the ideas of mass struggle and a socialist alternative to gain support.

Such a programme should include the nationalisation of the commanding heights of the economy, such as oil, gas, mines, banks, etc – placing them under democratic management and control of working people themselves. This will enable the start of socialist planning that can guarantee provision of the basic needs

of life for the vast majority, begin to develop the economy, and prevent economic sabotage.

Given the domination of the economy by multinationals, such a government will draw the rage of imperialist powers, including France and elsewhere. Therefore, especially in a small country like Gabon, such a government has to be built on a revolutionary mass movement, and appeal for the solidarity of the working class internationally – in Africa and especially inside the imperialist countries.

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● Read more 'The Nigerian coup and the potential for regional war and instability' at socialistparty.org.uk



Ousted president Ali Bongo. JEANNE MENOULET/CC

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the Socialist

Issue 1242

14-20 September 2023

formerly **Militant**

STUDENTS FACE UNI CHAOS

JOIN THE FIGHTBACK



KATIE HOLDEN
PLYMOUTH SOCIALIST STUDENTS

New and returning students going to university are told it is a place to learn, grow, and experience new opportunities. However, this may not be all that it cracks up to be for students starting this month.

Many students will find that they have to get part-time jobs or ask family members to help them out. However, asking family members to help is a privilege only some students have. Students from working-class backgrounds will have to work their way through university, which will also impact on their mental health as they battle between

unforgiving deadlines, core hours of learning, and work, just so they can afford to cover rent and basic living costs. Housing and food prices are forever rising as a result of the cost-of-living crisis.



Completing my dissertation, job hunting, looking after my mental health and covering basic needs is daunting

I am heading into my third year and just the thought of completing my dissertation - while also job

hunting, looking after my mental health and covering my basic needs - is daunting. The new maintenance loan scheme will mean students who start this year will pay for 40 years, not 30, and start paying when they earn £25,000 - lower than currently. More money to feed into government and corporation bank accounts.

Higher education needs to be free so students can have the university experience that has been advertised to them from college and sixth form. So students can study freely without having the extra stress of wondering whether they can afford to eat and house themselves, and afford to take part in all the opportunities that university has to offer.

Socialist Students says:

- Fight the government's debt repayment punishment - cancel all student debt, scrap fees and take the wealth off the 1% to fund it
- End the student cost-of-living crisis! For real living grants
- Students and campus workers - unite to fight for the funding our universities need!
- Kick out the Tories. Starmer's Labour doesn't fight for us. Fight to build a new mass workers' party
- Fight for the socialist transformation of society, here and around the world
- **Get involved, visit socialiststudents.org.uk**



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WHAT WE STAND FOR: THE SOCIALIST PARTY'S MAIN DEMANDS >>> see column on page 10

9 771366 962103 ISSN 1366-9621