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the Socialist

Issue 1245

5-11 October 2023

formerly **Militant**

LET'S KICK ALL THE TORIES OUT

The worst criminals from the last 13 years of brutal cuts and austerity got together in Manchester from 1 October.

Shouting for tax cuts for the rich, cheering for more privatisation of our public services, and hollering support for attacks on disabled people claiming benefits.

The headline act, that had people queuing around the block to get in, was Liz Truss, who

less than a year ago resigned as prime minister in disgrace after just 49 days in office.

While delegates inside Tory Party conference argued about how to possibly avoid electoral disaster in the next general election, and jostled for position for who will replace Rishi Sunak as Tory leader, thousands of striking doctors and radiographers protested outside.

Never before have doctors taken strike action on this scale. And never have our NHS and other public services been in such a mess - devastated by cuts and privatisation.

We've got to get the Tories out!

Just a short trip down the M62, Labour will meet for its conference in Liverpool a week later.

An indication that a Keir Starmer-led government is by far the most likely after the general election is that the money has followed him. Labour conference corporate sponsors outnumber the Tories 43-28. And he fully intends to govern in their interests, looking after their profits.

For that reason, a government led by him won't provide the fully funded pay rise the doctors are demanding. Labour front-benchers have also ruled out giving enough money to fix crumbling public buildings, or

promising to save thousands of rail ticket offices facing closure.

We need a new party that is a real alternative to pro-rich Tories, one that is prepared to take on the bosses and their profit system. That means a mass workers' party armed with a socialist programme. Join the Socialist Party to help us fight for it.

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Build a new mass workers' party

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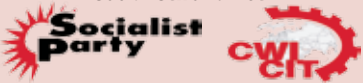
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"The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it."
Karl Marx



Michael Gove PHOTO: RORY ARNOLD / NO 10 DOWNING STREET/CC

Tory circus comes to town – kick them all out!

The circus came to Manchester at the start of October. Tories competed for who could say the most outrageous comment, and Boris Johnson wasn't even at the Conservative Party conference!

Michael Gove, levelling up secretary, truly is in cloud cuckoo land. His speech included:

Michael Gove: We have delivered better state schools than ever before.

Real world: Over 100 schools couldn't open for the start of term due to unsafe concrete, levels of which were kept under wraps by the Tory government. Last year, 40,000 teachers left the classroom.

Gove: Our universities the best in Europe and they are growing.

Real world: Chief executive of Universities UK, which represents 140 institutions, says of the state of university funding: "The path we are on is unsustainable".

Gove: Welfare is simpler, fairer and better targeted.

Real world: 421,967 people had Universal Credit sanctions, removing the limited money benefits provides to scrape by, imposed in the year 2022.

Gove: Families have many more hours of free childcare.

Real world: With childcare costs soaring, for the first time in decades the number of women not returning to work after having a baby is going up.

Gove: We have delivered the fastest decarbonisation of any major economy.

Real world: The UK "will not fulfil the [net-zero emissions] commitments", according to outgoing chair of the government's own Climate Change Committee. And that was before the recent huge U-turns.

Gove: We are world leaders in offshore wind.

Real world: Not one company put in a bid to develop offshore floating wind farms earlier this year (see 'Where are all the offshore wind farms? Nationalise the energy industry!' at socialistparty.org.uk)

Housing

Do you rent? Don't worry, the Tory housing minister Rachel Maclean has your back...

"There are plenty of young people who are in the PRS [private rented sector] who are not weed-smoking bad people in gangs and everything else, in crack dens... smashing up the neighbourhood..."

...no-one said there weren't Rachel...

Sunak mulls inheritance tax giveaway for the rich

NOAH EDEN
SHEFFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

What was once seen as the greatest capitalist party in the world, the Conservative Party is today growing weaker and splitting at the seams. John Cauldwell, who gave the Tories half a million pounds before the 2019 election is now considering backing Keir Starmer's Labour after Sunak's net-zero U-turns (see 'Tory net-zero ruin: Only socialist change can stop climate catastrophe' on socialistparty.org.uk).

Prime minister Rishi Sunak is, as reported in the Sunday Times, considering cutting and abolishing inheritance tax in another desperate move to try and win back the support of rich backers.

According to a report by the Institute for Fiscal Studies, it would cost

roughly £7 billion to abolish, with the richest 1% in Britain receiving an average tax cut of approximately £1.1 million each!

HM Revenue and Customs statistics show that, in 2020-21, less than 4% of estates paid inheritance tax. It is evident that Sunak wouldn't be doing this to benefit the working class facing the cost-of-living crisis, but once again to act to benefit those at the top of society.

If Sunak continues with his decision to lower it and eventually abolish it, the cost will be passed on to the working class. This means more austerity and cuts to public services. We fight for fully funded public services, including the tax collectors, paid for by taking the wealth off the one percent, to run society democratically for the millions not the millionaires.

Braverman anti-refugee rhetoric Fight against Tory divide and rule

MILA HUGHES
COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

On a recent trip to the US, addressing the right-wing thinktank the American Enterprise Institute, Tory home secretary Suella Braverman argued for a 'full reform' to the current UN refugee convention.

She belittled the real dangers that people face by saying that "simply being gay, or a woman, and fearful of discrimination in your country of origin" should not enough to be granted asylum. Braverman has previously said it was her "dream" to see a flight full of asylum seekers taking off to Rwanda.

This is yet another instance of leading Tories turning to divisive rhetoric to try to appeal to a small section of Conservative Party members and supporters. Braverman and her peers argue that these changes will "fit the modern age" - when they're clearly pushing us backwards! The splits and fractures in the Tory party were on display again with senior Tory politicians and donors criticising Braverman for 'dog whistle' politics.

Tobias Ellwood, another Tory MP, responded: "I distance myself from some of those comments that I've just heard now, which are clearly designed for a particular audience and it doesn't do the prime minister any good, indeed as we lead into our own conference"

In the year 2022, 108.4 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced from their homes, of which 35.3 million became refugees in another country. This is due to persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations and climate disasters happening across the world. The migrant crisis is a consequence of profit-driven capitalism, a system lurching from crisis to crisis.

Even when some asylum seekers are given 'safe routes' and able to stay in Britain, they face the same poverty, housing and job crises that the whole working class faces. Labour does not offer policies to solve these crisis - a £15-an-hour minimum wage, council house building, and real pay rises for public sector workers, for example. And Keir Starmer's Labour is not willing to take a stand against racist immigration policies either, saying it has 'no choice' but to carry on forcing migrants onto unsafe barges if they were in power.

As socialists, we must stand in opposition to all racist immigration laws and campaign for a genuine right to asylum. This has to be linked to fighting for a system that meets the needs of the majority and not just the rich - a socialist society that can provide decent jobs and homes for all who need it. And to start to build a world free of war, persecution and environmental destruction that forces people from their homes.



Suella Braverman PHOTO: SIMON DAWSON / NO 10 DOWNING STREET/CC

Tory doctor plan must be a joke

The Tories have loudly announced an extra 205 medical school places for next year.

This actually means the number of new people training as doctors is slowing down!

There are over 130,000 vacancies in the NHS. So the Tory announcement will be a drop in the ocean when dealing with the NHS waiting list, which now includes a quarter of the population.

NHS money won't touch sides

And the Tories are also promising £30 million to help the NHS roll out new technology. What about the £80 billion that the NHS is going to hand to profiteering private companies in PFI deals?

The government says this will help them delivering their 10,000 'virtual' beds. But, in the last 30 years of Tory and Labour cuts and privatisation, half of the NHS's actual beds have been chopped.

WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?

● editors@socialistparty.org.uk

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



Thousands of doctors, radiographers and other health workers march against the Tories

THEO SHARIEFF
SOCIALIST PARTY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBER

As junior and consultant doctors took historic coordinated strike action, 3,000 members of health unions, including the doctors' unions BMA and HCSA, Unison, and the Society of Radiographers, gathered in St Peter's Square in Manchester to protest at the Tory conference.

