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# the Socialist

Issue 1257

11-17 January 2024

formerly **Militant**

**Mass, democratic,  
socialist struggle to**

# STOP ISRAELI STATE TERROR



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- **Build a working-class socialist alternative to Tories and Starmer's Labour**

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Issue 1257 11-17 January 2024

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

# Brutal Israeli-state offensive continues and threat of regional spread grows

Socialist Party WHAT WE THINK

Over 2 million Palestinians in Gaza are suffering a horrific situation on a daily basis, with nowhere safe to go. Bombing continues and Israeli ground operations continue in the south - the area where people were once told to flee to safety.

Almost the entire population is going hungry. Famine could result within the next six months, according to the UN. Refugee camps already levelled by Israeli bombardment have suffered flooding with devastated sewage infrastructure failing. Disease is spreading. The Israeli state attacks have ruined hospitals and healthcare. The death toll now exceeds 23,000, with thousands more missing presumed dead.

The Israeli military spokesperson Daniel Hagari told the US press on 8 January it has begun a new, less intensive phase in its war on Gaza, just as US Secretary of State Antony Blinken was set to arrive in the Middle East for the fifth time since the start of the war. But bombs still rain down on Gaza and in the West Bank.

The same day, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defence Minister Yoav Gallant made a statement to Israeli media to say that the war "will continue for many months".

Increasing instability US imperialism, for its own geopolitical interests, gives strong support to Israeli capitalism, but at the same time it has been pushing for some military restraint by Israel to try to prevent an escalation into regional war. Primarily because this would have a major impact on economies and stability worldwide.

Yemeni Houthis have been attacking ships in the Red Sea shipping route that accounts for about 12% of global trade. Already, major shipping companies Maersk and Hapag-Lloyd are avoiding the route - adding 10 days and around £1 million to the cost of a typical voyage. This already has wider economic implications, and more the longer it continues.

US Navy helicopters have sunk three Houthi vessels, killing the crews, UK defence secretary Grant Shapps has also threatened 'direct action' to protect shipping lanes, and Iran has sent a warship to the Red Sea to support the Houthis.

Already in the first days of 2024, as well as an intensification of the Houthis' attacks on shipping there have been targeted Israeli missile strikes that killed a Hamas deputy leader and five others in South Beirut, a Hezbollah commander



in southern Lebanon and an Iran-backed military commander in Iraq; and there was a terrible bombing attack claimed by Islamic State killing nearly 100 in Iran.

The Beirut missile was described by Hezbollah leader Nasrallah as "the first time something like this has happened since 2006", referring to the 34-day war that year between Israel and right-wing Islamist organisation Hezbollah in Lebanon, a Hamas ally.

The Hezbollah leadership declared it would have to retaliate. An escalation of the military conflict with Hezbollah would be welcome to some of the right-wing government ministers in Israel. The Israeli defence minister argued in favour of a pre-emptive strike against Hezbollah in the immediate aftermath of the 7 October Hamas-led attack and Benny Gantz, another member of the Israeli war cabinet, said in December: "If the world doesn't get Hezbollah away from the border, Israel will do it".

'The day after?' The Israeli government has not outlined its plans for 'the day after', in fact it is split over them. In advance of a war cabinet meeting to discuss the issue, Defence Minister Yoav Gallant released his own document. In it, he outlines his vision for Israeli "occupational freedom of action" in Gaza, with governance involving

the Israeli state, Palestinians, Egypt and a US-led multinational force charged with 'reconstruction'. In other words, continued military occupation backed by US imperialism.

The US talks up the possible role of a 'revitalised' Palestinian Authority, a body completely discredited in the eyes of most Palestinians for its role colluding with Israeli state oppression and presiding over mass poverty.

It is the view of a number of right-wing Israeli ministers, as well as sections of the Israeli military and other state forces, that Palestinians must be driven from Gaza, to make way for Israeli settlers. This threatens a new 'Nakba' (catastrophe), echoing the events of 76 years ago when hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were driven from their land.

Far-right Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich has said: "What needs to be done in the Gaza Strip is to encourage emigration. ... If there are 100,000 or 200,000 Arabs in Gaza and not two million Arabs, the entire discussion on the day after will be totally different."

Mass, democratic, socialist struggle

The Socialist Party and the Committee for a Workers' International stand for an immediate withdrawal of all Israeli troops from Gaza, an end to the wars on Gaza and blockade, the right

to national self-determination for the Palestinians, and a socialist solution to the conflict.

30 years since the world capitalist powers supported the Oslo Accords as a step towards a capitalist Palestinian state, they have long proven to be a dead end. An armed, competing, Palestinian capitalist state would be intolerable for the ruling Israeli capitalist class, which has made every effort to prevent it from ever coming into existence.

Palestinian national self-determination can only be achieved by a mass struggle of the Palestinians themselves - a third 'intifada' - this time democratically organised and based on socialist ideas. Democratic structures would need to be built by such a movement and would be the basis for a new working-class based political party to challenge the pro-capitalist parties in Gaza and the West Bank.

Such a movement would be a beacon to workers and poor people across the region facing oppression and poverty. A direct appeal to workers in Israel to struggle for decent living standards and services, and against their own right-wing, capitalist government, would be necessary too.

No capitalist solution is possible. Only a socialist programme based on public ownership of the main corporations and democratically decided economic planning offers the way forward. On that basis, resources could be used and developed to meet the needs of all people across Israel-Palestine.

Trade union lead For campaigners in Britain, the best way to struggle is to continue to build working-class pressure in opposition to the war, including student walkouts and the mass demos that

Netanyahu has been forced to notice. Socialist Party members will be building for the biggest-possible turnout for the anti-war demos, beginning with the demo in London on 13 January, and fights for the trade unions, which represent over 6 million workers in Britain, to mobilise their members too.

Discussions in the unions should be initiated between workplace trade union members and representatives in the arms, logistics and transport industries over what workers' action can be taken against the war. Dockers in Unite the Union at an Ellesmere Port refinery refused to unload Russian oil from a tanker in 2022 in opposition to the war on Ukraine, for example.

Who can I vote for?

In an election year, a pressing question for thousands on the anti-war demos, who have watched Tory and Labour politicians stand behind the Israeli onslaught on Gaza, is: 'Who can I vote for?' The same question was asked by thousands on strike for decent pay deals in the last 18 months too as Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer told shadow ministers that they shouldn't be on picket lines.

The answer is, we need a new mass party, based on the working class and trade unions, that fights to end the cost-of-living crisis and stands in solidarity with the struggles of working-class people internationally, including against the war on Gaza.

As a step towards that, the Socialist Party is preparing with others in the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition to stand candidates in the next general and local elections. Anti-war campaigners, trade unionists, community campaigners, students, socialists, coming together to put forward a socialist alternative.

SOCIALISM TODAY Monthly magazine of the Socialist Party December - January issue includes... Understanding Israel-Palestine New twists, but a Starmer government is still most likely The 1973 Arab-Israeli war, reprint socialismtoday.org/subscribe / 020 8988 8777 Paper subscription £3 a month, e-subscription £2.50

## Anger at Tories and Labour seethes at more Gaza protests



Folkestone - Starmer is a bad punchline

A shout came from the crowd: "What about Starmer?!" The union rep chairing the rally replied: "I was coming to him next, you stole my punchline!"

The protest was led by a former union rep, who has previously stood against the Labour Party in local elections. He outlined the shameful role played by US imperialism and the UK government in supporting the Israeli state's brutal attacks on the Palestinian people.

Socialist Party members played a leading role in organising the first Folkestone protest against the war in Gaza. Over 150 people turned out to listen to a wide range of speeches, including a Jewish ex-member of the Labour Party who had been expelled

by Keir Starmer, and a Palestinian refugee.

Eric Segal spoke on behalf of the Socialist Party on the importance of the role of trade unions in opposing this war. He eloquently laid out the need to take a class approach to the crisis, and explained that only socialism can ultimately bring an end to war in the Middle East and elsewhere.

Our ideas went down very well with the crowd. Many came to our campaign stall to buy our Socialist paper and donate to our party.

This was only a small protest compared to the larger ones that have happened in London. But it clearly showed the anger that exists at the role played by the Labour Party in

The Socialist Party is fighting for:

- 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 rights for all minorities, as part of the struggle for a socialist Middle East
No trust in the capitalist politicians, internationally or in Britain. Fight to build a workers' party in Britain that fights for socialism and internationalism



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 Or text 07761 818206 with your name and postcode.



## Flooding nightmare another capitalist crime

KAREN SEYMOUR  
MANSFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

The widespread flooding at the start of 2024 has been some of the worst of recent times. Blame for the severity and impact has rightly been aimed at Tory and Labour governments, historically underinvesting in flood defences, the need to tackle climate change, and the underfunding of emergency services.

This week, the Guardian reported that families will face even more disruption and misery due to lower temperatures and treacherous ice following storm Henk, with either amber or yellow cold weather alerts covering all of England. This is likely to place our underfunded and understaffed NHS under even more pressure at what is always its busiest time of year.

Currently, there are 167 flood warnings in place, and 171 flood alerts across England. The government's response to the floods has been predictably woeful. The Tories have

activated a 'flood recovery framework'. Flood-hit households will be able to apply for up to £500, and small to medium-sized businesses can apply for up to £2,500. Peanuts for those who are likely to have lost everything!

Some people are likely to be spending many months in temporary accommodation, and of course when they return to their homes, they will find it nigh-on impossible to get flood insurance, or have to pay huge excesses. Some homes may not be insured at all, due to cost-of-living pressures.

Ordinary people have shown solidarity and kindness towards their neighbours, rescuing individuals, offering food, shelter, and other support.

