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the Socialist

Issue 1254

7-13 December 2023

formerly **Militant**

END GAZA SLAUGHTER

- For mass workers' struggle against war and capitalism
- Build a socialist alternative to Tories and Labour



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PAUL MATSSON

the Socialist

formerly Militant

Issue 1254
7-13 December 2023**DO YOU HAVE NEWS FOR US?**

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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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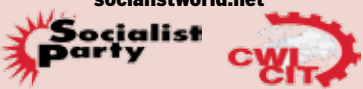
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The Socialist is the weekly newspaper of the Socialist Party, the England and Wales section of the Committee for a Workers' International

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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 OfficePrinted 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

Build the student walkouts against Israeli state terror

MILA HUGHES
COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

The United Nations has warned that "an even more hellish scenario is about to unfold" in the Gaza Strip and attempts at aid operations are hindered by Israeli bombardment and tank shelling.

Benjamin Netanyahu's Israeli government has said it is open to "constructive feedback" to mitigate risk to civilians – so long as this is consistent with their aim to destroy Hamas. Nearly 16,000 have been killed so far. The spokesman said "the United States sees eye-to-eye with us about the strategic objectives of this war"; as usual the British Tory government follows, and so does Labour's Keir Starmer. Britain's Ministry of Defence has confirmed it will conduct surveillance flights over Gaza, assisting the Israeli military.

The system we live under, capitalism, prioritises profit interests and power, however many deaths that

results in. For most young people, we've witnessed endless economic crisis in Britain, as long as we can remember. We have had enough with capitalism's cheap 'solutions' for devastating problems. That's why Socialist Students is building for more student walkouts to fight against this war on Gaza!

From Sheffield to East London, students and young people are getting organised and have protested outside of their schools, colleges and universities against brutal Israeli state terror. Young working-class people are using their voices to put necessary pressure to not only call for an immediate permanent ceasefire, but for the right of Palestinians to national self-determination. Socialist Students campaigners are making the case that this means fighting for socialist change.

Call a walkout in your school, college or university. Get in touch with Socialist Students to discuss what steps you can take.

Help us build the youth movement against war, to kick out the Tories and to replace the broken capitalist system with socialism!



PHOTO: JAMES IVENS

YOUNG SOCIALISTS AGAINST WAR
What you can do

- 1 Organise a public meeting** at your school or college to discuss how we can build the campaign
- 2 Call and organise a protest outside your school gates and march to your local MP's office.** Join a lobby of your local MP or councillors alongside other students, workers, and trade unionists
- 3 Set up a school or college students' union** to strengthen our movement
- 4 Join the socialists!** Scan the QR code to link up with other young socialists near you



The Socialist Party demands:

- **End the siege - for the immediate permanent withdrawal of the Israeli military from the occupied territories**
- **For a mass struggle of the Palestinians, under their own democratic control, to fight for liberation**
- **For the building of independent workers' parties in Palestine and Israel and links between them**
- **For an independent, socialist Palestinian state, alongside a socialist Israel, with guaranteed democratic rights for all minorities, as part of the struggle for a socialist Middle East**
- **No trust in capitalist politicians, internationally or in Britain. Fight to build a workers' party in Britain that stands for socialism and internationalism**

ISRAELI STATE BEGINS NEW BRUTAL OFFENSIVE

BUILD THE MASS MOVEMENT AGAINST WAR AND CAPITALISM



WHAT WE THINK

The brutal Israeli state wasted no time in re-releasing its horrific onslaught on the Palestinian people in Gaza as soon as its agreed temporary pause in fighting ended on Friday 1 December.

Not satisfied with its murderous destruction of northern Gaza, and spurred on by the most right-wing warmongers in the Israeli government, who openly criticised the temporary pause and any negotiation over hostage releases, the IDF has begun a new hellish bombardment of southern Gaza to clear the path for its land offensive.

Already hundreds have been killed since it unleashed its firepower once again. Nearly 16,000 have been killed at the time of writing, and the death toll is rising fast. Disease, malnutrition and every element of social and inhumane catastrophe is accelerating.

2.3 million Gazans have nowhere left to run as the Israeli forces begin a new rampage south. In a sick game of 'battleship' and 'tig', the IDF has published a map of 620 separate blocks, each numbered, some the size of a couple of football pitches. Gazans have been told to 'keep following the map carefully' and move from one block to another when the IDF tells them they are going to bomb a block via social media... in a place that has seen IDF-imposed internet blackouts and power shortages.

West Bank

On the West Bank, far-right settlers, often with the backing of Israeli soldiers, have escalated their organised killings of Palestinians. In the first few days of December, over 60 Palestinians were seized and arrested in nighttime raids. Many were children. Their crime: stone throwing!

Many across the world have been enraged by the fact that it is Palestinian children that have made up many of the prisoners released by Israel in exchange for hostages. No family on the West Bank is unaffected by the traumas of nighttime raids that take Palestinian children and throw them into prison after kangaroo military court procedures.

Over 200 Palestinians in the West Bank have been killed since 7 October, over 50 were children. There has been a recorded 220 'assaults' on Palestinian communities, including the bombing of a refugee camp killing over 70 and vicious street murders of ordinary Palestinians by a combination of far-right settlers and the IDF. There have been many attacks on solidarity protests over the bombardment of Gaza.



Devastation in Gaza, the aftermath of Israeli army rocket fire Wafa/APAimages/CC

Over 400,000 Palestinians have lost their jobs or ability to work since the start of October. For Palestinians in Gaza, the West Bank or within Israel itself, there is pain, suffering and feeling that there is no prospect of a way out.

New Nakba

As Gazans are forced closer and closer to the sea and Egyptian border, and pogrom-style attacks increase in the West Bank, the prospect of a new 'Nakba' or catastrophe is deep-rooted.

The objective conditions for a mass eruption of the Palestinian poor and masses are there. While many, particularly on the West Bank, will have looked more to Hamas as a vehicle to take on the Israeli state and right-wing settlers, as opposed to the distrusted Fatah-run PA, neither will bring about liberation, decent living standards, or an end to the conflict - none of which are possible under capitalism.

The way forward for the Palestinians will be through democratically organised mass struggle - a socialist intifada - based on the interests of

workers and the poor, independent of those of the Hamas and other Palestinian leaders, and the rich elites of the Arab world.

The Arab rulers, especially in Egypt where many have been arrested on Gaza solidarity protests, are terrified that the mass rage against Israel and the oppression of the Palestinians could fuse with the huge anger at poverty and repression at home, creating the basis for a new 'Arab Spring' (see pages 8-9).

Already, the mass anti-war movement around the world, and also growing pressure within Israel, have been important factors in forcing the 'pause'. But now we need to continue to build the anti-war movement.

However, winning a genuine right to self-determination for the Palestinian people is inextricably linked to the overthrow of capitalism and socialist change. Only on this basis will discussion and cooperation be possible between elected representatives from both the Palestinian and Israeli working classes to resolve all the key issues, including borders, and guarantees for the rights of minorities.

US Imperialism

The USA props up about a fifth of the Israeli defence budget, about \$3.8 billion. But the Biden administration continues to grow more impatient and angered by its largely ignored public warnings for Israel to scale down its attacks and 'try harder' to reduce its civilian murder toll.

US imperialism fears the growing political cost internationally and domestically for its support for Israel. It also fears wider regional war and conflict developing, and with it an economic and trade breakdown in the Middle East.

This is taking place at the same time as war in Ukraine and with ongoing tensions between China and Taiwan, and internationally. Domestically the US is increasingly politically polarised. Twice, a government shutdown has been narrowly avoided, with support for Israel a factor in forcing the House of Representatives to 'kick the can down the road'. That will come back into the situation again in January. Overshadowing all this is the growing tide of a new Trump presidential campaign threatening his return to

the White House. Further geopolitical crisis, war and conflict is on the horizon.

In the UK, further demonstrations and school student walkouts and protests are set to continue and could escalate again. Many who have taken to the streets have connected the dots and seen that the struggle of the working class and poor in Palestine is linked to the struggle against our own ruling capitalist class.

The chants of "Sunak is a wasteman" and "Starmer is a wasteman" have almost become the anthem of protests up and down the country. It gives a glimpse of the political vacuum growing, and with it openness to the idea of a new political voice for working-class people.

Not content with chasing Tory coattails in policy, warmongering Starmer is even more determined to out Tory the Tories, with his remarks praising Margaret Thatcher. Unpopularity and distrust of Starmer from millions of youth and workers keeps rising to new levels.

Organise forces for socialism

Socialist Party members are fighting for steps towards a new party, by campaigning for a list of workers' candidates for the general election, backed by the trade unions. But preparations for a general election stand need to begin now. The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, which the Socialist Party participates in, has set the date for a 'general election organising convention', 3 February in Birmingham, inviting others to participate.

To make sure the anger that has been seen on the streets doesn't evaporate, revolutionaries have a vital role to play, not just in supporting and building the mass movements, but in arguing for the socialist programme that is needed for victory, and winning and organising forces to fight for it.

The working class ties every struggle together. Armed with a socialist programme and revolutionary organisation, it has the potential power to end this rotten system and start to build new socialist societies able to meet the aspirations of the working classes and poor masses of the Middle East and worldwide.

SOCIALISM TODAY

Monthly magazine of the Socialist Party

December-January issue includes...

- Roots of conflict - brief history of Israel/Palestine
- Trade Unions and the early Labour Party
- Starmer's Gaza crisis

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TUC MEETS TO RESPOND TO TORY MINIMUM

- Name the date now for a mass demo
- Demand employers refuse to issue work notices – including Labour authorities
- Prepare to strike to defend victimised unions and members

ROB WILLIAMS
SOCIALIST PARTY WORKPLACE ORGANISER

In the press release announcing its 9 December Special Congress against the Tories' new Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act (MSL), Trades Union Congress (TUC) General Secretary Paul Nowak said: "The UK already has some of the most restrictive trade union laws in Europe. Now the Tories want to make it even harder for people to win fair pay and conditions. That's why we are calling this once-in-a-generation Special Congress."

If the Tories get away with it, the MSL Act represents a serious attack on the right to strike, in effect forcing unions to organise their own strike-breaking operations. The Tories' 'code of practice' for the new law states that trade union-appointed picket supervisors "will be instructed by the trade union to use reasonable endeavours to ensure that picketers avoid, so far as reasonably practicable, trying to persuade members who are identified in a work notice not to cross the picket line at times when they are required by the work notice to work".

