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# the Socialist

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18-24 January 2024

formerly **Militant**

# NO TRUST IN THE BOSSES' POLITICIANS



PHOTOS: UK PARLIAMENT, CHRIS MCANDREW & RICHARD TOWNSEND/CC

# WE NEED A NEW MASS WORKERS' PARTY

**DAVE MURRAY**  
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

“There is nothing wrong with the system – the problem is you.” This is what the wrongly accused subpostmasters were told by Post Office investigators as they were fitted up for fraud and false accounting, but it might as well be the slogan of the UK’s dead-on-its-arse Tory government and the deeply cynical ruling class.

The issues keep piling up which show increasing numbers of working-class people that none of the capitalist parties look out for anyone other than the bosses.

## Post Office and Fujitsu

Even as insiders warned that Fujitsu’s new IT system for local post offices was riddled with errors, local post office operators were pressured into making up losses from their own pockets, accused of fraud, and even jailed for a problem that was entirely the making of those who were running the prosecutions.

The scandal has implicated every mainstream political party. Tories, Labour, and Lib Dems were in government as the faulty IT system was unleashed like a wrecking ball into people’s lives.

The leader of the Lib Dems was postal affairs minister as the problems started to

emerge, and the Tories have given former senior Fujitsu UK executives well-paid jobs at the centre of government, including the cabinet office, while failing to exonerate and compensate the victims.

Labour leader, Sir Keir Starmer, then the state’s most senior prosecutor, failed to use his power to stop the prosecutions.

We cannot trust the main parties to defend anyone other than the rich elite.

## Yemen and Gaza

It’s no surprise, then, to learn that Starmer pre-approved Sunak’s military attacks on Yemen this week – showing that they are

happy to protect the commercial interests of the corporations but refuse to even oppose the slaughter in Gaza.

## Socialism

There has to be an alternative to these parties: we need a new mass workers’ party!

The Socialist Party’s message to all those who have followed the Post Office scandal with horror, who have marched and spoken out against the brutality suffered by Gaza, who oppose the attacks on working-class people’s lives and living standards is this: there is nothing wrong with you, the problem is the system. Let’s organise to replace it with socialism.

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

Hundreds of thousands pack the streets of London against the war on Gaza



Central London 13 January PHOTO: NICK CLARE

BERKAY KARTAV LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY ORGANISER

On Saturday 13 January, once again hundreds of thousands of people flooded the streets of London to join the first national demonstration of 2024, marching from Bank to Downing Street.

Appalled by the brutal war on Gaza and the recent US and British airstrikes in Yemen, it was clear that the anger towards world and regional powers and warmongering pro-capitalist politicians has not dissipated.

More than 100 days have now passed since Israel escalated the war on Gaza following the October 7 Hamas attack, with the death toll rising to over 24,000, and millions of Palestinians have been displaced from their homes.

As the Israeli military forces continue with the bombardment of Gaza, many demonstrators are searching for how this brutal war will come to an end and how Palestinian liberation can be achieved.

Like in previous demonstrations, our placards and papers calling for a socialist alternative to war were snapped up quickly as soon as people started arriving. The material we distributed pointed to the need for socialist change and called for a mass struggle of Palestinians, under their own democratic control, to fight for liberation.

We have consistently argued that the only 'superpower' that can bring an end to the misery Palestinians are facing is the working class. Due to its collective consciousness and role in production and distribution, this is the only social force in society capable of replacing capitalism with socialism.

Capitalism, a rotten system based on a tiny minority owning and controlling the huge wealth and resources that exist in the society, is incapable of providing a solution to national conflict and oppression. That is why we point to the need to build independent organisations of the working class in both Palestine and Israel, as part of a struggle for a socialist Middle East.

Palestinian liberation in the face of mass slaughter of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank means there is a significant layer who are looking for a political alternative.

At the end rally of the demo, speakers, including former Labour MP Emma Dent Coad who intends to stand as an independent in the General Election, led enthusiastic chants of "no ceasefire, no vote". Many people told us that they are done with Labour.

We were frequently asked: "Who can I vote for in the next general election?" It's crystal clear that the pro-capitalist parties in Westminster, whether the Tories, Labour or Lib Dems, offer nothing but austerity, war and further attacks on the living conditions of the working class. They are all complicit in the suffering of Palestinians.

Those who were interested in helping us to stand candidates against Starmer's warmongering Labour signed our petitions on the day and wanted to know how they can get involved. We discussed what initial steps can be taken to challenge these pro-capitalist politicians at the ballot box in the next local and general elections, and how a mass socialist alternative can be built.

We raised the urgent need for a new mass party, based on the working class and trade unions, that stands in solidarity with Palestinians and other oppressed people, and offers a socialist way out of the crisis both in Britain and internationally. A workers' list of MPs, made of trade unionists, campaigners and anti-war demonstrators, backed by the trade unions would be a step towards this.

Socialist Party members will be standing up and down the country in the upcoming elections as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) and encouraging all those who want to be part of a working-class challenge to get in touch.

If you agree we need to build a socialist alternative and fight for a socialist change, then join the Socialist Party today!

Join the fightback JOIN THE SOCIALISTS Visit socialistparty.org.uk/join or call 020 8988 8777 or text your name and postcode to 07761 818 206 to find out more today!

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 socialisttoday.org/subscribe / 020 8988 8777 Paper subscription £3 a month, e-subscription £2.50

ANGER AT THE ELITES ON THE RISE FROM AIRSTRIKES ON YEMEN TO THE POST OFFICE SCANDAL...

Socialist Party WHAT WE THINK

The first mass protests of the year against the ongoing slaughter of the Palestinians were fuelled by huge anger at the Tory government sending Royal Air Force jets to hit targets in Yemen, as the extremely junior 'partner' in US president Joe Biden's airstrikes against the Houthis.

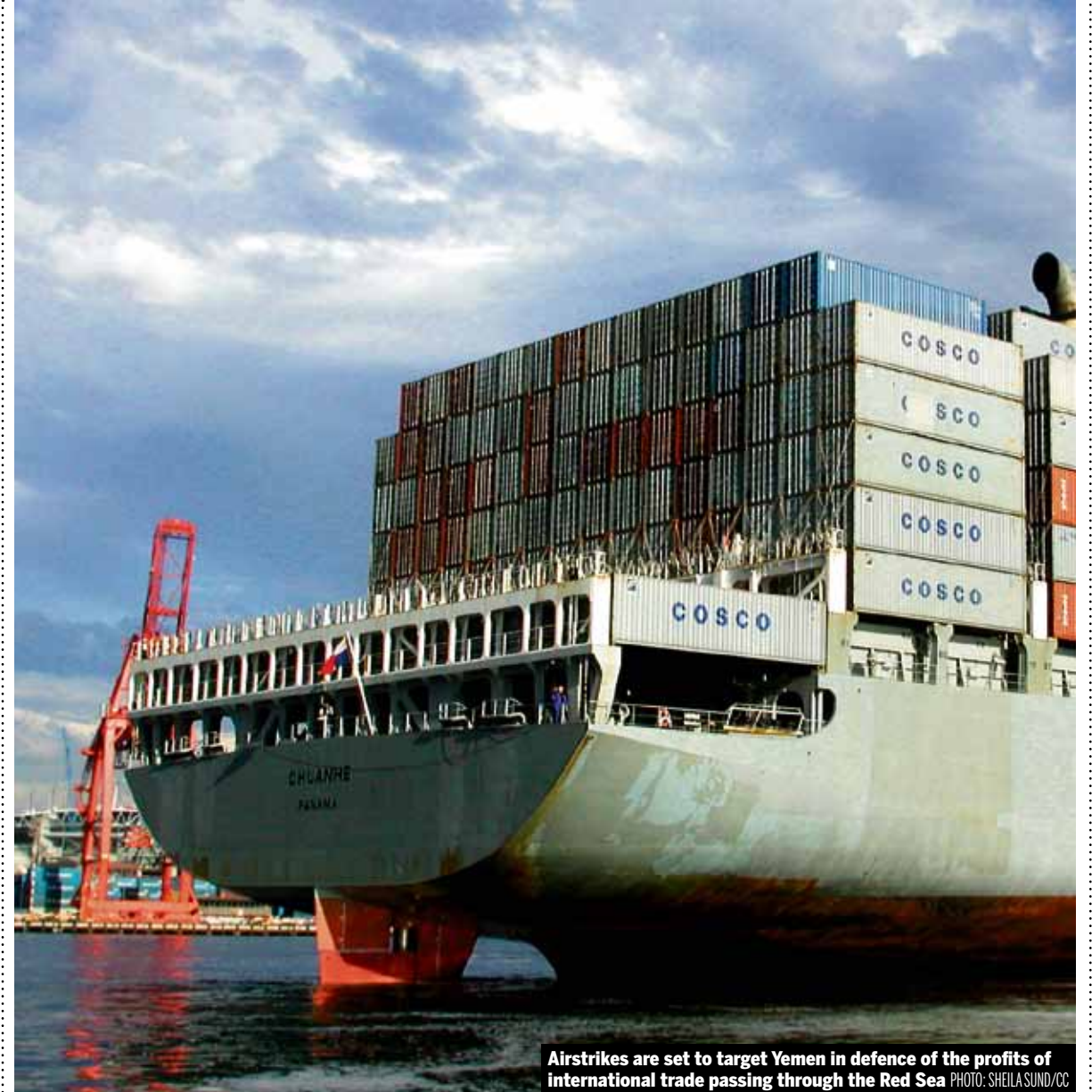
US imperialism has consistently asserted that it doesn't want the current situation to escalate into a regional war, as has the Tory government. No doubt this is something both would rather avoid; it would have huge economic and political consequences. The airstrikes they carried out are, nonetheless, the biggest single escalation of the conflict so far, and risk ratcheting it up significantly.

Biden and Sunak have justified the airstrikes by the Iran-backed Shia Houthis' targeting of more than 25 ships in the Red Sea since November. Yet the Houthis' stated precondition for stopping attacks on shipping is sufficient humanitarian aid reaching the Palestinians trapped in the Gaza Strip under Israeli military bombardment, facing starvation and the winter. The response of Biden and Sunak? Attacking the Houthis while continuing to back the Israeli regime's slaughter.