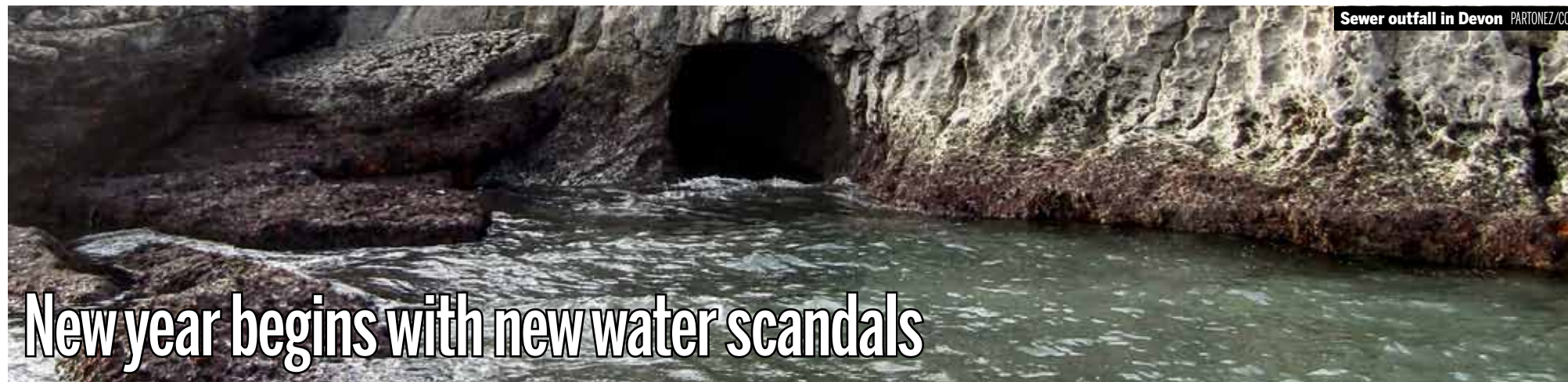
Meanwhile, the National Flood Forum charity has warned that people affected by this month's floods will face the same problems in future. For communities to access government support for flood defences, either from their local authority or the Environment Agency, they have to first

make a 'business' case, or be turned down!

Profit-based capitalism is incapable of tackling climate change; COP28 has shown us that. It can't keep us safe from the effects of the extreme weather either! And Starmer's Labour will be no different to the Tories in this regard, it defends the same capitalist system and has committed to match their spending plans if it wins the next general election.

Taking the big companies responsible for climate change into public ownership, under democratic workers' control and management, is the only way to tackle the problem. This would mean we could use the wealth and resources to guarantee the investment in flood defences and plan what is needed to protect future generations.

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## New year begins with new water scandals

CLARE DOYLE  
LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

The year 2024 opens as the old year ended - with private companies making vast profits out of ceaselessly releasing sewage into our rivers and seas. Hundreds of swimmers celebrating Boxing Day with a traditional dip on the beaches of the Isle of Wight had not been warned by Southern Water that untreated sewage had been flowing into the sea at Sandown on Christmas Day. Sewage was spilled on beach fronts where festive swimmers were expected to visit for a staggering 4,574 hours last year.

### Thames Water

Newspapers have publicised the scandal of water companies paying out vast sums to executives and shareholders. On 15 December 2023, the Financial Times covered the appointment of a new Chief Executive to manage Thames Water, Britain's largest water company, and its £18.3 billion debt pile. In June, it was in danger of falling into administration and "effectively being renationalised", the paper said. The company is under investigation for

a £37.5 million dividend payout in October. His pay and perks "could rise to £2.3 million if bonus targets are hit."

The company could face substantial fines over sewage dumping after an Ofwat inquiry and is seeking to raise new equity to reverse the trend of increasing pollution and customer complaints, along with what the Times calls "industry-high rates of leakage in the mains pipes". The new boss also wants to push up bills by 40%. Thames Water cites "financial troubles partly caused by bills being kept 'very low'". Rises in charges to customers amount to new attacks on ordinary working people's living standards in order to line the pockets of the rich.

On a smaller scale, South East Water has managed to pay £2.5 million to shareholders despite losses which stemmed from failing to maintain the supply of water for several days in the summer. The Guardian reported that South East Water now plans to increase customer bills to pay for investment in infrastructure amounting to at least £20 a month.

And what is the record of the water company sharks in relation to actually doing their job?

### Pollution

A recent Panorama programme dealing with the water pollution scandal concentrated on the north west of England and the company United Utilities, a company at which workers took strike action against the cost-of-living crisis in 2023. The company has 7 million customers and made £414 million profit last year. It released untreated sewage into its waterways for a total of 425,000 hours in 2022, the highest of all water companies. A representative of 'Wildfish Environmental Group' said 23 different pharmaceutical drugs were found in tests of water they carried out. Untreated sewage is released in vast quantities whenever it rains, and also when it doesn't.

The company had refused to test any of the numerous dead fish found in waterways it was responsible for. Examples were given of the tiny proportion of inspections that were carried out - "5% of pollution incidents attended to".

A whistleblower gave her opinion to Panorama that the company saw "Reputation and profit" as primary, and the health and safety of people and wildlife as secondary. "We dance to their tune!" she said. Of 931

incidents over three years, the Environment Agency had visited just six. Water companies are constantly downgrading incidents with the approval of the Environment Agency to avoid inspections.

United Utilities said it was regulating itself. It would face a £400,000 fine if it was found to have breached the existing laws. Yet there was evidence that five million litres of sewage had been 'leaked' into Sandon Dock over two hours and 20 minutes.

### Private profit over public safety

The Tory government allows the water companies to continue their vast profit-making enterprises, with shareholders and directors receiving vast pay-outs. But, as the Tory Party unravels and Labour looks likely to win the next election, Labour's leader, Keir Starmer, is travelling further to the right. He refuses to include the renationalisation of any privatised industries in the party's programme, despite energy companies such as British Gas and E.ON posting billions of pounds of profits.

Shadow environment secretary Steve Reed recently said that Labour "will give the water regulator powers

to block the payment of any bonuses until water bosses have cleaned up".

At the time of the last election, Labour, under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn, promised to renationalise both water and energy. We need a programme of wholesale renationalisation of all industries privatised under Margaret Thatcher and plundered for profit ever since. Not a penny compensation should be paid to the millionaires who rake in the profits by allowing our rivers, lakes and seas to be polluted. They have been made out of bounds for the growing number of people in Britain - young and old - who look to improve their health and longevity by swimming in them. 1,000 public swimming pools have closed since 2010, 2,000 could be lost forever by 2030, and one in four children leaving primary school cannot swim the government-prescribed 25 metres unaided.

These water companies should be nationalised and put under democratic workers' control and management as part of a wider planned economy, so we can make the investments needed to end pollution and lower our bills, instead of allowing resources to be siphoned off as profit into the pockets of the rich.



Keir Starmer PHOTO: US DOS/CC  
Junior Doctors striking in Newcastle ELAINE BRUNSKILL

## Starmer plans to 'tread lightly' in power Be bold – join the fight for socialist change

MARK BEST  
WEST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Labour leader Keir Starmer, likely to be prime minister by the end of the year, laid out his pitch to the country in a speech on 4 January. Working-class and young people desperate to get rid of the Tories may have been listening with some hope, agreeing with Starmer that they have been driving the country "into the rocks of decline."

Starmer is trying to tap into the very real anger felt across the country. People are, as Starmer puts it, "crying out for change". Thanks to over a decade of Tory austerity our lives are worse off - wages are down, vital services destroyed, and infrastructure is literally crumbling around us.

War, poverty, climate destruction, the feeling that there is no decent future available for young people. To tackle these issues you need to confront the profit-driven system of capitalism and put forward an alternative way of running things - a socialist society based on democratic planning and cooperation.

But what is on offer from Starmer is a "politics that treads a little lighter on all our lives." The consequences of the disastrous Liz Truss mini-budget, elected after winning the votes of just 80,000 Conservative Party members,

had a big impact on households across the country. She was punished by 'the markets' and ordinary people had to suffer with higher borrowing costs and more austerity.

Pro-capitalist politicians making decisions in parliament that put profit ahead of the lives and livelihoods of working-class people is an issue that would continue under a Starmer-led government. There is no party in Westminster which represents the interests of the majority of the country - the working class.

### 'National Unity'?

Starmer talks about an end to "politics fuelled by division", to "moderate your political wishes" and to follow a "politics that aspires to national unity". After a year in which workers have had to struggle together against the cost-of-living crisis while those at the top have continued to make massive profits, this amounts to putting aside our interests to keep the capitalist show on the road.

Because despite what Keir Starmer says, working-class people do have a "common enemy" - the bosses that make massive profits out of us working for them each day.

The Socialist Party is fighting for workers' action in the workplaces and trade unions - to fight for the kind of collective action needed to get the pay rises we deserve. We are

organising with others the steps necessary for a mass party that represents our class interests.

And all of this comes back to the need to change society, for workers ourselves to run society on a democratic socialist basis. This capitalist system is rotten to the core and we desperately need an alternative.

If you want to be part of the fight for socialism then you should join.

**JOIN THE SOCIALISTS**

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

Or scan the QR code below:



## FROM THE NHS FRONTLINE A service that needs to be fought for

### NHS WALES NURSE

There's been around 18 months of 'normal' working situations since the worst of Covid. But things will never be normal for some of us. As with everything, the things done as favours inevitably become an expectation. Treatments usually reserved for high dependency units are now routinely managed on the wards. We have no more staff than we had; fewer if anything. Again though, with resolve and solidarity, we keep going.

If the pandemic didn't do enough to show the country that the NHS is struggling, there is again an unprecedented 'new normal' being expected of the service.