What is needed?

Union reps and activists looking on at the Special Congress will ask the question: what is needed for the trade union movement to force the Tories back?

Sunak's government is weak and

divided. He became the third Tory prime minister in two months when he took office in October 2022 and his government is mired in crisis - shown by the sacking of his Home Secretary Suella Braverman and the return of ex-PM Cameron. Also, the Tories and the employers are faced with a strike wave that has seen the biggest level of action since the Thatcher period of the 1980s. There is ten times the level of industrial action than when David Cameron brought in his Trade Union Act seven years ago.

It is an open question what the Tories' intentions are for the MSL Act. The original legislation was tabled in January 2023, yet it's still not clear if and when it will be implemented. It was finally passed into law in July, just before the summer parliamentary recess, and was then followed by a lengthy consultation process.

Serious

But the threat of the MSL must be taken with maximum seriousness. The Tories have now started to propose actual minimum service levels for some sectors. For the rail industry, they state: "Where a strike affects passenger train operation services, the MSL is the equivalent of 40% of the operator's timetabled services during the strike." Also, the Tories have now announced their intention to overturn the defeat they suffered in the High Court in the summer on using agency workers to undermine strikes.

Actually, the Tories have begun to use MSLs as a threat against a number of groups of workers, especially those in dispute and considering calling action, from doctors to education staff. The latest statements from the government specifically target workers on ambulances, border control and on the rails.

While there aren't currently live disputes in the first two areas, Aslef train drivers continue to take nationwide strike action (including during the week before the Congress) and the RMT is balloting on pay on London Underground. A serious clash could quickly be posed, for which the Special Congress must set out a concrete course of action.

Such a plan of action is the most likely way to push the Tories back from moving to implementation. Alternatively, the union leaders may argue that because Labour's Keir Starmer is overwhelmingly likely to be elected as prime minister next year, and has promised to repeal not only the MSL but Cameron's Trade Union Act, that if a union is targeted, there should be a pragmatic retreat.

That would be a massive mistake. Union activists have already learned not to be too trusting in Starmer. They are well aware of his refusal to support the strikes, even sacking Sam Tarry as shadow transport secretary for supporting action by rail workers from his former union TSSA.



National Shop Stewards Network lobbying September's TUC (Rob Williams, centre) LOUIE FULTON



Lobby of TUC Special Congress
9-10am Saturday 9 December
TUC Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3LS

SERVICE LEVELS ATTACKS

Starmer's Labour

Particularly buoyed by the Tory meltdown over Truss that reached its height at last year's Congress, Starmer told delegates that he wouldn't apologise for not supporting union action and warned that his government would be one of 'tough choices'. This was correctly understood by many at the Congress to mean yet more wage restraint, after enduring the biggest cut in living standards for generations.

Starmer has reinforced this message by scandalously praising Thatcher in the Sunday Telegraph! In addition, his craven tail-ending of the Tories over Gaza, including refusing to support a ceasefire amidst the barbaric assault of the Israeli military, is further confirmation that his starting point in Downing Street will be to represent the interests and profits of big business. This all poses the need for a political alternative for workers.

The best way to ensure that the MSL Act is defeated or repealed by an incoming government is to build a mass campaign of defiance or, as the motion passed at September's Congress defined it: "non-compliance and resistance".

Name the date

This means concretising that resolution. Therefore, the Special Congress should name the date for a mass union demonstration early in the new year, linking together the fight for the right to strike with the struggle against the Tory cost-of-living squeeze. There should be an agreed process for if and when any union is threatened with a fine (which could be up to a £1 million) or if any group of workers faces dismissal for not complying with the legislation. This could involve the calling of an emergency demonstration outside the courts. But it should also include preparing the ground now for a national

stoppage on the sale of a 24-hour general strike by all unions if anyone is attacked.

The TUC should demand not only that Starmer keeps his promise to repeal the MSL Act along with the Trade Union Act, but that all employers, particularly those led by Labour representatives, refuse to issue work notices; this includes the Welsh government, councils and directly elected mayors such as Sadiq Khan in London and Andy Burnham in Manchester, and fire authorities like Merseyside, who the Fire Brigades Union have had a longstanding dispute with.

This is the concrete fighting programme that is needed. If that does not come out of the Special Congress, the militant unions must come together in a 'Coalition of the Willing' behind the strategy that's needed

Lessons from struggles against anti-union laws

The TUC's press release stated that the last time that the TUC called a Special Congress was over 40 years ago. That Congress, in April 1982, was organised in response to the first tranche of Thatcher's anti-union laws. But it wasn't inevitable that the Tories would be successful in their imposition.

However, because most of the union leaders were not willing to take the mass collective action to support the major industrial disputes that were targeted by Thatcher, such as the miners' strike and the print strikes in Warrington and Wapping, the Tories were able to implement and consolidate this brutal anti-union attack. It still forms the basis of what Tony Blair once boasted (and largely left on the statute book) the most restrictive trade union laws in Western Europe, and has been

including naming the date for a national demonstration.

The strike wave that has built over the last 18 months, including at least two days where over half a million workers took strike action together, has shown that workers are prepared to fight. New sectors where union organisation has barely existed have seen big battles such as at Amazon. At the other end of the battlefield is a weak, divided and crisis-ridden Tory government.

The workers movement can win a real victory that could not only inflict a terminal defeat on the Tories but lay down a warning to Starmer too. This is the fighting programme that union reps and activists must now fight for, and is what Socialist Party members will be demanding of the TUC at the NSSN-organised lobby on 9 December.

added to by the Trade Union Act 2016 of Rishi Sunak's new cabinet recruit David Cameron.

However, there was another special Congress staged in Croydon in 1971; organised to oppose Tory prime minister Edward Heath's Industrial Relations Act. Those anti-strike laws were eventually repealed by the 1974 Labour government, but only after they were rendered inoperable by a mass workers' movement in 1972 against the jailing of the 'Pentonville 5' London dockers. An unofficial stoppage of general strike proportions defeated Heath and forced the release of the dockers' union reps. The TUC was forced by this movement to name the date for a general strike, the first since 1926, although by then the TUC knew that the Tories were going to buckle. Thatcher was a minister in Heath's cabinet that suffered this defeat.

National Education Union agrees plan to fight Minimum Service Levels

SHEILA CAFFREY
NEU NEC MEMBER (PERSONAL CAPACITY) AND
CANDIDATE FOR NEU VICE-PRESIDENT

The Tories told education unions that before imposing minimum service levels (MSLs) during strike action in schools, they would discuss with the

unions. The talks have ended without agreement.

The union's National Executive (NEC) met on Saturday 2 December. Socialist Party members on the NEC proposed what is necessary for the union to fight MSLs. The amendment below was passed by the NEC.

The general secretaries of all the education unions have rightly condemned the Tory government's phoney consultation on minimum service levels. We note the disdain the government treated the talks with the education unions, and fear that this reflects the attacks to come if we do not make it clear we will resist. Therefore, we must also state clearly what we will do.

- The NEU should demand of all employers, but especially Labour authorities, that, like the Scottish government, they refuse to cooperate and refuse to issue work notices
- The NEU must call on the TUC to implement the decisions it made at its September Congress in full - including a mass trade union demonstration and 100% support for any union

attacked - and should encourage NEU members to lobby the TUC Special Congress on 9 December to that effect

- The NEU must demand that a Starmer-led government does not implement, and instead repeals, the MSL legislation - along with the other anti-trade union legislation. In the meantime, we should call on Starmer to pledge to underwrite any fines levied on unions this side of a general election
- The NEU should make it clear to all members that any school group taking action will receive the full backing of the union in resisting MSLs and opposing any victimisation
- Should the union receive a work notice, it should call an emergency Executive to plan next steps to defend our right to take industrial action without government and employer interference

- Sheila Caffrey is seeking nominations from NEU districts to stand in the election for vice-president of the union. Nominations are open until 15 December



Barts NHS Trust workers keep on fighting

On 4 December, Unite the Union members at Barts NHS Trust embarked on their fifth tranche of action in their dispute over pay and safe staffing, with 24 days of action already under their belts.

The week-long strike takes place at five east London hospitals, and involves workers in 'soft services' - domestics, porters, catering staff, security etc - who are fighting for fair treatment. One porter at Whipps Cross said: "We don't know if we'll win. But we have to think about our children and grandchildren."

At the Royal London hospital in Whitechapel, these workers are joined in strike action by A&E nurses and pathologists.

Vote for change in PCS

Vote Marion Lloyd for general secretary and John Moloney for AGS



MARION LLOYD
BROAD LEFT NETWORK CANDIDATE FOR PCS
GENERAL SECRETARY

I'm standing for election as the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) general secretary, because our union needs a democratic, fighting, socialist leadership. I'm also supporting John Moloney in his bid to be re-elected as PCS assistant general secretary (AGS).

We are the candidates for change.

Hopefully, by now, many of you will have already voted for us. The election closes on Thursday 14 December at midday. To ensure that your vote is counted, then please make sure that you complete the ballot paper and send it back by Monday 11 December.

I'd like to thank everyone for the tremendous amount of support. But there is still time to not only send in your ballot paper but talk to others. Encourage your teammates to do likewise.

A vote for us will put our union in the strongest position to defend our pay, improve our jobs, and to ensure that we are all properly represented over the weeks and months to come.



Marion supporting PCS ISS strikers at BEIS HELEN PATTISON

If elected, we pledge:

- To remain on our civil service wages, and to donate the rest of the general secretary/AGS wage (approx. £80,000) to union campaigns
- To reinvigorate the union's faltering national campaign on pay, pensions, redundancy rights and jobs. We can win!
- To fight hard for privatised workers, to win on pay, terms and conditions, and to bring these workers back into the civil service
- To rebuild PCS by backing our branches to recruit new reps and members, putting money and staff support into branches

A home truth about housing benefit reform

The announcement in the Tory Autumn Statement that Local Housing Allowance (LHA) is being restored to the 30th percentile, meaning rents for the cheapest three in ten places in an area are covered, might seem to give tenants some help with soaring rents. Most reporting of this crumb from the rich man's table is that it will be frozen again at next year's levels.

