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the Socialist

Issue 1256

5-10 January 2024

formerly **Militant**

TORIES OUT

Build the working-class fightback

2024 is highly likely to be the year that we finally see the back of the Tories after five Tory prime ministers. Rishi Sunak, Liz Truss, Boris Johnson, Theresa May and David Cameron are hate figures for many working-class people for the devastation they have inflicted on our services and communities over more than a decade.

Millions hope against hope that a government led by Labour's Sir Keir Starmer will be different. What's needed is money for council services, investment in our NHS and a fully-funded decent pay rise for public sector workers.

But Starmer has promised none of that. His watchword is 'fiscal discipline' - cuts. And like the Tories too, he stood behind the Israeli state's bombardment of civilians in Gaza.

Trade unions, made up of working-class people defending their living standards, have been to the fore fighting the Tories in 2023. Mass protests against the onslaught on Gaza brought down Tory home secretary Suella Braverman.

The anti-war protests continue, and junior doctors and London Underground workers are on strike at the start of this year.

Labour should be wholeheartedly campaigning for an end to the war on Gaza and for Palestinian national self-determination, as well as promising to meet the doctors' and tube workers' demands.

To best fight for working-class people in 2024 means continuing to take strike action where necessary, whichever party is in power. And also, to use the upcoming elections - local and general - to fight for pro-working class policies. That's why the Socialist Party is preparing with others to stand as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) - a step towards the new mass workers' party we need.

The end of the Tories has to mean the end of the Tories' policies. Socialist Party campaigners will be fighting for socialist policies such as building council homes, a £15-an-hour minimum wage, and the renationalisation of mail, rail and the utilities. These things can be afforded, and more. But it means taking on the super-rich profiteering bosses, and fighting for socialist change by taking the big companies into democratic public ownership so the economy can be planned to meet the needs of all, not the profits of the rich.

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

Organise a working-class challenge to Tories and Starmer's Labour

Millions will rejoice when the Tories are finally booted out of office. But Keir Starmer's Labour has promised to continue Tory spending cuts, refused to grant striking workers with the

inflation-busting pay rises they need, and Starmer's awful position on Gaza has been no different to the Tories. A Starmer-led government will act on behalf of the capitalist class. The workers' movement would be in a much stronger position if it had

its own mass party. The Socialist Party, part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), is campaigning for the strongest possible list workers' candidates for the local elections in May and the general election, as a step towards this.

- TUSC is organising a Convention to discuss organising a working-class challenge to the Tories and Starmer's Labour, taking place in Birmingham on 3 February.
- See tusc.org.uk for details.



Junior doctors on strike. Princess of Wales hospital, Grimsby



The most recent national demonstration in London against bombing of Gaza. IAN PATTISON

What is point of Welsh Labour if it passes on UK Tory cuts?

DAVE REID
SOCIALIST PARTY WALES

Happy New Year! The Welsh government has put forward a devastating budget for public services for 2024. The figures are terrifying. Because of inflation, the budget is worth £1.3 billion less now than when it was originally announced in 2021. It was already a cuts budget. And the real value of the Welsh budget is £3 billion less than it was in 2010. The real-world consequences will be horrific. Lives will be lost and others ruined. The Welsh government claims to be "protecting" core services - health and council services - by not cutting them so much. But even these increases do not keep up with inflation - ie they mean cuts. Core inflation runs at 5.5%, and has been over 10% this year. But health spending will only 'increase' by 4%, and local government by 3.1%. Both real-terms cuts. Other services will not even get these insufficient increases. The NHS is already on its knees in Wales, unable to provide basic services in many cases. The Welsh

Ambulance Service advises many people who call 999 to get a taxi to hospital, because they will probably never get an ambulance. NHS workers are leaving the service in droves, because the pressures of work are so great, while real pay has been cut year after year. One third of sickness absences in the NHS are caused by stress at work. Yet this budget means even more cuts. If anything, local government is in an even worse state. Councils face the prospect of going bust or just providing what is required by law - statutory services. That means more library closures, and more charges for social care. **Devastating failure** The Welsh Labour government tries to pin the blame on the Tory UK government cutting funding for Wales. And, yes, 13 years of Tory austerity has devastated services across the UK. But the decline of public services in Wales is also a testament of a failed political strategy by Welsh Labour. Welsh Labour leaders claimed they could mitigate the cuts imposed by Westminster, and use devolved powers to run things more fairly than

the Tories in England. They told us that it would be a mistake to fight the cuts - that the Tories would impose them anyway. But where have we ended up? The NHS in Wales is in an even worse state than in Tory England. Council services are just as threadbare. The Tory policy of charging for basic public services in health, education and social care has been implemented by a Welsh Labour government, and will now be extended, with more charges for dental services, social care, and university tuition fees. The Welsh government has the power to set a no-cuts, needs-led budget that tackles poverty, fully funds public services, and massively expands NHS and council services. It should immediately implement a £15-an-hour minimum wage, nationalise Tata Steel, transport, utilities, and the top companies, and organise a mass campaign around this with the trade unions and working-class people in Wales. The Tories are so discredited that even though Labour's Keir Starmer is unpopular, he is likely to win a

significant majority in parliament. But the idea that we should wait for a UK Labour government has been exposed even before it has been elected. Rachel Reeves, Labour's shadow chancellor, has promised to continue Tory spending levels (cuts) until productivity increases - something that has not happened since the 1960s. Starmer welcomed business leaders at this year's Labour conference, saying: "If we do come into government, you will be coming into government with us". **Social partnership?** Some trade union leaders have believed the Welsh Labour government's false promise of 'social partnership', and therefore blocked action by their members against Labour councils or working for Welsh government services run by Labour. This must change. A notable exception has been Unite the Union's support for its council workers in Cardiff and Wrexham, who have been on strike for pay rises that keep pace with inflation. To provide an alternative to the Tories and Labour, we need a new mass workers' party with socialist policies.

Southampton - community in Bevois ready to support one of their own as TUSC candidate



TUSC candidate and Socialist Party member Nadia Ditta speaking at the massive community meeting in Southampton. AMJID JABBAR

CATHERINE CLARKE
SOUTHAMPTON WEST SOCIALIST PARTY

Nadia Ditta, a local community worker, has been outraged by the lack of response of Southampton Labour Council to what is happening to people in Gaza. She was one of a group anti-war campaigners who came to a Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) meeting, organised by the Socialist Party - 258 people in total. The Socialist Party has been participating in the protests in Southampton, supporting Palestine liberation, and calling for a socialist intifada.

People piled in
Over the past month, Southampton Socialist Party branches have been preparing for our TUSC meeting in Bevois. Nadia and her friend worked hard with us, and their local community, to knock on doors and hand out leaflets to ensure a good turnout. People piled in. Socialist Party member Declan Clune introduced Nadia. Declan is secretary of the Trades Union Council in Southampton. He highlighted how appalling our Labour councillors have been. In power for most of the last decade, they have been stripping the poorest communities, like Bevois, of resources such as youth centres and large item waste kerb collections. Labour leader Keir Starmer has been unwilling to support striking workers fighting to keep their children fed and warm, with a roof over

their heads. And Starmer supports unconditionally the Israeli government's bombing of Gaza. Declan stated that only TUSC has clearly stated that it is anti-war and anti-cuts, locally and nationally. Nadia gave a rousing speech, calling the community to action to fight the council on issues that the local community informed her were concerning to them. During the meeting, they spoke about their local park not being safe for children to play in, since it is not been maintained, resulting in syringes and rubbish everywhere. Large items of furniture are dumped on the streets. The Newtown Youth Centre, where the meeting was held, is being earmarked for sale by the council, as well as St Mary's Leisure Centre, which we fought to save two years ago. The audience heard how racism and Islamophobia is rife.