In the past six months there has been the expectation that the wards now accommodate an extra bed. A four- or six-bedded bay is now expected to take a fifth or seventh bed. The beds, referred to as 'boarding', are placed into either a bay window, recess, or even doorways, despite there being no electrical sockets, oxygen ports, curtains, light, nurse or emergency bells. And no dignity. Objections and complaints are made, but the transfer of patients happens regardless. Senior staff state

that patients are assessed as to their 'suitability to be boarded', but bed-bound, incontinent, and vulnerable people still find themselves in these beds. Worse still, they are so tired and unwell that they are 'just glad of a bed', not understanding the gravity of the poor situation they are in.

Severe lack of social care means inability to safely discharge patients from hospital. Hospital beds are blocked, accident and emergency departments fill beyond capacity, ambulances are unable to offload their patients so remain in car parks. Trolleys and beds are added to corridors and any available area to share the ever-mounting pressures at the door. Emergency departments designed to manage 60 patients routinely have 100.

Do patients know we are turning storerooms into extra capacity? Even if the door cannot close around the trolley that has been slotted in?

### Unsafe staffing

Stress and burnout is at an all-time high. Newly qualified staff review their career prospects after only two years of work. Experienced staff shouldering too much for too long are worn out. Recruitment is at an all-time low.



**Emergency departments designed to manage 60 patients routinely have 100**

Staff retention will remain an issue until there are pay increases to appropriately reflect responsibilities and skills demonstrated by staff. Real-terms pay cuts over ten-plus successive years, austerity and a cost-of-living crisis mean there are nursing staff across the country who work full time and qualify for state financial assistance, while also having to pay back their student loans.

### Invest in our NHS

Is the money wasted on PPE contracts unrecoverable? Recovering the millions lost to nepotistic contracts should be a priority and immediately reinvested so that the staff can maintain the provision of high-quality, safe and timely delivered care to everyone. None of us joined our varied careers in the NHS to feel like we struggled to provide a kind, caring and effective service at the end of the day.

Staff working at the hospital are likely to be residents of nearby towns and villages and will also be reliant upon the services of the same hospitals in their own times of illness. Their families will be admitted to the same wards. There is a sense of responsibility to ensure the care provided is the

care we also would want and expect for our own. It's increasingly difficult to provide a service you would yourself like to receive when you often have more than ten patients to care for each day.

The weight of this noble ideal gets heavier when the government won't appropriately staff and fund the service. Even the most principled nurse cannot do three people's jobs indefinitely without reconsidering their position. Do we make ourselves ill for an unappreciated and unrecognised principle? The goodwill that has floated the service for far too long is wearing much too thin. Is the value of the NHS entirely lost to those in government?

The NHS is the jewel in the UK's crown. Not the Monarchy, and certainly not the government. We must not allow the soap opera of UK politics to dampen our resolve or wear us down to indifference. The NHS is struggling, but Nye Bevan was right - it will remain here if there are folk enough to fight for it. Please fight for it, it's a fight for us all.

● To read part one see 'NHS frontline: Covid battles echo, we are still fighting' at [socialistparty.org.uk](https://socialistparty.org.uk)

# PCS union Broad Left Network: 'Our union must be stronger on Gaza'

THIS IS AN EDITED, SHORTENED VERSION OF AN ARTICLE PUBLISHED BY THE PCS BROAD LEFT NETWORK

Around the world, millions of working-class people have erupted into anger at the murderous actions of the Israeli state, provoking demonstrations. The vast majority have no sympathy with Hamas, but are outraged by the killings and destruction of communities in Gaza. In the UK, in many cities and on almost every weekend since the invasion, there have been major demonstrations, many joined by UK-born Palestinians and the families of those who live in Gaza, who have tried to get their families out, or who have not been able to contact their families. Broad Left Network (BLN) supporters in PCS have supported all of these.

In London, PCS members asked union reps what else their union can do to force an end to the conflict, and to support members with family caught up in the crisis.

Most unions, including PCS, have published statements calling for an end to hostilities, and leaders have spoken on major demonstrations to call for the same. Unions in general can and should go much further, however, to mobilise the power of labour to force an end to the conflict, particularly given the role of PCS as the largest trade union in the UK civil service.

Several PCS branches and groups have been proactive in encouraging union members to join the demonstrations in London. This is a good first step and could be widened to other parts of the UK.

### Leadership said no

It is with surprise, therefore, that supporters of the BLN on the PCS National Executive Committee (NEC) found themselves outvoted by the majority of the union's NEC on this question.

The union's NEC met on 6 and 7 December. The NEC majority, under president and now also general secretary-elect Fran Heathcote, voted against a proposal by assistant general secretary John Moloney to work to broaden out these demos across the UK.

The majority Democracy Alliance grouping (which includes the Left Unity group) also opposed a donation to the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF) appeal to support international unions' efforts to get medical supplies and food in to Gaza.

They further opposed a proposal to hold a national lunchtime online meeting to publicise the union's position on the Gaza conflict, which was intended to have a Palestine Solidarity Campaign speaker.

At the NEC meeting, the question of a small number of resignations from the union over the Gaza statement was raised as a reason not to do more for Gaza.

Branch reps have told us that a very small number of resignation letters have been received denouncing the



PCS members have joined the demos LUC LACEY

union for "supporting Hamas", which is simply not true (see PCS Statement on Israel and Gaza at pcs.org.uk).

Any time the union takes a strong position on questions that matter to workers, a small number of people will not like it and some prefer to resign from the union rather than engage with the union's democratic process, including members' meetings.

### Union must lead

This is not a reason to shrink from a robust defence of the lives of Palestinians facing the destruction of their homes, communities and lives.

We call on the union's NEC to reverse their position, to agree the donation to the ITF appeal, to agree to organise workplace and city or town demonstrations, in concert with other parts of the labour movement and national campaign organisations such as Stop the War Coalition, to call for a ceasefire, and to organise a national PCS meeting to explain the union's position and what members can do, with a speaker from the Palestine Solidarity Campaign.

Our union, in particular, must be more proactive in ensuring that civil servants are protected from the

government's attempts to politicise civil service workplaces by projecting the Israeli flag on to buildings, and from any activity which may be in breach of UK or international law, including having any role in the transfer of weapons to a state that is clearly attacking civilians.

Much more than this, we need to work across the entire labour movement to increase the numbers on demonstrations. Trade unions, the largest membership-based organisations in the UK, and representatives of the 'sleeping superpower', the working class, have a crucial role to play in this, and should name the day for a national day of action - following the example of school and college students - for workers to unite on the streets in protest at our government standing by while Gazans are slaughtered.

This requires national coordination across all trade unions. PCS could take this up with the Trades Union Congress (TUC). The defence of any group of workers in the UK who strike to block arms to Israel must also be raised.

We also need an organised political opposition to the Israeli armed

offensive. Keir Starmer's stance shows clearly that the Labour leadership is unwilling to play this role.

Trade unions could convene an open meeting under a 'Stop the War' umbrella, drawing together all socialist political forces, including MPs and councillors who have called for solidarity with Palestine and who oppose the invasion, to organise political opposition.

• See bln.org.uk for the full article

### PCS Broad Left Network 2024 conference

Join the discussion on building a strong left challenge in PCS

Saturday 20 January 12 noon  
Meeting ID: 856 1128 4998

## Dudley Mitie NHS workers strike over Covid bonus



PHOTO: NICK HART

NICK HART WEST MIDLANDS SOCIALIST PARTY

Outsourced caterers, cleaners and maintenance staff at Russells Hall Hospital in Dudley have resumed their campaign of strike action.

Despite working alongside directly employed NHS workers all through the pandemic, tight-fisted bosses at Mitie are refusing to give them the £1,655 Covid bonus.

This comes on top of years of payroll problems, with some of the lowest-paid workers in the hospital not receiving their correct wages from month to month, or their long-service payments.

And this from a company set to make £190 million profits this financial year by leeching off the NHS and other contracts for public (and formerly public) services!

In a sign of how vital these Unite members are to keeping the hospital running, in catering it's taken two managers or other Mitie employees to fill in for each striking worker! Meanwhile, 16-year-old apprentices have been left to cover maintenance duties they have not yet been trained for, potentially putting patients and co-workers at risk.

Time for these workers to be paid what they're owed, as a step towards a real living wage for all NHS staff and an end to cowboy companies profiting out of healthcare!

## Linking up across Trusts

Workers from Dudley joined with Unite members from two other NHS Trusts - Barts in east London, and Kent - in a protest outside the Department of Health on 18 December. They have all been refused a lump-sum bonus for what they did during the pandemic. Sam, West Midland Unite NHS branch secretary, said: "We worked hard throughout Covid. We're just fighting for what's ours."

IAN PATTISON, ENFIELD AND LEA VALLEY SOCIALIST PARTY

# London tube strike wins £30 million

## Trade unions can build on this to beat back all attacks

GARY HARBORD RMT LU TRAIN GRADES SECRETARY, PERSONAL CAPACITY

In an unprecedented move, London Underground bosses and the mayor's office came up with an extra £30 million to try and settle transport union RMT's dispute over pay.

The week's worth of strike action had already begun, with Transplant drivers taking action from 6pm on Friday 5 January. This seriously disrupted planned engineering work on the District line.

Power control workers were preparing to take action on the Sunday when a phone call came through to our head office saying that Transport for London (TfL) had found another £30 million.

Just two days earlier, a senior director had sent a letter to the RMT saying that 5% was a "full and final offer" and no more money was available!

This astonishing climbdown was a result of RMT's reps and wider membership refusing to accept the



Acton, west London LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

company's narrative of "financial restraint", culminating in a mass meeting of 150 reps voting to continue action.

It was clear that, with a London mayor election weeks away, Labour mayor Sadiq Khan was desperate to find a way out of the dispute in order to preserve his reputation. A reputation that has been severely damaged among many RMT members for refusing to back our campaigns against ongoing attacks on pay and terms and conditions.

Unfortunately the regional leadership of train drivers' union Aslef had recommended acceptance of the 5%, but even so, London would have been shut for a whole week, resulting in a serious impact on the London and national economy.