So who is this aimed at? Landlords with increased mortgage payments giving them time to prepare a blizzard of possession proceedings.

LHA has been frozen since 2020, based on rents in 2018-19, while private rents have risen rapidly to their highest recorded levels. Tenants need real help – genuinely affordable rents and rent controls.



Nottingham City Council issues 114 notice We won't pay for crisis – no cuts, closures or job losses!

JEAN THORPE

NOTTINGHAM CITY UNION (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

Labour-run Nottingham City Council has issued a section 114 notice. This means that spending deemed 'unnecessary' by the Council Chief Finance Officer will cease. This will continue for at least 21 days and, within this timeframe, the City Council is required to hold a full council meeting to consider the position they are in. All services are potentially at risk. Even though the council is still legally required to deliver services to vulnerable people – including child and adult social care and for homeless people – any service could face cuts.

This is terrible news for the workforce and for our local communities. Council staff are in no way to blame for this crisis. Council unions do not have details of any proposed job losses or service cuts yet, but all cuts and other attacks should be opposed. We have already heard of possible losses running to hundreds of jobs.

The position that the city council now finds itself in is primarily a result of government underfunding since 2010 and earlier. It also includes losses from the council's failed commercialisation strategy. Amongst other things, the city council set up its own energy company Robin Hood Energy (see 'Nottingham City Council: The (mis)adventures of Robin Hood Energy' at socialistparty.org.uk). When the company collapsed in 2020, the city council lost up to £38 million and 230 jobs were lost. Further difficulties emerged in 2021 when it was

discovered that the council had used £40 million from the Housing Revenue Account (money that was intended for council house repairs and improvements) on its general funds. A total of over £51 million had to be paid back.

In 2020, the city council decided to invest £17 million in a private sector regeneration of Broadmarsh Shopping Centre. When the owner Intu went into liquidation, the council had to take on responsibility for regeneration. The area remains a building site and the issue of how it will be redeveloped is still unresolved.

The council, together with other

underfunded councils, should have mounted campaigns to keep the needed money, particularly after the government changed funding arrangements for councils in 2013. They reduced the direct funding from central government (known as the Revenue Support Grant) and replaced it with allowing councils to keep more of the council tax and business rates that they collect. Poorer areas raise less from these local taxes and therefore funding decreased significantly. 80% of properties in Nottingham are in council tax bands A and B (the lowest) and the council says that it gets £100 million

less from central government than it did a decade ago.

Passing on the cuts

Unfortunately, so far, the city council has failed to mount a fight against this underfunding. Passing on the cuts has just invited further cuts from the Tory government. A public campaign by the council could have, and could still be, developed mobilising the workforce, trade unions, local communities and appealing to other councils, many of whom are not far off issuing section 114 notices themselves.

In the meantime, a huge response is needed by council trade unions and the trade union movement locally, going out into communities to mobilise a campaign against any cuts, for proper funding for council services and demanding councillors vote against any cuts demanded by unelected commissioners.

Labour nationally, likely to lead the next government, should commit to reverse the collapse in services faced by so many councils. If, as expected, a Starmer government refuses, this highlights again the urgent need for a new workers' party that would.

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, which the Socialist Party is part of, has opened applications to stand in the upcoming local elections. If you would like to find out more and be part of an anti-cuts stand, visit tusc.org.uk



One of the many protests against council cuts in Nottinghamshire. PHOTO: ALI TEZUK

Crisis in maternity services

ELEANOR DONNE
ESSEX SOCIALIST PARTY

The Care Quality Commission (CQC), the body that oversees and regulates health and social care in England, has found that nearly two thirds of maternity services are inadequate. This includes 15% of maternity units deemed so unsafe that there is a "high risk of avoidable harm to mother or baby". This is double the number of unsafe units since last year.

Kate Terroni, interim deputy chief executive of the CQC, talks of a "deteriorating picture in maternity services". This is very worrying news for anyone who is currently using or will need these services in the future. But it will come as no surprise to midwives and maternity support workers who are feeling overworked, underpaid and 'burnt out' by the stress of trying to plug the gaps in service left by chronic staff shortages. The Royal College of Midwives (RCM) has calculated that in just one week in March 2023 midwives across England worked 100,000 extra unpaid hours. Many had 'gone the extra mile' during the Covid pandemic,

putting their health and that of their families at risk. But when normal times can still mean 12-hour shifts with no break or food, no wonder that 'burnout' is a growing issue, with staff on long-term sick or leaving for other, less stressful jobs.

100,000
extra unpaid hours worked by midwives in one week

Before Covid there was already a shortage of 2,500 midwives in England and the RCM warned in 2021 of a further 'midwife exodus', citing eight out of ten concerned with staff levels and two thirds not satisfied with the quality of care they were able to deliver. Dr Taylor of the RCM has stated that there is a "direct

correlation between staffing levels and safety".

The Maternity Safety Alliance, made up of families whose babies have died or been harmed in the care of the NHS, is calling for a statutory public enquiry into England's maternity services. The RCM has stated that it shares the frustration of the MSA at the pace of progress in maternity safety and the lack of action after previous enquiries. In the same statement it rightly says that systemic change is needed in the NHS.

Step one is to get rid of the Tory government. But Labour under Keir Starmer is not committed to ending the internal market in the NHS, or increasing public spending. Health unions will have to continue to battle for decent pay and resources for NHS workers, but we also need genuine systemic change in the whole of society so that profit doesn't come before life and health.



Midwives protesting in Hull in 2021. PHOTO: TED PHILLIPS

David Cameron's back in government His austerity legacy has remained

TOM PORTER BROWN
BIRMINGHAM CENTRAL BRANCH

With Suella Braverman out, former Prime Minister David Cameron making his way back into the Tory cabinet certainly took people by surprise, illustrating the dire situation the Tories find themselves in. They limp from crisis to crisis, now forced to call upon a man from a more 'stable' era of British politics.

But of course David Cameron did not run a stable Britain. It was his actions that paved the way for the dire state the working class is in today, with a cost-of-living crisis and ongoing cuts. He became Prime Minister off the back of the 2008 financial crisis, which gave Cameron and Chancellor George Osborne, backed by their coalition partners the Liberal Democrats, the opportunity to implement swingeing austerity.

over **800**
libraries shut as councils passed on Cameron's cuts

This saw huge losses of jobs in the public sector, as funding to councils was slashed. Many turned to

the private sector, meaning services began to be run for profit. Working-class people suffered the worst as services they depended on were slashed to the bone under the guise of 'reviving the economy', a situation which has only worsened in the decade since.

14%
cut in real-terms spending on public services between 2010 and 2020

Like his successors, Cameron's solutions to the housing crisis were impractical and out-of-touch, including the hated bedroom tax which Socialist Party members fought against. In 2015 he prided himself as being determined to get homes built but was unwilling to address the actual issue – affordability.

But his biggest failing, from the bosses' point of view, was the disastrous EU referendum, the result of which sped up the slow-motion splintering of the Tories.

After the result, Cameron resigned as Prime Minister, he now returns to government after years feathering his nest lobbying for big business.



Socialist Party placards against Cameron's cuts in 2015. PHOTO: LONDON SP

Tory Autumn Statement reforms unfair for disabled people

READING SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBER

As always, a Tory Chancellor's Autumn Statement offered next to nothing to help ordinary people. Not that we should be surprised! We are being forced to pay for the capitalist class's catastrophic 'mistakes' built into their chaotic system.

What riles me most is the proposal that all disabled people are expected to work from home. Will the government fund internet access, computers, scanners and printers for those who do not have them? Of course not! Disabled people will be expected to meet the cost out of already dwindling funds. A lot of chronic health conditions already require out-of-pocket expenses for things

like mobility aids simply to make life more bearable. These items are necessities not luxuries!

Benefit fraud is actually quite low and, once again, people are being demonised and persecuted for something they didn't choose. If the Tories want to know about fraud they really should look closer to home and their dodgy expense claims.

As someone who has numerous hidden disabilities I am incensed by this. I could physically work, given the opportunity. But there are people who genuinely can't. One size doesn't fit all when it comes to health and disability, hidden or otherwise. We need to fight for those in our own communities who have no voice.



World leaders arrive at COP28. PHOTO: THE PRESIDENT'S OFFICE, MALDIVES/CC

COP28 – hypocritical capitalist climate conference

MARK BEST
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

The COP UN climate change conference is under way in Dubai. Every year world leaders gather to rub their hands and discuss the various climate records smashed in the last year, the dire consequences of a heating planet for millions of people and agree that something should be done about it – as long as it's not them.

This year's president, UAE climate envoy and fossil fuel chief executive Sultan Al Jaber, has been a useful pantomime villain for others to point at and say, 'well we're better than him at least.' Questioned about the need to phase out fossil fuels to prevent global temperatures from increasing by an average of 1.5°C, he answered that there is "no science" for this "unless you want to take the world back into caves."

But are the British politicians who flew over to the summit in separate private jets any better? They certainly went out in the hypocrisy contest. Prime minister Rishi Sunak, during the less than twelve hours he spent in Dubai, claimed other countries were grateful for the work the UK had done so far as a climate leader. This comes after abandoning net-zero pledges, failing to secure any new offshore windfarms by relying on big business to invest, and giving the go ahead to increased oil and gas extraction in the North Sea.

But would Keir Starmer, who claimed that under a Labour

government the UK would be back to playing a "leading role" in talking climate change, be much better? He has U-turned multiple times on pledges for climate investment, pushing the much-needed promised funds further into the future! Starmer and shadow chancellor Rachel Reeves are committed to "iron-clad fiscal rules", which means they won't be investing what is needed as they do the bidding of the bosses.

2,400
fossil fuel lobbyists attending COP28 - another record broken!

And can we really take any lessons from King Charles about the need to do more to prevent climate change while he sits in a golden chair weighed down by baubles and trinkets?

Al Jaber's frankness shows the reality of climate chaos under capitalism.

While the capitalist class makes massive profits off the back of polluting industries and compete against each other on national and world stages, maintaining living standards for working-class people and taking action against climate chaos is a pipe dream.

The announcement of potential clean energy funds from COP28 shows the bosses are only interested when they can make a profit, generated by the exploitation of working-class people around the world.