Local community has tried
The local Bevois community had always tried to work closely with the council, believing this would result in needed services being provided in the community. But it was just an information-gathering exercise. The Labour council cares little for their needs. Now it is near impossible to see a doctor face to face. Homecarers are struggling daily without any physical support from the authorities. Nadia rallied the troops, recorded issues of concern, got names of people who want to work with us. She told the gathering that they should be proud of their community, and their children, and that we will make our voices heard in the council chambers of Southampton. We now plan to hold a city-wide 'People's Budget' meeting to offer an alternative to council cuts. We will lobby the council budget meeting in February, and build support for a citywide election campaign to offer an alternative to cuts and war.

● Come to a Socialist Party meeting near you. Find out more at socialistparty.org.uk, or text 07761 818206 with your name and postcode.

Brighton and Hove - councillors have a choice

- Save St Peter's school
- Vote TUSC on 11 January

DAVID MAPLES
TUSC CANDIDATE IN SOUTH PORTSLADE BY-ELECTION

The Tory government has cut Brighton and Hove Council funding by over £110 million since 2010. Senior councillors in the local Labour-run administration are now discussing £33 million in further cuts. But councillors have a choice. They can wring their hands, ration services like adult social care, and implement Tory cuts, or they can stand up

for the communities they are elected to represent. **Where's the money?** In the South Portslade by-election the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is campaigning for a no-cuts budget. The council should set a budget to meet community needs. Labour leader Keir Starmer should pledge to restore council funding cut by the Tories when he's elected prime minister. The council is closing St Peter's Community School. This sets a

precedent. Other schools will close and have classes removed. The last thing pupils need is to be moved to another primary, and then to secondary. They have already had massive disruption because of the pandemic. If pupil numbers are reducing, there should be smaller class sizes. Primaries are more than just schools. They are building blocks of local welfare, where the community meets, and families get support when other services fail. There is a vigorous parent-led

campaign against the closure. The parents have ensured a high participation in the council's consultation. The parents have pressured the council, lobbying it before Christmas. 250 people were on that protest. They also included social workers on strike, Palestine protesters, and parents opposed to another school closure - St Bartholomew's. **All the way** The parents are willing to fight all the way. The involvement of the school workers' trade unions would strengthen the campaign. The Green Party proposal for an all-party working group to examine primary school provision falls far short of a commitment to keeping all schools open. The proposed closure can still be stopped. Electing a TUSC councillor would shock the establishment parties, and could help force a U-turn to keep the school open. Last year, Labour and Green councillors voted to close Mile Oak Library. £33 million of cuts will mean

more proposals like library and toilet closures. End the uncertainty. The budget proposals should be published now, rather than after the by-election, so we can oppose them. During a cost-of-living crisis, council tax has been increased by the maximum permitted. New charges have been introduced and others increased. Parking in Brighton and Hove is exorbitant. Gas and electric are going up. This is a wealthy country. But the money is in the wrong hands. In the last year, the 100 largest companies have paid £79 billion in dividends. In the last two years, the energy companies have made £170 billion in 'excess profits'. Rather than squeezing residents, the council should use its reserves and borrowing powers to freeze council tax and stop the cuts. The council could then build a mass campaign to get funding from government restored.

FROM THE NHS FRONTLINE

Covid battles echo, we are still fighting

NHS WALES NURSE

I've worked as a nurse in a hospital setting for well over a decade. The highs and lows of the job are unlike any other I know. It is stressful, heart-breaking, utterly hilarious and bloody hard work. I am fortunate to experience the very best of humankind, and often during their very worst of times.

As with all difficult jobs, I have had many days where I've wondered whether I could or should continue to do it.

Work-life balance is poor, stress levels always high, bureaucracy endless, traumatic situations on repeat, and of course the poor pay.

As most of the country and indeed the world is aware, the stress and difficulty of the job saw its most pronounced period in decades with the emergence of Covid in 2020.

Covid 'heroes'

Heroes in the news for a while, and emboldened by the support and sincere wishes of our families and community, we faced the fear of the unknown with solidarity and resolve.

To begin with we didn't know how to treat it. International conversations and 'Teams' meetings, information sharing and publications on a scale never seen, we spoke daily with medical teams across the world, sharing experiences. Trying to collate information, pattern-see from the data, to attempt to identify treatment protocols and therapies, was such a massive undertaking.

While that was happening, our patients were the ones we trialled this information on. They knew we were trying, but they also knew we weren't sure. I cannot imagine how that felt, being at the mercy of a disease while facing a healthcare system that openly stated it didn't know how to treat it.

As the world developed treatment regimes, medications and therapies, the feeling of fighting through darkness was alleviated slightly. But then came the numbers. For every bed that was filled and each ward that met capacity, another was opened to accommodate. My hospital has 25 wards - each with 25 beds - and three months in, we had swallowed eight wards. This didn't stop for over two years.

Unmanageable and uncharted

Day and night they came. Intensive care units expanded capacity to proportions beyond safe management. Medical ward staff took on responsibilities usually shouldered by high-dependency units.

Redirection of staff and resources meant everyone was at some point, if not for prolonged periods, working in areas which they felt wholly unprepared for and without the knowledge and skill to feel they were doing it (and therefore their patients) justice.

That alone is a very stressful situation to be in, even for one day. Add to



HACKNEY SOCIALIST PARTY



MARIE SCHULPIG



Redirection of staff meant everyone was working in areas which they felt wholly unprepared for

that the sheer number of admissions, their critical illness, the fact that the patients were our own community... school dinner ladies, teachers, neighbours, corner shop owners, and our own colleagues and relatives, and we then find ourselves in unmanageable and uncharted territories.

Finding therapies that worked was a wonder, but the treatments took a long time. Some were under our care for months. Their physical health recovered to a degree, but their mental health will undoubtedly require years of rehabilitation.

And all this without their families being able to visit and support them. I had conversations over telephones I should never have had.

Watching people die with a respiratory illness is among the worst

things to witness. The panic of not being able to breathe is dreadful. The fear experienced by our patients was just awful, and we tried not to mirror it even if we felt the same. They pulled our PPE off us, grabbing us and pleading with us to help. There was nothing we could do.

Throughout this time we saw poster after poster addressing staff mental health. A 'recharge room' was allocated. An internal, windowless room, hotter than Lucifer's lair, with leaflets and lukewarm water jugs, and packaged teabags on the side. Tick-box exercises. An astounding lack of understanding, or worse.

• Part two will be published in a future issue

Junior doctors strike

Junior doctors in the BMA are on strike for six days in January, following three days in December, continuing their bold fight for a pay rise that makes up for losses suffered over the last decade.

On the picket line outside the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham, one junior doctor told Nick Hart:

"I get asked to come in and do overtime shifts on a team that should have eight doctors but is down to four. And then when it comes to getting paid, I'm spending what little free time and energy I have chasing it up when the extra hours don't appear on my payslip!"

"Most of the senior managers in charge of HR and staffing have no experience in clinical healthcare. And the ones that do have been off the frontline for so long they can't relate to the job as it is now. There should be more input from junior doctors and other grades in how hospital trusts are managed.

"If it wasn't for the health worker exemption, the pay of junior doctors would be too low to meet the Tories' new income threshold for issuing visas!"