As the Tories continued to fight amongst themselves and splinter at their conference, an angry rally outside heard leaders of the BMA as well as rank-and-file doctors, determined to defeat the Tories.

The rally came after BMA leaders announced that they were going to pause strike action for four weeks to allow an opportunity to negotiate with the government. However, the union said it was prepared to strike throughout the autumn and the winter if a settlement isn't reached.

The rally was a fighting display of the determination of junior doctors and consultants to score a victory against the Tory government, and to kick them out of office altogether, to save the NHS.

Socialist Party members spoke to doctors about the need for more unions to coordinate their strikes to bring maximum pressure to defeat the Tories. We also discussed the need for a new political voice for workers and trade unionists, to take on a likely Starmer-led government in defence of the NHS and for inflation-proof pay rises for all workers.



PHOTO: THEO SHARIEFF



ROB WILLIAMS, SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL INDUSTRIAL AND WORKPLACE ORGANISER, SAID:



We're here in Manchester supporting this magnificent rally. These are NHS workers who are fighting to defend the health service.

They're here today because the Tory party conference is in Manchester. These are the people who are wrecking the health service.

This is a strike by tens of thousands

of NHS staff; like we've seen in the strike wave over the last year, workers fighting for public services, and of course key to that is the NHS.

Join the picket lines of the BMA. Support the strike by health workers in Unite in London.

Support the Aslef train drivers as well.

Support the strikes, coordinate the action, defeat the Tory anti-union laws, and defeat the Tory government!

From the picket line: 'Things can't carry on as they are'

AT SOUTHAMPTON GENERAL HOSPITAL, A BMA JUNIOR DOCTOR TOLD NICK CHAFFEY:

"It's a big step forward to be out with consultants and radiographers. We've got a strong mandate to continue with our rebalot and public support is still strong. We will keep striking, please keep supporting. We're a very determined bunch and we're not going away."



NICK CHAFFEY

A RADIOGRAPHER SPOKE TO RYAN ALDRED:

"We're striking for better working conditions and for the ability to provide a better service to patients.

"Right now, we're not being invested in. There's a national shortage of staff; the level of service needed far outstrips what we can provide with the staff we have. There is a skills gap developing, as experienced radiographers aren't being replaced. We're using old, outdated equipment, which the government has promised to replace but so far hasn't followed through on.

"A lot of people are just leaving; I could get better pay in an equivalent position in Lidl and I'd not have patients' lives in my hands.

"More are joining the Society of Radiographers to get involved in the strike. We haven't got the outcome we are hoping for yet and we're prepared to come out again if necessary. I'm proud of my hospital and proud of my department but things can't carry on the way they are."

Tories threaten civil service job cuts

Marion Lloyd, Broad Left Network candidate for PCS general secretary, responds



At Tory conference, Chancellor Jeremy Hunt announced that the size of the civil service will be cut by one fifth. He said he will ban government departments from increasing their workforce and order them to 'shrink' to pre-pandemic levels within five years.

Marion Lloyd, Broad Left Network candidate for PCS general secretary, responded:

We all know what that means. That means job cuts and privatisation. It means increased stress levels. It means increased workloads, and worse quality services.

They've also announced a 'value for money' survey on equality and diversity. This 'anti-woke' agenda across the civil service is a further crude attempt to divide workers, ironically during Black History Month.

They are using civil service workers, hardworking people delivering crucial services, day-in day-out, as political footballs.

They are more intent on attacking us than ensuring properly trained, properly paid civil service workers who can deliver crucial, quality public services.

It is absolutely vital that PCS responds immediately.

We must relaunch the national campaign. The national leadership has had its 'pause'. That pause has invited aggression from the employer.

It is urgent that the PCS leadership sets out what is required to win. We need to rebuild the national campaign, including action, to ensure that we protect our jobs, protect our conditions, and protect the crucial services that we provide.

That task is urgent and immediate.

In the PCS elections, nominate Marion Lloyd for General Secretary and John Moloney for Assistant General Secretary - see page 7

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Scraping the oil barrel; Sunak gives go-ahead to Rosebank oil field



Fossil fuel platform in the North Sea. Platforms like these could be dotted across the Rosebank field in the coming years. PHOTO: NAC/CC

DUNCAN MOORE
PLYMOUTH SOCIALIST PARTY

The Tory government has granted a licence for big oil companies to extract oil and gas from Rosebank, the largest untapped oil field in the North Sea.

Prime minister Rishi Sunak claims that another domestic source of fossil fuels will help to protect Britain from soaring prices, in case of a future energy supply shock; like the one that followed Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

This is nonsense. Britain's oil and gas sector is privatised; which means that the UK has no control over who buys the oil or at what price, set by international markets. Opening up Rosebank will not reduce the price of energy one jot, at your electricity meter or at the petrol station, unless the government enforces price controls making oil companies sell to UK consumers at less than the market value. Unsurprisingly, neither the Tories or Starmer's Labour are going to impose these price controls.

Who will benefit?

In 2022, Chevron, ExxonMobil, Shell, BP and TotalEnergies made \$134 billion profits on top of what they would normally expect. Meanwhile, over a thousand extra deaths were recorded in the UK last winter, mostly elderly and sick people living in cold homes.

The grasping fingers of the energy companies digging into the Rosebank oil field will not solve the cost-of-living crisis we are all facing. It will make the Tories' rich pals even richer while we continue to struggle.

The energy companies' thirst for profits is making the rest of us poorer, and at the same time bringing us closer to a climate disaster. This summer saw new record-breaking temperatures, thousands dead from floods and wild fires, and a terrifying outbreak of extreme weather events.

The wealth and resources are clearly there to produce the energy we need from renewable sources, without digging out more dirty fossil fuels, to reverse climate change. It's a question of who owns and controls it.

The Socialist Party calls for the

nationalisation of the banks and big businesses that dominate the economy, including the energy and fossil fuel companies, under democratic workers' control and management. This would mean workers themselves would be able to use their skills and knowledge to help transition to renewable energy generation without losing out on jobs and livelihoods.

In this, trade unions have a crucial role to play in fighting for well-paid jobs in renewable energy. The strikes of Unite members on North Sea oil rigs over pay show the power these workers hold when they act collectively.

The Socialist Party stands for guaranteed jobs and pay for workers in polluting industries, as part of a socialist plan of production drawn up democratically by workers here and across the world. The wealth and resources exist to produce what is needed to provide a good standard of living for all people, without polluting the planet. If you want to fight for such a world, get in touch and join us.

Energy bills are still too high!

ADAM HARMSWORTH
COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

The new lower energy price cap will do nothing to alleviate rising fuel poverty and the cost-of-living crisis. The price cap is falling by £577 compared to last winter, but several factors mean many bill-payers will see little difference, or even be worse off.

The £400 energy bills subsidy provided by the government last year won't be there this time. Other household bills have also risen in that time, less energy efficient homes - more likely to be owned or rented by those on lower incomes - will cost even more to heat.

Even if you reduce your energy use, your bills could still go up. Many suppliers are putting standing charges up.

The Tories are leaving millions to struggle with obscenely high bills, all so the energy companies can keep making gigantic profits. A recent YouGov survey found 34% of adults expect to struggle to afford their energy bills. Meanwhile, the big energy suppliers are making hundreds of millions of pounds. British Gas

profits soared nearly 900% in January to June this year.

The limited extra support is only available to those who receive means-tested benefits, something not all those struggling with bills receive.

The money the government does provide is coming from the Treasury rather than from the profit-hoarding energy giants. It means we're paying through the nose for energy as well as our taxes funding energy companies' profits!

Socialist alternative

The Socialist Party will keep fighting for an end to this money-grabbing merry-go-round at the expense of hundreds of thousands of workers, pensioners, and students going cold in their homes.