Capitalism means climate chaos, and politicians across the world that act in the interests of capitalism will mean more of the same limited action while global temperatures increase and with them extreme weather, droughts and famine.

Socialist change across the world, in which the working class owns and makes use of the world's resources to provide a decent standard of living, is essential to undo the mess that's been made of the environment in the dash for profit.

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The catastrophic situation in Gaza follows years of grim events across the Middle East. Just 13 years ago a very different outcome was possible. The 'Arab Spring' could have set the region on a different course, ending poverty, war and despair. Mass uprisings took place in the Middle East and North Africa, toppling long-standing dictators in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen. Fearsome security forces could not save them. In Syria, President Assad survived by fostering sectarian divisions and with military backing from Russia and Iran. Mass protests also took place in Morocco, Algeria, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Sudan and Israel.

Yet despite these movements, the ruling classes survived, replacing some ageing dictators but not loosening their grip on the economy. Exploitation of working-class and poor people for profit continues. Poverty, lack of decent public services, minimal democratic rights and now war, remain.

Could a socialist federation of the Middle East have been won? What lessons can be drawn for future struggle? **David Johnson** looks back at some of these events.

On 17 December 2010, a 26-year old Tunisian vegetable street seller, Mohamed Bouazizi, had his cart, scales and produce confiscated by the authorities and was publicly beaten.

In debt after buying that day's produce, without money to bribe officials, and with a family depending on his takings, in desperation he stood in front of the town hall, shouting: "How do you expect me to make a living?" and set himself on fire.

Protests began in his town within hours. With 30% unemployment, poverty, corruption and police oppression, thousands identified with Bouazizi's plight.

He died almost three weeks later, by which time protests had swelled and spread around the country. All workers and poor people in Tunisia suffered during President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali's dictatorship, in power since 1987.

Despite repressive laws, with police firing on demonstrators, by 14 January Ben Ali's position had become untenable. With other members of the corrupt and fabulously wealthy Trabelsi family, he fled the country.

State-controlled and privately owned media censored news but these events were shown on satellite TV. Ben Ali's downfall electrified workers and youth throughout the region. They too identified with Bouazizi, also suffering under authoritarian regimes protecting ruling elites.

These regimes were in turn backed financially and with military supplies by the US and other imperialist powers. 'Democratic' governments happily turned a blind eye to police brutality, sham justice, torture and fraudulent elections in return for protection of their financial interests in the region.

Historic repression

President Hosni Mubarak, previously the Air Force commander, had ruled Egypt since 1981. Throughout that time an 'Emergency Law' was kept in place giving police extended powers, suspending constitutional rights and legalising censorship. Opposition political activity was banned. Gatherings of more than five were prohibited. Indefinite detention without trial and civilian trials by military courts were permitted.

Despite these harsh restrictions, protests and strikes could not be held back forever. In 2000, after the second

Palestinian intifada (uprising) broke out, marches and rallies erupted in Egypt. Demonstrators chanted slogans such as "We haven't forgotten you, Palestine; we are also occupied!"

Egypt was the biggest recipient of US arms in the Middle East after Israel. When the US and Britain (under 'New Labour') invaded Iraq in 2003, Mubarak dutifully supported his Washington backers. 40,000 protesters demonstrated and occupied Tahrir Square in Cairo for ten hours. Battles with police continued the following day. For the first time chants against Mubarak were heard on the streets.

A group of activists from these demonstrations began organising together, mostly students and left-wing activists. Their campaign, 'Ki-faya' (Enough), bravely defied police repression with protests demanding Emergency Law abolition and full democratic rights.

However, as they mostly did not take up issues like low pay, poor schools, health services and housing, they got little active support from the wider working class. But their audacity and determination helped raise workers' confidence to fight back.

Mubarak's son, Gamal, a US-trained investment banker brought into his father's Cabinet, pushed through a privatisation programme. New owners attacked workers' longstanding terms and conditions. From 2004 onwards, strikes grew in number and militancy.

As well as other obstacles, workers had to battle against trade union leaders. The Egyptian Trade Union Federation was, in effect, another branch of the repressive state. Its leaders were state-appointed - policing the members instead of fighting for them. Nevertheless, it had four million members in key industries.

In 2006 a strike broke out at Mahalla al-Kubra, the largest factory in the Middle East. 3,000 women workers began the action, marching round the huge site chanting: "Here are the women! Where are the men?" They were joined by the rest of the 27,000 workforce, demanding a bonus of two month's pay. After five days they settled for a 45-day bonus.

The victory raised workers' confidence further. Two million workers took part in 3,000 strikes and industrial actions between 2004 and 2010, the largest working-class movement in the Middle East for decades.

The single largest collective action

2011 ARAB SPRING: WHEN REVOLUTIONARY UPRISINGS SWEPT THE MIDDLE EAST



Tahrir Square, Cairo, January 2011. RAMY RAOUF/CC.

“Despite harsh restrictions, protests and strikes could not be held back forever”

of this movement was the 2007 strike by 55,000 real estate (property) tax collectors. After three months of strikes and a 13-day sit-down protest in front of the Finance Ministry, involving 5,000 workers a day, they won a tremendous 325% pay rise. These workers went on to form Egypt's first independent trade union.

Mahalla workers geared up to strike again on 6 April 2008 demanding, among other things, a big increase in the national minimum wage. The strike was blocked by heavy policing on the factory floor, but later that night there was a pitched battle between 40,000 residents (in a city of 500,000) and security forces. Police used gun-fire while posters of Mubarak were ripped down and destroyed, as was repeated on a national scale in 2011.

The prime minister went to the factory the next day, addressed a mass meeting and announced a 30-day wage bonus. The regime zigzagged between repression and concessions, trying to extinguish flames beginning to threaten its continuing existence.

Without a workers' party, the political vacuum was partly filled by the Muslim Brotherhood. Egypt's oldest and best-organised opposition to the regime had built support over many years by providing social services

and filling some (very large) gaps in the welfare system. Despite illegality, the Brotherhood leadership mostly avoided police crackdowns by avoiding economic issues or directly confronting the regime.

Food and drink prices rose 21% in the year to March 2010. Strikes, sit-down protests and demonstrations became daily occurrences. Women workers (now 40% of the workforce) often played a prominent role. A number of significant victories won unpaid wages and pay rises.

After the vicious murder of 28-year old Khaled Saeid, dragged from an internet cafe by police while posting about police corruption in June 2010, 5,000 workers and youth marched in Alexandria. State thuggery was enraging, rather than intimidating in the way it had for decades.

Mass protests

Following the tumultuous events ending with Ben Ali's downfall in Tunisia, several Egyptian campaigns called for demonstrations on 25 January 2011, starting events that led to Mubarak's downfall.

15,000 demonstrated in Cairo, with around 25,000 attending at least eight other protests. These did not disperse



“The regime zigzagged between repression and concessions, trying to extinguish flames beginning to threaten its continuing existence”



“Neither the capitalist class nor the working class were fully in control. The masses occupied Tahrir Square. But the state still controlled government offices, the Bank of Egypt, Stock Exchange, broadcasting headquarters and other key buildings nearby”

after a few hours as usual but grew late into the night, resisting police tear gas, water cannon, baton charges and rubber bullets.

More gathered each day, occupying city squares across the country. Instead of a few hundred brave demonstrators running for shelter from police attacks, as in the past, thousands were heroically charging back against the police. Like a cornered rat, the regime became even more vicious. At least 846 were killed and many more wounded by police weapons during the 18 days that followed.

Most armed forces ranks were conscripts from poor backgrounds. Senior army officers could not rely on them to fire on the huge crowds. Appeals were made to soldiers to stand with demonstrators against the police, but not clear calls to break with senior army officers, organise a soldiers' union to end low pay, elect officers and join with workers to build a new socialist society.

Many workers took part, although mostly not present as organised blocs from their workplaces. Strikes began to develop. Fearing the movement could result in workers taking over their workplaces, the ruling class split between Mubarak and those who

feared their entire system would be swept aside if they didn't ditch him.

Middle layers in society had moved decisively against his regime, joining with workers who were beginning to put their class stamp on these mighty events. The fearsome state machine could not suppress this revolutionary situation.

Concrete questions were being posed as the revolution unfolded, however there was no political organisation proposing clearly what needed to be done to lay the basis for a secure victory.

Neither the capitalist class nor the working class were fully in control. The masses occupied Tahrir Square. But the state still controlled government offices, the Bank of Egypt, Stock Exchange, broadcasting headquarters and other key buildings nearby.

A revolutionary party would have argued for these to be taken over, with urgent development of democratic workplace and neighbourhood committees. These could have linked up to become a government of representatives of workers, small farmers and the poor.

That could have guaranteed democratic rights and organised a real parliament, a revolutionary constituent assembly, to decide Egypt's future. A

workers', small farmers' and poor people's majority could have implemented a democratic socialist programme. Nationalisation of the commanding heights of the economy under democratic workers' control and management, enabling a socialist plan to be drawn up, would have changed the system.

In Mubarak's place?

After Mubarak was forced to resign on 11 February, senior armed forces officers clung on to government control in the absence of a revolutionary alternative. The CWI distributed a leaflet in Egypt outlining concrete steps that needed to secure the revolution's victory (see 'Egypt: CWI leaflet distributed in Egypt after February 12' at socialistworld.net).

Already in March 2011 a law, the first of a number of anti-union measures, limited the right to strike and in June 2011 an attempt was made to ban strikes. But the strength of the workers' movement at that stage meant this could not be implemented. Strikes and demonstrations continued.

Those who had been most involved in the pre-2011 struggles put much effort into the struggle for a democratic constitution and free elections. These democratic demands needed to be linked to a wider programme to address issues such as low pay and a lack of public services.

And for millions who survived as day labourers or street traders, ongoing instability disrupted their opportunities to earn enough to keep their families each day. Fatigue with revolution, which had not produced real lasting changes, was starting to grow.

An election was held for a new president in 2012, the Muslim Brotherhood's Mohamed Morsi winning, although with only 25% of first round votes (on a 46% turnout) and 52% of second round votes (52% turnout).

It quickly became clear to a large majority that nothing was improving (except job prospects for Muslim Brotherhood members). Within twelve months, a petition to oust him collected 22 million signatures, followed by demonstrations of up to 17 million - even more than came out against Mubarak.