Airstrike effect It is not clear if the US and UK attacks will have some effect on the Houthis' military capabilities short term. But it will certainly not achieve any other goals. It will strengthen rather than undermine the Houthis' domestic support.

Biden is the fourth consecutive US president to order military strikes on Yemen, the poorest country in the Middle East. A coalition led by the Saudi regime, with US support, fought a war against the Houthis over eight years. Thirty million people, 80% of the population, were left in urgent need of humanitarian aid, while tens of thousands were killed. However, the Houthis remained in power in the West of Yemen.

The airstrikes can only achieve an increase in the tensions in the region which, in turn, will increase the danger of terrorist attacks across the world, not least in Britain and the US. Sunak gave the order to take part in the bombing, safe in the knowledge he would face no significant opposition in parliament. Sir Keir



Airstrikes are set to target Yemen in defence of the profits of international trade passing through the Red Sea PHOTO: SHEILA SUNDU/CC

Starmer, so-called leader of the opposition, had been informed of the airstrikes beforehand, and made clear his full support, as he has done publicly since. Nothing could make it clearer that Starmer will act in the interests of the British capitalist class in government, including playing the traditional role of tail-ending US imperialism. The Liberal Democrats have fulminated about the need for a retrospective vote, but have not actually opposed the bombing!

While Sunak might face no significant resistance in the Palace of Westminster, it is a different question among the population. For many, especially young people and those from a Muslim background, the horrific plight of the Palestinians is currently the central issue motivating them to take action. But it is far from the only question causing the deep anger felt by the majority - against this government first and foremost, but also against all the capitalist

warnings about problems with Horizon, while Starmer was Director of Public Prosecutions and therefore ultimately responsible for some of the wrongful convictions.

Having done nothing over decades, public pressure has now forced Sunak to take action via parliament, which he pledges will "exonerate and compensate victims". The strength of the public outrage has forced him to promise action.

But why stop there? The subpostmasters are not the only campaign fighting for justice. How about the thousands of victims of the blood transfusion scandal or the Hillsborough football stadium disaster? Come to that, how about the many who have suffered police brutality and criminal charges whilst involved in protest, from the miners at Orgreave in 1984, to the students protesting against increased tuition fees in 2010? All the endless legal obfuscation and delay suffered by the subpostmasters and all these other campaigns have been shown to be totally unnecessary.

Tories out The Socialist Party is fighting to build the anti-war movement, as well as the struggles against all the injustice faced by working-class people here in Britain. Not least is the battle to defeat the latest Tory anti-trade union laws, the minimum service levels legislation, which is attempting to further curtail our right to strike. One essential part of all those battles is fighting for the creation of a political voice that fights in the interests of the majority, instead of standing with the elites.

It is clear we are on course for a Starmer-led government, but that it - like Blair's New Labour - will act in the interests of the capitalist class. However, even a small bloc of MPs in parliament fighting for working-class interests, including Jeremy Corbyn for example, and others excluded from Labour, would increase the pressure on that Labour-led government enormously. Whether it was supporting strikes, moving votes against war, or campaigning relentlessly for subpostmasters and their ilk, MPs fighting our corner would be a step forward.

We need much more than that, however. Here in Britain, the working class needs its own party, fighting for the socialist transformation of society, starting with taking the levers of power out of the hands of the capitalists, nationalising the major corporations and banks, and beginning to build a democratic planned economy. The same thing is needed in other countries across the world, not least in the Middle East.

Before the brutal war in Yemen it, like many countries across the region, was part of the Arab Spring, where the poor masses rose up and pushed out old dictatorships. In Yemen, like elsewhere, the masses' lack of their own party allowed other forces to step in, including the Houthis, and a brutal civil war ensued. The fight for the working class and poor to have their own parties is essential preparation to make sure future mass movements end differently.





## Railways: Private profits over public safety

ASLEF MEMBER

It's almost a cliché that when talking about streaks of bad weather in the UK it correlates with severe disruption on our rail network. But with the continued decline and degradation of vital infrastructure, this joke won't stop anytime soon or get any funnier.

Frontline staff and members of the travelling public are seeing on a daily basis the negative results of a shift within Network Rail from a 'preventive' mindset to 'reactive' maintenance. This is due to the vast cuts made to available funding – compounded by calls from the Tories to cut even more.

In previous years there were gangs of P-Way (Permanent Way i.e. railway workers) who managed their own sections of track, keeping a constant vigil on railhead and railside conditions. Now issues are only being reported when they occur. This includes the conditions of trains themselves; depot factories have backlog lists going back several months for fixing faults and failures, resulting in under-maintained rail stocks contributing to cancellations and delays.

There is a notable increase in the numbers of railhead cracks, retaining wall collapses, signalling and track circuit failures, overhead wire surges – including on high-speed lines while some drivers are in low-protection fibreglass shell driving cabs. These have not been given the media attention they deserves.

This race to bottom from the Tories is disgusting enough on its own but it comes on top of cuts being made to Network Maintenance which contributes to public safety. At the same time, the continuation of subsidies to the tune of billions of pounds to privately owned train companies begs the question, what's the priority – public safety or private profit?

This is more than just an issue of resource allocation but a desperate example of why we need a fully nationalised rail sector, under democratic workers and service users' control and management and fully-funded. This would be possible by a government acting in the interests of the working class – using the wealth and resources of society to provide safety for all.

# Get ready for general election and Starmer government at Socialist Students conference

SAM HEY  
MANCHESTER SOCIALIST STUDENTS

As energy bills and other running costs soar to unprecedented levels, universities across the country plunge head first into a funding crisis. The Tory government stands by and watches.

Domestic tuition fees have been maintained at £9,250, so universities will rely more on international students, who can be charged more, to make up the shortfall from rising costs from record-high inflation. Top universities, including York, have resorted to lowering grade boundaries for international students in an attempt to make up this funding deficit.

The Tories are preventing international graduate students bringing their families to the UK, reviewing cutting the international students two-year window in the UK after graduation to find work, and cracking down on 'low-value courses'.

This places a new Starmer-led government in a position where inaction will be catastrophic for the university system. Their plan of "fiscal responsibility" means course closures, staff layoffs, and universities turning to increasing accommodation rents to try and bridge the funding gap.

Without pressure from students organising across the country, Labour will be able to shirk their responsibility of fixing the higher education system. Under Jeremy Corbyn, Labour stood for free education, so a record number of young people turned up to support him. For higher education to be accessible to all, we need a complete funding overhaul before there is irreversible damage.

Socialist Students calls for a free

## Socialist Students conference 2024

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



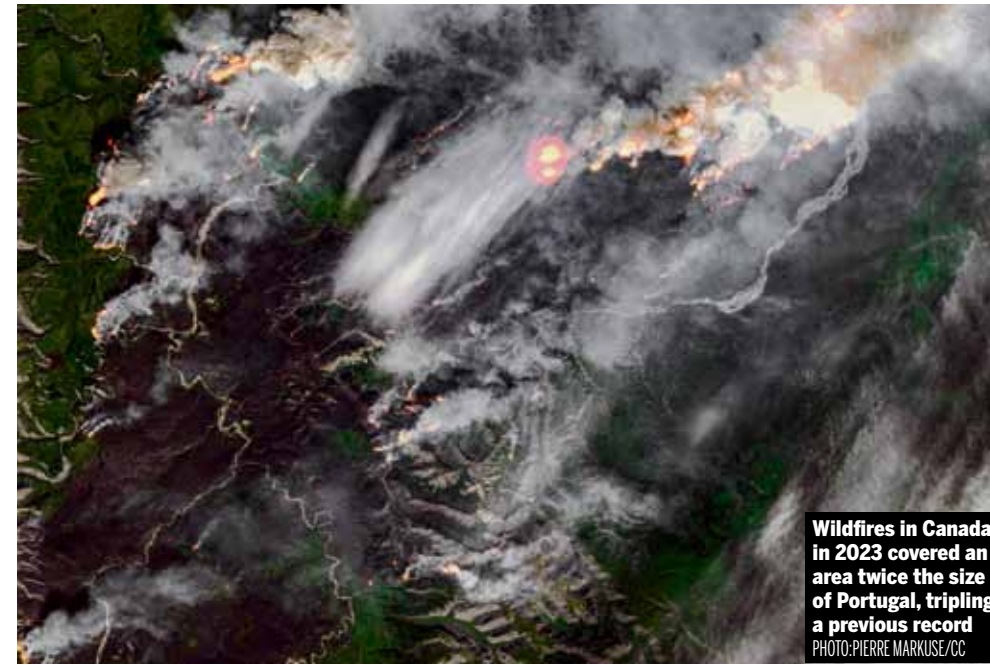
higher education system, which is properly funded, based on what universities actually need. Not based on the number of students they can cram into a lecture hall.

This would allow us to replace tuition fees with grants that we can actually live on, end predatory rents in university-owned accommodation, and introduce fair pay and working conditions for all university staff.

Let's make these policies a reality. We need to build a student movement that aligns itself with the struggle of the working class to demand that the Labour government fix what the Tories have left broken.

On Saturday 10 February, Socialist Students will hold our annual conference in Birmingham. A key discussion session will be 'How should students prepare for the general election and a Starmer-led government?'

If you think we need to take action on a broken education system, if you can't trust the Tories and Labour to fix this financial mess, if you think free education is something worth fighting for, then come to the conference. And let's build a movement in the interest of students and the working class to stand up for us when no one else will.



Wildfires in Canada in 2023 covered an area twice the size of Portugal, tripling a previous record  
PHOTO: PIERRE MARKUSE/CC

## 2023 hottest year ever- Capitalism is guilty, fight for socialist change

ROY WILLS  
WALTHAM FOREST SOCIALIST PARTY

There were clearly massive benefits that came from the Industrial Revolution, but those involved may not have appreciated the full significance of their actions. Because, many megatonnes of toxic fumes later, in 2023, we have just experienced the hottest year on record.