The energy industry should be nationalised with no compensation to the bosses who have been siphoning money for years. And it should be run democratically on a socialist basis. We would be able to invest in the improvements to infrastructure and provide the improvements needed to heat our homes efficiently. Only this will ensure energy security for all.



PHOTO: GEORGE SHUKLIN/CC

Renationalise water

Who should pay to fix the decrepit water system polluting our waterways with sewage? The water bosses' answer is: you!

Water companies want to raise bills by an average of £84 a year by 2025, and £156 by 2030 - on top of inflation. Government watchdog Ofwat will have the final say.

£156

water companies want to raise bills by 2030, on top of inflation!

£66 billion

dividends paid by water companies since privatisation

A total of £66 billion has been paid out in dividends by water companies since privatisation. The Socialist Party says the way to lower water bills and invest in infrastructure is to take the water companies back into public ownership, this time under the democratic control of the working class and with no compensation for the existing fat cat bosses.

PHOTO: STV

Come to a Socialist Party meeting near you

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

- Go to socialistparty.org.uk/join
- To see meetings in your area socialistparty.org.uk/events
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Christopher Sermanni

Scottish Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition

PHOTO: STV

Chris Sermanni, member of Socialist Party Scotland (sister party of the Socialist Party in England and Wales), is standing in the Rutherglen and Hamilton West by-election as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition. Polling day is on the 5 October. In a 30-second broadcast on STV, Chris said:



As a trade unionist and worker living in the constituency, I know all too well the impact of the cost-of-living crisis. Big business is getting richer while the working class are getting poorer. I'm standing on policies such as nationalisation of the big energy companies, full funding for council and NHS services, and a £15-an-hour minimum wage. If elected, I'll also live on a worker's wage. None of the political parties in power are prepared to fight for these policies so we need to build one that will, based on the trade unions.

Notts Veolia workers strike against low pay and disgusting conditions



JOHN DALE

Veolia waste management workers in Nottinghamshire are entering their second week on strike. GMB members fighting for a cost-of-living pay rise spoke to **Jon Dale** on the Work-
sop and Mansfield picket lines.

Workers on the Mansfield picking belt are only paid the minimum wage – less than Veolia workers on the same job in neighbouring counties. Drivers on a two-year pay deal got 3% last year and just 3% this April. Only managers, office and weighbridge staff received one-off £500 cost-of-living payments.

As well as low pay, workers have had enough of bullying management, micro-managing everything from toilet breaks to PPE. '99p gloves' don't give protection from needles hidden in rubbish and are expected to last a week, even if soiled with faeces.

The dead animals bin costs Veolia money to dispose of, so is only emptied every few months. In summer heat, gas builds up inside, risking exploding disgusting contents over anyone opening it.

Labour-run district councils should stop their bin lorries and street cleaning trucks using these sites during the strike. Bassetlaw council officers have told their drivers they can cross the picket, which Labour councillors should stop. Some drivers have refused to cross picket lines.

Non-union and agency drivers need convincing that unions will fight for their jobs and pay too. Veolia has hired extra agency workers to work on the picking belt in place of strikers.

Nottinghamshire County Council gave French giant corporation Veolia a 26-year Private Finance Initiative (PFI) contract in 2006, when Labour ran the council. It's now Tory controlled.

Veolia can well afford to pay the workers' full demands. Its half-year profits are up 18.7% to €662 million. PFI should be abolished and all outsourced contracts taken back under council control, with good wages and working conditions.

East London bin workers: Striking works!

Low-paid Newham and Tower Hamlets council workers in Unite the Union have secured an extra £750 on top of the national pay offer of a flat rate £1,925.

Over 200 refuse workers and street cleaners in Tower Hamlets took nearly two weeks of strike action to win this extra money. Around 50 agency workers will also be brought in-house by the end of December. 105 refuse workers in Newham were due to walk out between 25 September and 22 October.

Cardiff Council workers up the action in the fight for a decent pay rise



SOCIALIST PARTY WALES

DAVE REID
CARDIFF SOCIALIST PARTY

Unite members working for Cardiff and Wrexham councils are in the fourth week of their strike for a pay rise that does not cut their living standards further.

They struck for two weeks in September, followed by three weeks in October. Unite has announced the addition of another six weeks, extending the strike to 24 November in Wrexham and 26 November in Cardiff.

Picket lines have been strongly supported, especially in waste and recycling, where other Unite members have stood in front of lorries persuading non-Unite drivers not to leave, delaying collections by hours.

In a pathetic attempt to make

picketing more difficult, the council spent thousands of pounds putting up railings and flower pots on the traffic island outside the Lamby Way site. But this has only amused the pickets: "Nice of them to provide flowers for our picket line". But why does this Labour council want to spend thousands against picketing instead of resolving the dispute?

Cardiff Labour council has, at the time of writing, still refused to even negotiate on the insufficient pay rise offered by Welsh councils. Unite members have overwhelmingly rejected the pay offer of local authority employers which is just £1,925, worse than last year and a real-terms pay cut. Many Unite members within Welsh local authorities work for a wage that is barely above the national minimum wage. Local

authority workers in Wales have seen real-terms pay cuts of around 20% over the past decade. And for council workers in Cardiff the offer is worth even less, because of the high living costs.

Rubbish has remained uncollected in parts of the city, but public support is high for workers taking a stand against the cost-of-living crisis. Cardiff Trades Council has organised solidarity, with delegations of other union members visiting the picket line, and the Unison council branch supporting the strike. Already thousands have been paid into the union hardship fund.

Resolve is high, with a second march through the city planned, and a fifth week of strike action to go ahead unless the council comes up with a better offer.

Kings Lynn housing maintenance workers on strike

On the picket line at the Freebridge Community Housing headquarters on Austin Street, Kings Lynn, Unite rep **Adrian Ramage** spoke to the Socialist.

"We are campaigning for a 2% increase on our wages. The company have refused to negotiate with us. We originally put in a request for 7% and the company told us they wouldn't give us 7%. They gave us 5% and a £500 non-consolidated payment, and basically shut the door on our face. And that's why we're here today. We're campaigning for the extra 2% on our wages as we feel our employees need it, and due to the high earnings for the chief executives of our company.

"We've got support from Fenland organisations, lots of organisations across Norfolk and also from London. Unite came down to the picket the other week from London. We get support from other unions that are involved in industrial action at the moment. We all support each other, which is brilliant.

"After this week, we will be having the mass meeting in a couple of weeks' time to talk to the members



SOCIALIST PARTY

about what other action we can take. We are looking towards another week, or maybe a two-week strike. Or a Christmas strike."

On 29 September, strikers marched through the town.

Tyneside college strike



PETER ROBSON

PETER ROBSON
NEWCASTLE SOCIALIST PARTY

There was a strong turnout on the University and College Union picket line on 3 October at North Tyneside College in Wallsend. The strike is over a disgraceful offer of a 3% pay rise made by management which, as we all know, in the current climate is not a pay rise at all. The campus is part of a cluster called Tyneside Met. Management recently shut down the Queen Alexander site in North Shields to save money, without any discussion in the community and minimal with the staff. Strikers told us the principal is paid well over £100,000 a year. Strike action will continue on 23 October.

Socialist candidates are on the ballot paper in PCS elections!

Nominate Marion Lloyd for general secretary and John Moloney for AGS

PCS MEMBER

Socialist Party member and Broad Left Network (BLN) supporter **Marion Lloyd** has cleared the 15-nomination threshold to get on to the ballot paper in the election for general secretary of the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union.

Marion, an activist of more than 40 years' experience as a rep in PCS, is fighting for the re-mobilisation of the union's national campaign on pay, pensions, jobs and redundancy rights. **Fran Heathcote**, the current President of the union, has deliberately abandoned the union's national campaign.