December picket at UCLH PAUL MATTSSON

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PCS election result shows battle for the future of the union is on

After a hard-fought campaign, the results of the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union general secretary and assistant general secretary elections were announced on 14 December. Fran Heathcote has been elected general secretary with 10,340 votes. Marion Lloyd, a Socialist Party member standing on behalf of the Broad Left Network (BLN) grouping in the union, lost by just 783 votes, with 9,557.

Marion's vote is an indication of the strong mood among PCS activists for the union to take a more fighting stance on behalf of its members. Fran Heathcote's victory was narrow, despite being the 'continuity candidate'; currently national president of the union and backed by the outgoing general secretary Mark Serwotka.

The turnout in the election was very low, 11.5% compared to 18.6% in 2019. This undoubtedly reflects a feeling of disappointment among many members at the weakness of the union's leadership over the past period. Nonetheless, an important layer of activists drew the conclusion that they needed to vote in order to get the campaigning leadership the union needs.

The mood for change was also reflected in the re-election of John Moloney as assistant general secretary, with 11,705 votes compared to



PCS members striking at Arena Central in Birmingham BIRMINGHAM SP

8,152 for his opponent, an unelected full-time official of the union, who was also backed by Mark Serwotka.

John and Marion stood on a joint 'action not words' ticket, pledging to campaign to rebuild the PCS's national campaign on pay, pensions,

redundancy rights and jobs, including fighting for a 10% pay rise and a £15-an-hour minimum wage. Both also pledged to remain on their civil service wages, and to donate the rest of their salaries to union campaigns.

Over the last two years we have

seen the biggest fall in living standards since the 1950s. For civil servants, like many others, that has come on top of a decade of real-terms pay cuts. Trade unionists have responded with the biggest and most sustained strike wave for three decades.

Many have drawn important lessons from that experience, including the need to elect militant fighting leaderships. However, electing national leaders is only one step to strengthening and transforming our trade union movement. Socialist Party members in PCS will be campaigning as part of the BLN for the election of a team of National Executive Committee (NEC) members on the same campaigning policies as we fought on in this election, as part of a campaign to strengthen the union at every level.

That will be vital, because, as Marion has argued, it is clear that whoever is in government workers are going to have to fight for decent pay, conditions and public services. Successive Tory-led governments have presided over unprecedented austerity, but unfortunately Keir Starmer's Labour is not offering anything fundamentally different.

Starmer has retreated from almost all the anti-austerity pledges contained in the 2019 Labour manifesto under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership. He has even praised Maggie Thatcher, whose crimes against trade unionism included banning the predecessor of the PCS, the CPSA, from GCHQ. Trade union leaders, who are prepared to defend workers interests whoever is in government are going to be vital in 2024 and beyond.

No trust in Tata bosses – Save all jobs Nationalisation not devastation!

ALEC THRAVES SWANSEA SOCIALIST PARTY AND VICE-PRESIDENT SWANSEA TRADES COUNCIL

In the run-up to Christmas, steel workers and residents were on the edge of an economic and social precipice, yet again.

Tactical differences on how to respond to Tata's threat of a jobs slaughter emerged between the steel unions. The Community union and GMB advocate support for the Syndex plan, claiming it's a "strategy for job cuts" which would "decimate the steel industry".

Undoubtedly, these divisions are driven by the furious reaction of steel workers. They were confronted by Tata representatives with the closure of the two blast furnaces and their replacement with an electric arc furnace - ending primary steel making, with the loss of up to 3,000 jobs in the 'heavy end', and becoming essentially a big scrap metal operation, employing a few hundred workers. Unions believe Tata wanted the closure of the furnaces by March 2024!

Despite ongoing discussions, there should be no illusions now that Tata Steel, or any other private corporation, would be willing to finance the estimated £12 billion of investment necessary to retain the blast furnaces, decarbonised with new technology

to save the environment, and to save all the jobs in the steelworks and surrounding communities.

Sharon Graham, fighting general secretary of Unite, is correct when she says: "Tata's sole purpose is serving its shareholders, not UK steel communities".

She adds that: "Only by the government taking a stake in the company will the right choices be made for the UK's economy".

But why only take just a stake? If steel production is of such national and strategic importance to the UK economy, along with the thousands of jobs reliant on it, then the steel unions should be demanding that an incoming Labour government guarantees the full nationalisation of steel, under democratic workers' control and management, with compensation paid only on the basis of need.

That essential demand has had the support of many steelworkers and local residents on our Socialist Party campaigning stalls in Port Talbot.

Unite's strategy of fighting to save all steel jobs and the retention of virgin steel production should be fully supported, with a clear demand that such an objective can only be achieved by returning what's left of a run-down steel industry to public ownership. The Labour-led Welsh government should be taking the lead on this demand. If steelmaking on any kind of serious scale is threatened in Port Talbot, unions must

demand that the Welsh government steps in.

Unite, alongside the other steel unions, also urgently needs to prepare for all forms of industrial action to defend UK steel. A mass national demonstration in Port Talbot would be a warning to Tata and the government that this fightback has begun!

- Save every job for future generations!
- No trust in Tata bosses!
- Nationalise and reinvest in a UK green steel industry!



Port Talbot steelworks PHIL BEARD/CC

London RMT strike most concerted on the tube in decades



Victoria, central London LONDON SP

GARY HARBORD RMT LU TRAIN GRADES SECRETARY, PERSONAL CAPACITY

RMT members on London Underground (LU) are taking strike action from 5 January in an ongoing dispute over pay, after 95% voted to take action.

The week's rolling action is likely to have a significant impact as engineers, fleet, power control, signallers, stations and trains go out on different days. This is the most concerted strike action on the tube that the union has called in decades.

The company's offer of 5% was roundly rejected by a mass meeting of reps back in December, and by over 90% in a ballot, showing the resolve of the members for a better pay increase. Unfortunately, Aslef, the train drivers' union, recommended acceptance of the offer and this was agreed in a referendum.

The RMT has consistently rejected

the narrative that the money isn't there. Senior managers paid themselves £12 million in bonuses over the last 12 months. Andy Lord, the Transport for London (TfL) commissioner, received a £40,000 pay increase in 2023. Levels of footfall are back to pre-Covid levels creating a surplus across LU.

As part of our claim we are demanding parity with Elizabeth Line and London Overground staff, who get concessionary travel on national rail. Both the Elizabeth Line and Overground come under the umbrella of TfL and LU staff should not be treated any differently.

The Labour London mayor Sadiq Khan needs to recognise the crucial role that LU workers play in the London economy. He needs to stand with the unions and demand that central government provides the funding necessary for a transport system that is cheap, safe, and that treats its workforce with dignity.

HANNAH SELL

SOCIALIST PARTY GENERAL SECRETARY

Internationally, 2023 saw unimaginable horror being suffered by Palestinians in Gaza, the continuation of the grinding Ukraine war with hundreds of thousands of casualties, and a COP28 conference that failed to agree any proposals that will seriously combat climate change. Here in Britain, we are still in the midst of the worst squeeze on workers' incomes since the 1950s, the NHS is in meltdown, and the hated Tory government has introduced new anti-trade union legislation. There are many reasons to look towards 2024 with trepidation.

The working class is back!

However, war, misery and austerity were only one side of the year that has just passed. The other side was summed up by Mick Lynch, general secretary of the transport workers' union, the RMT, when he declared that "the working class is back". We agree. Over the course of the last eighteen months, we have seen the largest number of workers on strike in Britain for three decades. Similarly, the level of strikes, including across the car industry, has surged in the US, reaching 4.5 million days lost in October 2023. Both have seen the highest level of industrial action since the collapse of Stalinism in Russia and Eastern Europe in the early 1990s.