RMT's membership on London Underground can rightly feel proud of its unbending resolve in forcing this climbdown. This action shows what is achievable when all grades stick together and a combative leadership is shown in the face of management intransigence.

A period of negotiations is under way that must ensure all grades are rewarded, particularly those on the lower pay bands. Underground workers are also demanding concessionary travel on national rail, the same as other TfL employees on the Elizabeth line and London Overground. We will not hesitate in putting strike action back on if the company renege on any of the commitments that it has given.

In the words of the late Bob Crow: "If you fight you won't always win, but if you don't fight you will always lose" - on this occasion we fought and won!

The success of RMT members' action in forcing a U-turn on Sadiq Khan has pushed the Aslef leadership to now return to the fray, and the TSSA transport union to demand talks and remind bosses they are "ballot-ready".

The confidence of tube workers is up and the battle over pay and for the future of London Underground is not over. A united campaign of London Underground workers could fight to resist all cuts and demand full funding from Labour's mayor and an incoming Labour government.

Get all the latest union news nationalshop stewardsnetwork NSSN bulletin: shopstewards.net

## Sheffield council calls for Labour to pledge to reverse minimum service sanctions on unions

TRADE UNIONIST AND SOCIALIST COALITION (TUSC)

Following the declaration in November by the Scottish government that it "will not co-operate with establishing any minimum service orders here", Sheffield City Council has become the next public authority to state that it will use "the discretion not to issue work notices" in the Tories' new Minimum Service Levels Act, in order to defend workers' right to strike.

This was the result of a debate initiated by the socialist councillor Sophie Wilson at the full council meeting held on 6 December.

### 'Don't issue work notices'

Sophie, a Labour Party parliamentary candidate in the 2019 general election who now sits as an independent in the 84-seat authority, had submitted a motion to commit the council not to issue 'work notices' in any disputes that it is involved in. These are the notices employers are empowered to issue to individual workers by the Minimum Service Levels Act to instruct them to continue working during a strike.

Sophie's motion also called for the Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer to pledge that "an incoming Labour government [would] reverse fines and other measures taken against any union" under the terms of the Act. With a union potentially losing its protection from liability and subsequent claims for damages from

non-compliance with the Act, or facing action for contempt of court, realising such a commitment would be an important blow against the anti-union law.

Sheffield council is not controlled by any one party but, since 2022, has been led by a 'rainbow coalition' of 31 Labour councillors, 28 Lib Dems and 14 Greens. They have all consistently voted in the council chamber for cuts to meet the austerity demands of central government, which has seen the real-terms spending power of the council decline by 50% since 2010. But on this occasion they could not agree on a united position.

An amendment from Labour councillors deleting the action points in Sophie's motion was defeated. Then some additional debating points were added by the Liberal Democrats and Greens. After that, the motion as a whole was passed, with the commitments still in place.

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) core policy platform for the May 2024 local council elections - the minimum commitments that every TUSC candidate must sign up to - includes the pledge to "demand that councils as employers refuse to issue 'work notices' against strikers under the new anti-union Minimum Service Levels Act" (see TUSC's core policy platform for the May 2024 local elections at tusc.org.uk).

### The power of one councillor

The key to making inoperable the

new anti-union law is still action organised across the trade union movement. This must include an immediate national demonstration and preparations for a one-day general strike if the legislation is used to levy punitive damages against an individual union exercising its democratic right to take strike action. But pressurising public sector employers to refuse to apply work notices is another weapon in the battle.

Not every council is a 'hung council', where the jockeying for position between the different establishment parties can be used for the workers' movement's advantage. But still, the Sheffield motion is an example of what even just one socialist councillor can do.

It is another argument for the widest possible stand of socialist and trade union candidates in the 2024 local elections.

### SHEILA CAFFREY for NEU vice-president

Zoom meeting open to all who want to campaign for a fighting NEU leadership!

Sunday 21 January 4pm  
Zoom ID: 910 2534 6730

Elections open 1 February!

## Junior doctors in longest NHS strike

The longest strike in NHS history has seen junior doctors in the BMA out for three days in December and six in January. Socialist Party members have supported their picket lines, backing their demand for a pay rise that makes up for real-terms cuts over a decade. The BMA is preparing for a new ballot to renew the strike mandate, as demanded by the Tory anti-union laws.



Top: Birmingham; above left: Leicester; above right: east London; below: Sheffield SOCIALIST PARTY



AMY SAGE

BRISTOL NORTH SOCIALIST PARTY

A report published this year by the United Nations predicted that it could take another 286 years to close the global gender gaps in legal protections for women and girls. We have recently seen significant victories for women, such as the mass movements in Latin America, which forced governments to legalise or relax restrictions on abortion. But at the same time, the rights of women have been rolled back in many countries around the globe, leading people to ask: 'How far can this backlash against the rights of women go?'

In order to answer this question, we must first consider how far the attacks on the rights of women have already gone.

Internationally, particularly since the start of Covid, there has been an acute rolling back of the rights and legal protections for women. In July 2022, the Supreme Court in the United States overturned the 1973 Roe v Wade ruling which recognised the constitutional right to an abortion. This represented the biggest attack on women's rights in the US for the last 50 years.

Around 22 million women of reproductive age now live in a state that has banned abortion, representing about a third of the total childbearing population in the USA. Of these 22 million women, it will be working-class women and those who do not have the resources to travel hundreds of miles to states where an abortion is still possible, who will be suffering the most.

The USA is not the only country where abortion rights have recently come under attack. In Poland in 2021, the right-wing Polish Law and Justice government introduced a near-total ban on abortion, it being allowed only in cases of rape, incest, or when the pregnancy threatens the life of the mother.

The law is applied so strictly that Polish officials have even taken to raiding the homes of women under suspicion of facilitating illegal abortions, and a technique has been developed to test for the presence of abortion pills in women's blood. Since 2020, at least

six women have died in Poland after doctors performed a medically necessary abortion either too late or not at all, with the doctor citing fear of legal consequences.

Abortion is still totally illegal in 24 countries around the globe, and in 37 it is only available if the woman's life is in danger.

However, it is not just the right to abortion that is under attack globally. In China, recent censorship policies have included banning the use of feminist terms and content they see as "inciting conflict between the genders". In South Korea, the conservative People Power Party has pledged to abolish the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family.

In Afghanistan, the Taliban have banned women and teenage girls from taking part in most aspects of daily life, while in other conflict zones, such as Sudan and Nigeria, there is escalating violence against women and girls.

### Economic attacks

In Britain we have not yet seen the same level of attacks on women's rights as in other countries. There was the case of Carla Foster who was sentenced to 28 months in prison for terminating a pregnancy during the Covid lockdown, highlighting that even 56 years after the 1967 Abortion Act there is still not a legal right to abortion in Britain. And, in fact, since last year, there has been an acceleration in prosecutions being brought against women who have had abortions after the 24-week limit.

However, we have so far not seen the attacks on abortion rights that have taken place in the US and in other countries where right-populist governments have been in power. This is because of a general understanding within the Tories that there is overwhelming support for the right to abortion in Britain, and that any attack could provoke a backlash, adding to the crumbling of their electoral base.

However, that is not to say that women in Britain haven't suffered attacks in recent years - rather, the attacks women face here are more material than ideological in nature.

One of the effects of the Covid

# HOW FAR CAN THE BACKLASH AGAINST WOMEN'S RIGHTS GO?



PHOTO: PAUL MATTSSON

pandemic to shine a spotlight on and exacerbate existing gender inequality in capitalist society. And because of the double disadvantage that working-class women face in capitalist society, they have also been placed at the sharp end of the post-pandemic economic devastation. More dependent upon the welfare state than men, and more likely to work in and rely on the public sector, they have been hit hardest by cuts to benefits and services.

Cuts to domestic violence services mean that many victims of domestic violence are unable to flee their abusive partners. Cuts to street lighting, to bus routes, the sacking of guards on the trains, as well as all the cuts to other vital services we need, have exacerbated the undermining of women's safety. And, of course, the cost-of-living crisis has only intensified these issues as women have had to bear the brunt of low pay and spiralling prices.

None of this, of course, is to deny that working-class men have also suffered attacks. Working-class people of all genders worldwide are facing the biggest onslaught on working-class living standards for 40 years. However, because of their economic position within capitalism, women have

historically faced unique forms of oppression and inequality.

### Roots of the backlash

When asking how far the backlash against women's rights can go, we also need to consider where it's coming from. Firstly, it's important to stress that these recent attacks are not the result of some global conspiracy of men pushing back against the gains made by women, nor has there necessarily been an overall societal rise in sexism and misogyny. Recent movements globally have raised awareness of gender inequality and oppression, and that has given some women more confidence to report harassment and abuse.

Also, the increased use of sexist and misogynistic rhetoric, particularly by public figures, does not necessarily reflect social attitudes more widely. But where figures such as Andrew Tate and Jordan Peterson have been allowed to build a platform on social media, this has emboldened some men to be outspoken and express destructive views towards women.

It is important to recognise, however, that these figures have been able to take advantage of a very real set of issues facing some, mainly young and

economically disadvantaged men.

Exploiting the hangover of sexist ideas that go back thousands of years - to when class societies and private property first arose, and women became the property of men within the family under their authority and control - they have managed to convince some of these men that the cause of all their problems is not capitalism but women: effectively, a zero-sum game whereby any gains for women mean losses for men.

The recent attacks on the rights of women are not the result of a societal rise in sexism, but are instead reflective of global processes, particularly since the 2007-08 'Great Recession'. These have been contradictory. On the one side there has been a drastic erosion in confidence in capitalist institutions, ideology, and the establishment political parties that uphold them. The widening gulf between the rich elite and the poor and 'left behind', the uncertainty and fear for the future that the economic crisis engendered, have provoked a searching for an alternative, more radical form of politics, with many, especially young people, looking to the left.