Under the leadership of Heathcote and the so-called 'Democracy Alliance' (involving the groupings 'Left Unity' and 'PCS Democrats'), which makes up a clear majority of the union's National Executive Committee (NEC), our strikes have been shelved, our rebalots for further action have been cancelled and further efforts to raise strike funds have ceased.

Yet Heathcote and her supporters protest as out of touch and arrogant. An incident at the recent PCS Annual Delegate Conference in May 2023 has caused widespread concern when, as chair of the conference, Heathcote deliberately arranged for a filibuster to keep a motion on LGBT+ rights from being debated.

This has been compounded by the misuse by the NEC of a recent civil service-wide ballot. In the vote about

current Assistant General Secretary (AGS), **John Moloney** of the Independent Left group, who is standing for re-election. Heathcote and her allies brought forward the date of the next AGS election from May 2024, in a bid to undermine John's position.

Both Marion and John are running on the basis that they will not accept the inflated senior official pay. Marion will stay on her current civil service wage. John already does this. They will both donate back to the union the remainder of their salary so that neither will benefit financially if elected.

In addition to the fight to re-energise the campaigns on pay, pensions, jobs and redundancy rights, after the below-inflation offers received by the vast majority of civil servants and workers in the privatised areas represented by PCS, both Marion and John aim to increase democracy in the union.

Out of touch

Increasingly, the leadership is perceived as out of touch and arrogant. An incident at the recent PCS Annual Delegate Conference in May 2023 has caused widespread concern when, as chair of the conference, Heathcote deliberately arranged for a filibuster to keep a motion on LGBT+ rights from being debated.

This has been compounded by the misuse by the NEC of a recent civil service-wide ballot. In the vote about



Marion supporting ISS strikers at BEIS. **ROB WILLIAMS**

the union's national strategy, Heathcote and Co worded the ballot so that if you voted 'yes', the campaign ended; if you voted 'no', the campaign ended.

Evidently many activists are now drawing the same conclusions. At the end of September, dozens of union activists – mostly, but not solely, in the second-largest section of PCS, the Revenue and Customs (R&C) group – resigned their

membership of Heathcote's Left Unity faction.

Reps from R&C group cited Heathcote's behaviour at PCS conference, the recent ballot, and a myriad other ways in which they feel that the group that runs the union is interested in holding power but not in winning for members or supporting reps on the ground.

We agree. The time has come for change in PCS, and we encourage all

activists to support, nominate and vote for **Marion Lloyd** for General Secretary and **John Moloney** for Assistant General Secretary.

We look forward to working with all those in the union who want to come together to campaign for a democratic and fighting PCS.

● **Nominations close on 16 October**

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HUGO PIERRE

Domestics, porters, caterers and other 'soft services' staff at Barts NHS Trust, who won an historic victory in 2022 when they were brought back in-house from private employers, are continuing their fight for fair pay in the NHS, joined by other staff and coordinating with workers in other trusts.

Speaking on the Unite picket line at Whipp's Cross hospital, Unite branch secretary **Len Hockey** welcomed Unite members working for private company Synergy, and nurses

in A&E at the Royal London, out on strike as well.

"These are truly historic times in the fight to defend our NHS from the destruction of this government of the rich."

Len explained that on Wednesday 4 October, a joint demonstration would be taking place with the RMT and Aslef rail unions, and doctors in the BMA – "unity in action against this government and the destructive effect they're having on all public services."

He then said: "We've heard

reports from inside this hospital. They talk about not having enough staff when we go off sick, when we're on holiday. Look at how many people they begin to find when we go on strike.

"Isn't this a sign of the hypocrisy of the employers and the government, when they won't resource patient care properly and give us our lump-sum payment which our colleagues have already received.

"We need justice, we need fairness, and we will stand for nothing less than that."

'Enormous' Scottish schools strike

JIM MCFARLANE
DUNDEE CITY UNISON SECRETARY, PERSONAL CAPACITY

The historic three-day strike by over 22,000 Unison members in Scotland working in schools and early years was an expression of the pent-up class anger felt by council workers across the country.

The participation was enormous. Thousands took part in picket lines and local rallies. Up to 1,000 strikers engulfed the Scottish parliament on 27 September in one of the biggest protests Holyrood has seen in years. Thousands have joined Unison

and hundreds have stepped forward to become union reps. This strike was a lightning conductor, and not just on pay. Years of frustration at ever-increasing workload, the impact of cuts, and being undervalued in the workplace produced a militant class mobilisation. A dam has been breached by this group of workers, many of whom were striking for the first time.

● This is an extract from 'After Unison schools strike – reject below inflation pay deal and return to action' at socialistpartyscotland.org.uk



PHILIP STOTT

After years of tumultuous events, 1983 was an important moment in the history of the Labour Party. This workers' party, established initially by the trade unions in struggle, had encompassed a 'broad church' of views, from extreme right-wing bureaucrats and middle-class intellectuals to the left-wing and Marxists. In this arena Militant, the Socialist Party's predecessor, was growing ever more influential, especially through the Labour Party Young Socialists (LPYS) and on Merseyside, as well as other places. It was then that the ruling class decided that, if this developed any further, Labour could no longer be trusted by big business if it came to power again. Their shadows in the right-wing of the labour movement, gleefully supported by their friends in the mass media, started procedures for removing Militant's Marxist ideas from the party.

We spoke to **Peter Taaffe**, Political Secretary of the Socialist Party, about the witch-hunt against Militant, how the Militant Tendency was able to develop its influence and help lead mass movements of the working class.

In November 1982, Labour's National Executive Committee began proceedings for the expulsions. The right wing thought that by expelling a Militant's leaders on its editorial board - Peter Taaffe, Clare Doyle, Keith Dickenson, Lynn Walsh, and Ted Grant - it could kill the whole movement. All five were longstanding members of the Labour Party - with a collective membership of 121 years!

Peter said: *At first, we were tolerated because we were a breath of fresh air to the Labour Party, and the Labour Party took the attitude: let the young people kick over the traces, live and let live. And they thought, "we were all like this when we were young, but then as you grow older you turn into 'more sensible' members of the Labour Party!"*

You were tolerated so long as you were the hewers of wood and carriers of coal. You were there as dogsbodies of the Labour Party. But once you got a voice, and began to have an effect, and what we were putting forward chimed with workers, that was another matter. As far as the right wing were concerned, and sometimes the soft left, they cannot tolerate for the Marxist analysis to be right.

Once we moved from general support to actual support, like when we got councillors, or were vying to become parliamentary candidates like Terry Fields in Liverpool Broadgreen, the alarm bells began to ring. As other Militant supporters fought to be council and parliamentary candidates in various parts of the country, we became a serious challenge to the right wing.

As active members we had a policy of winning over the more advanced workers already involved in trade unions and campaigns to Marxist ideas and the class struggle. Regular Labour Party and trade union meetings were a forum for vibrant debates and discussion; arguments from all sides; votes for all kinds of policies fought over.

We were a well-known part of the political life of the city of Liverpool. In many areas our socialist ideas held sway. In other places we were a leading force. We did this by campaigning and explaining and answering counterarguments, alongside canvassing and leafleting in elections. It was hard work.

Ultimately, the only way that the right-wing could deal with our ideas

was through expulsions. They could not answer our arguments. And that came from what we did in the LPYS, through that the Labour Party, not just in Liverpool but then nationally and internationally. That was how we went about developing our influence. Several years later trade union leader Tom Sawyer, speaking on the NEC of the Labour Party, was to admit: "I defy anyone to tell me how you can go to Liverpool and defeat Militant by argument."

The LPYS developed in size and influence throughout the 1970s, against the background of industrial unrest and revolutionary movements developing internationally. Militant built its influence in this growing and radicalising youth movement. In 1974, Militant candidate Nick Bradley was elected as the LPYS representative on Labour's NEC by 143 votes to 18 for his nearest rival.