The Stalinist regimes were brutal dictatorships which bore no resemblance to genuine socialism, but their collapse and the seeming triumph of capitalism as 'the only possible system', pushed back workers' consciousness and organisation globally. Now, the working class in a number of countries is beginning to rise from its knees. The working class, ultimately responsible for creating the capitalists' profits and for keeping society running, is potentially the most powerful force in society.

The magnificent and ongoing mass anti-war movement against the onslaught on Gaza is another indication of the increased combativity of many workers and young people. The movements have alarmed the Israeli government. Israel's prime minister Netanyahu has fretted about the "huge demonstrations in Western capitals". In Britain, the anti-war movement can also claim credit for the sacking of ultra-right wing home secretary Suella Braverman.

But there is, of course, a huge gap between the current level of cohesion, confidence and understanding of the working class today, and what is required to successfully transform the world by bringing this rotten capitalist system to an end. That will require mass organisations of the working class with conscious leaderships armed with a socialist programme and a determination to fight for it, both in Britain and internationally.

Tasks for 2024

Clearly, more attacks will rain down on the working class and poor in 2024. It is also clear that they will not be accepted – further strikes and protests will be on the agenda. But what role can socialists play in Britain to both increase the chances of individual struggles being victorious and to help prepare the ground for the successful socialist transformation of society?

Vital will be campaigning to prepare the movement for a Starmer-led government. With Sunak's approval

2024: A GENERAL ELECTION BECKONS – PREPARE NOW FOR STRUGGLE UNDER A NEW LABOUR GOVERNMENT



PHOTOS: PAUL MATTSOON

rating plunging to the depths of Boris Johnson's unpopularity when he was forced out, and even approaching Liz Truss levels, it is clear to everyone that Starmer is on course to be next prime minister.

Millions will rejoice when the Tories are finally booted out of office, but a Starmer-led government will act on behalf of the capitalist class. Like a rattlesnake's warning rattle, Starmer is doing all he can to let working-class people know that he will attack their interests in office. Starmer's position on the assault on Gaza has been no different to that of the Tories and the Biden administration. He has openly admitted that his priority is not to stop the slaughter but rather to "align with our international allies". His predecessor Tony Blair was equally anxious to "align" with US imperialism. As a result, his government took part in the invasion of Iraq which resulted in half a million or more dead, and destabilised the whole region. Starmer has already made clear he will behave no differently.

Nor will things be different when it comes to domestic policy. Labour's Policy Forum did not even agree the most modest reforms – like introducing universal free school meals at a time when 2.5 million children are regularly going hungry. Shadow health secretary Wes Streeting has ruled out meeting the junior doctors' pay claim and has pledged greater private involvement in the NHS. Corbyn's manifesto pledges of public ownership of mail, energy, and telecoms have all been ditched. Starmer's own £28 billion pledge for Green Capital Investment, far short of what is needed, has been delayed and

threatened with the chop altogether on the grounds that it is necessary to reassure "the markets".

Even Starmer will have to provide a few small concessions to the working class. For example, he has pledged to repeal the anti-union Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act, but not the huge swathes of anti-union laws introduced over the last forty years. In essence, however, doing the bidding of the markets is going to mean a continuation of brutal austerity. At a time when the UK economy is contracting, and with the national debt having reached 100% of Gross Domestic Product, this will be far more the case than under the first incarnation of New Labour.

Facing up to reality

Unfortunately, however, the overwhelming majority of national trade union leaders are not prepared to face up to the reality of the next Labour government, and therefore are not preparing the working class to defend its interests under it. The RMT is not affiliated to Labour, and Mick Lynch has gone further than many others in declaring that the trade unions will need to, "under a new government, exert themselves as an independent working-class movement." Nonetheless, he argues that there is no choice but supporting Labour at the general election. At the same time, he and other national union leaders continue to appeal to Starmer to make clear what he stands for and whose side he is on. This obscures the fact Starmer could not be clearer that he is on the side of the capitalist elite.

The workers' movement would be in a much stronger position if even a

few of its leaders had recognised that under the next government it will need both a fighting industrial stance and its own political voice. Even a small bloc of MPs in parliament fighting for working-class interests, including for example Jeremy Corbyn and others excluded from Labour, would increase the pressure on a Labour government enormously. We got a glimpse of the enthusiasm that a new workers' party could engender from the launch of Enough is Enough – led by Mick Lynch, and Dave Ward of the CWU – back in 2022. Half a million people signed up, but because its leadership was not prepared to launch a new party it is now almost forgotten.

However, the massive anger against Starmer's support for the war on Gaza, particularly among those from Muslim backgrounds, has again shown the vacuum that exists to the left of Labour. It is essential, however, that such a party is democratic and based on the working class, and is not limited to one issue alone, but rather has a clear programme in opposition to every aspect of both the Tories' and Starmer's pro-capitalist warmongering agenda. The Socialist Party, as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, is campaigning for the strongest possible workers' list in the general election.

Battle lines beyond the general election

The majority of the capitalist class in Britain are now putting their hopes in a Starmer-led government to defend their profits and their system. They expect the leadership of the trade union movement will be willing to attempt

to prevent strike action against a Labour government. It is already clear that many trade union leaders will try to play this role, and that this may have some limited effect for a while as workers give Labour a chance.

However, after the experiences of the last decade, the working class is far more ready to take action to defend its interests than it was back in the late 1990s when Blair came to power. The new year's message from Pat Cullen, general secretary of the Royal College of Nursing (RCN), which until the last eighteen months had never taken strike action, is undoubtedly only a faint echo of the mood of her members. She declares: "Politicians only granted us modest progress – enough to save their own skins but not the revolution that nursing needs and patients deserve. Would we do it over again? Yes," and she goes on, "2024 is a general election year and every party will be challenged by the RCN to demonstrate clear vision and hard cash for nursing, the NHS and social care." Many of the strikes over the last two years have only won limited concessions, but nonetheless, the central lesson that has been drawn by broad sections of workers is that 'striking works'. Collective action, once decried as something from a bygone age, is now firmly back on the agenda.

In addition, today working-class people overwhelmingly do not see Labour as 'their' party, as was the case in the past. On the contrary, it is almost only hatred of the Tories which will mobilise the Labour vote. Even if Labour wins a big majority – as polls currently predict – it is likely to be on a low turnout, and with sizeable numbers voting for 'protest' parties,

including both the Greens and Reform UK. It would only be the collapse of the Tory vote that would be responsible for Labour's majority. This is a completely different situation to under Corbyn's leadership, with his anti-austerity manifesto, when Labour twice got over 10 million votes for the first time since 2001.

Even if trade union leaders were to succeed in blocking national strike action for a time, it will not prevent struggle. There will be local strikes, but also a myriad of protests on different issues are possible – including new movements against women's oppression, BLM protests, student struggles, and protests on environmental issues. However, it will be very difficult for right-wing trade union leaders to hold back national struggle, even in the short term. This will be a major battle line in the trade union movement.

For example, in Unite, general secretary Sharon Graham has defended the union's affiliation to Labour, but her record of being prepared to authorise strike action against Labour authorities, and to publicly attack them, means she still faces opposition within the union officialdom and, behind them, from the Labour leadership and the capitalist class. Unless under a Labour government she completely abandons the militant industrial programme on which she was elected, a ferocious campaign to remove her will develop in the run-up to the next general secretary election in April 2026.