When our current average global temperature is compared to that of the late 19th Century (ie when we really got into burning fossil fuels) it is about 1.48 degrees higher. This rise in temperature comes about through the increase in the emissions of 'greenhouse' gases (mainly carbon dioxide) which trap heat near the Earth's surface but a hotter climate isn't, of course, the only effect. Amongst the many symptoms are longer heatwaves exacerbating droughts, wildfires, heavy rainfall and floods; glaciers melt more quickly causing rises in sea level and the natural world is thrown into disorder. The COP UN climate change meetings have required nations to achieve 'net zero' by 2050, i.e. harmful emissions going into the atmosphere are balanced by their removal. (To read about how little progress has been made at these conferences see 'COP28: No solution while profit and capitalist competition reign' at socialistparty.org.uk)

### Crumbling capitalist system

The people who disagree with this premise are often defending their part of a crumbling capitalist system. For example, in Brazil, ex-President Bolsonaro encouraged the clearing of vast acres of the Amazon rainforest for agricultural production and claimed to be acting in the interests of ordinary working people. New logging jobs, and profits for the logging companies, may have been created in the short term, but he is also hastening a major environmental catastrophe which will have the worst impact on working-class and poor people across the planet.

The challenge for socialists is to convince people that it is possible to pursue green policies and provide substantial employment within a landscape of renewable resources, because it is.

In one short article it is difficult to fully reflect the impending sense of doom brought about by climate change. The Socialist Party puts the blame squarely at the capitalist system, which needs to be replaced by a democratic socialist society to guarantee a better future for all. Among the demands we fight for in our 'What We Stand For' are:

- Prioritising major research and investment into replacing fossil fuels and nuclear power with renewable energy and ending the problems of early and unrecycled waste
- 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
- For a major, publicly funded, insulation and energy transition plan for existing housing stock
- Nationalisation of the energy companies, under democratic workers' control and management, 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

If you want to be part of that fight then join us.

**JOIN THE SOCIALISTS**

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

SCAN:

# Tories' cruel Rwanda bill is back

ADAM HARMSWORTH  
COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

On Tuesday 16 January, as the Socialist goes to press, the Tories' widely despised 'Rwanda bill' returned to Parliament. The original plan to ship some asylum seekers to processing sites in Rwanda was ruled unlawful by the Supreme Court, due to safety concerns. But Rishi Sunak appears determined to make good on his 'stop the boats' rhetoric in a desperate attempt to recover in the polls.

The Bill has come back to Parliament after a new report on routes for migrants to enter the UK revealed absolutely no legal paths for asylum seekers. Nobody can claim asylum without being in the UK, and nobody can enter the UK to claim asylum! The exceptions are specific routes usually made for political convenience. Civilians in Ukraine and Hong Kong can seek asylum legally, but Palestinians for example aren't on the list. That leaves most of those fleeing war and persecution with only dangerous options, like the small boats crossing the Channel that frequently cause deaths.

Once they get here, asylum seekers have no access to money other than £8.18 a week – reduced to just £49.18 a week – reduced to just £8.18 if they are in accommodation that provides food. They cannot legally get work, often meaning they take up illegal and exploitative employment.

If they are detained before or after an asylum claim, they can be subjected to an indefinite stay in grim detention centres.

### Tory rebellion

However, the new Bill may become even worse thanks to a rebellion in the Tory ranks. Over 60 MPs

**“**  
**Nobody can claim asylum without being in the UK, and nobody can enter the UK to claim asylum!**

including two deputy chairmen of the Tory Party itself are backing even harsher amendments. They want to further restrict, or even end, any right to legally challenge deportations.

If Sunak doesn't support the amendments, only 29 of those MPs need to oppose his own bill – or 57 to abstain – to stop it entirely. But many of the approximately 100 'One Nation' Tory MPs are opposed to the right-wing amendments, and only 29 of them would need to oppose an amended Rwanda bill to stop that as well.

The Tories are desperately divided over their future, so much that a split in the party may be on the cards in the period ahead. Former immigration minister Robert Jenrick has warned in a Telegraph article, "three strikes and you're out". Their division reflects the crisis in capitalism, which has created so many refugees in the first place. Starmer's Labour, equally tied to capitalism, is looking to carry out virtually the same policies as the Tories on refugees.

Asylum seekers will never be guaranteed safety in a system where politicians can play with their lives in hopes of a boost in the polls. It will take socialist change here and internationally to ensure those fleeing persecution and war can find safety, and end the causes of the wars and crises that force people to seek asylum in the first place.

### Come to a Socialist Party meeting near you

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

To find meeting details in your area:  
• [socialistparty.org.uk/events](https://socialistparty.org.uk/events)

## Pharmacy cuts will impact society's most vulnerable

ALEX SAMPSON  
PLYMOUTH SOCIALIST PARTY

Last year, Boots announced that it was going to be streamlining its business, meaning the loss of about 300 local pharmacy locations. This comes after Lloyds closed 90% of its pharmacies in 2023, including all those located in Sainsbury's shops.

This latest round of pharmacy closures is part of a larger trend over the last decade. Community Pharmacy England, an industry body, found over 1,000 local pharmacies have closed in the last seven years, and that the trend is accelerating. They pointed to a squeeze in funding, with NHS funding to pharmacies seeing a real-terms cut of 30% over this period, as the main cause.

Most pharmacies, of course, now offer online and delivery services, but local pharmacies have always been an important part of the community. They have played an integral

role in identifying and treating minor ailments, and are increasingly taking on procedures previously done by over-encumbered GP services. The ability to walk into a pharmacy for advice is a valuable service for the elderly and more vulnerable who may find accessing online services difficult. Having to commute up to three miles for access to these services will be problematic for many.

### A country of poor health

Thanks to a decade of Tory austerity measures, Britain is becoming a country of poor health. Last year, the number of working-age adults declared long-term sick hit a record high of 2.6 million and, with limited access to GPs and long waiting times for hospital appointments, this figure will only keep climbing.

Cutting local pharmacy services will only add to these pressures, increasing the workload of already busy pharmacists struggling to find

many necessary medications due to NHS drug shortages (including for type 2 diabetes, HRT and now vital breast cancer medications). These closures will increase the negative health outcomes for the poorest, elderly and most vulnerable members of our society.

Neither the Conservatives nor Starmer's Labour are interested in investing in the health of the people of this country, focused as they are on opening more of our health service to private vultures.

Pharmacies, like other necessary services, should not be run for profit and their locations should not be at the whim of big business. What is needed is a fully funded, national pharmacy service, run as part of the NHS and easily accessible to all. A democratically planned health service, including nationalising the pharmaceutical companies, would be able to put the wellbeing of its all over the private profit of a few.



PHOTO: MTAYLOR848/CC



Rishi Sunak trying to hold the Tory party together at a cabinet meeting in June  
PHOTO: JACOB GROET/CC



## Welsh BMA strike against lowest junior doctors' pay rise in Britain



UCH, Cardiff DAVE REID

DAVE REID  
SOCIALIST PARTY WALES

Junior doctors went on strike at hospitals across Wales for three days on 15-17 January.

At University Hospital Wales in Cardiff doctors chanted "Claps don't pay the bills" on a very lively picket line. Hundreds of junior doctors attended the rally at the Senedd (Welsh parliament) on the second day of strike action.

Some junior doctors earn just £13.65 an hour in Wales. Junior doctors' pay has reduced in real terms by a third since 2008-09. While the Labour-led Welsh government has committed to restoring pay in words,

it has offered the lowest pay rise in of all the nations in the UK – just 5%. Even the Tories in England have imposed 6% on junior doctors there.

### Labour

Welsh health minister, Eluned Morgan, claimed there was no money to pay more, yet in Scotland junior doctors have reluctantly accepted a 17.5% increase over two years. And the Labour Welsh government just accepts the levels of austerity demanded by the Tory Westminster government.

Despite the obvious evidence that there is problem recruiting and retaining doctors in Wales, the Welsh government has decided to pay the

lowest doctors' wages in low-paid UK medicine.

"We have no option but to take action," Megan, a junior doctor in Cardiff, explained. "No one wants to strike but we cannot just accept yet another cut in our pay. Year after year we have just accepted falling pay. This is all about fighting for the future of the Welsh NHS".

Cardiff Trades Union Council and Socialist Party members brought solidarity from the rest of the trade union movement to the picket lines and the rally at the Senedd. Despite cancelled appointments, the support of ordinary people in Wales was shown by the horns of passing cars.

Cardiff council workers have also stood in solidarity with Palestinians at a protest outside the surgery of the local MP, who voted against a ceasefire. Many of these striking workers are coming to the conclusion that Labour won't fight for them, and will instead be a safe pair of hands for the rich.

## Brewdog pay cuts – No longer all about the 'people'

DANIEL FORREST  
TEESSIDE SOCIALIST PARTY

A storm is brewing at Brewdog, Britain's largest craft beer brewery.

Last week, Unite the Union's hospitality section revealed on X (formerly Twitter) that Brewdog had written to its workers announcing that they will no longer be paid the 'real living wage', and will instead be paid the national minimum wage from April of this year. This has rightly outraged many online and doubtless many of the company's workers.

James Watt (Brewdog's largest shareholder) took to social media to defend the company's actions, claiming that this was a 5% 'pay rise' – a cynical attempt to dress up

## Cardiff bin workers: Striking over pay and to defend the service



PHOTO: CARDIFF SOCIALIST PARTY

JOHN WILLIAMS  
CARDIFF SOCIALIST PARTY

After eleven weeks of action in the autumn of 2023, Cardiff Council workers in Unite are striking again, against the national local government (NJC) pay offer.

Strike action by refuse and recycling workers started on 28 December and was due to end on 25 January, but is now extended until 22 February.

The council is considering removing public bins on residential streets and moving to three-weekly bin collections. This is part of their plans to deal with their £30 million budget gap. These plans will undoubtedly mean job cuts, and Unite members are outraged.

Passing on cuts instead of fighting them is a pattern of behaviour from the Labour-run Cardiff council, which also isn't taking seriously the issue of bullying at Cardiff bins.

Sharon Graham says: "Unite the union's support for our members at Cardiff council is unwavering and workers will continue to receive the union's total backing in 2024 for as long as it takes."

Cardiff council workers have also stood in solidarity with Palestinians at a protest outside the surgery of the local MP, who voted against a ceasefire. Many of these striking workers are coming to the conclusion that Labour won't fight for them, and will instead be a safe pair of hands for the rich.

what is in actual fact a real-terms pay cut.