But still there was no workers' party rooted in workplaces, with a socialist programme to meet the needs of all workers, the poor and the middle classes, and with a leadership that understood the tasks required for workers to take power and transform society.

President Sisi

Once again, the armed forces filled the vacuum. The military arrested Morsi in July 2013, appointed an interim President and quickly moved to crush the Brotherhood. Hundreds of their members were massacred while they occupied public squares, branded as "terrorists".

However, the leader of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions was appointed Minister of Labour in the new military government, despite significant opposition within the Federation. He thereby accepted responsibility for its actions, until dismissed when General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi became President in March 2014. And it was not long before strikers were also arrested and charged as "terrorists". In 2015 strikers in public services were criminalised. Democratic rights have become even more restricted than under Mubarak.

Sisi attempted to fire up the ailing economy with mega-construction

projects like widening the Suez Canal and building a new capital city. But Covid hammered the tourist industry. Devaluations and then the Ukraine war hiked up food prices. All but the wealthiest have been hit by rising inflation.

Egypt's government is massively debt-laden and has needed four International Monetary Fund bail-out loans with strict conditions - cutting state spending on essential food and fuel subsidies, and privatising many military-owned companies.

Sisi's popular support is sinking fast, and his support from senior armed forces officers could be threatened if they lose their well-paid retirement posts in military-owned companies. A presidential election was due in Spring 2024, but he brought it forward to 10-12 December 2023, planning to get it over before making more cuts.

Not that he is worrying about the result. A candidate with two million Facebook followers and a programme seeming to offer some respite from falling living standards was prevented from standing - and is now charged with breaking electoral law. The remaining three other candidates offer no serious threat to Sisi.

But five days after announcing the early election, war erupted in Gaza. This was certainly not what Sisi wanted. He has continued Mubarak's agreements with the Israeli government, including gas sales and restricting the Rafah crossing between Egypt and Gaza.

To ease growing pressure for Palestinian solidarity, a demonstration supporting Sisi's condemnation of the war was officially organised on 20 October. Buses were laid on for government employees and state-run trade unions also organised members to attend.

However, hundreds marched to Tahrir Square, breaking through police cordons. "Bread, freedom, social justice" was chanted - the 2011 uprising's slogan - along with slogans of solidarity for Palestine. No further demonstrations have been allowed.

The movement that ultimately brought down Mubarak showed repression alone will not save a regime supporting the rich while the rest suffer. But a socialist alternative needs explaining and building for. This needs a party based in the working class, with members in all key workplaces, universities and housing areas.

All the conditions for a socialist Egypt and Tunisia were present in 2011 except the existence of such revolutionary parties. Had the working class succeeded in gaining power, the rest of the Middle East and North Africa could have followed, including the Israeli working class. The nightmare that is now taking place could have been prevented. Steps need to be taken now to build such parties, in preparation for the further uprisings and revolutionary opportunities that will develop in the Middle East and worldwide.

Come to a Socialist Party meeting near you

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

- If you would like to participate:
- **Go to socialistparty.org.uk**
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Redundancies at Oxford Brookes uni? Students and staff say no!

CALLUM JOYCE
OXFORD SOCIALIST PARTY

Over 100 people, staff and students, protested at Oxford Brookes University because close to 50 lecturers are being made redundant. The redundancies affect 11 different departments, with management threatening to completely close the music and maths departments.

Many students spoke passionately at the demonstration, outlining the support they have received from many of their lecturers over the course of their degrees. Management claims that redundancies must be made due to financial restrictions, while the vice-chancellor is paid over £250,000 a year.

I was able to speak on behalf of the Socialist Party, raising the need for the university finances to be subject to inspection by democratically

elect representatives of students and staff, through their trade unions.

I also explained that there needs to be a broader fight to change the funding model for universities. Scrapping tuition fees and replacing them with proper government funding would ensure all students could receive a free, high-quality education, and that enough staff can be hired at a decent rate of pay.

University and College Union (UCU) members at Brookes overwhelmingly passed a motion at a recent meeting declaring that they would be willing to take industrial action against the redundancies. Members should be balloted as soon as possible to allow them to go on strike.

This must be linked with a broader campaign involving students as well, which Socialist Party and Socialist Students members will be help build.

Protests force Kirklees Council to back down on leisure centre closures

Now fight to stop all cuts



Protesting in November against cuts PHOTO: IAIN DALTON

IAIN DALTON
SOCIALIST PARTY YORKSHIRE SECRETARY

Two leisure centres, under threat from Labour-run Kirklees Council, are staying open. This reprieve follows a march to Dewsbury from one of the centres, Batley Sports and Tennis Centre. The campaign at Colne Valley Leisure Centre has been ongoing since last year.

Council leisure services are run by arms-length company Kirklees Active Leisure (KAL). The council announced that there would be a 'new model of leisure centre provision'.

But no details have been forthcoming. So it is questionable whether it meets the demand of local government union Unison in Kirklees, of bringing services back in-house.

Kirklees leisure centre provision

has still been reduced. Batley Baths closed a year ago. Dewsbury Sports Centre closed due to RAAC concrete issues.

The gym at Kirklees Stadium shut on 30 November. And Deighton Sports Arena has only got a reprieve on a limited opening basis until April.

The council is still proposing closing two care homes, and several public buildings, and increasing charges for allotments and parking, amongst other cuts.

The Stop the Closures umbrella campaign has vowed to fight on to retain all facilities. Care home campaigners have launched a legal challenge.

The Kirklees local government branch of Unison, the largest amongst the council workforce, has voted to ballot for strike action

amongst both council workers and those in arms-length bodies like KAL. Unfortunately, these are still yet to take place, and need to be urgently expedited.

Any strike action taken in defence of jobs and services would build on the community campaigns that have sprung up. A Unison delegation lobbied the council alongside community groups at last month's council meeting.

Campaigning in Huddersfield on 30 November, Socialist Party members found huge anger at the council. Many people pointed out the increased burden on health services if leisure centre provision is cut.

We raised the need for councillors to vote against cuts, and fight for funds to preserve existing services. This is the policy of Kirklees Unison, which also calls for the council to support a no-cuts budget.

The council should use its reserves and borrowing powers to set a no-cuts budget, and then demand that the millions cut per year from its funding is restored. If an incoming Labour government was serious about defending services it must pledge to reimburse councils the necessary money.

But if Labour fails to commit to that, we need working-class candidates to stand against the local and national politicians on an anti-cuts basis, as the Socialist Party and others in the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) are aiming to do.

This demand is getting an increasingly positive response from members of the public fed up with Labour and Tory politicians blaming each other for the cuts, but standing aside from the community and trade union campaigns actually fighting to defend services.

Councillors pay commissioners for advice on making cuts

PAUL COUCHMAN
SURREY SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBER
AND SOSIS SECRETARY

Save Our Services in Surrey (SOSIS) brought together residents, trade union reps and community campaigners to lobby Woking's Lib Dem council on 30 November.

Chanting "save our services, stop the cuts", protesters called for a halt to cuts, an end to service charge rises, and for the council to take the fight to save Woking services to the government.

But council leaders said they had no choice but to follow the dictates of government commissioners, who are being paid over £1,000 each per day by the council to oversee the

decimation of our public services.

According to charity Scope, the additional cost of being disabled is £975 per month. And only 7% of working disabled people earn over £30,000 a year. Those who most need services are least able to pay.

Council leaders spoke about raising £15 million per year. But services are costing £45 million. Protesters argued that they should refuse to make cuts and make the government fund the shortfall.

Save Our Services in Surrey is planning a campaign meeting on 4 January, and is building towards a major protest outside the full council budget-setting meeting on 8 February.

• sosis.org.uk

Go North East strike concludes: A striker writes of their experience

Industrial action at Go North East (GNE) bus company came to an end on 2 December after members of Unite accepted a pay deal. The deal was a 10.5% pay rise, backdated to 31 June, and a further 0.7% from 1 January. There is a minimum of 4% in June 2024, but if RPI-inflation is higher, the company will match it. RPI is the higher measure of inflation - employers usually use the lower CPI measure. The company has promised no changes to working conditions without union agreement. The majority of suspensions of union members during the action have been lifted.

"Members accepted the deal by a slim margin of 50.28%. Seven votes were the decider, that's how close it was. There are concerns about

possible changes to working conditions further down the line, but that is now a fight for another day.

"Being on the picket line for seven weeks has been an overall positive experience, as I really feel I've finally been able to get to know my colleagues. As a bus driver, roughly 90% of my day is spent on my own, only seeing workmates as we zoom past each other, or very briefly when handing a bus over at the end of a shift. I think that the real victory is definitely that.

"United, we stood against GNE and that's something that, despite their best efforts, they can't take away from us. GNE attempted divide-and-conquer tactics and has even been suspending drivers for further investigation for the awful crime of telling the truth about the strikes on social media platforms.

"The atmosphere on the line has been great and they failed completely to break us. Members have been helping each other out, bringing food and drinks in for everyone. We've kept warm with a fire going, sang songs to keep morale up, and each depot had a visit from 'Scabbie the rat'.

"It's honestly been great and though nobody wanted it to go as long as it did (particularly when it's been made evident that GNE had the money to avoid the situation altogether - offering free travel to all customers for a week, at a cost of a whopping £1.8 million!) I feel that I couldn't have asked for a better group of people to strike with.

"But for better or worse, the members accepted the pay deal. As seven famous dwarves once sang: 'Hi ho, hi ho, it's off to work we go.'"

RMT rail members vote to accept Prepare now for fight on 2023 pay



PHOTO: PAUL MATTSOON

WEST MIDLANDS RMT MEMBER

RMT members have voted to accept the 'Memorandum of Understanding' offer from the employers' organisation the Rail Delivery Group (RDG).

Since June 2022, rail unions RMT and Aslef have been at war with the Train Operating Companies (TOCs) who have had the full weight of the Tory government behind them. Aslef remains in dispute and is taking a week of industrial action spread across all the TOCs from 2 December.

The offer has two parts. Part one is a 5% or £1,750 pay rise, whichever is greater, backdated to the 2022 pay anniversary, with supposedly no strings attached. Part two is for the union to enter into discussions with each individual TOC in February 2024, which will aim to negotiate a pay deal for 2023. Many reps will

have concerns about this break-up of the national negotiations.

