

TORIES OUT STRIKE THREAT BEATS BACK ANTI-UNION LAWS



DAN SMART
SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE UNISON BRANCH
SECRETARY (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

Crumbling public services and over a decade of decimated wages are just part of the Tories' disgraceful legacy.

For much of the last two years, workers have been taking to picket

lines and striking back – against the cost-of-living crisis and to defend our services from attack. The Tories are hated, face electoral disaster and are lashing out with increasingly cruel and draconian methods.

The new Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act (MSL) is an authoritarian attempt to restrict the right of over five million workers to go on strike.

This is a class war being waged on workers. And the first shots were fired when government-run train operator LNER threatened to impose a 40% minimum level of service on striking train drivers. They were

quickly forced to U-turn, however, when the Aslef union threatened an extra five days of strike action!

This shows how the Tories can be beaten back, and how united trade union action could smash the anti-union laws. The Trades Union Congress (TUC) has agreed that unions will refuse to tell their members to cross picket lines, and to come to the support of any worker or union punished using the laws.

The national TUC demo on Saturday 27 January in Cheltenham is also a step in the right direction. Trade union leaders must not simply wait

for a Labour government to repeal the MSL laws.

While Keir Starmer has said he would do so, he has broken almost every promise made prior to being elected Labour leader and cannot be trusted. Demands must be put on him to immediately repeal all anti-union laws, at the same time as preparing trade union action to defy them where necessary.

Workers should be confident of the power we have when we get organised and fight back together. It's clear that our Tory enemies are weak and divided – shown by the

splits over the Rwanda Bill. They are arguing over how best to scapegoat those most in need, while thousands queue for food banks and can't afford to heat their homes.

Together we can smash these anti-union laws, and with it bring down the despised Tories and the bosses' system of greed and profit whose interests they represent.

- **National Shop Stewards Network online public meeting against Tory anti-union laws**
- **Tuesday 30 January 6:30pm**
- **Zoom meeting ID 850 1058 8852**

the Socialist

formerly Militant

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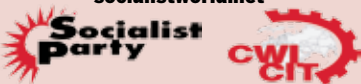
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"The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it."
Karl Marx

Tata Steel: Nationalisation not devastation



Steel workers protest outside Parliament PHOTO OSCAR PARRY

ALEC THRAVES
SWANSEA AND WEST WALES SOCIALIST PARTY AND
SWANSEA TRADES COUNCIL

Our Socialist Party slogan of "no trust in Tata" has been tragically confirmed by the announcement that the two blast furnaces at Port Talbot steelworks will be shut down, with almost 3,000 steelworkers losing their jobs over the next several months.

Tata's announcement is a declaration of class war, as they attempt to defend their shareholders' multi-million pound profits, by destroying the lives of thousands of families of workers at the plant as well as thousands more across the area who are reliant on the steelworks.

Unite the Union has exposed that Tata Steel Limited, the direct parent company of Tata Steel UK Limited has reserves of £1.6 billion and has paid out dividends of £1.4 billion to shareholders between 2019 and 2023!

Steel unions must demand that the Welsh Labour government, and a future Starmer Labour government, must now act upon the widely supported demand of 'nationalisation not devastation!'

Mass demonstration needed

As a first step in defending jobs, the steel unions, supported by the Wales TUC, should call a mass demonstration in Port Talbot on these demands. This can give confidence to steelworkers that the fight is not over and that militant industrial action is possible and necessary to put pressure on both Tata and the politicians.

Such action must be supported by the whole of the trade union movement, because Tata's brutal proposal will also affect many more thousands of supplementary jobs that rely on the steelworks: small engineering companies, contractors, shops, and hospitality.

It really will devastate Port Talbot and the surrounding areas. Labour politicians including local MP

Stephen Kinnock has reportedly said: "Steel is critical for our national security, good local jobs and for the transition for a greener economy - and we need our steel to be made in the UK."