It is true that the new national minimum wage of £11.44 is 5% higher than the living wage rate previously paid to Brewdog workers, which was £10.90 for 2022-23. But if those workers were kept on the living wage for 2023-24, then their wages would have increased by more – to £12 outside London and £13.15 inside London.

This may come as a shock to some, as after all Brewdog's slogan is "beer, people, planet". This can now be seen as nothing more than empty words and a marketing gimmick. It is strikingly hypocritical for a company that loves to portray itself as anti-establishment to pay its workers the bare minimum during a cost-of-living

crisis, while its largest shareholder sits on a fortune of reportedly over £260 million.

Unite Hospitality organiser Bryan Simpson has said that his union is working with members in Brewdog to collectively challenge these attacks on pay. This should include organising a recruitment campaign within Brewdog workplaces up and down the country, linked to preparations to take strike action if necessary.

The Socialist Party fights against all cuts to workers' pay, and for a minimum wage that is enough to live on – £15 an hour as a bare minimum. The trade union movement must take the lead in this fight, including taking steps towards building its own fighting political voice which backs workers all the way.

## PCS elections

At the end of 2023, Socialist Party member Marion Lloyd came within 800 votes of winning the election for Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) general secretary, standing as a candidate for the PCS Broad Left Network (BLN). This clear desire for change in the union, for a more combative and democratic leadership, makes the elections this spring to the National Executive Committee (NEC) and Group Executive Committees (GECs) even more important. The BLN hopes to work with all others in the union who want a fighting leadership.

### PCS Broad Left Network agrees fighting programme in DWP

PCS MEMBER

On Saturday 13 January, socialists from the PCS union met together at a BLN conference for union reps based in the civil service's Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The BLN brings together PCS reps and members who want a fighting, democratic trade union with socialist policies.

As the largest government department, DWP has borne the largest number of job cuts, with staffing falling by more than 4,000 from April 2022 until October 2023. This is despite regular recruitment attempts, bringing in thousands of new staff – in essence, the department is running to stand still.

Complicating the situation, the Tory government has announced 66,000 further job cuts across the civil service, with all government departments scheduled to submit plans later this year for how they intend to comply with the scheduled cuts.

In DWP, poor working conditions and poor pay (for a third year running, by 1 April wages will be below the national minimum wage) drive the high turnover of staff. This



PCS members in DWP on strike as part of the national action in March 2023 ELEANOR DONNE

reduces the number of experienced staff and places pressure on all existing staff, including those responsible for training and mentoring. Members of PCS look to their union to do something.

Reps attending the conference reported that the union's leadership in DWP seems unable or unwilling to do more than talk, condemning management's attitude – which is resulting in crushing workloads in areas like the Universal Credit Service Centres – while doing nothing practical to force them to change their approach.

BLN activists, including Socialist Party members, are determined that

this should change. A whole battery of motions to the union's annual conference for members in DWP have been agreed, and those BLN supporters elected to the union's GEC in DWP have tabled a motion laying out clearly what should happen next.

BLN activists have also agreed that they will stand in the forthcoming union elections, to demand a fighting leadership that does not leave members in the lurch. BLN intends to work with all left forces across the union to help construct this fighting leadership. We urge all socialists and union activists in PCS, in DWP and beyond, to join with us.

A national BLN conference will take place on Saturday 20 January.

### 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

## UCU leadership elections: A serious fighting and democratic leadership needed

BEA GARDNER  
UCU MEMBER

Members of the University and College Union (UCU) are voting for a new leadership, with the general secretary election beginning on 25 January, alongside elections for vice-president and the union's National Executive Committee (NEC).

The Socialist Party calls for a fighting, democratic leadership which gives a serious, consistent industrial and political lead.

Across all sectors in which it is organised, UCU members have mounted heroic and determined fights in recent years. Fighting against job cuts and closures, for inflation-proof pay rises, in defence of pensions, and for better workloads with less job insecurity.

Prison education members took strike action for the first time. More colleges than ever coordinated action as part of the 'Respect FE' campaign, with many winning awards above the 7.5% pay recommendation.

In universities, members showed their determination to fight by delivering two historic strike mandates, which smashed the Tories' required 50% turnout threshold on a collective basis for the first time.

A significant victory was achieved

in the USS pensions dispute – as a result of the 69 days of determined strike action members have taken since 2018 – with cuts reversed and member benefits restored by an estimated £16-18 billion.

### Leadership mishandling

Nevertheless, the mishandling of the disputes by the leadership, particularly in universities, through a series of delays, retreats, and anti-democratic manoeuvres, has resulted in many members losing confidence in the current leaders.

Last year, UCU Congress voted to censure the actions of general secretary Jo Grady in the university disputes, and a 'no confidence' vote was held, narrowly failing. UCU HQ is also in disarray, with two strike ballots by UCU staff and a convention notice issued by the Health and Safety Executive. Jo Grady is now opposed by three candidates in the general secretary election.

The incoming leadership must prepare a fighting strategy that is seriously prepared for and built – a campaign for above-inflation pay rises, an end to marketisation, and for full funding. We must defend the right to strike, oppose the use of the minimum service legislation, and defend against victimisation.



UCU HE strike rally, 2023 PAUL MATTSSON

A coherent political strategy is also vital with a rapidly approaching general election and likely Labour government to follow it. The general secretary candidates should demand that an incoming Starmer-led Labour government deliver full funding to adult education and be prepared to fight for it industrially and politically. That includes backing candidates that support UCU policies to stand in the local and general elections.

Rank-and-file members must have control over their disputes and their union. We call for the democratic election of all union officials, who should be subject to recall and paid an average members' wage.

### Two candidates with left support

These elections could have galvanised activists and reps to organise on a shared platform for a fighting, democratic union, laying the groundwork to fight as part of a new, democratic left. It would have been better if there was one left candidate.

Unfortunately, there are two general secretary candidates standing – Saira Weiner and Vicky Blake – who have a base among left reps and activists.

Standing as the 'UCU Left' candidate, Saira offers a stronger

## Sheila Caffrey for NEU vice-president

Ballot papers will be sent out for the National Education Union (NEU) vice-president elections on 1 February. Socialist Party member Sheila Caffrey, currently elected to the National Executive, is standing. She is the only candidate who has consistently campaigned for national action for all members, including post-16, support and supply staff, alongside teachers. She pledges to give a fighting lead on funding, pay and workload, while building the union from below.

If you would like to find out more or get involved, come to Sheila's Zoom campaign meeting on 21 January, contact her at sheila\_caffrey@hotmail.co.uk, or find her on Facebook: Sheila Caffrey for NEU Vice-President.

### 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!

## Drax caterers strike again

IAIN DALTON  
LEEDS AND WEST YORKSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY

Mouldy coffee machines, lumpy milk and out-of-date food were among the things that catering workers at Drax power station found when they returned to work after their fortnight of strike action in December.

Bosses at contractor Baxter Storey, which runs Drax's catering services, claimed that services would run as normal during the strike. But like employers the world over, they have found that it is workers who keep things running.

Since then, Unite members have taken a further week of strike action in January, with another fortnight commencing on 22 January.

From refusing to recognise the

union, Baxter Storey have now committed to voluntary recognition and a one-off payment of £380. This has been rejected by union members as inadequate.

Baxter Storey pay workers the Living Wage Foundation 'living wage', but only six months after the yearly increase has been introduced. Workers are demanding they get the uplift straight away.

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

Socialist Party member Duncan Moore is standing on this programme for a national Further Education seat on the NEC. The ballot runs from 25 January to 1 March. See the next issue of the Socialist for more on Duncan's campaign.



# POST OFFICE SCANDAL EXPOSES ROTTEN RIGGED SYSTEM

The Post Office Horizon scandal has burst into the spotlight, propelled by the four-part ITV drama 'Mr Bates vs the Post Office'. The series resonates because it chimes with the widespread sense that the system is rigged, and that there is one rule for them and another for us.

It follows the Covid Partygate, PPE contracts, MPs' expenses and numerous other scandals, and is against the background of an ongoing cost-of-living crisis. It has provoked huge anger. In one way or another, almost all levels of government, and all capitalist establishment parties are embroiled.

"Of course we respond to public pressure", Kevin Hollinrake, the Tory minister responsible for the Post Office, was forced to concede, after it was announced that all criminal convictions against subposties would be expunged – an unprecedented step.

"One would start getting anxious if it became a habit", said former Tory attorney-general Dominic Grieve. Anxious no doubt because of the festering mountain of injustices – legal yes, but social and economic too – faced by working-class people.

If the allegedly mighty 'weight of the law' can be so rapidly overturned by parliament, what excuse is there, for example, for Keir Starmer not to pledge that in office his government would reverse and refund any legal measures or fines made against trade unions and their members under the Tories' new anti-union minimum service levels act?

Imagine what other 'unprecedented' steps could be taken if mass 'public pressure' had an organised expression.

Below we print a review, written by **Bill Mullins**, of 'The Great Post Office Scandal', first published in our sister publication Socialism Today in March 2022.

Just before the start of the new millennium the Post Office, or to give it its full title, Post Office Limited (POL), introduced a new computer system for all its sub-post offices throughout the country. The system, known as the Horizon system, linked up 40,000 terminals at 18,000 sub-post offices with head office in London and the IT company Fujitsu in Bracknell.

As the book makes clear, despite all the lies, arrogance and bluster of the Post Office and Fujitsu bosses, the system was fatally flawed. As the author Nick Willis spells out in great detail, this led to a human tragedy of massive proportions for hundreds (if not thousands, as evidence continues to come out) of subpostmasters.

Hundreds of court prosecutions took place involving the same postmasters, dozens of whom went to jail. Many lost their homes as they were effectively bankrupted; nearly all lost thousands of pounds and were left in debt. A number of suicides took place as well, as many of the subpostmasters (including some directly employed members of staff in Crown Post Offices) ended up with major mental health problems. There were even some whose wellbeing was so badly affected by what happened to them that they died of their ill-health before the whole scandal was exposed in the courts, in parliament, and in the media.

On top of all this, the Post Office has already spent over £100 million in legal fees as it attempted to justify what it did during its cover up of the

scandal. Nick estimates that the final cost will be something like £500 million after the hundreds of subpostmasters take the company to court for the damages it has caused them.