An important part of the Socialist Party's role in the post-election period will be to campaign for all the trade unions to adopt a militant fighting strategy against the government's

attacks, and for the development of democratic fighting broad lefts in order to organise for that policy, including fighting to win union elections. Alongside that we will continue to campaign for the unions to have a political voice. The close-run election for civil servants' union PCS general secretary, with Socialist Party member Marion Lloyd coming within 800 votes of winning, shows the appetite among a new generation of union activists to elect fighting leaders. We will fight to make sure they have the opportunity to do so across the movement, including in the forthcoming PCS executive and Presidential elections.

A new wave of struggle before the election?

The power of the working class could be further demonstrated before the election, particularly if the new anti-union minimum service legislation (MSL) is used against a group of workers. Whereas the last round of anti-union laws in 2016 was allowed to pass by the TUC leadership with no serious opposition, this time pressure from below has led to the TUSC special Congress passing a motion which does agree some important measures which, if implemented, could defeat the new laws. Socialist Party members on the national executives of unions including the National Education Union and Unite, and as part of the National Shop Stewards' Network, have campaigned to harness the pressure from below and maximise the pressure on the TUC leadership to take effective action.

The measures the TUC agreed include developing "practical solidarity plans for unions actively engaged in

strategies of non-compliance", supporting "any worker subject to a work notice, including with support from across the trade union movement, if their employer disciplines them in any way", and ensuring "that where any affiliate is facing significant risk of sanctions because of this legislation, we convene an emergency meeting of the Executive Committee to consider options for providing practical, industrial, financial and/or political backing to that union".

The TUC has also agreed to call an "urgent demonstration in the event a work notice is deployed, and a union or worker is sanctioned in relation to a work notice". The first concrete step that has been taken is for a national demonstration in Cheltenham on 27 January. The reason given for the location is to combine the protest with commemorating the anniversary of the banning of trade unions at GCHQ, which is based in Cheltenham. This is an important anniversary, but it would have been far better to call a national demonstration on the MSL in a major city to maximise the turnout. Regardless of the location, however, it is important that the demonstration is built for as a real show of strength.

It is a sign of the pressure from below that the TUC leadership is, at least in part, talking the talk on the MSL, but it will be necessary to walk the walk to ensure any attempt to use it is defeated. However, given the increased confidence of the working class to take industrial action and the strong feeling that we are facing a weak Tory government in its dying days, the mood from below to defy attempts to use this unjust law will be strong. If the MSL is defeated by workers' action, it would add enormously to the confidence of the working class that it had driven the Tories out of office.

Join the Socialist Party

However events pan out in 2024, it is clear that an incoming Starmer-led government will be acting in the interests of ailing British capitalism, and it will be the working class that is expected to pay the price. However, Starmer will face mass opposition. He will face a working class that has begun to rediscover the power of collective action and a population that is disillusioned with capitalism, with many looking for an alternative to this rotten system.

Starmer may be feeling smug because he defeated Corbynism within Labour. However, Corbyn's popularity stemmed from the inability of the capitalist 'system' to meet the needs of the majority combined with increasing support for socialist ideas, particularly among the young, and both remain. Today two thirds of young people consider themselves socialists. There is no prospect of them accepting the 'iron-clad fiscal discipline' that will be on offer from Starmer's New Labour.

The Socialist Party will be fighting tenaciously for every step needed to maximise the ability of the working class and young people to defend their interests. Above all, we will be campaigning to win mass support for the socialist transformation of society. As a starting point, that will require taking the levers of power out of the hands of the capitalists, nationalising the major corporations and banks, and beginning to build a democratic planned economy, able to meet the needs of humanity and the environment. If you agree, join us.

Review Chile: How and why the revolution was crushed, by Tony Saunois

OSIN DUNCAN
SOCIALIST PARTY NORTH WEST ORGANISER

The fiftieth anniversary of the 1973 coup in Chile has generated a lot of discussion about the revolutionary events which preceded it. Salvador Allende, elected President leading the Popular Unity coalition in 1970, introduced reforms and socialist measures such as nationalisations. But the Allende government left the armed forces and other state forces in the hands of the bosses. Ultimately he was removed and murdered in a bloody coup. The harsh lessons demonstrated in Chile in the 1970s are vital for revolutionary socialists to learn for the next era of struggle.

Take for instance the personal experiences author Tony Saunois, CWI secretary, recounts in the foreword of the book, visiting to build the forces of the CWI under the military dictatorship which followed the coup. Through his account, we can bear witness to the brutality of the dictatorship, and also to the bottomless ingenuity of the Chilean working class in response.

Additionally, and with interest to Marxists in Britain, coup leader General Pinochet's friendship with former British prime minister Margaret Thatcher reflects the international scope of events in Chile; the role of the US is perhaps more well-known, but the role of British imperialism is subject to far less discussion (another great reason to buy this book!).

Moreover, the Chilean ruling class pushed a political narrative, aided by some cultural similarities to Britain (it was even nicknamed 'the England of Latin America'), to cover up some of the massacres which took place under so-called 'democratic' governments (for example, the Puerto Montt massacre of 1968).

Similarly, the ruling class in Britain has covered up several violent episodes of repression during the 1984-85 miners' strike, the Troubles in Northern Ireland, and more.

The parallels with Britain continue with the retelling of union leader Jack Jones' contribution to Labour Party Conference in 1973, after the coup, when Jones correctly warned that a government led by Labour left winger Tony Benn in Britain would meet the same fate as Allende's. There were other international links; Fidel Castro had gone on an official state visit to Santiago and gifted Allende an assault rifle. While the imagery of this exchange may appear obvious, Castro also urged the government not to go too far too quickly, lest they provoke the reaction of US imperialism. This was bad advice.

There was nothing special about the 'democratic traditions' or 'constitutional armed forces' in Chile; the ruling class would use whatever means at its disposal to whittle the

revolution in blood. By urging caution, Castro contributed to the false notion that leaving the officer corps untouched was correct, when in fact it contributed to the downfall of the revolution.

So, having understood that a democratically elected government was overthrown in a violent coup in Chile in 1973, should socialists conclude that elections have no role in our activity? Again, the experience of the Popular Unity platform provides valuable lessons for us today; the Communist Party and the Socialist Party it included had made very serious mistakes previously in the electoral field, which had actually led to Communist Party members being imprisoned in concentration camps. The correct lesson drawn from this was that cooperation with workers' organisations was the way forward, not accommodation with the bosses.

Even without the high membership of those parties at that time, socialists must still meet the working class where its political consciousness lies. At this point, there is a glaring absence of mass parties standing in elections who would even touch Popular Unity's programme under Allende, so we have to build them!

Mass working class parties

The need for mass democratic working-class parties is borne out by the degeneration of the current Boric government in Chile, elected initially as the voice, albeit self-appointed, of the mass movement in 2019 against the Piñera government and the holdover constitution from the dictatorship. Having been elected, Boric almost immediately accepted establishment politicians and even IMF economists into his cabinet, a complete betrayal of his supporters. Frustratingly, this example is reflected in many countries in Latin America and other regions, and underlines the need for revolutionaries to seriously take up the electoral question.

This is where some of the supplemental material in the book becomes incredibly useful; Appendix III, a reprint of the pamphlet the CWI produced just after the 2019 mass movements in Chile, Ecuador and other countries, skilfully explains the role of calling for a constituent assembly in the midst of such a struggle, but also the pitfalls of going along with any ploy by the bosses' representatives in using that demand to demotivate the masses.

Appendices I and II are more article reprints, this time all the way from the 1970s and 1980s respectively, detailing what our comrades were writing at the time of the revolution itself, and under the heavy repression which the counter-revolution wrought on Chilean workers and youth. It shows that we are not just armchair Marxists; although we did correctly predict a



Soldiers burn Marxist literature following the coup PUBLIC DOMAIN

coup was likely in 1973, it was an attempt to warn the most militant layers of the class in order to avoid this disaster. Later, as we were building up forces and eventually our sister party Socialismo Revolucionario, we found success discussing with established activists in the underground anti-Pinochet movement, and discussing with them the need not just to overthrow the dictatorship, but capitalism as well.