A single vote was taken for both elements, and by accepting the Memorandum the national dispute is now officially terminated. Socialist Party members in the RMT argued to reject.

This result will come as a blow to those RMT reps and activists who worked hard to deliver the tremendous 'yes' votes in the reballots in October, which not only smashed the Tory undemocratic minimum turnout thresholds, but in many cases delivered 'yes' votes of well over 90%. Six weeks later the dispute is over.

The Memorandum was circulated to members on Wednesday 8 November and the electronic referendum opened just two days later. The leadership put no recommendation for members to accept or reject.

Members had less than 48 hours in

order to read and digest the offer before the ballot opened, and there was no time to organise meetings either online or in person before the voting started.

At an online 'rally' jointly organised by the RMT's South West and South Wales and West regions, assistant general secretary John Leach explained the contents of the Memorandum to members, along with the South West's NEC member. They highlighted that the employers were not offering as much as we would have liked, but that members would be able to have a break from the dispute for a few months, and if necessary ballot in the new year. However, several reps expressed anger at the contents of the offer after we had taken 25 days of strike action.

In one meeting in the Midlands, the unanimous view of the activists present was that the Memorandum

was unacceptable and should be rejected. The branch issued a leaflet explaining its position and encouraging members to reject.

However, both meetings took place several days after the ballot opened, which meant that the proverbial horse had already bolted.

Strategy to win

A major factor in the overwhelming vote was that members felt that they were not presented with a credible strategy to win by the leadership. By the time the third rebalot took place the strike campaign had diminished to just the odd day. With the managers running a basic scab operation on strike days, it was clear to members that something had to change.

In the absence of any significant coordination with Aslef and other trade unions across the wider economy, many members felt it would be best

to bank the 5% now and try to make further progress locally in the new year.

Despite making no official recommendation, the RMT leadership has implicitly promoted the offer as having 'no strings attached' and delivering substantial backpay. Backpay has been promised to be in members' bank accounts before Christmas, which will undoubtedly be welcomed.

It would be incorrect to say the dispute has achieved little. Driver Only Operation has been taken off the table, as have mass ticket office closures. The 2022 pay offer has been increased from 2% with strings to 5% or £1,750.

Negotiators in each TOC must now remain focused on the objective of securing an inflation-proof pay rise which makes up for the huge loss in purchasing power over the last two years, and which recognises that we have settled for a real-terms pay cut for 2022.

RMT's leadership must completely reject the idea that any pay 'rise' will be paid for by 'workplace reforms' - ie giving away jobs, terms and conditions. This has been explicitly stated in the Memorandum and repeated by employers and Tories in the media.

It should also be emphasised that the 'no compulsory redundancy' agreement until the end of 2024 can be withdrawn by the employers if, in the talks beginning in February, we fail to agree the bosses' 'workplace reforms'.

We must counter demands for increased 'productivity' by exposing that the bosses continue to bleed the railways dry. How 'productive' is it that FirstGroup has extracted £129.9 million in dividends to shareholders over the last three years? Or that shareholders of parasitic train-leasing companies like Eversholt enjoyed a profits bonanza of £40 million last year? This is why the union must continue to campaign for renationalisation of the railways.

Although there will be members and activists who are disappointed with the terms of the settlement, the RMT has not been defeated.

The battle for a 2023 pay deal has not yet begun. We can recharge our batteries over the next few months and prepare for re-engagement. Only by showing the bosses that we are still up for the fight can we achieve a just settlement.

London Underground: Vote 'yes' in the ballot to fight for a fair pay increase

JOHN REID
RETIRED RMT NEC MEMBER

The RMT is an all-grades transport union that seeks strength through unity and action of all grades in London Underground (LU) to defend and improve our conditions.

We are not limited by narrow 'craft interests'. That is why the 'final offer' from LU bosses of 5% is not acceptable. It would further increase the gap between the higher-paid members

and the lower-paid. Even for higher-paid members, 5% represents a significant real-terms pay deduction. Over the last year, RPI has fluctuated between 13% and 9%. Only recently has this fallen to under 5%.

On London Underground, for over a decade we have won inflation-proof pay increases through taking industrial action, and have delayed attacks on our pensions. But these savage cuts, backed by the Tory government and the Labour Mayor of

London Sadiq Khan, remain on the table. Action by members also won back around 200 station jobs.

That is why it was a massive message to management when we achieved a 'yes' vote to defend jobs and pensions.

The latest 'final' offer should be rejected. And we must build a campaign throughout our membership to resist this threat to reduce our real wages at a time of high inflation. This offer should also be rejected because

it contains a freezing of pay bands for some of the grades we cover. This, if implemented, would lead to a pay cut and reduced pensions for these members.

To win, we will require unified and sustained action, which would close down London. We are always told that a day's strike costs the London economy £50 million-plus a day. In fact, the British Chamber of Commerce puts the figure as high as £300 million per day. This shows how important our

members are to the London economy. The vast wealth of the London economy is robbed from the workers who create the wealth for big business and the parasitic bankers. The money is there to pay our members and other public service workers that kept the capital running during Covid and continue to keep it running.

Vote yes to take action to defend pay, and link the defence of pay to the defence of jobs, conditions and pensions.



Film: Napoleon

Brilliant film, but not true representation of events in revolutionary France

JIMMY HADDOW
SOCIALIST PARTY SCOTLAND

Director Ridley Scott's new film Napoleon stars Joaquin Phoenix in the title role and Vanessa Kirby as Joséphine Bonaparte leading a cast of other brilliant actors.

Cinematically it is outstanding and the battle scenes are out of this world - brutal as befitting the epoch. The filming is marvellous and the soundtrack is wonderful. The film is more of the story of Joséphine and Napoleon rather than just about Napoleon, although I considered the acting by Phoenix and Kirby brilliant.

Scott and the scriptwriter took huge artistic license with some of the history and have been criticised for it. Scott's response, according to film critic Mark Kermode, was to say: "When I have issues with historians, I ask: 'Excuse me, mate, were you there? No? Well, shut the fuck up then.'" Although I watched Kermode's review of Napoleon and did not agree with his interpretation of it at all.

I enjoyed the film, the acting, the music and so on but it should not be taken as a true representation of Napoleon, or more importantly from my point of view, the social, class and political events of 1789 to 1815.

● Napoleon is in cinemas now

MASSES ARISE
the great French Revolution 1789-1815
● Visit leftbooks.co.uk
● or call 020 8988 8789
● PO Box 1398, Enfield EN1 9GT

Napoleon's support for the Republic - ie the sweeping away of the feudal regime in France and the rest of Europe, and Egypt.

The foreign wars that Napoleon led were on behalf of the new ruling class that was turning into the capitalist class. The regime of Bonaparte represented reaction, against the working-class left element of the French Revolution, and the Royalist usurpers; but also against the rest of the feudal and semi-feudal world.

Terror

British capitalism was terrified of losing its profits from its foreign holdings because of Napoleon's victories and, more importantly, the class sympathy the French Revolution gained in the British working class was worrying to the British rulers as well, hence their intervention.

I would recommend the film - but if you want a real class history of the French Revolution and Bonaparte's part in it, I suggest there is no better book than 'The Masses Arise - the great French Revolution 1789-1815' by Peter Taaffe.



Rather than bury my head in the sand, I joined the Socialist Party

DAN SHERBORNE
PLYMOUTH SOCIALIST PARTY

As someone passionate about human rights, the environment and social justice, I felt increasingly disillusioned with the world we live in, and the government we live under.

I was never a fan of the blatant cronyism and barely concealed racism of the Tory party. Neither could I find any confidence in the so-called Labour opposition, especially after the witch-hunt against Jeremy Corbyn, and Keir Starmer's constant pledge breaking.

I have a lot of respect for what many environmental and human rights groups are trying to achieve, but always felt they were only fighting the symptoms of a greater illness - capitalism.

Capitalism is at the very heart of many of the world's issues. I needed

an organisation that promised to put an end to it. I wouldn't find that kind of thinking in the neoliberal attitudes of our mainstream politics.

Rotten system

Then I discovered the Socialist Party. A political party dedicated to dismantling the whole rotten system.

A system that has done little but swell the pockets of the elites at the expense of workers, that propagates war and poverty, and that continues to increase the already sickening wealth divide, not just in this country, but around the globe.

After attending my first few local Socialist Party branch meetings, I was pleased to learn that tackling capitalism was not the only thing the party stood for. Campaigning for a higher minimum wage, abolishing university tuition fees, and pushing

for a fairer more egalitarian society were all things that resonated strongly with me.

For a long time I wanted to run away from it all. Go and live with the nomads in outer Mongolia, and bury my head in the sand.

Discovering the Socialist Party showed me that there were, in fact, people out there who thought like me. People who were committed to fighting for a brighter future, despite the monumental task at hand.

I saw that not only were they out there, but they were organised, passionate and dedicated. Now my nihilism has dissolved, and the future feels a lot less bleak.

The conservative tree has roots that may run deep. But the fact that the trunk is rotten is plain for everyone to see. Surely with enough people pushing, the whole wretched thing will come crashing down.

Fight anti-democratic attacks on right to trial by jury

ALEX PENSON
WALTHAM FOREST SOCIALIST PARTY

The Defend Our Juries campaign (defendourjuries.org) organised silent protests at 40 crown courts on 4 December, reminding juries of their constitutional right to acquit as a matter of conscience.

Earlier this year Trudi Warner, a retired social worker from Waltham Forest, silently held up a sign reminding a jury of its constitutional right to acquit a defendant as a matter of conscience. She was arrested and sent to the Old Bailey, where a version of the same message was displayed. The Attorney General has now said that she will be prosecuted for contempt of court with a maximum sentence of two years imprisonment.

The last few years have seen a crack-down on protest as well as on the right to strike, often in the name of 'public order' and preventing 'disruption'. If the public were as deeply 'anti-protest' as the government and certain sections of the media would have you believe, then being tried by twelve randomly selected members of the public, would be very bad news for protesters.

Acquit

In fact, juries have recently acquitted people involved in many protest cases, including those that toppled the statue of a slave trader, disrupted deportations to Jamaica, and targeted Shell HQ, arms manufacturer Elbit which makes drones used to kill Palestinians, and most recently the headquarters of HSBC.