That means that because POL is still a government-owned company (unlike Royal Mail which was privatised some time ago) the taxpayers will pick up the final bill. And yet not a single boss either from the Post Office or Fujitsu lost their job, never mind being taken to court for their criminal behaviour during the cover-up.

Probably the one figure that is most culpable is Paula Vennells, the chief executive officer (CEO) of Post Office Ltd, who was guilty by her absolute backing of her underlings when they persecuted and wrecked the lives of the subpostmasters who were completely innocent of any wrong doing.

## Subpostmaster federation

The author goes into chapter and verse of who the guilty parties were (and are to this day) from the so-called Post Office investigators (who acted like a Stasi and bullied and blackmailed the subbies into sometimes false confessions), to the so-called union of subpostmasters, the National Federation of SubPostmasters (NFSP), who put to shame the very notion of what a trade union should be all about. And then there are the government ministers responsible for the Post Office – there were ten in ten years, from Lib Dems, the Tory Party, and New Labour – who consistently backed up the Post Office throughout most of the period the scandal was happening.



IMAGES: RODHULLANDEM/CC AND THE WUB/CC

The author, who was a local BBC journalist, did not set out to expose the POL shenanigans, and only stumbled upon the story through a conversation with a taxi driver whose wife was one of those imprisoned. Indeed, the individual subpostmasters themselves, when their accounts were audited and a shortfall in money was supposed to have been uncovered, were always told that they were the only ones it was happening to. After all it couldn't have been the Horizon computers that were responsible. It

was declared for years that the system was 'robust' and that any losses were down to their own dishonesty or incompetence.

Many examples are given of individual subpostmasters who found that their Horizon-linked terminal was showing up losses of sometimes tens of thousands of pounds. What was the subbie to do? Some of them tried to ring the Post Office helpline and were told 'not to worry about it, it will fix itself', only to be accused later of fraud or theft. Many of them tried to

make up the book losses out of their own money by various ways. But they were never able to and ended up being prosecuted by the internal investigation unit of POL.

The Post Office was one of the only institutions that could take out prosecutions against its own employees or agents, in the case of the subbies. Most employers going down that road have to involve the police and the Crown Prosecution Service.

Between 2000 and 2005 the Post Office took out over 240 criminal

prosecutions against the subpostmasters and a few Crown Office directly employed counter staff, compared to 67 in the previous years before the installation of Horizon. Later on in the book the author quotes the Post Office as saying in court that another 2,400 cases were pending.

Horizon was one of the first private finance initiatives (PFIs) proposed by the Tory government of John Major in the 1990s. International Computers Limited (ICL), which later became part of Fujitsu, won the contract (out

of eight companies bidding), because it made the cheapest offer.

With 40,000 terminals, in what was then 20,000 local sub-post offices involving 67,000 people (subbies and counter staff), the system was the biggest and most complex non-military computer network in Europe.

Originally the Department of Social Security's Benefit Agency was going to be part of it, given the huge number of pensions and other benefits that are paid out every week in your local sub-post office. Luckily enough the DSS (which was merged into the Department for Work and Pensions in 2001) pulled out, otherwise who knows what would have happened to the pensions of millions of people.

The author pays special attention to the response of the subbie's so-called union, the NFSP, when individual postmasters raised their concerns. In a word, the NFSP was not interested and, further, they gave full public support to the Horizon system from the get go, calling it 'robust' and the best thing that ever happened to the Post Office.

Only later in the courts was it brought out that the NFSP was wholly financed by the Post Office. Written into its financial arrangements with POL was the understanding that the NFSP would always support the Post Office whatever it did. The extent of this cosy arrangement was illustrated when it was revealed that the general secretary of the NFSP when Horizon was first installed was the father of the Post Office's company secretary, who was on the Post Office board of directors.

When the only NFSP executive member to take the scandal seriously raised the issue on the executive he got no support whatsoever from the rest of the committee. Indeed, in the long-drawn-out court proceedings (the book goes into great detail about the various trials and court hearings that took place) the more recent general secretary of the NFSP, George Thompson, was seen as the best defender of the Post Office and its Horizon system and was much quoted by the POL bosses.

The Communications Workers Union (CWU), the main union in the Post Office and Royal Mail, has now launched a campaign to recruit subpostmasters. The lead officer for this is the ex-NFSP executive member Mark Baker.

Nick Wallis explains a little about the outlook of subpostmasters early on in his book, which he characterises correctly as having a "small businessman mentality". You get throughout it the heartrending personal stories of subbies caught up in a deeply flawed system, with most of them (some of whom employed their own counter staff) unable to believe how they were being treated by the Post Office.

They had considered themselves as partners with POL in trying to develop a successful business. Many of them were from the older generation who, after a lifetime of other work and employers, saw that being

a subpostmaster gave them a certain status in their local communities. But with the scandal you could say that the veil has dropped from their eyes.

Many parts of the book are necessarily devoted to explaining some of the technical reasons for what was wrong with the Horizon system and how both the Post Office and Fujitsu were complicit in the cover-up, attempting to hide the problem even if it meant many people suffered as a result.

At one stage, the author recounts how an executive member of the NFSP went on an official visit to the HQ of Fujitsu in Bracknell and was astonished to accidentally witness a demonstration of how the company, from a basement in the building, could alter the accounts remotely of local subpostmasters, without the knowledge of the subbies. It was only in 2019 that the Post Office was forced in court to admit that this was happening and had taken place regularly over the previous decades. A whistle blower who had worked at Fujitsu, Richard Roll, went on a BBC Panorama programme in 2015 after he had left the company and explained this was happening.

## Paula Vennells

Special outrage is reserved for Paula Vennells, the CEO of the Post Office from 2011, who was fully complicit in the cover-up. What really grates about her role is that when she took over as CEO she declared that it was her 'Christian values' that drove her every day in her actions as the Post Office boss.

'The Reverend Vennells' was a non-stipendiary vicar of the Church of England. She was given a mission not to practice 'Christian values' by the then prime minister David Cameron but to make the Post Office 'operationally profitable'. One of the ways she did this, according to the author, was to "cancel the payment of subpostmasters' salaries". This immediately impoverished thousands of them so that they had to rely more and more on the retail side of the business.

Such was the stink created by the scandal that Vennells left her Post Office job in 2019 but was then awarded a CBE in the same year [which she has since handed back] and given a number of lucrative seats on various company boards, as well being the chair of a large NHS trust. Many of the subbies and some MPs were outraged to find this out and forced her removal from these posts. Nick Wallis describes how he unsuccessfully attempted to get interviews with her, at one time turning up on the doorstep of her Oxford mansion.

The book's retelling of the court trials and hearings are some of the best I have ever read and the author should be especially congratulated for them. The book ends with a number of subpostmasters' criminal convictions being overturned on appeal and them being declared innocent.

● *The Great Post Office Scandal*, published by Bath Publishing Ltd, 2021, £25



# Nottingham council cuts Fighting section 114

A UNISON MEMBER

The financial crisis at Nottingham City Council and the section 114 notice, issued in November 2023, continues.

This means all new spending must be signed off by the Chief Finance Officer. Managers spend huge amounts of time filling in paperwork for often very small amounts of money, meaning they are taken away from their 'day job'.

As well as this year's financial crisis, the council faces an estimated shortfall of £50 million in the year 2024-25.

Current proposals to achieve these cuts are horrendous, involving attacks on critical frontline services and 554 full-time-equivalent (FTE) posts at risk over four years. The three council adult residential homes are threatened, as is the much-loved Jackdawe homecare service for adults with complex and challenging behaviours.

The library service faces 31 FTE jobs being cut, although the council is likely to think twice about further library closures after a recent magnificent campaign saved three libraries. The welfare rights service is under threat, as is the remaining young people's centre, and an adventure playground, with many other services at risk.

In response to the threat of government commissioners coming in, the Labour council has essentially told the government there is no need, as they can make the cuts themselves!

Disgracefully, the council has only allowed four weeks for the public consultation on these cuts, and that included the Christmas break. Contrary to previous years, it organised only four public consultation meetings, only one of which was in-person. The union Unison has challenged this.

## Unison

Nottingham City Unison branch is organising meetings with members, and held a joint protest before Christmas with other council trade unions and the trades council. We have produced model letters to MPs and councillors, and are holding a public meeting jointly with the trades council, Unite and GMB unions, with a German film company attending to film for a documentary on "Broke Councils".

With over one million jobs gone in local government in the last ten years and 20% of councils staring into a financial abyss, the potential is there for Unison, the biggest union in local government, to organise a national fightback.

Nottingham City Council has lost an average of £97 million each year for the last ten years in government spending. Unison's national local government committee needs to organise a national meeting of all affected branches to mount a campaign and coordinate branches to fight against the slaughter of jobs and services.

In Nottingham, usable finance reserves have been utilised to reduce but not prevent previous cuts in services - despite councillors previously telling us they couldn't use them. However, the council never refused to make cuts and use the time they could have gained from using reserves and other legal routes to balance their budget to build a mass campaign to fight for the money needed.

In Nottingham, City Council spending and governance has also been overseen by an Improvement and Assurance Board led by Sir Tony Redmond since early 2021. There is only one councillor on it.

## Labour

No Labour councillor has yet spoken out publicly against the proposed cuts, whether or not they have made some words of opposition in the Labour group. However, it is not too late for a group of councillors to do so, and it is possible for the council to set a legal 'balanced' budget that does not involve cuts.

The council should demand direct support - a bailout - from government, to cover the £50 million gap next year and what remains of the current year's deficit.

There is recent precedent for this sort of government support. In 2018, Northamptonshire County Council received an additional £70 million from government, and in 2022, Surrey County Council was given £100 million in return for a restructuring of its special educational needs provision.

These were both Tory councils but there is nothing to stop a Labour council like Nottingham campaigning for additional financial support.

Given the timidity and compliance of the Labour council so far, such a campaign is unlikely, but a local trade union and community campaign can do so.

## Anger

There is huge anger that can be mobilised within the council workforce and local communities to stop this attack on local government jobs and services.

This anger also needs directing to the Labour leadership, in anticipation of a Starmer-led government, to say that they need to commit to reimbursing councils that have to borrow or use reserves to avoid making cuts, before council services in many areas are reduced to the bare statutory minimum.