Peter: *The approach towards us was always many sided. Some Labour comrades were very friendly and prepared to collaborate with us because we were young people - believe it or not, I was young at one stage! And we appeared to be very sincere, which we were. And we were friendly.*

The witch-hunt started to get into full swing in 1982. Labour's best performance in the council elections was in Liverpool. In the civil service trade union CPSA (predecessor of PCS), our influence was growing too. The CPSA Broad Left swept the board in the NEC elections, with seven Militant supporters elected, and a Militant supporter elected President too.

As the witch-hunt gathered pace, "there was ferocious resistance amongst the socialist rank and file of the Party. Two hundred Constituency Labour Parties protested to the NEC against the witch-hunt. The regional conferences of the Scottish, West Midlands, London, Southern and South West Labour Parties opposed any witch-hunt. In the North West a motion supporting expulsions was contemptuously dealt with; a delegate moved 'next business'" (Rise of Militant).

Militant was able to draw on the support of rank-and-file activists. In September 1982, Militant organised a 3,000-strong rally at the Wembley Conference Centre in opposition to threats of expulsions. The conference included 1,622 delegates from Constituency Labour Parties, 412 trade union delegates and almost 1,000 visitors. The right-wing News of the World reported: "By any yardstick yesterday's rally by supporters of the Militant Tendency was menacingly impressive... Almost as big as the Labour Party itself could muster."

The ratification of the expulsions of Militant's editorial board at the 1983 Labour Conference was not a tame affair. Appeals against the expulsions of the five was on the agenda. There was massive media interest, but this session had been designated a closed session. 200 Labour parties had already protested to the NEC against this witch-hunt.

Amusingly, at one NEC meeting, Denis Healey, a leading right-winger, declared that "It was not a witch-hunt - it was a Militant hunt!" Big meetings took place in many areas like South Wales where militant workers were in conflict with parliamentary careerists like Neil Kinnock, once known as a

LABOUR'S Militant WITCH-HUNT

40 years since expulsion of Militant Editorial Board



left but who had now moved over decisively to the right.

The five were allowed to speak for only 5 minutes each to appeal against their expulsion. In the end it was ratified with the big block votes of the right-wing trade union bureaucrats. However, 80% of the delegates from constituency Labour parties and a number of other delegates voted against. Leading left MPs like Tony Benn and Eric Heffer expressed their opposition. Militant warned that if the right got away with expelling the five, the 'soft lefts' would follow at some point. The expulsions were headline news. Thousands of ordinary workers were aware of what was happening through the television in their front room. Also, at this time Neil Kinnock was elected as the new leader.

But, no way was this the end of the story! Massive protest meetings were held all over the country. A few months later, at the 1983 general election, two Militant-supporting Labour

MPs were elected: Terry Fields in Liverpool Broadgreen, and Dave Nellist in Coventry Southeast. And building on success in the 1982 Liverpool council elections, Labour gained another 12 seats in 1983, winning control of the council, with the city's Labour Party overwhelmingly under the political influence of Militant.

Peter: *We always tried to educate our ranks that there was no shortcut to success. You reap what you sow. You cannot automatically expect workers to support you. You have to convince them by argument and especially by deed.*

It was the propaganda of the deed. And that's what Liverpool represented on a colossal scale. If you could achieve this in one city, that could be multiplied elsewhere. And it would find an enormous echo amongst working people.

That's one of the reasons why, when we appeared on the scene and became

a growing influence, they were more worried about us than about some of the other groups, because from us it was not just propaganda. For us it was not just what you said, it's what you did. No cuts to jobs or services and no rent or rate rises!

After Labour won control of Liverpool City Council, in its first year in office it reversed plans for 1,000 redundancies made by the previous Liberal administration and instead created 1,000 new jobs. A minority of Labour councillors were supporters of Militant, but it had a decisive influence in the Labour Party in the city. The hundreds-strong Liverpool District Labour Party (DLP) played a crucial role both in decisions about what policies the councillors should carry out, and in defence of those singled out for expulsion later.

Peter: *The Liverpool District Labour Party had such authority because*

things were openly debated, there was open discussion. If you disagreed, you said so. And through arguments and counterarguments, there was a clarification and then the movement was united on the basis of that position.

That's why setting the rates in Liverpool was discussed, not in any little committee, but in the District Labour Party. And therefore, in the course of the discussion, it was seen to be democratic, and it was acted on. And that's what terrified the right wing and the ruling class.

Here's people who take seriously what they do. That means when they pass motions and then those motions become policy, that policy is adopted by tens of thousands of workers, not in some little committee. This then led to the massive demonstrations on the streets in Liverpool.

However, we were ultimately defeated, not because we were wrong, but because of the capitulation of others, including former lefts who played

a regrettable role. At first many Labour councils declared we would all fight the cuts together. Then people like Ken Livingstone [the left-Labour councillor who was then the leader of the Greater London Council, and was later the first Mayor of London], and others started capitulating to the right. When they were faced with the real fight, remain or retreat, they took the road of retreat. Only Lambeth council held on.

The expulsion of the MEB did not stop Militant building mass support for its ideas in Liverpool. The book 'Liverpool: a City that Dared to Fight' details the heroic struggle which took on Thatcher to win £60 million. During its time in office, the council created more than 2,000 jobs, built 5,000 council homes with front and back gardens, seven sports centres, and new parks, as well as better conditions for council workers and other workers locally.

At the peak of the movement, 29 March 1984 saw a city-wide general strike in support of the city council's stand against Tory cuts. 50,000 workers and youth demonstrated outside the budget-setting meeting. Later, the city's trade union movement seriously discussed taking all-out strike action in defence of the council against the government attacks - 7,200 workers voted in favour of such action, including the majority of the manual workers.

In 1985, Militant's 5,000-strong national rally took place at the Royal Albert Hall. But with the Liverpool council isolated, the Labour Party right wing, backed up by the capitalist press and the courts, attacked the Liverpool councillors - the next batch to be expelled from Labour after the Militant Editorial Board.

By 1988, despite the attacks, the Militant rally was 8,000-strong and took place at Alexandra Palace. Militant would go on to lead the mass struggle against the Poll Tax, when 18 million defied the law and refused to pay. Further expulsions took place, including Militant supporting Labour MPs Dave Nellist and Terry Fields. The latter went to prison for defying the law refusing to pay the poll tax along with millions of other workers.

The character of the Labour Party has now fundamentally changed, and it no longer has the mass active participation of the working class in its ranks. The witch-hunt against the Militant Editorial Board was only the first step. Since then, along with

expulsions that continue today, Tony Blair got rid of Clause IV part 4 from the Labour constitution which called for public ownership and was once printed on every Labour Party membership card.

Peter: *Well, of course all this didn't take place in a vacuum. These events took place against the background of the general economic and social situation, and there was a gradual move towards the right. I think the central point that we've got to make, is that it wasn't easy for the witch-hunters. It wasn't a walk in the park.*

It was really civil war in the Labour Party waged by the right, backed up by the capitalists in a thousand different ways. They urged the right in the Labour Party, if they were going to be acceptable and become the second eleven of capitalism, if you like to use that term, then it had to do its duty by making the Labour Party safe. We can see this process taking place on a huge scale with Starmer closing down local parties and foisting his own candidates on them for elections. And look how he got rid of Corbyn!

This was shown also by the refusal to tolerate even Ken Livingstone in the leadership of the London Labour Party for a time because he might reflect some of the pressures of the rank-and-file activists.

So, this is an ongoing battle. It's the class struggle that will never stop. We need to continue to build the support of working-class people to challenge the whole capitalist system.

And the thing is with Keir Starmer, it's quite incredible, his evolution. He's trying to reinvent himself, together with all the other creatures in the Parliamentary Labour Party. If they're pushed into power, it's going to be an incredible situation.