Ultimately, after reading this book, I felt incredibly proud to be a member of an international which put

forward a revolutionary alternative to the dictatorship, not just an accommodation with capitalism. However, the more important part of this book is the analysis of the ideas of Popular Unity, including its errors and lessons for today. If we want to fight for a socialist revolution in this period, then we will have to avoid the same path of Allende's government, understand fully the role that the state will play while controlled by the bosses, and the need to challenge that control in order to build a socialist society.



Probation in crisis: Fight for full funding and democratic working class control

AMY SAGE
PROBATION WORKER, BRISTOL NORTH SOCIALIST PARTY

In June 2020, the Socialist published an article in response to the Ministry of Justice's decision to renationalise the National Probation Service (NPS). The article described this as a "step in the right direction" but called for all public services, including the probation service, to be fully funded and under the democratic control of its workers.

Since 2021, when the service was brought formally back under the publicly owned NPS, two reports by the HM Inspectorate of Probation into the probation unification programme have highlighted the need for sustained additional investment. They stated that the reunification of the service was not "a magic bullet" and did nothing to properly address crucial issues that have been emphasised in previous inspections, in particular, a critical lack of frontline staff and excessive workloads.

Several high-profile cases since the end of 2022 have highlighted the catastrophic consequences of failing to tackle these issues. Zara Aleena was murdered in June 2022 by Jordan McSweeney. McSweeney had been released from prison on licence just nine days before, having been imprisoned for robbery, and was therefore under the supervision of the Probation Service. He was incorrectly classified as 'medium risk', a decision that meant that when he failed to attend scheduled appointments with his Probation Officer, the speed of response was inappropriate. There were also delays in completing the paperwork to initiate a recall to custody. In classifying McSweeney as medium risk, his previous offending history and behaviour in prison, which indicated that he was a violent, woman-hating racist, were not taken into consideration.

Similar failings were found in the case of Damien Bendall, another violent offender who murdered his partner, her two children and another girl in September 2021. Bendall was also under the supervision of the Probation Service when he committed these murders, having been sentenced to a 24-month suspended sentence for arson. Again, Bendall had been incorrectly classified as medium risk, despite having allegations made against him for domestic abuse. Police had also contacted the Probation Service prior to the attack about the risk of "serious sexual harm" he could pose to girls.

HM Inspectorate of Probation reports into both cases found that, had the correct risk assessments been in place, McSweeney and Bendall would likely not have been free to commit these horrific murders. Rather than focusing on any failures of individual members of staff, the reports found that excessive workloads, exacerbated by staff shortages,



impacted the ability of Probation Practitioners to carry out 'high-quality work'.

Staff shortages and high caseloads within the probation service are nothing new. However, then Tory justice secretary Chris Grayling's disastrous 'Transforming Rehabilitation' agenda, which brought 70% of the existing caseload under the management of 21 private Community Rehabilitation Companies, resulted in an exodus of highly qualified staff, leaving those remaining with unsustainably high caseloads managed largely by unqualified practitioners.

Even after re-nationalisation, staff vacancies and caseloads remain high - earlier this year, it was revealed that ten of twelve probation regions in England and Wales have staff workloads above the nationally recognised maximum.

This is due, in part, to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, more significant is the impact of persistent low pay and below-inflation pay rises that have meant that the service has struggled to fill these vacancies.

In September of last year, Probation Service workers across the three main unions (Unison, NPO and GMB) were balloted over a three-year pay deal which, in real terms, amounted to a significant pay cut. This came on top of over a decade of below-inflation pay rises - since

2010, pay for probation staff has

risen by just 1% whilst the cost of living has increased by over 40% across the same time period. Due to a lack of coordinated leadership by the unions, members voted to accept the pay deal, many of them stating that 'at least it is something now'.

Whilst a decent pay rise would not have solved all the problems that currently plague the service, for probation workers who deal daily with high-risk, challenging people often with complex needs, such a pay offer would at least have reflected the level of respect we deserve. However, as one of my colleagues said: "We are struggling to attract new staff to the profession because we are not treated like professionals."

As part of the Civil Service, probation service staff received a one-off 'cost of living payment' of £1,500 at the end of May this year. However, as a non-consolidated payment, not only is this nowhere near enough to cover the decades of pay erosion suffered by staff, it does nothing to address the staffing and workload crisis that poses a real danger to public safety. Unison, NPO and GMB have launched the Joint Unions Workload campaign 'Operation Protect' which aims to work with ministers and the Probation Inspectorate to agree safe workload levels and a workload reduction programme but without any mention of pay.

Whilst this is another 'step in the right direction', it is clear that what

the Probation Service needs is for the three unions to build a joint campaign over both pay and working conditions. Without a strong, fighting, coordinated leadership from the unions, more and more staff, demoralised, stressed and underpaid, will leave the service.

System failure

The vast majority of probation workers are motivated by a genuine desire to help rehabilitate offenders, reduce crime and protect the public. However, if not properly funded, democratically accountable and controlled by the people it is meant to help and protect, the National Probation System will become less and less capable of serving this function.

The Socialist Party demands the criminal justice system, including the courts, police and the Probation Service, be placed under democratic workers' control and management. This would ensure that they are accountable to local communities and trade unions so that working-class people decide how they are run and what their priorities are. Judges and other officials in the system should be democratically elected, subject to the right of recall if they are judged to be no longer serving the interests of those they represent, and paid a worker's wage, as opposed to the £100,000-plus a year that some judges are currently on.

A large proportion of crimes committed are, at root, the result of the poverty, alienation and deprivation created by the capitalist system. Socialist policies such as building high-quality council housing, providing comprehensive youth services and free education, and giving everyone decent pay, pensions and benefits for example, would undermine the causes of crime.

Ultimately, capitalism is based on the exploitation of the majority by a tiny minority of big-business bosses. The capitalist criminal justice system is necessary for the maintenance of that system. Therefore only the socialist transformation of society can ensure a justice system that serves the interests of working-class people.

Fighting for a probation service that is fully-funded, properly staffed and can genuinely rehabilitate offenders, reduce crime and protect the public is part of that fight.

The Socialist Party fights for:

- A coordinated, fighting leadership in the trade unions to ensure proper pay restoration for probation staff and for fully funded, inflation-proof pay rises
- A fully funded and well-resourced probation service
- The whole justice system be placed fully in the public sector, under democratic workers' control and management
- An end to the inequality, prejudice, division, alienation and poverty capitalism brings - for the socialist transformation of society



WHAT WE STAND FOR

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

The Socialist Party organises working-class people to fight against the attacks from this rotten system on our lives and livelihoods, and for a socialist alternative: a society which takes the wealth out of the hands of the super-rich and is democratically run by working-class people to meet the needs of all not the profits of a few.