Council workers in Unison, here striking against Tower Hamlets council, in 2020 HUGO PIERRE



Part of the protest at the Venny

# “Don't be mean, save our green”

## Stop Southampton Labour council closing Venny playground

SUE ATKINS

SOUTHAMPTON EAST SOCIALIST PARTY

There were around 35 of us, mainly women, chanting “Save our Venny” and “No to council cuts”. In the adventure playground in the inner city Southampton area of Newtown, one child had made her own placard with the message to the council - “Don't be mean, save our green”.

We were there because the Labour council is running a ‘consultation’ to close the Venny, and the footpath leading to it, thereby losing the only public green space and playground in the area.

The reason the council says is due to “anti-social behaviour”. If this is a factor, closure will only push the problem elsewhere.

The council should think of other ways to combat any problems in the area, such as rebuilding youth services, building council homes to house the homeless, expanding services for alcohol and drug misuse. The lack of all this leads inevitably to problems being played out on the streets.

The Venny is a very pleasant green area, with trees and play equipment, which local parents and children make good use of at weekends and school holidays, and evenings in the warmer weather. If closed it will be a great loss to the community.

Next to the Venny there used to be a community building, with a

kitchen and meeting room, which housed various activities and clubs. This was replaced with an attractive purpose built facility that the community was delighted with.

However, this lasted for less than a year. Eventually, it was handed over to ‘Dingley’s Promise’, a charity specialising in pre-school education for children with special educational needs and disabilities (Send), for up to 60 children.

It is great that there is a pre-school for Send children. But it’s shocking that this is run by a charity when it should be part of the state education system.

Also that this should be an extra facility, instead of robbing the local community of its own much-needed and valued building. In itself, our old community building would contribute to reducing anti-social behaviour by playing a positive part in social pride and cohesion.

This is why local people need the Venny to stay in the heart of the community, and not be another casualty of council cuts. And it will be part of Socialist Party member Nadia Ditta’s campaign to be a Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) councillor representing this ward in May.

● See ‘Southampton Bevois – ready to support one of their own as TUSC candidate’ at [socialistparty.org.uk](https://socialistparty.org.uk)

# Enfield unions back workers’ candidates against pro-war politicians

Enfield trades council brings together local representatives of the trade unions in the north London borough. The trades council has written to local councillors and MPs, calling on them to speak out.

It will lobby the next full meeting of the Labour council – Enfield Civic Centre, Wednesday 24th January, 6pm. Come protest with us.

The trades council has produced this statement based on a motion it passed.

Enfield Trades Council will not tolerate any antisemitism or anti-Muslim racism in any of its guises, and expresses solidarity to all emergency and humanitarian workers seeking to alleviate suffering in the conflict, and its deepest sympathy and condolences to all those who have lost loved ones – both Israelis and Palestinians.

We condemn the Israeli state’s criminal collective punishment of the Palestinians in Gaza, including cutting off water, food, power supplies and medicines. We condemn the threat by Israel to millions of Gaza residents told to flee their homes in

the north to the south of the strip, ahead of a brutal land invasion. We condemn the Tory government and Starmer’s New Labour for their backing for the Israeli state’s war on Gaza.

We call for:  
1) Immediate lifting of the blockade on Gaza, and the immediate withdrawal of the Israeli military from the occupied territories.

2) All Labour movement organisations to support the demand for an immediate ceasefire. We agree to organise delegations to meet local MPs and councillors to call on them to speak out on this issue.

## Right to protest

We condemn the Tory government’s attempts to clamp down on the right to protest the Israeli state’s brutal attacks, and to show solidarity with the oppressed Palestinians.

We note that Starmer’s New Labour has written to Labour MPs and councillors saying “they must not, under any circumstance” join Palestinian solidarity protests. We need political representatives who oppose the capitalist elites and stand for the rights of the working class



London boycott bill protest BERTAV KARTAV

## London protests anti-boycott bill

The Tories’ ‘anti-boycott bill’ intends to hinder the right of universities, local authorities and other public bodies from making ethical choices, without the express permission of the government. Why should we no longer be allowed to influence where these public bodies invest the money they get from and our payments and taxes?

The mood from the crowd was dismay with those currently occupying Parliament. One speaker said: “Those people in the Parliament buildings, enjoying our tax money, do not represent us”.

I spoke to one person who said: “I’ve always voted Labour, not anymore. Now I’m looking for someone who will represent me, my views and my needs.”

“I don’t agree with what they’re doing in Palestine. I don’t agree with the wars and aggression.”

“They’re being paid a lot of our money, and they don’t care about what we want.”

“My friend and I will look out for TUSC. Please can you be seen at the next elections.”

“You must stand. These elections will be very different.”



Hundreds of thousands again marched on the latest massive national protest in London NICK CLARE

and oppressed, here in Britain and internationally.

That must include standing in solidarity with people in Gaza today.

We would welcome trade union-backed candidates standing in the general election on that programme, including Jeremy Corbyn who has



Oxford protest

been banned from standing for Labour.

We support mass struggle by the Palestinians for self-determination and their own viable state, which will not be granted by the capitalist elites. Only the struggle for workers’ unity, for full national rights, and for socialism, can remove reactionary elites, and lay the basis for an end to oppression and wars, and see Palestinians and Israelis mutually agree their future relations, free of all coercion, and able to live in peace and prosperity.

## Tory backers

Socialist Party member John Dolan is secretary of Enfield Trades Council. He said: “The horrific, destructive actions of the Israeli government in Gaza – backed by our UK government – will only prolong the conflict for years and decades to come.”

Paul Kershaw proposed the motion that was passed by Enfield Trades Council. He is a Socialist Party member, and chair of the local trades council.

He said: “Trade unions and workers stand in solidarity with the people of Gaza. All our affiliated unions have called for a ceasefire at national level, and we want to see our political representatives in Enfield join that call.”

“Politicians of the capitalist establishment will not grant self-determination for Palestinians. The massive demonstrations in central London and local Enfield protests show that working-class people and youth have a different view.”

## Oxford – deselect demand

A lobby against local Labour MP Annaliese Dodds was called in response to her abstaining from the Gaza ceasefire vote. People shouted: “Deselect Annaliese Dodds”.

This raises the question, who would replace her? We want a true workers’ candidate, who calls for a socialist alternative, not another MP who still works in the interests of capitalism, and falls in line with Keir Starmer.

The Socialist Party put forward not only the need for deselection, but for standing socialists and trade unionists in elections too, which resonated with workers attending the protest.

ROSIE DOUGLAS-BROWN AND RAE COX

● Read the Socialist Party’s editorial ‘Anger at the elites on the rise’ about the airstrikes on Yemen on page 3. And read about the latest massive protest against the war on Gaza on page 2.





# WHAT WE STAND FOR

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

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

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

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

### WORK, PENSIONS AND BENEFITS

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

### PUBLIC SERVICES

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

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

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

### ENVIRONMENT

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

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

### DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

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

### SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

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

# Readers' opinion Post Office scandal shows the need for workers' control

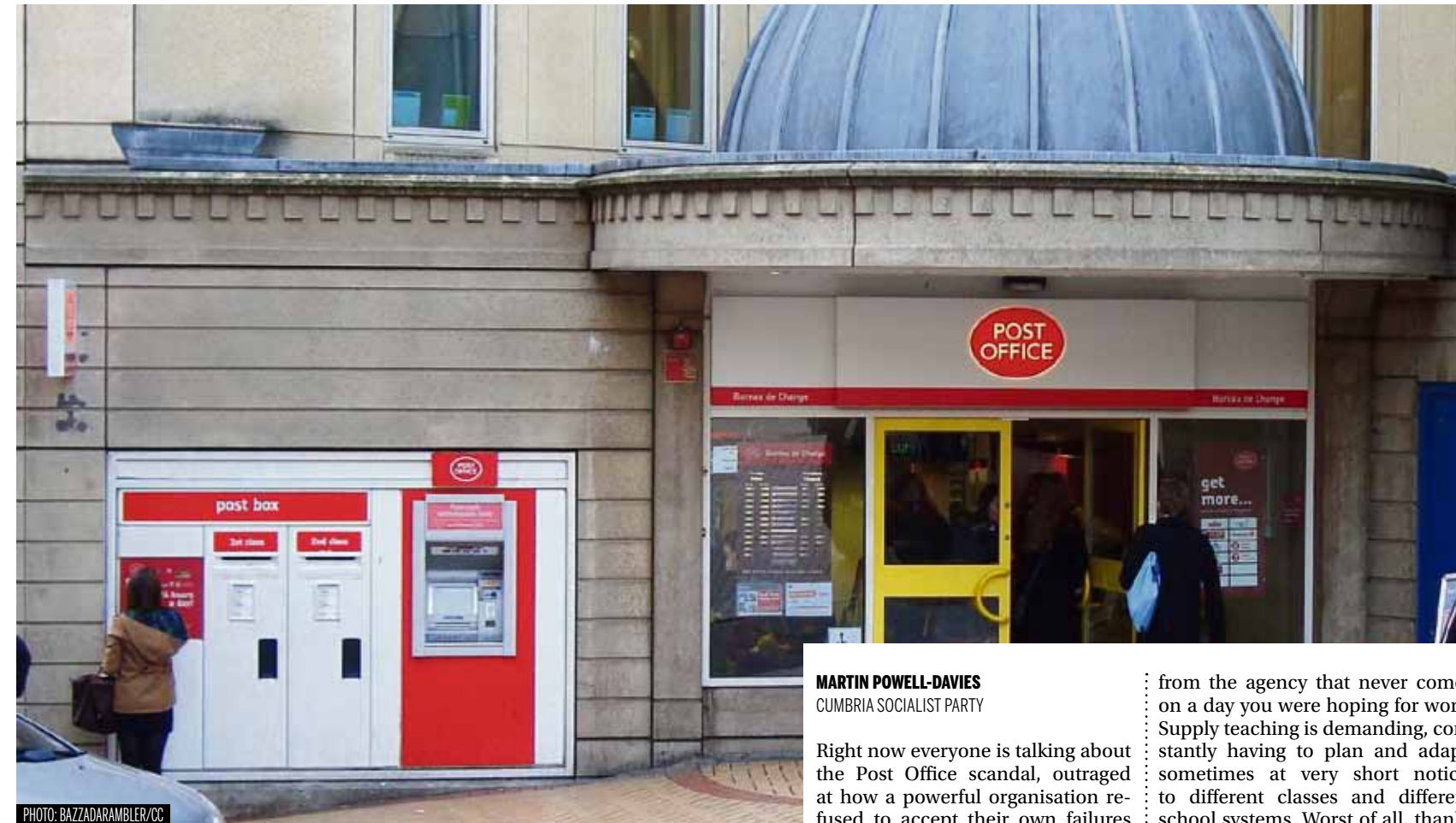


PHOTO: BAZZADARAMBLER/CC

KEVIN PATTISON  
LEEDS SOCIALIST PARTY

Thank you to Gary Clark for his excellent review of Mr Bates vs the Post Office in the Socialist (see 'TV Review: Mr Bates vs The Post Office' at socialistparty.org.uk).