Every traditional party is under the hammer now and will be tested by events. Capitalism's powerful forces could be reduced to dust in the process. And we, the Socialist Party on the one side, must be prepared for the growth in our support - much bigger growth than most of our members anticipate. In particular the working class and youth will be looking for more and more radical alternatives.

We are ready and will prepare for that. Our experiences in going through the expulsions, the battles we organised in Liverpool and the victory against the poll tax will stand us in good stead to deal with whatever is coming down the line from the bosses in the not-too-distant future.



The Rise of Militant
by Peter Taaffe
£12



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Protesting under shadow of dangerous Walthamstow tower blocks

Nancy Taaffe is chair of the 'Save Our Square' campaign, and a member of the Socialist Party in Waltham Forest.

Our local campaign group 'Save Our Square' met under the shadow of the two newly constructed lift shafts for the two monster blocks being built in Walthamstow, east London. Our campaign has held these buildings at bay for eight years.

As these lift shafts have risen from the earth, residents are looking up and pointing at them, like some monstrous spaceship that has landed from another planet. They can be seen from almost anywhere in Waltham Forest.

On 30 September, 40 people protested.

It should be criminal - in the true sense of the word - that the Labour council has not paused construction until the Grenfell Inquiry has reported. Criminal, because it is expected that new regulations will ensure that no more tall buildings are built with only one stairwell and one lift - like these in Walthamstow. But the Labour council has rushed to establish 'facts on the ground'.

Some people ask us: "Why do you bother to continue campaigning when these towers are being built?" We answer "We have to be bothered, for all those that will live in them, for our environment that is being destroyed, and for those in housing need, who these towers offer nothing to."

A number of people approached us to say that they had been passive



The tower block so far... PHOTO: SAVE OUR SQUARE

onlookers in this campaign. But since the towers have gone up, they now want to be more actively involved. Save Our Square has challenged any ruling Labour politician to come to a public debate on 4 November to defend this private model for housing. If councils are going to passively accept it, then they should have the gumption to come and defend it.



Protesting on 30 September, including Nancy (second from left) PHOTO: SAVE OUR SQUARE

What's the point of another Labour councillor?

Nancy is the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidate in the Higham Hill by-election on 26 October. This is an edited extract from her leaflet.

Labour already has 45 councillors in Waltham Forest. Instead of voting for one more to put their hand up to cut our services and jobs, why not vote for a socialist fighter?

Nancy has campaigned to save libraries and youth services, campaigns for council homes instead of blocks of expensive flats, and isn't afraid to stand alongside workers striking for a pay rise.

Nancy says: "Many Labour councillors just trundle along to the council chamber, collect their expenses, and lead no resistance or make any stand against the devastating cuts, for fear of losing their positions and their potential future careers. We don't need any more councillors like that."

There are many campaigns outside of election times, where our elected Labour councillors are nowhere to be seen. Like campaigns against the

super-incinerator, cutting Higham Hill library service, the decimation of youth services, the fight for good community schools instead of business-run academies, or the rent and council tax rises.

People who are elected to stand up for us should be leading the fight against deteriorating services, and the impoverishment of more and more families. The profits of the rich are protected, and cuts cascaded into poor wards like Higham Hill. But the Socialist Party and TUSC are not like that.

On every important issue that affects Higham Hill, Socialist Party members have been part of the campaign or have led the campaign. We are not only seen at election times, we can be seen every Saturday down the market, campaigning against low pay, supporting strikers, or campaigning against the monster blocks

in the town square."

You don't have to vote Labour to keep out the Tories in Higham Hill. There's no risk of the Tories winning. TUSC got more votes than the Tories in the 2022 Higham Hill election.

In the Socialist Party, we think it is clearer than ever that working-class people need a party of our own.

"Nancy was solid and unwavering in support of 63 tenants who fought a year-long battle from being evicted. We could not have won the battle without Nancy."

BUTTERFIELDS RESIDENTS

"Nancy is a brilliant campaigner, who puts local people and services at the heart of all she does."

SUE WILLS, CHAIR OF SAVE HIGHAM HILL LIBRARY

tusc.org.uk

Tamil Solidarity Day discusses workers' struggle in Sri Lanka and Britain

LAWANYA CHANDRA TAMIL SOLIDARITY AND SOCIALIST PARTY

Solidarity Day, an annual event organised by the Tamil Solidarity campaign, took place on 30 September. The first session was about struggles and the trade unions in Sri Lanka, and was held in Tamil.

Senan - International Coordinator of Tamil Solidarity, and from the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) - spoke about how our small campaign is involved in various struggles in Sri Lanka and against the Buddhist chauvinist Sinhalese government. People coming together in a mass movement in 2022 got rid of the Rajapaksa family (see 'Sri Lanka: One year since the uprising' at socialisworld.net).

Saarangan, from Young Revolutionaries in Solidarity, spoke about how youth and the unions can unite oppressed people and win our rights. Refugee Rights Campaign activist Dhanu explained how we will continue to fight for the right to work and right to asylum.

The second session, 'Tamil rights and trade union action', held in

English, was about what's happening in Britain. April Ashley, the black members' (female) rep on the national executive of public sector union Unison, and a Socialist Party member, spoke in a personal capacity.

She spoke about the cost-of-living crisis, the strikes that are taking place, adding that we also need a political voice, and to build our own mass workers' party.

Hugo Pierre, another Unison activist and Socialist Party member, also spoke.

When he saw the 2022 Sri Lanka protests (Aragalaya - The Struggle) throwing out their government, he said he wished to see those events come here. When Hugo was on Unison's 'international committee', he put forward a motion for the union to support last year's protests, which was passed (see 'Trade union solidarity with Sri Lankan workers' at socialistparty.org.uk).

Socialist Party member Len Hockey has worked in the health service for 35 years, and is Unite the union secretary for Barts NHS trust (see 'Unite strike at Barts NHS' on page 7).

Len said all the crises at the moment are a product of a crazy blind capitalist system, and the breakup and privatisation of public services.

Len wants union leaders to talk more about how we won the health service and welfare state. It came out of successive struggles of past generations.

After seeing Aragalaya and the people's power, the Sri Lankan establishment is shaken. It is using the old technique to divide people and create communal violence.

Tamil Solidarity supports trade unions in Sri Lanka organising international solidarity. The unions need to be independent of the government, and should coordinate and mobilise all the workers and supporters. We are proposing a conference of trade union activists in Sri Lanka.

We need to build our strength. Mass struggle can dismantle oppressive regimes, and win our rights.

The Socialist Party's sister party, United Socialist Party, is fighting for socialism in Sri Lanka - socialist-world.net

tamilsolidarity.org



PHOTO: TAMIL SOLIDARITY

I was losing hope, until I joined the Socialist Party



Nick (left) at Plymouth Pride PHOTO: DUNCAN MOORE

NICK HAWKSFORD DEVON SOCIALIST PARTY

There was a Socialist Party campaign stall happening on my local high street, and I was intrigued.

I had always considered myself on the left politically. Though, for years, I had felt politically homeless.

I did not belong in any of the mainstream parties. Labour was in thrall to its capitalist wing.

The Green Party lacks any serious class analysis. Through my experiences online, I was beginning to lose hope in left politics.

When I spoke to the people running the Socialist Party stall, I was rather shocked to hear there was a party which seemed to align very closely with my own ideals. A party that was unabashedly Marxist in its analysis, democratic in its processes, and willing to put forth a left-wing economic argument.

So I stuck around for the stall and

chatted, and agreed to come down to the next stall that was in my town.

A week later, and there I was again.

The more I heard, the more I realised that this was a party of people who were not in this for some aesthetic reason, as was often the case in online circles. But, instead, these were people who were ready and willing to give up their time and money for a cause that they, and evidently I, believed in.

When I was asked to join the Socialist Party at the end of that stall, it was a no-brainer. Torquay high street may not have been the place I would have bet on to have found a party of revolutionary socialists. But I am very glad it was, because I have not regretted a moment since.