This was especially reflected in the massive initial support for Bernie

Sanders in the US, Jeremy Corbyn in Britain, Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain. Many of the movements initiated by women internationally over the past few years - for the legalisation of abortion, against violence towards women, to protest sexual harassment and sexism generally - have flowed from this radicalised mood, with anger at economic inequality spilling over into challenging all forms of inequality and injustice.

But at the same time, in some countries, right-wing populist forces have become the electoral beneficiaries of the anti-establishment wave, aided by former mass workers' parties becoming part of the capitalist establishment, and by new radical left forces failing to translate their support into an organised political alternative capable of overthrowing capitalism.

The 'anti-feminism' and misogynistic rhetoric of Bolsonaro and Trump is not reflective of social attitudes generally, and their elections as president unleashed mass protests in both countries by women fearful of the severe attacks on their hard-won rights to come.

Nevertheless, Trump and Bolsonaro were able to mobilise religious groups, especially evangelical

Christians, around a socially conservative programme that promised restrictions on abortion and LGBTQ+ rights, and tapped into the fears of a minority section of society looking for a return to old certainties in a rapidly changing and uncertain world.

More recently, we have seen the election of the far-right libertarian candidate Javier Milei in Argentina, whose surge in popularity represents a cry of desperation from the masses who are faced with a collapse of living standards and accelerating levels of poverty and violence in society.

Milei, who has threatened savage economic attacks on the working class, as well as threatening the recently won legal right to abortion, offers no hope to resolve the crisis, and has already provoked protests and resistance to the economic and social measures he is proposing.

### Fighting back

How far back women's rights will be rolled depends on the level of resistance waged, critically from the working class. Recent global movements on the issue of abortion have shown that legal rights can be won through grassroots and mass campaigns.

But legal change is not enough. Even when women in the US had a constitutional right to an abortion, it was never free. They were paying as much as \$500 for a termination, excluding travel and childcare costs, and loss of wages for taking time off work.

Fighting for the legal right to abortion must be combined with demands for free healthcare for all that covers the full cost of abortion, and for accessible local clinics. 'Pro-choice' should also mean the right to give birth to and raise children free from poverty and social constraints.

So, the movement for the right to abortion should be combined with campaigning for free and flexible networks of quality, publicly funded, and democratically controlled childcare; real jobs for all on at least a decent minimum wage; the right to flexible working and adequately paid maternity and parental leave; quality public housing and transport, etc.

Movements for women's rights need to make links with other movements for social justice, especially

struggles by workers in the workplace against low pay and exploitation. But, as we have seen in the case of Argentina, unless we have a political alternative to defend our hard-won gains, they will always be under threat of being rolled back. The crucial task in Argentina is the building of a movement of workers of all genders to struggle against Milei's reactionary anti-working class and anti-women and LGBTQ+ rights policies.

Crucial to the struggle in Argentina and elsewhere is the building of mass workers' parties capable of fighting now to protect the rights of women and the whole of the working class, capable of drawing together workers' struggles with women's and other social movements, and one which is capable of offering a socialist alternative to the crisis of capitalism.

We live in an unequal, crisis-ridden society, where a small minority owns the wealth; where exploiting women in low-paid, precarious jobs generates enormous profits for the capitalists; where the unpaid work that women do in the home saves capitalism billions of pounds every year.

Private companies which dominate and control the media, beauty, fashion, leisure and other industries continue to reflect and promote traditional expectations and norms about how women and men should look and behave, often turning women's bodies into commodities to make a profit.

Because capitalism is based on inequality and competition, the capitalists and the politicians who represent them are prepared to resort to the use of power, force and violence to defend their interests and control, and this is reflected more broadly in society.

As long as the capitalist system remains in place, exploitation, discrimination, sexism and abuse will continue. While fighting to resist all attacks on women's rights, this must be linked to the struggle for a different economic system with alternative values, based on equality, cooperation and solidarity, in which the major companies are publicly owned, including the media and social media, and where society is democratically planned in the interests of the majority.



PHOTO: VICTORIA PICKERING/CC



Amy pictured protesting BRISTOL SOCIALIST PARTY

ADAM POWELL-DAVIES  
SOCIALIST STUDENTS NATIONAL ORGANISER

Socialist Students is holding our national conference in Birmingham on Saturday 10 February. Already, 2024 has seen a continuation of the Israeli state's brutal bombardment of Gaza.

The Ukraine war lumbers on into its third year. Everywhere the climate crisis threatens the very foundations of life itself.

And in Britain we've got the prospect of a general election, where the Tories are likely to be kicked out, but with absolutely no alternative being offered by Starmer's Labour Party.

So if you're a student or a young person, and you're interested in fighting back against the capitalist system, and fighting for a socialist future, you should come to the Socialist Students conference in Birmingham.

**Socialist Students 2024 conference agenda**

The Socialist Students 2024 conference is taking place at the Birmingham and Midland Institute, 9 Margaret Street, B3 3BS.

- 9-10am - Registration
- 10am-12noon - A world in crisis and the struggle for socialism
- 12:45pm-2:15pm - How should students prepare for the general election and a Starmer-led government? Marxist Student Federation has been invited to debate



**Saturday 10th February Birmingham**  
**Birmingham and Midland Institute,**  
**9 Margaret Street, Birmingham, B3 3BS**



- 2:30pm-3:30pm - Workshops
- Organising young socialists in colleges and schools - the case for students' unions
- Building the student walkout movement against the siege of Gaza
- Fighting the housing crisis on campus
- How to help organise a voice for students at the next election
- 3:45pm-5:15pm - Motions discussion: Voting on Socialist Students national programme and election of Socialist Students steering committee
- 5:15pm-5:30pm - Closing remarks

# Huddersfield meeting discusses a socialist alternative to cuts and war

LOUIE FULTON  
LEEDS AND WEST YORKSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY

The Socialist Party hosted a public meeting in Huddersfield, as a follow up to our campaigning to stop the cuts proposed by the Labour council in Kirklees, and against the war in Gaza.

Seven people were attending a Socialist Party meeting for the first time, after finding out about us via campaigning around Huddersfield.

For many attending, this was the first time they had been able to discuss a socialist view on these issues. A discussion arose about what the trade unions can do to help fight back.

One attendee had just joined the Socialist Party and another agreed to join at the meeting (see 'Why I joined the Socialist Party - standing together we are stronger' at socialistparty.org.uk). Many agreed to another meeting in the new year, and are ready to actively participate in campaigns in the area.

**Organising in a union**

There was a discussion between a few attendees after the meeting, about how to organise a union in your workplace, and participating in campaigns and in the unions. We shared our experiences, and Socialist Party members offered advice.

Our success shows the importance of organising meetings, and campaigning for them in different areas to reach new people who have been looking for a party that represents them and their communities.

● See 'Protests make Kirklees Council back down on leisure centre closures' at socialistparty.org.uk

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

# UK anti-boycott bill on wrong side of history

PAUL HERON  
HACKNEY SOCIALIST PARTY

The 'Anti-Boycott Bill' is designed to restrict the freedom of local authorities, universities, select pension funds, and other public institutions from exercising ethical judgments in their financial decisions. It aims to prevent public bodies from expressing dissent or disapproval through their spending or investment choices, unless explicitly authorised by the government.

The full name of the Tory

government's legislation is the Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill. It shields entities involved in human rights violations, environmental degradation, or aggressive conflicts.

**Threat**

It poses a threat to trade unionists, workers and public bodies who deeply value human rights, workers' rights and environmental preservation. It undermines our ability to push public institutions to align with the entirely justified concerns of all

of us when regarding illegal and unethical practices.

Make no mistake, this is a trade union issue. Do we want our pensions invested in the Israeli settlements in Palestine? Do we want them invested in exploitative, super-profitable schemes that benefit the bosses?

This bill strips out democracy, and our power to tell local councils and other public bodies what to invest in. There will be a protest outside when the bill is debated in Parliament on Wednesday 10 January.

# £70,380 – thank you for helping Socialist Party raise record amount

At the anti-war protests, Socialist Party campaign stalls, like here in Birmingham, were swamped by people buying the Socialist paper, donating to the Socialist Party and asking to join the party too



ISAI MARIJERLA  
SOCIALIST PARTY TREASURER

We are witnessing the brutal war taking place against the Palestinians, and the massive anti-war movement in response. Socialist Party members are taking part in these protests. We put forward a socialist alternative when we're out campaigning, including during the anti-war protests.

We've printed hundreds of thousands of leaflets, thousands and thousands of placards and posters. We raise boldly the socialist programme needed.

We call for an end to the war, and expose the hypocrisy of capitalist politicians, including the Tories and Sir Keir Starmer's Labour Party. The support for our ideas is reflected in the donations we receive.

Every quarter, we set ourselves the target to raise £25,000. This is the minimum needed to ensure we have the funds and resources available to continue our work, and to produce and distribute material. We want to thank all for the

donations and support we received last quarter. We raised £70,380.

This is the most the Socialist Party has ever raised in a quarter. It means that we are able to spread the ideas of socialism further and wider.

Capitalism means continuous poverty, increasing war and conflict, and never-ending crises. Across the world and in Britain, people are looking for an alternative.

There is growing urgency to get rid of this rotten system, and replace it with something that prioritises the interests, livelihood, health and well-being of the majority of the people in the world.

Working-class and young people need our own political representation, a new mass workers' party that fights for socialism.

Our fight is not over. We now begin a new quarter. Please donate. And help us raise funds to fight for socialism.