The faulty Horizon system which the Post Office claimed to be totally accurate would have been the first complex IT system in history without some bugs. Any IT engineer knows that all new systems have some errors when first installed. What is needed is trade union oversight to ensure that IT systems are fit for purpose. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need, not to the fat cats.

The drive to automation in an attempt to reduce costs and have a more 'businesslike' philosophy rather than public service has ultimately resulted in a loss to the public purse in legal costs and compensation of £1.4 billion so far, leaving the Post Office effectively bankrupt according to Channel 4 News.

Although the Post Office is nationalised, it is not under democratic workers' control and management, but follows capitalist business methods. The Post Office was unable or unwilling to recognise the faults in the system that it continues to pay Fujitsu an arm and a leg for. In order to protect its 'brand image' it maintained that there were no faults in the system long after the huge numbers of prosecutions compared to

previous years should have made it question its claimed faith in the Horizon system far earlier than it did.

Post Office and Royal Mail staff workers have a proud public service ethos, as do the self-employed postmasters and postmistresses, but they have been treated like criminals by Post Office management. This attitude has also been common in Royal Mail following industrial action in 2022-23 when hundreds of shop stewards were victimised by management.

With proper workers' control, post offices would be free to develop public services. Many post offices have closed especially in rural areas, cutting off a vital source of banking and other services at a time when the banks themselves are also closing branches.

Fujitsu has so far contributed nothing to clean up the mess that they created and are completely unaccountable. Indeed, they continue to be awarded lucrative contracts by other government departments and continue to be paid to run the Horizon system for the Post Office.

**WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?**

• editors@socialistparty.org.uk

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

# After the Post Office scandal - school managers need to stop and think too

MARTIN POWELL-DAVIES  
CUMBRIA SOCIALIST PARTY

Right now everyone is talking about the Post Office scandal, outraged at how a powerful organisation refused to accept their own failures and instead sought to bully critics into silence.

Perhaps the reason why this story has sparked such a widespread public reaction is because so many workers recognise something of that bullying approach in the way that they are treated too. And that includes school staff. Schools may not have pursued teachers into the courts like the Post Office, but every local union caseworker has had to deal with similarly broken colleagues, bullied out of their post under draconian threats of 'capability' procedures. More often than not, they have also had to sign a 'non-disclosure agreement' that stops them from talking out about how they have been treated.

Some school managers need to stop and reflect whether their practice needs to change. Are they just piling the pressure put on them via Ofsted and league tables down onto their staff, pushing too many to breaking point, when, instead, they should be standing up against the impossible demands put onto schools?

The impossible workload, and the hounding of staff by supposed 'support plans' and capability targets, is one (although certainly not the only) reason why some teachers end up working for privatised supply agencies. As someone whose own personal circumstances meant that I earned my living in this way for the last years of my teaching career, I know what a difficult way of earning an income this can be.

Work is uncertain, sometimes leaving you waiting for a phone call

from the agency that never comes on a day you were hoping for work. Supply teaching is demanding, constantly having to plan and adapt, sometimes at very short notice, to different classes and different school systems. Worst of all, thanks to the privatised system of profiteering supply agencies through which most supply teachers are hired, you are working for less - sometimes far less - than the 'rate for the job' that would apply under statutory teachers' pay scales. On top of that, you have no access to the Teachers' Pension Scheme and no income to tide you over the school holidays.

That exploitation continues, despite the introduction of legislation fought for by trade unions that was meant to provide equal treatment. The Agency Workers Regulations (AWR), introduced in 2011, should guarantee that, after a qualifying period of 12 weeks in the same job, agency workers receive the same basic employment and working conditions as colleagues who have been recruited directly. But most agency school staff are still not being paid 'the rate for the job' that applies to directly employed staff under the Schoolteachers Pay and Conditions Document.

It's worth non-agency employees remembering that unions didn't push for AWR just to protect agency staff, but to protect permanent staff as well. After all, if employers can find a way to pay one section of the workforce on lower rates of pay, then, especially when employers are looking to cut costs, they will find a way to get rid of more expensive employees and employ cheaper agency staff instead. So demanding equal treatment for all staff is in everyone's interests, especially when schools are going to face more funding cuts, whoever wins the 2024 general election.

# Labour and Greens punished for cutting Brighton services



Election meeting including speakers David Maples and Sheila Hall BRIGHTON SP

David Maples was the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidate in the South Portsldaye by-election, and is a Brighton Socialist Party member.

Brighton is a great place for a hen party. But away from the centre, it's a difficult place for working-class households. The Labour council is planning to ram through £33 million cuts from April. As a foretaste, it is proposing to close St Peter's and St Bartholomew's schools, and reduce classes in a further nine. This created uproar at the schools.

The joint chair of the Children, Families and Schools Committee - a Labour councillor for 52 years - resigned from the council. Labour triggered the by-election, hoping to get a Starmerite cone elected before the depth of the cuts is revealed. Still, the Labour vote halved compared to the local elections, only eight months previously.

The Green Party has twice run Brighton and Hove Council, and forms the elected opposition. But its vote also fell. With 779 councillors, and running nine local authorities, it could be leading the anti-austerity movement. The Green Party has a very popular MP in Brighton. But, as its Brighton councillors implemented Tory budget cuts, its record has not been forgotten.

TUSC's stand was important. In the face of Labour and Green failure, Tory and Liberal Democrat vote percentages increased. Six candidates, including two right-wing populists, opposed the closure of St Peter's school. But only TUSC set out a strategy. TUSC helped to reduce the right populist vote. Standing for the first time, the

Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) got 3.3%. Only TUSC organised a public meeting, issued press releases, and had a sea of posters.

The meeting was exceptional. TUSC had pushed for hustings at St Peter's school to put Labour on the spot. When the school community couldn't organise this, TUSC organised a public meeting. Two parents, Kirsty Moore and Emily Brewer, gave a devastating critique of the council's consultation, and the ruinous impact closure would have.

There is no guarantee siblings can go to the same school. Special educational needs have been ignored. There is no replacement nursery facility. Tiny children could have to travel two miles to a new school on roads clogged with traffic.

During a cost-of-living crisis, with housing costs shooting up, parents, especially mothers, are faced with having to give up work to look after their children.

The school is right on the borough boundary. Whilst pretending it has considered the needs of Brighton and Hove families, the proposals also wash their hands of West Sussex children too. Many of these are from long-standing Brighton families, forced to move along the coast, because of the lack of affordable social-rented housing.

In a very welcome development, Brighton Trades Union Council sent a speaker, Sheila Hall to our TUSC meeting. Sheila clearly explained how the unions could help the campaign.

Only TUSC used its election leaflets to include a call for a permanent ceasefire in Gaza. When Sheila highlighted this, she provoked spontaneous applause.

At the meeting, I called for class sizes to be reduced to 25 across the city. This would cost £4.5 million.

I invited the Labour council to send Rishi Sunak the bill, and for Keir Starmer to pledge to fund councils adequately. By improving education, Labour could build an enormous campaign to secure this money. But it has refused to.

Parents will lobby future council meetings. We will help them build a campaign with the trade unions. Strike action could halt these proposals. When the Socialist Party was campaigning against on the Saturday after the election, we met the GMB rep at another school who is keen to discuss with us.

Closure of this small school would cost 32 jobs. Across the city, hundreds of jobs are at stake.

Decisions at council meetings will be far from the end of the issue. TUSC will make this a general election issue too.

### Brighton TUSC general election planning meeting

- Wednesday 7 February, 7pm
- South Wing 2, Community Base, 113 Queens Road, BN1 3XG

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# Public meetings with Nigerian socialists speaking Nigeria in crisis: How can the working class and poor win change?

## Hear Democratic Socialist Movement leaders, Hassan Taiwo Soweto and Abbey Trotsky, speak

Coming up to the first anniversary of President's Tinubu's election victory, Nigeria is facing one of the gravest crises in its history as the economy founders and insecurity reigns in many parts of the country.

Once again the country is facing a currency shortage which is drastically affecting people's lives and the economy. ATMs don't work and those buying notes from point-of-sale merchants have to pay a premium to get hard cash. Nigerian students in Britain and elsewhere are also suffering as a result.

But the naira is hardly 'hard currency'; since last year's devaluation it has crashed in value. Currently it is around 1,400 to £1, a mighty crash given that the rate was roughly 550 at the start of last year. One result is a sharp cut in living standards as inflation leaps.

However inflation is not simply the result of the devaluation, it also is the result of Tinubu's attempt to begin his presidency with an assault on living standards.

### Tinubu attacks working class

The first warning of this was Tinubu's impromptu announcement of the end of the fuel 'subsidy' in his inauguration speech. This sudden announcement, without any hint of any measures to soften the blow, meant an immediate cut in living standards. Last November food inflation was running at over 24% but in some states, like Kogi, Kwara, and Rivers, it was over 40%.

Overall the World Bank estimated in December that the number

of Nigerians living in poverty had risen to 104 million, nearly half the population, as a result of recent developments. However, reflecting the international support that Tinubu has, the World Bank entitled its report 'Turning the Corner', something which many Nigerians would feel meant 'Things Fall Apart', to use the title of the famous novel.

### System in question

The deteriorating economic situation, plus Nigeria's totally inadequate infrastructure, has led to a series of multinationals, like GSK, Unilever and Procter & Gamble, abandoning local production and adopting a policy of selling imported goods.