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

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

WORK, PENSIONS AND BENEFITS

- A £15-an-hour minimum wage for all, without exemptions. For the minimum wage to automatically increase linked to average earnings or inflation, whichever is higher.
- Share out the work. A maximum 32-hour working week with no loss of pay or worsening of conditions. The right to flexible working, under the control of workers not employers. An end to insecure working, for the right to full-time work for all who want it; ban zero-hour contracts.
- All workers to have trade union rates of pay, employment protection, and sickness, parental and holiday rights from day one of employment. End bosses using bogus 'self-employment' as a means to avoid giving workers rights.
- No to austerity through inflation. For all wage rates to be automatically increased at least in line with price rises.
- Open the books of all companies cutting jobs or claiming they can't afford to pay a real living wage. State subsidies, where genuinely needed, for socially-useful small businesses.
- For trade unions independent of the capitalist state, with members having democratic control over their own policies, constitutions and democratic procedures. For all trade union officials to be regularly elected, subject to recall by their members and paid a worker's wage.
- Reduce the state retirement and pension age to 55. For decent living pensions.
- Replace universal credit and the punitive benefit system with living benefits for all who need them.

PUBLIC SERVICES

- A massive expansion of public services including the NHS and council services. Reverse all the cuts, kick out the privateers. Bring private social care and childcare facilities into public

ownership under democratic control, in order to provide free, high-quality services for all who need them. Expand services for all women suffering violence.

- For local councillors who are committed to opposing austerity and all cuts to local services, jobs, pay and conditions.
- For a socialist NHS to provide for everyone's health needs, including dental and eye care – free at the point of use and under democratic control. Kick out the private companies! Nationalise the pharmaceutical industry under democratic workers' control and management.
- Renationalise privatised utilities – including rail, mail, water, telecoms and power – under democratic workers' control and management.
- Free, publicly funded and democratically run, good-quality education, available to all at any age. Abolish university tuition fees and write off student debt, end marketisation, and introduce a living grant. No to academisation. For all schools to be under the genuine democratic control of local education authorities, school staff, parents and student organisations.
- The right to a safe secure home for all. For the mass building of genuinely affordable, high-quality, carbon-neutral council housing. For rent controls that cap the level of rent. Fair rent decisions should be made by elected bodies of tenants, housing workers and representatives of trade unions. For cheap low-interest mortgages for home buyers. Nationalise the privately owned large building companies, land banks and estates.

ENVIRONMENT

- Prioritising major research and investment into replacing fossil fuels and nuclear power with renewable energy, and ending the problems of early obsolescence – where products are designed to 'wear out' and be replaced – and unrecycled waste.
- Nationalisation of the energy companies, under democratic workers' control and management, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need, in order to carry out a major switch to clean, green energy, without any loss of jobs, pay or conditions.
- A democratically planned, massively expanded, free to use, publicly owned transport system, as part of an overall plan against environmental pollution.
- For a major, publicly funded, insulation and energy transition plan for existing housing stock.
- Agribusiness to be taken into democratic public ownership. For a food processing and retail industry under workers' control to ensure that standards are set by consumers, small farmers, and

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

DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

- For united working-class struggle to end discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, disability, sexuality, age, and all other forms of prejudice and oppression.
- Repeal the anti-trade union laws and all others that trample over civil liberties. For the right to protest and to strike! End police harassment. For the police to be accountable to local committees, made up of democratically elected representatives of trade unions, local community organisations and local authorities.
- For the right to choose when and whether to have children – for the right to access abortion, contraception and fertility treatment for all who need it.
- For the right to asylum – with democratic community control and oversight of emergency funding resources. No to racist immigration laws.
- Expand democracy. For the abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords. For all MPs to be subject to the right of recall by their constituents at any time, and to only receive a worker's wage. For proportional representation and the right to vote at 16.
- For the right of nations to self-determination. For an independent socialist Scotland and for a socialist Wales, both part of a voluntary socialist confederation of Wales, England, Scotland and Ireland.
- Oppose the dictatorship of the billionaire owners of the media. For the nationalisation of newspaper printing facilities, radio, TV and social media platforms. Access to these facilities should be under democratic control, with political parties' coverage being allocated in proportion to the popular vote at elections.
- For a new mass workers' party, based on the trade unions, and drawing together workers, young people and activists from workplaces, and community, environmental, anti-racist and anti-cuts campaigns, to provide a fighting, socialist political alternative to the pro-big business parties.

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

- No to imperialist wars and occupations!
- Take the wealth off the super-rich! For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and the banking system that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working-class control and management. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need, not to the fat cats.
- A democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, and in a way that safeguards the environment.
- No to the EU bosses' club. Organise a campaign with European socialists and workers' organisations to use the talks on post-Brexit relations to tear up the EU pro-capitalist rules. For a real collaboration of the peoples of Europe on a socialist basis as a step towards a socialist world.

Do you agree? Join the fightback!

JOIN THE SOCIALISTS

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

Help fund the fightback!

DONATE TODAY

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Why I joined the Socialist Party

Standing together we are stronger



PAUL MATTSOON

HANNAH GLENDINNING

NEW MEMBER OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY IN HUDDERSFIELD

I believe in the importance of standing up for the less fortunate, combined with the power of collective action.

On benefits, and living in a council house, with a child, I have experienced first-hand the effects of capitalism and right-wing policies. They do not meet the needs of those at the bottom of the ladder.

My introduction to socialism came from JB Priestley's play 'An Inspector Calls'. I studied it in GCSE English.

I was inspired by the call to justice from the inspector character. My teacher explained how the wealthy family in the play represented capitalism. Whilst the girl, in whose death each family member individually plays a part, represented socialism.

I highly recommend giving this a read. I decided I was a socialist.

Struggling

I have worked in various law firms and corporate settings, in order to gain experience, and try to provide for myself and my seven-year-old daughter. The 'law firm and corporate culture' is dissuasive toward socialist and left-wing viewpoints, and instead promotes right-wing capitalist and corporate ideologies, for the bosses' own benefit.

But this is to the downfall of workers, and individuals from less affluent backgrounds. Conservative and right-wing policies do not meet their needs in the provision of services, healthcare and education.

This is why I was so inspired when I heard about the Socialist Party. I was

drawn to the party's clear and bold policies and ideas.

Contrast this with Labour flitting between right and left, prioritising power at the expense of societal needs. The Socialist Party's approach inspires confidence, as it has from myself.

Our policies, such as prevention of council cuts and opposition to the current war in Gaza, could attract new members. Keir Starmer's abhorrent refusal to call for a ceasefire has allowed continued bloodshed of children and civilians.

Anyone personally affected by, or against government austerity measures, which by design deprive us of sufficient education, healthcare and basic living needs, may be attracted to the Socialist Party too.

I would not have had the courage to rally on a Socialist Party campaign stall for the first time, were it not for Socialist Party members Iain Dalton and Kevin Pattison standing with me, and showing me the ropes.

Inspire

A little encouragement goes a long way. And strength is in numbers. The more we offer our strength to stand up against the current power system, the more we inspire others to do the same.

Since joining, I have met some great friends, and gained much insight and education into the state of society, and how we can serve it for the better. I am proud to call myself a member of the Socialist Party, and am committed to doing my part to help the party grow.

With individual and collective drive and determination, and standing together, we can create a healthier and fairer society for the many.

SOCIALIST STUDENTS CONFERENCE 2024

PREPARING TO KICK
OUT THE TORIESGet involved!
socialist
students
socialiststudents.org.ukAND FOR THE STRUGGLE UNDER
A STARMER GOVERNMENT

10AM SATURDAY 10 FEBRUARY

BIRMINGHAM & MIDLAND INSTITUTE, 9 MARGARET STREET, BIRMINGHAM, B3 3BS
(10 minute walk from Birmingham New Street)

2023 has seen yet more devastation wrought across the globe by capitalism. The horrific siege on Gaza is just the latest example of the dystopian reality that this anarchic, unequal system offers to billions around the world.

In Britain, the hated Tories are facing disaster at the next general election. They are widely hated for inflicting attacks on young people and workers on behalf of a capitalist system in crisis. But what kind of alternative would a Starmer-led Labour government be?