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

AREA	£ RECEIVED	£ TARGET	Q4: OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2023	FINAL CHART
London	18,924	5,000		378%
South West	6,343	2,100		302%
Southern & SE	5,314	2,400		221%
Northern	1,690	800		211%
West Midlands	5,148	2,700		191%
East Midlands	3,504	2,050		172%
Eastern	1,894	1,300		146%
Yorkshire	3,591	2,650		136%
North West	1,551	1,200		129%
Wales	2,840	2,400		118%
Other	19,582	2,400		816%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>70,380</b>	<b>25,000</b>		<b>282%</b>

# Anger at Tories and Labour seethes at more Gaza protests

## ● Tower Hamlets and Hackney – we want reps that stand with us

Speeches highlighted the continued absences of local Labour MP Rushanara Ali. And speakers raised a demand for representatives that align with what the community stands for.

People have seen the power of the trade unions in recent years. So a speaker from the trades union council, calling for more solidarity and support for Palestine from the trade unions, was met with agreement from the crowd.

150 had gathered at Altab Ali Park to march to Barclays bank, and then to Tower Hamlets Town Hall.

Socialist Party members discussed with people who expressed despair at both the Tories and Labour. They asked us about electoral change.

Some demonstrators were attending their first demonstration for Palestine. They shared their experience discussing the topic in their workplace.

The demonstration met with the march from Hackney. And 30 people bought a copy of the Socialist, in addition to people interested in joining the Socialist Party.

Attendees were keen to organise within trade unions, and committed to attending local and national demonstrations until the occupation ends.

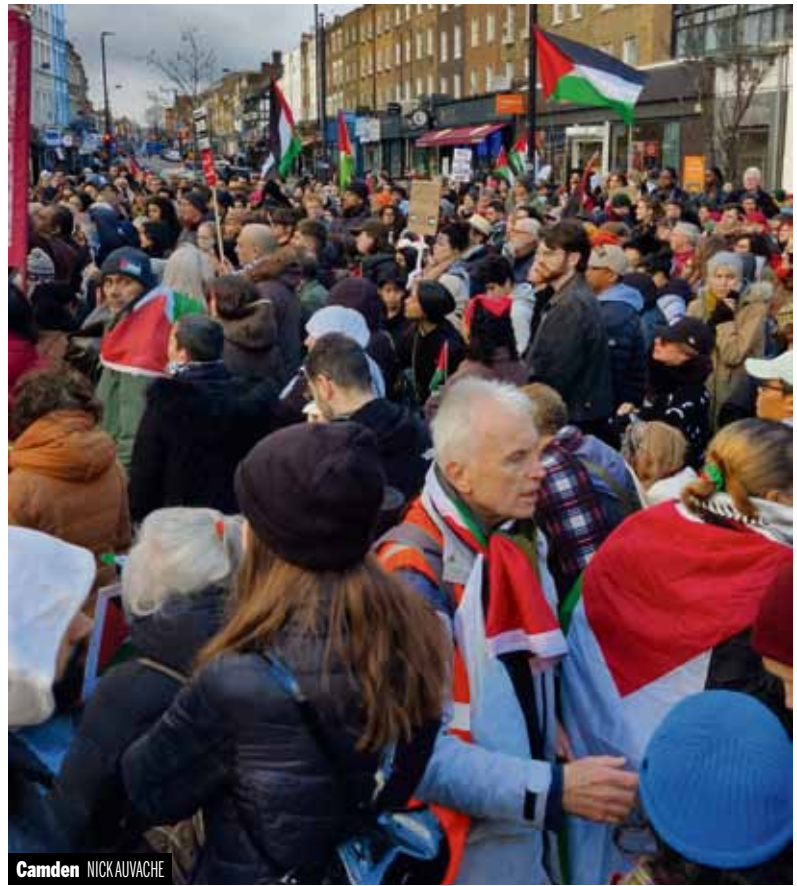
EMILY

Before Christmas, there was another protest in Hackney. Socialist Party member **Eddie Blindell** said:

There was a good turnout of more than 300, which is now commonplace, and, again reflecting the diverse nature of the local area, reinforcing that the conflict has left an impact on a wide range of people. The tone was significantly more sombre than previously. Protesters stood in silence to remember those who had died. Later, the names of some of the dead were read out.

Whist support is still very robust, the extent of the continued conflict and the rising number of casualties set the mood for this protest. The Socialist Party attended to show solidarity and support. In discussions we had with protesters, it was clear that the conflict, the response of the capitalist media, and the approach of Tories and Labour had triggered a wider questioning of the status quo, and the need for robust and viable alternatives.

The protest marched in silence. But, again, initiating support from motorists and passersby. The protests look like growing in support, rather than abating. We want our politicians to spend



## ● Southampton – capitalist politicians don't care about us

Primary school children shouted "Free Palestine", as they ran down the footpath opposite our vigil. Ali Haydor, a Socialist Party member, gave a very passionate speech.

He highlighted the disgust felt by workers throughout the world watching. None of the capitalist politicians are asking the Palestinian people what they want.

The US, UK and European countries are providing weapons and ammunition to the Israeli state. But we don't want our country making bombs to kill children, mothers and fathers.

We want our politicians to spend

this money to renovate and build housing for the homeless and future generations. We want youth centres, staffed with youth and mental health professionals for our young people.

We want disability benefits to be increased, as well as wages, so people can thrive rather than just exist. As Parveen Ishaq, from Southampton Palestine Solidarity Campaign, stated during the vigil, our capitalist governments care nothing for us, the working class, here in Britain or in Palestine.

We must continue the protests and vote for political parties that base their policies on people's needs, not war and greed.

CATHERINE CLARKE

Do you agree?  
**JOIN THE SOCIALISTS**  
socialistparty.org.uk/join



**Selling the Socialist**  
Just some of the events where the Socialist newspaper was sold in the past week...

## Southampton – Labour close eyes to homeless

A local housing adviser and advocate stopped at our Socialist Party campaign stall. They informed us that the council had promised to house all the homeless in Southampton and provide them with the support they needed.

Clearly, due to their inaction from the Labour council, reality is much different. It seems our homeless are dehumanised so much by the council that they no longer exist from the Labour Party's perspective!

CATHERINE CLARKE

## Preston – massive meeting misses chance to stand against pro-war Tories and Labour

Lancashire Socialist Party attended a meeting addressed by Jeremy Corbyn, Ian Hodson, president of the bakers' union BFAWU, and Palestinian activists.

Many of the 350-strong, hugely enthusiastic audience happily took the Socialist Party leaflet. We call for a workers' electoral challenge to the warmongering politicians helping to prolong Israeli state terror.

With already a number of impressive protests locally in Preston, Chorley and Lancaster, and further demonstrations in London and Preston planned, the mood is clear that something must be done. This mood was reflected by the speakers.

But, unfortunately, there weren't any concrete proposals put forward by the speakers for standing against the Tories and Labour in the upcoming elections. This was a glaring omission.

With such a captive audience

opposed to the war on Gaza, the lack of a call for a new mass workers' party underlines the key role that the Socialist Party must play in fighting for an anti-war, pro-working-class alternative at the ballot box.

The Socialist Party, part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), will continue to reach out and work with any and all groups and individuals willing to work towards this.

DAVE BEALE

● 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 – tusc.org.uk

## Boscombe – ordinary people see Tory and Labour failure

More people than ever are looking for an alternative to the politics we currently endure. I had conversations with people who were not previously into politics, but were starting to question the current situation. There was agreement that Labour leader Keir Starmer offered nothing different to the Tories.

We also had even more enthusiasm from others. One couple was eager to pick up a Socialist paper, and also find out more about what the Socialist Party has to offer.

MARK RICHARDS

## Salisbury – Socialist Party out campaigning against war

The Socialist Party stall was campaigning to stop the war on Gaza. It was encouraging.

There was support for our stance of the need for workers' unity to resolve the conflict. This included support for building new mass workers' parties in Palestine, Israel, and here at home. Starmer's incessant support for Israel's occupation has angered people.

ALI COOKE

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socialistparty.org.uk/subscribe



## 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 leave, 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

Do you agree? Join the fightback!

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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.

### 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.



Tesla assembly line STEVE JURVETSON/CC

## Solidarity strikes against Tesla spread

ADAM HARMSWORTH  
COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

On 27 October, 130 engineers at Tesla workshops in Sweden began strike action against the car giant. They have been demanding Tesla recognise their union IF Metall and negotiates a collective bargaining agreement. Striking workers have raised six-day weeks and unavoidable overtime as part of their motivation.

Tesla and its notorious billionaire boss Elon Musk have refused union recognition for any of their workers across the globe. Currently some 90% of Swedish workers are covered by collective bargaining agreements.

That includes dockworkers refusing to unload Tesla vehicles, mechanics at independent workshops refusing Tesla cars, postal workers leaving letters and packages for Tesla untouched, and even waste collectors no longer collecting from Tesla sites.

Musk fears that if Tesla loses this fight, more of the company's 127,000

workers will be inspired to strike and unionise. German union IG Metall has said that a non-unionised Tesla factory near Berlin with 10,000 workers had workers reporting "extreme workload [and] excessive production targets". If Swedish Tesla workers can win recognition, then Musk may face the horror of tens of thousands of overworked Tesla workers demanding reasonable working conditions.

Tesla has already gone to court to sue the Swedish Transport Agency and state-owned mail carrier Post-Nord for holding onto Tesla licence plates. He also condemned the sympathy strikes in his very blunt and arrogant manner, tweeting simply: "This is insane."

With the ranks of Scandinavian workers coming to the defence of trade unionism against the world's richest man, this strike may last for some months. And whether Tesla wins or not, threats to collective bargaining will likely grow. Sweden's social democracy is not immune from the growing crisis of world capitalism. That's been shown by over a decade of attacks on 'Nordic model' principles by successive Swedish governments, including those led by the Social Democrats.

# TV Review: Mr Bates vs The Post Office

## Bosses prepared to ruin lives

GARY CLARK  
RECENTLY RETIRED SECRETARY OF CWU SCOTLAND  
NO.2 BRANCH

Watching this very moving four-part drama on ITV, no one could fail to feel anger and sorrow for the subpostmasters in their fight against probably the worst case of injustice over a period of almost 25 years. Potentially over 700 wrongful convictions have taken place, thousands of lives destroyed, four suicides taken place, and 33 former subpostmasters have died waiting on their convictions to be reversed. At present, only 93 have had their appeal heard and reversed.