All these come together to put the entire system into question. There is a growing desire for a change and the absence of signs of fundamental change is one reason for more and more seeking a way to leave the country.

Last year's presidential election summed up the situation. Just 27% of registered voters actually voted and only a minority of these voters backed Tinubu who won just 37.6% of the vote. In terms of numbers, Tinubu's 8,794,726 voters were a small minority of Nigeria's roughly 220 million population at the time of the election.

Now, on top of the disastrous policies Tinubu is already enacting, we see how the new gang in power are moving against their rivals within the ruling elite. The usual charges of 'corruption' are made, many are true but they apply to all the main parties. Already under the current government

there is the murky question of how over 585 million naira of Federal money meant to provide 'palliatives' to people to ease the current crisis was transferred into one individual's bank account.

But the main candidates opposing Tinubu did not have a fundamental alternative. There was much noise about Peter Obi who, after failing to win the People's Democratic Party's nomination, suddenly switched in 2022 to the pro-capitalist Labour Party who rapidly made him their presidential candidate. While Obi gathered enthusiastic support in Abuja and Lagos, his base in other states was more limited and, despite his calls for the rejection of older leaders, his programme was not fundamentally different from most other candidates supporting, for instance, fuel subsidy removal.

### Trade union fightback needed

The new Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) leadership has sometimes reflected this anger in words, their press releases can sound militant. But, so far, this has not been reflected in determined action. We have still seen general strikes called without serious preparation, and are called off when nothing concrete has been decided beyond more talks. The result is that there is some scepticism whether the new NLC leaders are really different from the last lot.

Right now a key issue is what will be the new the minimum wage that was last set at 30,000 naira a month in 2019. Legally it is only increased every five years, a ridiculous situation given inflation. Such is the desperation now that the Federal Government and some States are giving extra wages as a temporary 'palliative'. The popular pressure meant that Tinubu was forced to promise a "national living wage" in his New Year address, but already NECA, the employers body, are saying that this is not possible "at this moment".

The trade unions are calling for a 200,000 naira monthly minimum, but have not begun any serious mobilisation on this demand. This is necessary both to win a significant increase but also to ensure its implementation. The 2019 minimum was not implemented throughout the public sector let alone in the massive private sector.

To win such a demand a serious struggle would be required, a struggle which also included demands for the wage to increase in line with inflation, not simply fixed for years, and opposition to any retrenchment if bosses say they have to cut the workforce in order to pay the new minimum.

Youth have also been included

CWI members in Nigeria



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

socialistworld.net

in the new government's neo-liberal policies. The new student loan scheme is a vicious con aimed at further commercialisation of education. As the Education Rights Campaign (ERC) points out, it is only available to students whose parents' income totals N500,000 or less annually, only cover tuition fees not the students' other costs of accommodation, living expenses etc. and repayment has to start within two years of graduation.

Given the mass unemployment that Nigerian youth face, this is almost impossible to achieve yet non-payment will be a criminal offence and students will be "liable on conviction to a fine of N500,000 or imprisonment for a term of two years or both". As the ERC explains, this could easily become another source of oppression and extortion by the police and security services.

The ERC is one of the campaigns

led by the Democratic Socialist Movement (DSM) which strives both to win immediate improvements and oppose repression while arguing that Nigeria, like other countries, needs to break with capitalism in order to allow the use of the country's resources to be democratically planned in the interests of the mass of the working people and poor. This could only be achieved by the creation of a mass movement that would be the basis for a government representing, and under the control of, working people that would carry out such socialist policies.

The DSM also leads the Campaign for Democratic and Workers' Rights (CDWR) which is involved in workplace struggles and works to build campaigning and democratic trade unions that will take up serious struggle in the interest of all workers as part of building a movement to implement socialist change.

# Biggest ever strike in Northern Ireland set for 18 January

MILITANT LEFT (CWI IRELAND) TRADE UNION ACTIVISTS

Northern Ireland will see its biggest strike wave ever on 18 January, involving over 150,000 workers. Across the public sector, workers are demanding pay rises, as well as ensuring pay parity, where relevant, with public sector workers in Britain. The strike action will hit education, public transport and healthcare among other services. An economist estimates the strike will lead to losses of more than £10 million. Carmel Gates, the general secretary of NIPSA, the largest trade union in the North, has described the strike day as being in the order of a general strike.

The background to this unprecedented industrial action is the ongoing suspension of the power sharing executive at Stormont, and the refusal of the Tory government to release a financial package to meet the needs of workers in the public sector. The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) pulled out of the Stormont power-sharing executive in February 2022 in a row over post-Brexit trading arrangements. The UK government's Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Chris Heaton-Harris MP, claims that after months

of negotiations many of the requirements of the DUP have been met and a £3.3 billion package is on the table. But there is no sign yet of a return of the executive.

It is reported that the DUP leader, Sir Jeffrey Donaldson, wants to return to Stormont but more hardline members of the DUP are demanding that they hold out. Opinion polls show that DUP voters back a hard stance, as they fear that the 'Irish Sea border' arrangements undermine Northern Ireland's place in the UK. Some in the DUP believe that if they wait until a Keir Starmer Labour government comes to power later this year, which seeks to have closer relations with the EU, this could remove some of the checks on goods entering Northern Ireland from Britain, which is a major frustration for many unionists.

Heaton-Harris faces a legal deadline to call, or again delay, new assembly elections if the executive has not been restored by 18 January. The assembly has been on ice for more than 40% of the time since power-sharing was established under the 1998 Good Friday Agreement that saw the end of three decades of armed conflict. As the CWI pointed out at the time, power-sharing based

on sectarian blocks would always mean instability and that the executive would be prone to collapse.

Heaton-Harris has said that without an executive up and running, the £3.3 billion package, including nearly £600 million for public sector pay rises, will be unavailable. However this claim is largely interpreted in the North as a stick to use against the DUP to try to force them back into the assembly.

### Finances in severe crisis

Northern Ireland's public finances are in severe crisis. Senior civil servants in Belfast who are running Northern Ireland in the absence of the Stormont executive have slashed services severely. The North has the worst hospital waiting lists in the UK. Little wonder that so far a dozen unions have called for mass strike action on 18 January. "We are preparing a general strike for 18 January to force his [Heaton-Harris's] hand, if he hasn't delivered by then", said Carmel Gates.

So far, the Tory government has ruled out giving funds for public-sector workers unless Stormont is back in operation. This is commonly regarded as a crude sanction being used by the Westminster Tory government against the DUP. Workers understandably feel that they are being used as a political football and are having to pay for the ongoing political and financial crisis. Such is the widespread frustration and anger among public sector workers, whose wages have fallen by thousands of pounds behind those of their counterparts in Britain, that not just the larger unions, like NIPSA, Unite, Unison and the GMB but other smaller unions, including the Royal College of Nursing, the Society of Radiographers, National Association of Head Teachers, Chartered Society of Physiotherapists, and British Dietetic Association are taking action.

Supporters of Militant Left (the CWI in Ireland) are playing a key role in some of the trade unions and local trades union councils in preparation for the historic strike action. Several mass workers' rallies will take place on 18 January, including in Belfast, Derry, Omagh, Enniskillen, Cookstown and Magherafelt.

This is an important opportunity to develop the workers' campaign for decent wages. It must not end on the 18 January but rather this massive display of workers' power, which will largely shut down the North, should be a launching pad for further industrial and other action to force the Tories to pay up. For Militant Left, the 18 January also shows the potential political power of the working class united. From this mass action, a discussion and debate should be launched within the workers' movement about the need for independent political representation and opposition to the sectarian based political parties and the Tory party of big business.

Workers are strongest when fighting with both hands - the industrial and the political. The 18 January will show that the working class is the single most powerful force in society. Important initiatives towards building a political alternative for the working class, as steps towards building a broad mass party of the working class, with a bold socialist programme that can cut across the sectarian divide, can arise from this historic day of action.



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# the Socialist

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# FIGHT BACK AGAINST ANTI-UNION LAWS

## Come to TUC demo Cheltenham 27 January



National Shop Stewards Network online public meeting against Tory anti-union laws  
Tuesday 30 January 6:30pm  
Zoom meeting ID 850 1058 8852  
[shopstewards.net](http://shopstewards.net)

Lobby of TUC conference 2023 LOUIE FULTON

**JAMES COLLETT**  
GLOUCESTERSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY

**T**he recognition by the bosses that the working class is back is expressed in the Tories' new Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act, a vicious piece of legislation which attempts to restrict the right to strike of millions of workers in health, education, fire, transport, border security and nuclear decommissioning. It gives employers the ability to issue 'work notices', effectively ordering trade unions to keep services running by selecting their own members to cross picket lines.

Come to Cheltenham on 27 January and join the national march and rally, organised by PCS South West and supported by the Trades Union Congress (TUC), to make it clear that we will not allow this legislation to be used against unions fighting back.

### Fight for right to strike

Throughout its history, the working class has secured the right to strike only by fighting for it and defying the bosses' laws. The 1971 Industrial Relations Act was effectively defeated in 1972, and later repealed, because workers took strike action in defence of those victimised by the legislation, making the laws unworkable and posing the threat of a general strike.

The demo on 27 January is to mark 40 years since Thatcher's government banned unions at Cheltenham's GCHQ, a ban which was also overturned by solidarity action from the workers' movement.

The 2016 (anti-) Trade Union Act, on the other hand, placing undemocratic restrictions on the right to strike, was allowed to pass with barely a finger lifted by the TUC to oppose it. The lesson is clear.

We've witnessed the biggest strike wave in decades and millions of workers have experienced their enormous collective power. In reality, aspects of the 2016 legislation have already been overturned by workers' action: the stipulation that no more than six pickets are allowed on one picket line has been annulled in practice during the strike wave, which saw picket lines of hundreds of workers.

So let's show the Tories, and the TUC, that we are ready to fight - we should show our strength with a national demonstration in a major city. We will hold the TUC to its commitment to non-compliance with the Act, to organise solidarity action across the union movement in the event of a work notice being deployed. And let's also make it clear to Keir Starmer that he must keep his promise to repeal anti-union laws, and be warned: the working class is back and it's here to stay.