In response, the state is beginning to turn jury trials increasingly into show trials in these political cases, for example, by ruling out defences based on human rights or directing defendants that they cannot explain their motivations to the jury. In a number of cases like this, people have been sent to prison just for using the words 'fuel poverty' or 'climate change' in court to explain their actions.

Defendants have also been banned from reminding a jury of its constitutional right to acquit as a matter of conscience. Others have been arrested for holding signs stating this principle. A judge in a recent protest case threatened to decide the case alone without the jury under seldom-used powers.

Enfield, north London – politicians complicit in massacre

This was the first local Palestine protest – on a Saturday between two national demos – and won't be the last, with over 200 people.

There were many speakers. Some Palestinian themselves. Anger was expressed at British politicians, both Tory and Labour, who are complicit in the massacres of Palestinians.

Socialist Party member Paul Kershaw also spoke, on behalf of the Enfield Trades Union Council. He said that workers stood in solidarity with the Palestinian people, but that the local Labour MP Feryal Clark neither represented the interests of workers in Enfield nor the Palestinians in Gaza.

Feryal wasn't present at the ceasefire vote in Parliament, and hasn't made a public statement. The Socialist Party's Paul suggested that the protest should send a delegation to her office demanding that she act, but also that the movement needs working-class, anti-war candidates in the next elections.

There was great interest in our Socialist Party stall at the protest. 19 people bought our Socialist paper, they donated £100 for our fighting fund on top, and we met six people that wanted to join the Socialist Party.

We distributed leaflets for our next local Socialist Party meeting – 'How to build the movement to end Gaza slaughter and fight for Palestinian rights.'

DANA MIROV

Dewsbury, West Yorkshire – desire for change

Many raised the inhumane response from both the Conservatives and Labour, and putting pressure on local councillors and MPs. When Iain Dalton, regional secretary for the Socialist Party in Yorkshire, spoke, he discussed developing a new mass workers' party that could represent the people on this issue.

Afterwards, people wanted to discuss this, and the possibility of standing candidates in an election. Many left wanting to learn more about the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC).

The desire for change was palpable, and many people took our leaflets and placards, and bought our Socialist paper and badges.

Event in a small town on a freezing cold day on the other side of the

Outrage fuels more Gaza protests



Enfield SARAH SACHS-ELDRIDGE

world, people will turn out to show their solidarity with Palestine – and are looking for ways to change the system that leads to these horrors.

CAS MIDDLEMAS

Swindon – grew as we marched

The first person we met campaigning in Swindon town centre on 2 December saw the headline on the Socialist paper, 'Tories Out!', and gave a donation straight away. "I'm Wrexham fan. We sing 'Fuck the Tories' every week!"

Rightly, the most common question was, "Yes, Tories out, but what's going to replace them?" Keir Starmer's position has clearly alienated a lot of people.

Our programme for a new mass workers' party usually meets with agreement. No doubt this feeling will grow if and when Starmer enters Downing Street.

The next day there was a local demo for Gaza in Swindon. The turnout doubled in size as we marched.

The desire for an electoral alternative was even stronger here. A local Muslim community leader said: "There can be no change until we replace the rotten politicians". We approached him afterwards for a discussion on working with the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) in the upcoming elections.

We sold Socialist papers, raised money for the fighting fund and – most importantly – had several people fill out 'join the Socialist Party' cards.

There will be a bigger demonstration in Swindon on 16 December. We'll be there!

SCOTT HUNTER

Hackney – dismay at Labour

300-plus attended. The speakers

were predominantly young activists. Some had relatives in Palestine.

Whist speeches were strident in support for the Palestinian people, there was also sadness and reflection at the death and suffering.

The rally was well attended. But also the crowd was a fair reflection of the diversity of the local area, and the extent to which the conflict has impacted and affected people from all walks of life.

Socialist Party members had many conversations with a wide group of people at the protest. We spoke about this particular issue, but also the wider causes of conflicts brought about by the failings of capitalism.

There was dismay from attendees about the Labour Party's failure to support the vote for a ceasefire, which reinforced the growing idea that the Labour Party is no longer interested in them.

Attendees then marched, receiving warm applause and toots from car horns.

With the ceasefire now over, it was

clear that the determination of the protesters to keep showing support and solidarity was undimmed, and is likely to grow should the conflict continue.

EDDIE BLINDELL

Newham and Redbridge – pressure is mounting

Marches from two east London boroughs, Newham and Redbridge, convened in Plashet Park. Speakers included Sophia Naqvi (recently elected independent councillor for Plaistow North), Louise Regan (National Education Union executive), and Steve Hedley (chair of Newham Trades Union Council).

1,000 attended. The mood was furious and urgent. The area was heavily policed, and some witnessed officers attempting to question protesters regarding their signs.

Socialist Party members were speaking to people throughout the march and rally. We found protesters were interested in our perspective on the conflict. Many bought the Socialist paper, donated money to our fighting fund or took Socialist Party literature.

We call for the resignation of local Labour MP Lyn Brown, who had abstained from voting for a ceasefire. Many protesters expressed anger at the absence of local councillors and MPs. Pressure on local politicians is mounting, and it is becoming impossible for them to remain silent on this issue.

HARRIET ALLEN

Reading – every week

Reading Socialist Party members have made the effort to maintain a presence in every demonstration held since they started up, and plan to continue doing so as long as they are occurring. It is good to see the same core of individuals at the demonstration each week.

In particular, our conversations included younger people at the demonstration, and even those walking past showed an active interest in serious change. And there was knowledge and support for socialism being the direction of that change.

Demonstrators appreciate that we have been there week on week, showing solidarity.

Reading Socialist Party provided placards calling for a socialist infitafada as a key step in stopping the violence.

SPHERE SYSTEM

Climate change risks our existence, not the planet's!

JOHN MERRELL
LEICESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

I am writing to praise Pete Mason's excellent article: 'Climate change: Can technology save us' (available at socialistparty.org.uk). I have known Pete for over 40 years since he joined us in Leicester and had

an almost immediate impact on our intervention in the local labour movement.

I would just take issue with the use of the phrases "save the planet" and "needs of the planet". Whilst their use is quite widespread they are not based on scientific fact. A recent five-part BBC series titled 'Earth,'

presented by Chris Packham, now available on BBC iPlayer, exemplified this scientific reality.

In Earth's 4.5 billion years of evolution there have been several catastrophic events which exterminated almost all living species. Yet eventually, new species appeared. Packham stated: "The sum total of

species in the present era amounts to less than 1% of the total number of species that have existed on Earth".

Asteroid

We are one example. The asteroid that crashed landed on Earth 66 million years ago, in what is now known as the Gulf of Mexico, had a catastrophic impact on the environment and consequently wiped out 80% of animal species, including the dinosaurs. The rebirth many millions of years

later, eventually led to the creation of mammals and ultimately, ourselves, a mere 200,000 years ago.

The outcome of climate change, if capitalism remains in power, will bring about another chapter of Earth's evolution - without us.

I strongly recommend watching 'Earth' and then re-reading Pete's article to provide the political understanding and socialist programme that, if adopted worldwide, will replace capitalism and lead to the re-making of our habitable Earth.



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 sick pay, 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.

- 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.

- For local councillors who are committed to opposing austerity and all cuts to local services, jobs, pay and conditions.

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

DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- For a new mass workers' party, based on the trade unions, and drawing together workers, young people and activists from workplaces, and community, environmental, anti-racist and anti-cuts campaigns, to provide a fighting, socialist political alternative to the pro-big business parties.

- For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and the banking system that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working-class control and management. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need, not to the fat cats.

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

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

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

- No to imperialist wars and occupations!

- Take the wealth off the super-rich! For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and the banking system that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working-class control and management. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need, not to the fat cats.

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

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

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Protests follow far-right PVV's biggest vote in Dutch elections



Geert Wilders PHOTO: PETER VAN DER SLOUIS/CC

ANNOUNCES VALENT

The 'Partij Voor de Vrijheid' (PVV) - known as the Freedom Party - won a majority of seats in the recent elections in the Netherlands. The PVV managed to win this as the other main parties have no solution to the key issues of housing, jobs, and services. The PVV used immigration to divide working people in the Netherlands.

In interviews, PVV party leader Geert Wilders says: "We need to stop the influx of asylum seekers; we need the money to go to Dutch people only". This has clearly created division in society. Following the PVV election gains, protests took place in the main towns of the Netherlands.

The PVV is a far-right party, but Geert Wilders toned down his overt anti-immigrant policies during the election campaign. In France we saw a similar process, when Marine Le Pen tried to make her far-right party seem more acceptable during elections. Some in the Dutch media re-named Geert Wilders, 'Geert Milders'.

The Dutch government fell over the 'asylum seekers regulations' back in July. The last time there was a huge swing to the far right was back in 2002 when Pim Fortuyn stood on an anti-immigrant/asylum/Islamophobic programme. He was assassinated during that election campaign. At that time, we condemned the ideas that Fortuyn stood for, but at the same time, we are totally against the use of 'individual terrorism', which only divides and weakens the working class even more and could strengthen far-right ideas. The PVV capitalised on this, toning down their

main anti-Islam propaganda and learning from the French elections.

Since Wilders' election win, a PVV figure, Gom Van Strien, was chosen to try to pull together a new cabinet. But he had to step down after having been accused of fraud some years ago, allegedly transferring funds of up to £2 million to an investment firm in his wife's name.

Now an ex-PVDA (Partij Van De Arbeid - a social democratic party) minister has been named, but not yet confirmed, as the main negotiator to form a government cabinet. He has said that the Dutch people, "have spoken" and "it's quite healthy that there is a political change of guard, now and then".

Working-class response

The organised working class needs its own response to the election outcome. There were national rail strikes in the Netherlands in March this year, but the main trade unions have been silent and impassive since the PVV victory, including the Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging (FNV - Federation of Dutch Trade Unions).

Its main statement was along the lines of acknowledging people feel unheard due to uncertainty over the cost-of-living and housing crises. The FNV stated that it stands for unity and that the election result must not lead to division in Dutch society. However, no fighting programme was put forward on how to fight against the cost-of-living crisis.