The series shows the lengths that the Post Office and Fujitsu, the IT company behind the failed Horizon computer system, went to in covering up their corrupt failings, especially former Post Office CEO Paula Vennells. She resigned in 2019 and was awarded a CBE in 2020 for her work.

This provoked mass anger amongst Post Office workers at the time, and they will have huge support for their call for her CBE to be removed. Police investigations into fraud offences by Post Office management are under way.

### Public ownership

It should be remembered that the Post Office is still nationalised. The scandal proves something we in the Socialist Party have always said - nationalisation in itself does not go far enough. The Post Office is run by management like a private company. Instead, workers' control is vital.

The series also highlights the weakness of the National Federation of SubPostmasters (NFSP), which is not a trade union but a federation of small businesses which run Sub-Post Offices. These are different from the larger Crown post offices which are directly managed by the Post Office. The failings of the NFSP led



ITV STUDIOS

to the formation of Justice for Sub-Postmasters Alliance (JSPA), led by Alan Bates, whose story the series focuses on. The JSPA took on 550 cases against not only the Post Office, but also the government.

The show highlights how far management will go in the interests of the capitalist class, including destroying peoples' lives. More miscarriages of justice are now being reported since the programme has aired.

Dozens were jailed, many have been made bankrupt, seen their reputations ruined. The scandal has split families and seen people shunned by their communities, some being attacked in the streets, and labelled thieves and criminals. This will live with subpostmasters for the rest of their lives.

### Fighting for justice

I would support the removal of the CBE from Paula Vennells, but it should not stop at that. The whole senior post office management team should be removed and face criminal charges for what they have done during the last 25 years, and questions need to be asked about the government's role too.

We should also be calling for all the post offices closed over the past number of years to be reopened, with workers - staff and subpostmasters - organised in trade unions such as the CWU.

After years of Tory inaction, the series has ramped up public pressure on the government which is now considering exonerating all convictions. This should be supported, along with compensation for all those effected. But these measures themselves won't bring justice; the fight goes on against the bosses and their system prepared to ruin lives in pursuit of profit.

Note: As the Socialist goes to press, news has broken that Paula Vennells has agreed to hand back her CBE

• *Mr Bates vs The Post Office* is available to stream on ITV+

• Read more: 'Review – The Great Post Office Scandal: a true crime story' at [socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk)

## Readers' opinion: XL Bully ban ineffective and cruel

From 31 December it has been illegal to breed, sell or rehome a dog fitting the characteristics of an 'American XL Bully'. The government has released a very general description, one that could encompass many different breeds and crosses, and thousands of families in England and Wales will be impacted. Working-class families will be hit the hardest amidst the immense pressure of the cost-of-living crisis, and will have to make traumatic decisions about the lives of their pets.

Compensation of £200 has been

offered to families who opt to euthanise their animals. This puts families in a heartbreaking position. For those who refuse to euthanise their dogs, the process of applying for an exemption certificate is expensive, beginning with a £92.40 application fee.

Private landlords and council housing providers may refuse illegal dog breeds that fall under Section 1 of the Dangerous Dogs Act, adding to an existing housing crisis. Underpaid working-class animal rescue staff will receive no support for their mental

health from the government as they are forced into the distressing position of putting healthy, friendly and sociable dogs in their care to sleep, just for how they look.

Many people are scared about dog attacks and concerned for the safety of their families and pets. This is being capitalised on by the Tories in an attempt to distract the public from their significant failings in government. The Labour Party again fails to speak out against injustice by supporting the Tories' decision to ban the dog breed.

As a dog behaviour professional, I am saddened by the decision of both major political parties to ignore the research demonstrating the ineffectiveness of breed specific legislation (BSL), as well as the negligence to consider the devastating emotional impact of this law.

Dog attacks may be rare, but they can be traumatic and devastating for the people and animals that fall victim. However, BSL is not the solution and there is no evidence that it makes a difference to the number of dog attacks. In 2010, Denmark banned 13 breeds of dogs, but a scientific review in 2018 found that this had no effect on the amount of hospitalisations for dog bites.

Many of the UK's leading animal welfare organisations, including the RSPCA and Dogs Trust, have spoken out against the ban. Campaign groups such as 'Don't Ban Me, Licence Me' propose an alternative based around accountability, education and responsible ownership which does not involve condemning dogs that have done no wrong based on their physical appearance.

I am heartbroken for the families

of victims of dog attacks, as well as for the families who will be unfairly impacted as a result of this law, the dogs that have already lost their lives, and all the future dogs that fit this widely defined breed type that will face euthanasia.

JASPER MOLLOY  
NORTHAMPTON

## WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?

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# War in Ukraine grinds on, and the masses suffer

NIALL MULHOLLAND  
COMMITTEE FOR A WORKERS' INTERNATIONAL

The war in Ukraine continues unabated, at a terrible cost in both lives and resources. Generally described as a 'stalemate', there are still ferocious battles taking place and much blood being spilt, with hardly any territory changing hands. The much-vaunted Ukrainian military counter-offensive, launched last summer, has failed. This despite the huge sums given to the Ukrainian war effort by the United States and other Western powers since the conflict began. The US has spent more than \$75 billion, according to the Kiel Institute for the World Economy. The European Union (EU) has given more financial aid to Ukraine, but the US has provided the bulk of military hardware.

In the run-up to the recent counter-offensive, Ukrainian forces were trained by Western military and large amounts of armaments were sent to Kyiv. However, they have found it impossible to seriously breach the Russian lines, so far. The onset of winter means that fighting becomes even more difficult. Both sides have increased drone and artillery attacks in recent weeks.

One commentator described the Ukrainian forces being forced to move into a "defensive position" to stop any more Russian territorial gains. The Economist magazine describes how Russian forces have more effectively used electronic warfare and how "the skies over the battlefield are now thick with Russian drones. Ukrainian soldiers estimate that Russia is deploying twice the number of drones they are able to."

The Kyiv government is pleading for more arms, including high-tech, from the Western powers. However, according to the Economist, "There is some reluctance, especially on the part of the Americans, to show Russia its hand because actionable information, for instance on the frequencies and the channel-hopping techniques employed, is likely to be passed onto the Chinese."

## Global tensions

This comment illustrates how the conflict in Ukraine is not just about territory in that country but takes on international dimensions. Russia has increased its links to China during this conflict, as well as with Iran, some Gulf states and North Korea. In turn, the regime in Beijing has become more bellicose about its territorial claims over Taiwan and as the US conducts military exercises with allies in the South China Sea.

The war in Ukraine has helped to alter world relations and global tensions. According to the annual 'Armed Conflict Survey' by the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London, the world is "dominated by increasingly intractable conflicts and armed violence



amid a proliferation of actors, complex and overlapping motives, global influences and accelerating climate change... the Russia-Ukraine war is reshaping the regional and global security and economic order."

The conflict in Ukraine has taken a huge death toll on both sides. A retired U.S. Army colonel estimates that around 400,000 have died, mainly soldiers. The New York Times puts the figure of 10,000 Ukrainian soldiers killed, so far, in the counter-offensive. Tens of thousands are estimated to have died on the Russian side, as well. Neither side gives truthful information on the death toll, which indicates that the regimes know it would be unpalatable for their populations.

The war is having a devastating effect on the Ukrainian economy. The pre-war population of around 30 million has fallen by around 6 million, with many fleeing the country at the start of the Russian invasion. Unemployment sits at over 20% and the economy is only kept alive by massive Western economic subventions.

As the war has dragged on, public criticism of President Zelensky has increased, despite the imposition of martial law. The Mayor of Kyiv, formerly an ally, recently called him autocratic for not allowing elections. Small protests have taken place in the capital and elsewhere in the country by the families of deceased soldiers or those missing in action.

In the current stage of the conflict, Vladimir Putin's regime appears stronger and more consolidated than it has for months. Putin was able to see off the armed revolt, last June, by the Wagner group of mercenary soldiers. The warlord, Prigozhin, who led the coup attempt, was later conveniently despatched in a plane explosion.

The Russian economy has been able to withstand the sanctions imposed by the Western powers. Various means have been used to get around the embargoes. Fleets of container 'ghost ships', under various flags of convenience, trade around the world. The Putin regime has increased its military and economic ties with China, North Korea, Iran, and other countries. Russia has near full employment due to the sharp rise in production. In effect, Russia has a 'war economy' estimated to grow by about 3% this year (the US claims that the Russian economy has shrunk by 5% due to the war).

However, the Putin regime cannot rest easy. The vagaries of the battlefield mean that the tide can turn against him again. As the conflict drags on at a staggering cost in lives and treasure, sections of Russian society will increasingly voice opposition and can even call for a change to the regime in Moscow.

The US administration has mooted the idea of seizing up to \$260 billion of Russian central bank assets held abroad that were frozen early in the

war, and using them to fund Kyiv. But EU countries, including France and Germany, are reluctant. "Confiscating Russian reserves risks setting harmful precedents and undermining the global financial architecture", warns the Financial Times (London).

## Military aid

The continuing Israeli state attacks on Gaza, which entail large US funding and shipments of armaments, are putting pressure on the Zelensky regime. The US remains the world's largest economic and military power. Yet supplying funds and arms to two conflicts simultaneously is putting the Biden administration under pressure domestically.

US and EU financial and military aid packages, worth more than a combined \$110 billion, have been held up by political arguments on either side of the Atlantic. The US Republican Party, under the influence of former president Donald Trump, is increasingly sceptical about continuing funding for Ukraine. At the time of writing, Republicans in Congress continue to block funding worth \$60 billion to Kyiv and are tying the issue to demands for more curbs against migrants entering the United States.