Keir Starmer has lined up behind the Tories in supporting the brutality of the Israeli state. Policy after policy, broken pledge after broken pledge, Starmer has shown that his Labour Party will offer 'more of the same' by ruling in the interests of the super-rich and the capitalist establishment. That means crushing the aspirations of young people and the

working class - including opposing free education, inflation-proof pay rises, or effective action on climate change.

Capitalism is incapable of offering a decent future for young people and students, in Britain and across the world. So come to Socialist Students conference in Birmingham on Saturday 10 February to discuss:

- How we can build the movement to end the war on Gaza and kick out the Tories
- How students can prepare for a new era of struggle under a Starmer-led Labour government
- How we can finally do away with this rotten capitalist system and achieve a socialist society ...and more!

Join the student fightback
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Housing crisis needs socialist solutions

THEO SHARIEFF

SOUTH EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Recent statistics have revealed again the brutal reality of renting in today's 'backward Britain'. While the cost of renting in the private sector is rising at its fastest rate since 2006, illegal evictions by landlords, which involve physical violence or coercion against tenants, hit record levels in 2023.

Over the Christmas period there were more than twice as many long-term empty homes as there were homeless families and children living in temporary accommodation! Single parents (overwhelmingly women) and their children are particularly at risk of becoming homeless, owing to landlords' and letting agencies' effective bans on renters who claim Universal Credit or have children. 74,000 lone parents and their children are facing homelessness within weeks according to Shelter - that's one in seven single parent private renters.

While more and more ordinary working people and families live in fear of losing their homes, big landlords and the rich get away scot-free pretty much every time. In 2022, only 0.3% of illegal eviction cases resulted in conviction.

Landlords feel confident to act with impunity because all the main political parties in Britain are wedded to the 'profit before us' system of capitalism, and fundamentally back them. Thatcherism since the 1980s has meant a massive transferral of council housing stock from public hands to private property investment vultures. Since 1980, 300,000 council homes in London alone have been sold off - nationally the figure is in the millions. And none of the establishment parties have seriously challenged that happening.

Despite this massive assault on



PHOTO: JOHN SEB/CC

working-class people, councils to this day still have the legal powers to take on landlords who make the lives of millions a misery. Councils could not only introduce rent controls in council properties, but also compulsorily register all landlords and force them to take action on substandard living conditions. Any landlords who didn't comply could have their properties put up for compulsory purchase. There is no excuse why Labour councils couldn't take such measures now.

But ending the housing crisis on a permanent basis will require the democratic planning of society's resources, land and wealth to launch a mass programme of genuinely affordable council house building. The Labour leadership has excluded investing in the building of new houses if it wins the next election because of its self-imposed 'iron-clad fiscal rules' - read because of its slavish commitment to defending the interests of the capitalist system.

That's why we need to fight to transform society along socialist

lines, starting with taking the construction company giants, banks, and other companies which dominate the economy into democratic public ownership to ensure all working-class and young people have access to high-quality and genuinely affordable housing all our lives.

But working-class people need a party of our own which fights for all these demands in the council chamber, in Parliament, as well as in our communities and workplaces. The Socialist Party, as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, is fighting for the widest possible working class electoral challenge to all the pro-capitalist parties at the upcoming local and general elections (see pages 2 and 3). Join us in building that electoral challenge and in the fight for the socialist transformation of society.

WHAT'S
YOUR VIEW?

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East London school protest
against exclusion of student for
supporting Palestine

MARTIN REYNOLDS

WALTHAM FOREST SOCIALIST PARTY

On 21 December, around 200 people gathered outside Barclay Primary School in Leyton in protest at the school's discrimination of an eight-year-old boy being told he cannot wear a Palestinian flag badge on his coat. I spoke to a number of parents whose

children attend the school and who described what has been going on. One said: "This problem has arisen because of senior management, not the teachers. The teachers are fine."

Another said the boy has been humiliated by school management for refusing to remove a small Palestine flag from his coat. The boy, who has had friends and family killed in Israel's ongoing assault on Gaza, has not attended school since 23 November as a result of the dispute. The boy was told he cannot wear his coat in the playground and was given an adult coat to wear, which led to his peers laughing at him, and the boy feeling humiliated.

The boy's parents wrote a letter to the headteacher saying that the action taken by Barclay Primary had left their son feeling "distressed, hurt, humiliated, helpless, withdrawn and fearful". They say that he has "been made to feel as though in order to be welcomed at school he needs to abandon his identity", and that he sees the treatment "as being linked to him being Palestinian and Muslim".

Problems started on 'Children in Need' day when a number of pupils wore Palestinian colours, badges and stickers to school. Later that day, at least eight families received letters from school management banning

"this overt demonstration of political beliefs" and suggesting children could be being used as "political pawns" by their parents. The letter, which parents say was "threateningly worded", also said that "inappropriate... extremist or divisive comments" made at school could lead to referral to Prevent, the government's counter-terrorism body. The boy's parents were told that if he came to school the next day with his coat, he would not be welcome on school grounds.

I was told he had been completing his school work from home, until his class teacher was told by management that she was not to provide him with any more work, or to take in any work that he had completed.

In response to the letter to parents dated 17 November, a counter-letter signed by over 170 parents raised concerns about children's freedom of expression, the conflation of support for Palestine with support for terrorism ("at best ignorant, at worst Islamophobic"), and the school's "disparity of approach" in its solidarity with Ukraine following Russia's invasion in 2022.

On 20 December, after hearing about the protest planned by parents for 21 December, Barclay Primary announced it would be closing early for Christmas.



Protest outside Leyton school PHOTO: MARTIN REYNOLDS

£1/£2 solidarity price

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the Socialist

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STILL STRIKING BACK

AGAINST THE COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS

OSCAR PARRY

SOUTH WEST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

As another year of capitalist crisis begins, workers are fighting back against the ongoing cost-of-living crisis. Decades of public service austerity means the NHS is in constant meltdown while Jeremy Hunt's £20 billion of tax cuts favoured the richest 20% of earners. A combination of inflation and frozen income tax thresholds is dragging millions of workers into paying more tax - taking taxes as a share of the economy to the highest level since World War Two.

And this is the first parliament in which British households are on course to be worse off at the end; whole average earnings adjusted for inflation are not forecast to return to their 2008 peak until 2028!

But these attacks haven't just been accepted by the working class without a fight. Over the course of the last eighteen months, we have seen the largest number of workers on strike in Britain for three decades, from all sectors of the economy.

This strike wave is set to continue in 2024, with the first week of the year seeing members of the RMT on London Underground taking strike action against a derisory 5% pay offer from Transport for London, overseen by Labour mayor Sadiq Khan; and junior doctors beginning the longest strike in NHS history in pursuit of a 35% pay rise, which would restore their real earnings to 2008 levels.

Tory anti-union attacks

The hated Tories are fearful of the power that the resurgent workers' movement wields and are attempting to enforce anti-trade union laws that require minimum service levels for many industries, restricting the right to strike for millions of workers.

The mass mood of resistance from below has pressured the Trades Union Congress (TUC) to pass motions agreeing trade unions will refuse to tell their members to cross picket lines, a clear act of defiance. We call for the TUC to put this motion into action and develop a strong plan of action to oppose these new laws, including demonstrations and solidarity strikes.

Junior Doctors and RMT tube workers on strike in 2023
PHOTOS: PAUL MATTSSON AND LONDON SP



TUC National Demonstration against the anti-trade union minimum service level law.

27 January in Cheltenham

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