The unions need to be combative on a class programme. Allied with a party of the working class that has mass support and a socialist programme taking on the bosses and their system and for a transformation of living standards, the ground could be cut from under the feet of the PVV and the rest of the far right and the parties of the Dutch ruling class.

Dublin riots fanned by far right – only united workers' movement can stop reaction and show way forward

MILITANT LEFT (CWI IRELAND) STATEMENT

The knife attack against young children and a crèche worker outside a Dublin city centre primary school on 23 November horrified people across Ireland and beyond. But for the bravery of those people, including a Brazilian courier, who overpowered and disarmed the attacker, this attack could have been far worse. The motive for the knife attack is not known at this point.

Our sympathies go to all those affected by this shocking event. That very young children and a crèche worker could be subject to such terrifying violence has rightly horrified people. A young girl remains in a critical condition in hospital. We hope she makes a full recovery. We also stand in full solidarity with all childcare workers who must now feel real anxiety in the aftermath of the violent events.

The attack was followed by a night of violence, rioting and looting not seen in Dublin for decades. It is clear this violence was organised and orchestrated by the far-right and fascist elements who have emerged this year. Others opportunistically took advantage of the chaos to loot shops.

After a year in which these far-right groups have been given free rein by the Gardaí (Irish police) to carry out harassment, intimidation, and physical attacks, these events mark a radical and dangerous escalation.

The workers' movement, however, must keep its head at this point. The coalition government, led by its right-wing Fine Gael component, will undoubtedly agitate to launch a Gardaí crackdown and attempt to pass more repressive legislation, such as fast-tracking bodycam legislation. In the heat of the moment, this may well



Dublin Bus engulfed in flames during the riot PHOTO: CANALETHUSIASM/CC



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

garner significant public support, but it will do nothing to tackle the far right, to protect refugees and asylum seekers or to make migrant workers and their families feel safer.

The brutal truth is that this event marks the culmination of a long process of normalising the far right's perspectives. Those who were on the streets in Dublin are one element of a much wider social process. Their violent anti-migrant rhetoric is repeated in 'respectable' media outlets and in the Dáil (Irish parliament) and Seanad (Irish senate). A media which seems wholly incapable of even understanding the present reality is consistently failing to hold to account politicians - including TDs (members of the Irish parliament) and senators - who use far-right and outright fascist language and talking points.

What happened in Dublin will almost certainly add to the growing sense of chaos, uncertainty and confusion in society. The far right will take advantage of this and will make advances because of it. There is no going back to the comfortable consensus of just a few years ago. The far-right and fascist elements are a political factor in Ireland now and that cannot be wished away. They must be confronted by the workers' movement.

Trade union response

Those involved in the riot were clearly not bothered about attacking workers doing their jobs. Luas tram drivers, Dublin Bus drivers, Arnott's retail workers, ambulance and fire service workers were all subjected to assaults, intimidation and threats.

Trade unions must make clear that this is unacceptable. Workers should immediately refuse to carry out their jobs should the far right continue to target them. The issue of strike action and walkouts to stop the far right must be posed. One-day general strikes should be called by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), as a show of force. The ICTU call for workers to assemble in Dublin on 27 November should be broadened to across the country.

Where to now?

This riot signals a rupture in Southern Irish society. But it is part of a wider European and global process. Far-right candidates have triumphed in elections in Argentina and the Netherlands (see left). Capitalism is degenerating. The far right is rising everywhere as people seek a way out of the crushing oppression of capitalism. Massive wealth is being created, but going to a tiny, tiny minority of people. Life continues to worsen for the vast majority. The planet warms by the year, while the rich jet-set party like there's no tomorrow. These contradictions of capitalism are grinding open political space for the far right and fascism to grow and flourish.

A society organised on socialist principles would ensure everyone is decently housed, can reach their full potential, can access free healthcare, has a decent well-paid job, can access high quality public transport, can participate in a sustainable society and more. Far-right bully boys rampaging on the streets are a symptom of capitalism's decay. The only way to stop them is to build for a socialist future.

US imperialism's bloody bagman Kissinger dies

SCOTT JONES

Henry Kissinger, the former US secretary of state, diplomat and advisor to numerous US presidents and governments, has died at the age of 100. He leaves behind a bloody legacy of 60 years of coups and wars.

As national security advisor to Richard Nixon he was influential in the secret bombing of Cambodia during the Vietnam War, which paved the way for the brutal Khmer Rouge regime. He stood firmly behind the slaughter in Bangladesh by Pakistani forces which killed up to three million. He encouraged coups and invasions in Cyprus and East Timor. During the latter, he visited Jakarta in Indonesia, and told President Suharto, a brutal dictator, that he understood his reasons, advising him to

get it over and done with quickly. The next day, Suharto moved in with his US-equipped army, killing 200,000 East Timorese.

Kissinger also forged ties with and supported the military dictatorship in Argentina, the Israeli government's war against Palestine and the apartheid government in South Africa. But probably most infamously of all, he was a key figure behind US support for and involvement in the coup against democratically elected socialist Salvador Allende in Chile in 1973, which resulted in the defeat of the revolution, repression of the Chilean working class and the start of a 17-year neoliberal, murderous dictatorship (see right).

In later years, he spent his 'retirement' supporting the US invasion of Iraq and continuing his malign

influence by advising Donald Trump and other US presidents. The fact that he once received a Nobel Peace Prize was like a sick joke. Kissinger's time as a bagman for US imperialism may be over, now we must bury his legacy and the bloody capitalist system he served.



Kissinger PHOTO: BERT VERHOEFF/CC

Alongside the everyday hostility of capitalists and the state, the trade union movement now faces a growing and dangerous enemy in the far right, not afraid to use violence against workers. Wherever these movements have gained positions of power, they have always attacked the labour movement and sought to shut down trade unions. These political forces are also vehicles for misogyny and attacks on hard-won women's rights.

Many workplaces are now multicultural, many trade unions are multicultural with migrant workers playing important roles. Most trade union members are women. The agenda of the far right poses a direct threat to our movement. The state has shown this year it is not willing to tackle the far right. Should violence against workers from this quarter escalate then organised workers' defence committees should be formed.

This has precedent in the history of Irish trade unionism, with James Connolly founding the Irish Citizen Army to defend Dublin workers against violence from Dublin bosses.

Where to now?

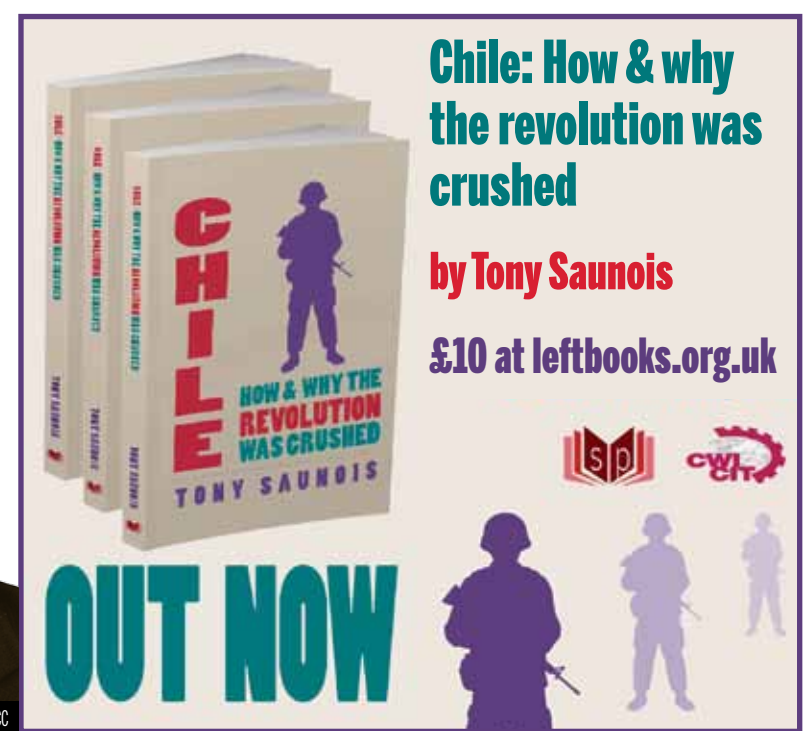
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TUC ANTI-UNION LAWS SPECIAL CONGRESS: MAKE IT THE START OF A FIGHTBACK!



PHOTO: LOUIE FULTON

- **Name the date for a national demonstration**
- **Demand employers refuse to issue work notices - including Labour authorities**
- **Prepare to strike to defend victimised unions and members**

ADAM HARMSWORTH
NAPO DELEGATE TO SPECIAL CONGRESS
(PERSONAL CAPACITY)

On 9 December the Trades Union Congress (TUC) will have one of its most significant meetings in decades. A Special Congress has been called to debate how unions should fight the draconian minimum service level (MSL) legislation. This is a welcome step in the fight to defeat the law which, if implemented, will rob millions of workers of their full democratic right to strike.

At the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) 'council of war' conference in June, hundreds of trade unionists backed a model motion to take back to their unions urging coordinated resistance to the law. In the summer many unions debated exactly that, and several unions passed motions styled off this.

At Congress in September a composite motion was passed which backed building a campaign of resistance and non-compliance. That included "an appropriate industrial response" and to call on employers,

including local authorities and mayors, to refuse to implement the law, particularly Labour-run authorities. It also ordered the calling of the upcoming Special Congress "to explore options for non-compliance and resistance".

Strike wave

The fact this Congress has been called is a demonstration of trade unionists' anger at the attacks on their rights and more, which have been carried out by successive Tory governments. The recent strike wave showed that many workers are no

longer prepared to accept bearing the burden of the economic crisis. Unions have been revitalised, and class struggle has begun to return from a decades-long lull.

This Special Congress could take the decisive action needed to rout the MSL law, bowl over this unstable Tory government, and put an incoming Starmer government on notice that workers will not tolerate any further punishment from the bosses.

Lay reps, other union activists and supporters can play a role in pressuring this Congress, by attending

the NSSN lobby from 9am outside Congress House, in London. The lobby will encourage the Special Congress to enact the motion already passed in June including:

- **100% solidarity with any trade unions attacked**
- **Support demonstrations and hold a national march opposing the legislation**
- **Explore options for non-compliance and resistance**
- **Call for a repeal of the anti-unions laws**

● See page 4 for more