Trump has indicated that if he wins the next presidential elections, he will bring the Ukraine war to a quick conclusion, possibly aiming to

weaken Russian-Chinese links. This perspective is undermining the attempts by the Biden administration to get its latest tranche of funding to Kyiv agreed by Congress.

Open divisions over Ukraine policy also exist within the EU. Both Hungary and Slovakia are holding up an EU financial package for Kyiv. The populist right-wing Hungarian Prime Minister, Viktor Orban, aims to keep his ties with Moscow for economic and geo-strategic reasons. Orban has blocked the EU's proposed €50 billion funding over four years for Ukraine. Orban opposes EU membership talks with Kyiv but removed himself from a recent EU summit which agreed to start the process. However, Orban later said that he can obstruct and halt the process at any time.

Following Zelensky's unsuccessful efforts to secure US funding during his recent visit to Washington, EU leaders, under pressure, agreed to 'unfreeze' €10 billion of Hungary's EU funds blocked due to Hungary's violations of EU laws. Orban, however, is demanding a full review of EU policy on Ukraine even if Brussels agrees to release all the funds for Budapest.

If the EU fails to get Orban to have a change of heart it is possible that the EU will have to find other ways to send money to Kyiv, perhaps by directly funding Ukraine from outside the EU budget. The hope amongst the most pro-Ukrainian Western powers is that this will help tide over Kyiv until remaining EU and US funds can be agreed.

## War weariness

There is a growing weariness over the drawn-out and bloody stalemate in Ukraine around the world. One poll found 40% of Americans thought the US was spending too much on Kyiv and only 11% thought it was not enough. The hypocrisy of the US, UK and other Western powers, who back the Israeli state's indiscriminate attacks against the people of occupied Gaza and West Bank while demanding that Russia ends its occupation of Donbas and Crimea, is not lost on working people around the globe.

Putin has been able to exploit these contradictions to increase his influence in the so-called 'Global South'. The Russian leader has recently visited Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates as part of his policy of deepening ties with various regimes. Significantly, Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, postponed a visit to Britain in order to meet Putin.

Sources around Zelensky say that the Ukrainian leader fears he will come under increasing pressure to negotiate with Moscow and to accept the status quo, ie that Russia will hold a large part of the Donbas region and Crimea for the foreseeable future. Even if this is likely, Putin is probably not under pressure to engage, at this stage.

The war may finally end with no formal negotiated settlement but as another 'frozen conflict' in the former Soviet Union, with more or less of the current territorial gains of Russia held (about 17% of the land of Ukraine). This would not signal a solution for working people in Ukraine or Russia - it threatens ongoing armed conflict, albeit at a lower level, but which can threaten to fully erupt again.

The war in Ukraine has its roots in the dissolution of the Soviet Union



Protesting against the Russian invasion in Ukraine, 2022 LONDON SP

in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Many of the initial new rulers overseeing capitalist restoration in the former Soviet Union regarded the expansion of NATO eastwards as an existential threat. Putin attempted to accommodate with Western imperialism while, at the same time, building up and modernising the Russian military as the economy improved, particularly due to an increase in oil and gas prices. The Russian military recovered enough to intervene against Georgia in 2008 and later played a key role in shoring up the Assad regime in Syria.

Following the breakup of the Soviet Union and the creation of an independent Ukraine, governments in Kyiv tended to oscillate between a more pro-Western or a more pro-Moscow stance. This sometimes led to protests and violent clashes on the streets as ruling class factions played on the national and religious tensions of the population.

In 2014, large protests in Kyiv led to the armed overthrow of the pro-Moscow government. Putin moved to annex Crimea. Since then, more pro-Western governments have been in power. For several years, before the Russian invasion, a military conflict took place between pro-Ukrainian nationalist militias and ethnic Russian armed groups, with Russian backing, in the Donbas.

Putin amassed a huge military force on the border with Ukraine and launched an ill-advised attack towards Kyiv in February 2022, which only succeeded in rousing the masses against foreign invasion. Forced to retreat, the Russian military has since tried to secure as much of the Donbas region and parts of eastern Ukraine as possible, while also holding on to Crimea.

From the point of view of the international workers' movement, it is essential to call for the unity of the working class across Ukraine and Russia and

the region. Socialists oppose the Russian invasion and call for the immediate withdrawal of Putin's forces. We also oppose Zelensky's martial law and anti-worker legislation.

## Workers' movement

In both Russia and Ukraine, the organised workers' movement, including trade unions, and many on the left, face severe repression. However, the seemingly endless war at the cost of huge sacrifices by working-class people can lead to growing opposition. There are reports that many Ukrainians are weary of Zelensky's endlessly upbeat and unrealistic propaganda, which cannot hide the bloody reality of the war of attrition. Zelensky has called for up to 500,000 new conscripts but neither the ruling party or top generals seem prepared to act on it, as they fear a public backlash. The development of an anti-war movement in both Russia and Ukraine can give confidence to the wider working class and help spur workers' struggles. It is essential that the international workers' movement and socialists give full support and assistance to any such developments.

The only real solution that can see an end to war, exploitation and poverty in Ukraine, Russia, and the whole of the former Soviet Union entails a return by the working class to the ideas of Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolsheviks. It is no coincidence that Putin attacked Lenin and his approach to the national question during a rambling speech justifying the launch of the invasion in 2022. Putin accused Lenin of accommodating Ukrainian nationalism and allowing the creation of an "artificial" Ukrainian state.

However, it was a correct and sensitive approach of the Bolsheviks on the national question that was a key factor leading to the success of the October 1917 socialist revolution. The young workers' government in Russia granted self-determination for the

Ukrainian people, which meant autonomy for Ukraine in the early 1920s. It was under the iron rule of Stalin that Great Russian national chauvinism was unleashed against other nationalities in the Soviet Union.

Stalin's disastrous policy of forced collectivisation led to famine in Ukraine, further exacerbating anti-Russian feelings. In the late 1930s, exiled abroad, Leon Trotsky advocated independence for Ukraine. Trotsky made this call because he feared that politically backward sections of Ukraine masses could be won over to the German Nazis who posed as an alternative to autocratic Stalinist rule and were making links with Ukrainian nationalists.

Trotsky called for an 'independent socialist Ukraine', which he believed would act as a spur to a political revolution in the rest of the Soviet Union, casting aside the Stalinist bureaucracy, restoring workers' rule, and allowing the conditions for a genuine voluntary and equal socialist federation, which a socialist Ukraine could decide to opt into or not.

Trotsky's perspective was proven correct but in a negative way. During the Second World War, the Nazis were able to find collaborators amongst Ukrainian ultra-nationalists during the years of German army occupation of parts of the country, which led to pogroms and massacres of the Jewish population and also of many workers defending what they saw as socialism.

In the post-war period, with economic development and industrialisation of Ukraine, nationalism waned significantly. However, in the 1970s and 1980s, as the Soviet economy stagnated, nationalist forces grew. The dissolution of the Soviet Union saw much of the Stalinist bureaucratic apparatus become evangelists of capitalism overnight. Ukraine became an independent capitalist state. Based on capitalism (poverty, class exploitation, and unemployment etc) tensions between ethnic and national groups increased, and sections of the ruling classes exploited these divisions for their own class ends. Under Zelensky, new legislation discriminating against the Russian language was introduced.

Any socialist solution to the crisis in Ukraine must take into account the right of the people of Ukraine to be free of foreign armies and outside meddling, and also the needs and aspirations of the people of Donbas and Crimea, many of whom are ethnic Russians. While it is highly unlikely that they want to live under the autocratic grip of Putin's regime, neither do they express a desire to be part of Zelensky's Ukrainian nationalist state that is also viewed with suspicion by some of Ukraine's Hungarian minority.

Self-determination for these oppressed groups means the right to democratically decide their future, without any coercion from local or world powers. For socialists, this is inextricably linked up to the struggle against the oligarchs and their divide-and-rule policies, and to change society fundamentally. Only a socialist federation of the region can offer a permanent solution to the nightmare of post-Soviet, capitalist life in the region - an end to wars, national and ethnic hatreds, exploitation, and poverty.

● This is a shortened version of the article published online at [socialistworld.net](http://socialistworld.net)



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# the Socialist

Issue 1257

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formerly **Militant**

## CEO payday already



# 'WE NEED A PAY RISE!'

- Real pay rise now – linked to rising cost of living
- £15-an-hour minimum wage for all



MIHAELA IVANOVA  
TOWER HAMLETS SOCIALIST PARTY

**A**s another year of crippling austerity begins, by the morning of Thursday 4 January, a FTSE 100 chief executive will have been paid more on an hourly basis than an average UK worker's annual salary of £34,963.

This disparity in wages is a glaring symptom of a system responsible for decades of increasing income inequality. Protected by the Tories, big business CEOs pocket absurd pay rises and bonuses at the expense of working people who have suffered through the longest wage squeeze in modern history. A City boss's average pay is a staggering 157 times higher than that of the average worker!

Many hope that things under a Labour government led by Keir Starmer would be different. But there is little chance that the 'iron-clad' fiscal discipline promised by Starmer will bring the desperately needed investment to the NHS, and other public services, and fund a pay rise for public sector workers.

Expect the continuation of what Tory rule has been - a government acting in the interests of profit.

Workers and young people have taken incredible steps to fight back against the rotten system that protects the interests of big business and profits over working-class interests. The resistance in 2023 is not lost as we walk into 2024 with more strikes, including junior doctors who have just concluded the longest strike in NHS history, and continued anti-war protests.

We need to fight for wages that rise at least with the cost of living and a minimum wage of at least £15 an hour, with no exemptions. We need a new mass workers' party to back up our fight for pay rises and to fight for socialist change.

WHAT WE STAND FOR: THE SOCIALIST PARTY'S MAIN DEMANDS ▶▶▶ see column on p12



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