£25,002 raised to fund socialist fightback - target reached!

ISAI PRIYA SOCIALIST PARTY TREASURER

As October begins, the Socialist Party's third quarter comes to an end. Typically the third quarter has always been the hardest to reach our target because of the summer period, and we are pleased to announce that we have reached our target by collecting £25,002.

Our members and supporters had a very busy quarter indeed. We were out on our Saturday campaign stalls across the country and attended picket lines of workers on strike, as well as protests and demonstrations.

With four weeks to go, we still had £10,000 left to reach our target. Our branches organised even more street activities and fundraising events.

Southampton West raised £15 on a stall campaigning on free school meals, Leicester raised £28.50,

Sheffield South East £19.50 and Cardiff West £150.20 out campaigning, on top of selling dozens of copies of the Socialist. Coventry branch collected £26.60 in donations for their homemade badges and rock cakes, and a member in Enfield donated £50 by selling clothes on Vinted.

Thank you to everyone that worked hard to help us reach our target and helping to spread the socialist ideas that are needed to win better living standards for all.

The first week of October begins the new, and final, quarter of 2023. Every quarter, we have a target to raise £25,000 to ensure we have the funds to maintain our campaigning and to have the materials to use in our fight for socialism. This is so we can continue producing our weekly newspaper, a monthly magazine and the vast array of leaflets and posters on various campaigns. Please

Meeting discusses fightback against Kirklees cuts

IAIN DALTON SOCIALIST PARTY YORKSHIRE SECRETARY

Over 100 people crammed into the Al-Hikmah Centre in Batley, West Yorkshire, on 29 September to discuss how the cuts to local services planned by Kirklees Council could be opposed. In August, the council announced it had overspent by £27 million on last year's budget and there was a black hole in this and next year's budgets, amounting to £47 million.

Some of the details of the planned cuts to fill in these funding gaps have leaked. Two council-run specialist dementia care homes, Clarendon House and Castle Grange, are due to be closed; 250 jobs are to be lost this year; Heckmondwike Town Hall is also to close. A further 750 jobs are estimated to go to cover next year's financial gap.

And Kirklees Active Leisure - the arm's length company running formerly council leisure services in Kirklees - is due to close further leisure centres on top of last year's closure of Batley Baths, including Colne Valley Leisure Centre which won a reprieve last year, as well as Batley Sports and Tennis Centre, and Dewsbury Leisure Centre. If this goes ahead it will mean that three out of four leisure centres in the North Kirklees area have been closed in the last year!

The meeting heard from many people directly affected by these cutbacks, including family members of care home residents, a swimming club left homeless by the closure of the Dewsbury Leisure Centre, and others. Some in the meeting already felt that the cuts were a done deal and were already talking about seeking Community Asset Transfers, but

others wanted to fight. As one speaker from the floor suggested: "It's up to us to demand what services we want from our councillors, not for them to impose upon us."

I spoke from the floor on behalf of the Socialist Party, pointing out that demanding back the over £100 million stolen by the Tories from Kirklees residents in funding cuts since 2010 should be a key demand, including on Starmer's Labour if elected at the general election. The council is able to utilise the £100 million in reserves as of March, and its prudential borrowing powers to balance a no-cuts budget and fund services in the meantime.

As was pointed out in the meeting, grassroots campaigns can win, campaigning earlier this year pushed back some leisure centre closures, and campaigning around the Huddersfield Royal Infirmary stopped the closure of the A&E. The next step agreed from the meeting was for a mass lobby of the next Kirklees Council meeting in Huddersfield on 18 October.



Campaigning to save Batley Baths PHOTO: IAIN DALTON

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

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Black History Month: Black workers and the strike wave

APRIL ASHLEY

UNISON NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COUNCIL, BLACK MEMBERS REP (FEMALE) (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

Camden traffic wardens - mainly low-paid Black workers - have won a fantastic victory of a £15-an-hour wage after eight weeks of strike action. More than 100 workers took part in the long-running dispute with NSL, Camden Council's private contractor. Pay will be increased from £12.70 an hour to £15 an hour. And by 2025 staff will be on a minimum hourly rate of £16.50.

This is an example of Black, Asian and alternative ethnicity workers being at the forefront of the strike wave that has swept across Britain for more than a year.

We have seen St Mungo's

homelessness workers achieving a higher pay offer after weeks of strike action with Black shop stewards to the fore, and Abellio bus workers won a magnificent £18-an-hour pay victory after a determined struggle with nearly all Black and Asian workers on very lively pickets lines - setting new traditions.

Amazon workers are still in the middle of their pay dispute with leading Black stewards. More recently, health workers in Unite in a number of hospitals have taken strike action including Bart's NHS Trust in East London with mainly Black and migrant workers who last year won a historic victory for higher pay and a return to direct NHS employment.

Now, this year, the same workers are taking strike action over safe staffing

levels, bank rates and lump-sum payments.

RMT train workers are continuing their dispute. And earlier this year health workers in the Royal College of Nursing and Unison were on strike for higher pay, as well as Royal Mail workers in the Communication Workers Union. All of the strikes had a significant number of Black workers participating and on the picket lines.

Black workers have been part of the strike wave in huge numbers because they have been hit hardest by the cost-of-living crisis.

As the head of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) equalities unit said: "The cost-of-living crisis is going to hit Black workers disproportionately because of the kinds of jobs they are

doing, the impact of Covid, and the challenges of an institutionally racist labour market."

The TUC report, 'Still rigged - racism in the UK Labour Market', showed stark figures of unemployment, precarious working and low-pay for black workers.

It states: "One in six (14.6%) of Black and minority ethnic workers are likely to be in insecure work, compared to 11.15% of white workers in this position. Ministers have ignored the growth in casualisation suffered by Black workers who are disproportionately trapped in temporary jobs, agency jobs and zero-hour contracts. This trend has resulted in high levels of in-work poverty, resulting in Black workers being trapped in low-waged occupations and in situations where they are expected to do the most demanding and dangerous work."

It is these worsening economic conditions that have forced Black workers to be at the forefront of the enormous strike wave of workers fighting back against the worst drop in living standards since records began.

Economic crisis

The economic crisis has impacted Black workers disproportionately because capitalism is an exploitative system deliberately using divide-and-rule tactics of racism, sexism, anti-migrant rhetoric, and so on to oppress the working class and the poorest in society in order to maintain and increase the wealth of the richest 1%.

The Tories and bosses use divide and rule, blaming everyone else except the capitalist system for the collapse of living standards, is increasing as the economic crisis deepens.

This has meant 'culture wars' and emboldens far-right activists trying to blame migrant workers for poverty, unemployment, lack of housing and the collapse of local services instead of the root cause, the capitalist system.

As Malcolm X said: "You can't have capitalism without racism". Capitalism means continued oppression and exploitation of the working class. The mass strike wave has been able to raise wages and better conditions for some workers, and have forced some employers back.

But only by building a mass movement uniting workers of all backgrounds on a common programme will we have the power to take the wealth off the 1% and run society for the 99%, rid society of the capitalist system, and build a socialist society free from exploitation, discrimination and oppression.

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Finland: University occupations against right-wing government

EDMUND SCHLUESSEL
CWI IN FINLAND

A wave of student activism has swept Finland as the Conservative-led government prepares to impose its first, austerity-led budget. Student groups have launched sit-in demonstrations at most universities, several technical colleges and upper secondary schools.

They have a common list of demands against cuts to student housing benefits, opposing the proposed introduction of tuition fees for international students, and for better mental health support. The students have also stated opposition to the broader problem of the government's racist and anti-immigrant policies and connections to the extreme right.

Students could lose effectively €70 a month if the government's austerity plans advance. The government plans to stop cost-of-living adjustments to student grants, even though the past two years have seen inflation higher than four times the normal rate.

The first occupation began on 18 September at Helsinki University, the largest and oldest university in the country. Students have set up tents and banners in a 'speaking area' of the university's main building, with dozens taking part at any moment. Support from the community has been broad and sustained, and the university has stated it intends to let the protest go on undisturbed.

One theology student and occupier who spoke to us said: "I'm relieved my generation, millennials and Gen Z, has the fight in us and we aren't as apathetic as we're depicted. One of the themes that constantly comes up in our daily meetings is the struggle against apathy, so at this point I personally see it as an anti-apathy movement as well."

While numbers are smaller at other university occupations, CWI supporters report the activists organising the protests universally show determination and are in good spirits. Several high schools have been drawn into the occupation movement, as well, with students at Finland's arts schools particularly mobilised.

An important feature of the demonstrations is the willingness to connect with other movements in solidarity. Students from Helsinki

University's occupation joined in the nurses' union's demonstration against cuts to healthcare, and arranged for the Elokapina (Extinction Rebellion in Finland) demonstration taking place on the same day to visit. They have also been very welcoming to guests and speakers.

A spark?

The student occupations could be an important spark for sustained, broad action against the government and its neoliberal, racist agenda. While the summer following the election was highlighted by several very large demonstrations against government racism, they have so far failed to coalesce into a sustained movement, in part due to sectarianism by the demonstrations' organisers. But these student demonstrations are coming as the largest Finnish trade union confederation, SAK, has already announced coordinated strike action by its member unions against government proposals to push back union and workplace rights.

SAK's leadership has denied it is currently planning a general strike. But students and young workers could, by advocating for such a demand to unite the diverse sectional struggles against the Petteri Orpo government, provide a counterweight to the backpedalling, ultimately management-friendly union bureaucracy.

Spontaneous walkouts, most recently by support workers at Helsinki Airport over the sudden and non-negotiated withdrawal of access to cheap airfare tickets as a staff benefit, show that many workers are more ready to take action than their leaders. The government's popularity is already tumbling as it faces scandal after scandal over hate speech from its ministers. A general strike, Finland's first since 1956, could easily bring it down.

The question then posed is, what should follow it? A return to rule by the Social Democrats, or more likely a National Conservative-Social Democratic coalition, would be less overtly racist but would continue the same programme of spending cuts and

attacks on unions, albeit at a slower pace. Parliamentary parties to the left of the Social Democrats, meanwhile, have already shown themselves too willing to cover up their own politics and follow along with a programme of cuts to try to make themselves acceptable to the rich.

Finland needs a new, openly socialist mass party, bringing together students, workers, the unemployed and all oppressed in struggle. Such an organisation could coordinate and sustain the fight against all aspects of capitalism and build the working class into a force to not just reform, but transform society.

Support and build on the student occupiers' demands!

- Increase, don't cut, housing subsidies
- No to tuition fees, now and forever
- Guarantee mental health services for all who need them
- Build solidarity in the university and across society with the movement against cuts

- Oppose all racist government immigration policies
- Living grants for all students, let every student focus on their studies

- Edmund, then a Socialist Party and Socialist Students member, was elected to the National Union of Students executive in 2013. That body has since been disbanded



The Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) is the international socialist organisation which the Socialist Party is affiliated to. The CWI is organised in many countries. We work to unite the working class and oppressed peoples against capitalism, and to fight for a socialist world.
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Azerbaijani military forces overrun Nagorno-Karabakh enclave causing mass exodus of refugees

NIALL MULHOLLAND
COMMITTEE FOR A WORKERS' INTERNATIONAL

In just under 24 hours on 19 September, Azerbaijani military forces overran the Nagorno-Karabakh enclave in the south Caucasus mountains, at the cost of around 200 lives. Since then, at the time of writing, nearly 70,000 ethnic Armenians have fled the territory, out of a total population of around 120,000.

It is likely that they will be joined by thousands more from Karabakh, who are not convinced by the claims of the Azerbaijan regime that minority rights will be respected. There are already unconfirmed reports of

Azeri troops indiscriminately bombing villages. Adding to chaos, more than 100 people were killed in Stepanakert, the capital of Nagorno-Karabakh, when a massive explosion ripped apart a fuel depot as car owners struggled to buy petrol.

The Azerbaijani government has called for the "dissolution" of all political structures in Nagorno-Karabakh. In a deal agreed with Russia, the local defence forces in the enclave will be disarmed and reintegrated into Azerbaijan. Political figures from the fallen Karabakh regime are being detained, including a Russian-Armenian billionaire, Ruben Vardanyan, who briefly held

a cabinet job in Nagorno-Karabakh. Samvel Shahramanya, president of Nagorno-Karabakh, reflecting the dire situation facing his administration, ordered all state institutions to disband by 1 January 2024, when "the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) shall cease to exist".

The terrified refugees desperately fleeing Nagorno-Karabakh are quite justified in feeling that they have been abandoned by the so-called 'international community'. For months they have faced an economic blockade conducted by Azerbaijan forces which the Western powers have ineffectually criticised. During the military operation ordered by

Azerbaijani president Ilham Aliyev, 2,000 or so Russian 'peacekeeping forces' stood by, even when several of the peacekeeping troops were killed by Azeri fire (which the Azerbaijan government claimed was a mistake and has formally apologised for).

Armenia's prime minister, Nikol Pashinyan, declared that the "allies we relied on for many years" were "ineffective" and the "instruments of the Armenian-Russian strategic partnership were not enough to ensure Armenia's external security".

The US and the EU have been largely low key in their criticism of Azerbaijan's aggressive military actions, partly as they do not want

to anger their Nato - an alliance of the Western capitalist powers - ally Turkey, which has significant influence in Azerbaijan. The interests of the ruling elites and governments of these various powers come well before the interests of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh, who are now facing de facto ethnic cleansing. This will no doubt evoke painful historical memories among Armenians, following the genocide that was conducted against Armenians by the Ottoman Empire during World War One.

Since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, EU states have been attempting to increase oil and gas trade with Azerbaijan, as they massively cut down on supplies from Russia. The appalling human rights abuse record of the Azerbaijan regime have been ignored or downplayed by Western powers in furtherance of their essential interests.

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Mouldy homes and rip-off rents

Fight for council houses and rent control



PHOTOS: ANDREAS PHOTOGRAPHY/CAND SOCIALIST PARTY

BASIL HOLST
SOCIALIST STUDENTS

If you don't have mould, then you probably know someone who does.

Homes in disrepair have become the norm rather than the exception, it seems, and landlords are letting properties fall apart around us, and simply giving it a lick of paint for the next tenant. I've personally watched our contractor

try to push past my partner in our kitchen to try and wipe mould off our cupboard before a council inspection. I've uprooted myself and moved three times in a month.

Monopolising the housing market allows landlords to demand extortionate rents, and extortionate rent prices keep would-be homeowners from ever saving enough money to be approved for a mortgage. And so the cycle continues.

The average property price in

the UK is now 8.5 times the average annual income, meaning it is effectively impossible for first-time buyers to get mortgage approval, and even then the interest rates reflect the price of the market. This won't change on its own. When a minority of the population holds a greedy surplus of a crucial resource why would they willingly give it up?

We need council houses, rent controls and a party that actually fights for these things.

The Socialist Party has changed my perspective on my own situation. I'm not the one at fault, and I'm not the only one. As individuals we may be getting swept aside, ignored and sent through hours of phone queues, but the sum is greater than its constituent parts, and together we can build a movement. In London on 18 October, the Socialist Party is holding a public meeting where we will be sharing our experiences and discussing the change that's needed. And we

will be marching against the housing crisis on 28 October. We need socialist planning to provide homes for all!

- **London Socialist Party meeting at 7pm, 18 October, at The Abbey Conference and Community Centre, 34 Great Smith Street, SW1P 3BU**
- **March against the housing crisis at 12noon 28 October, starting at the Department for Levelling Up and marching to Trafalgar Square**

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



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