If steel is so critical for the UK economy then the future Labour government should, upon coming to power this year, immediately nationalise the steel industry under democratic workers' control and management, with no compensation for Tata's billionaire executives.

Public ownership

This straightforward and clear demand to bring Tata into public ownership must be fought for now!

Enough time has already been wasted sowing illusions that Tata or any other private corporations could be convinced to put the investment needed into green steel production which would also retain primary steel making through carbon capture or hydron processes.

In an ironic twist of events, the

right-wing Italian government led by Giorgia Meloni, has started formal proceedings to put Europe's largest steelworks under special administration (nationalisation) after failing to agree with AcelorMittal over the planned closure of the steelworks and the loss of 10,000 jobs.

The Socialist Party has consistently supported the struggle in Port Talbot to save jobs and transition to green steel production. Tata and big business corporations' only concerns are maximising profits with no regards to the consequences and the livelihoods of the local populations.

To save steel, the only alternative is bringing the industry back into public ownership - do it now!

Nationalisation not devastation!

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



'Fear and anger' in Port Talbot

JOHN MORRISSEY
SWANSEA AND WEST WALES SOCIALIST PARTY

While manning the Socialist Party campaign stall in Port Talbot on Saturday 20 January, it was pretty obvious from the community the amount of fear and anger generated by Tata's decision.

Many of the people we spoke to feared the redundancies would greatly affect small businesses that support the steelworks, and local community shops, cafes, and bars. One person said: "Port Talbot is in economic decline and is heading to be a ghost town, like many others in Wales, with heavy industry disappearing".

The anger certainly came in the form of them wanting to fight back

against these cuts, many calling on the unions to organise a mass demonstration. People of Port Talbot and surrounding areas want to vent their feelings and call for action to prevent closure.

Many of the people we spoke to have a long and varied history within the Port Talbot plant, some worked there while it was British Steel and called for renationalisation.

The fear and anger is not going away. Virtually all the people we spoke to thanked the Socialist Party for our intervention in Port Talbot's struggle.

Get all the latest union news
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Port Talbot strip mill PHOTO: SIONK/CC

Tory anti-union laws

ORGANISE TO PREPARE FOR MINIMUM SERVICE LEVELS DEFIANCE



WHAT WE THINK

In response to the Tories' move to bring in further anti-union legislation attacking the right to strike, thousands will march through Cheltenham on 27 January, organised by the Trades Union Congress (TUC).

The Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act 2023 (MSL) stands on four decades of Tory anti-union laws. Arguably this is the most sinister attack yet, trying to force unions to organise their own strike-breaking operations.

But this isn't the act of a powerful government. Instead, the Tories are split asunder and reeling from crisis to crisis, with realistically just months left in office.

Aslef beats Tories back

This weakness has been revealed utterly by the retreat forced upon the state-owned rail company LNER by train drivers' union Aslef. In response to a week of national rolling industrial action across the train operating companies in the long-standing dispute, no doubt under the influence of Sunak's government, LNER had threatened to issue an MSL 'work notice' to Aslef, the first time it would have been used. But after the union put on five further strike days, the company backed off. This defeat inflicted on LNER, and behind it the Tories, points the way to how the unions can defy this latest Tory anti-union legislation.

Rishi Sunak came in to Downing Street in the midst of the strike wave, just as it was spreading to the public sector. His first instinct was to dismiss the action, refusing to negotiate with unions on pay. But he was forced back to the table by mass action. Although for many workers in the public sector the improved pay deals fell short of what was needed, the main lesson for most was that action works!

Now, Sunak has built on Boris Johnson's attacks on the right to strike, first tabled in the Queen's Speech after his general election victory in December 2019. Initially aimed at the rail and transport unions, it was left on the shelf as the pandemic struck and Johnson's chaotic government slid into crises.

Strategy to beat MSL laws

A Special TUC Congress in December set down the basis of a strategy that, if implemented and built upon



Workers at the National Shop Stewards Network lobby of the TUC in September 2023. LOUIE FULTON

with concrete steps of defiance, could inflict a fatal defeat on Sunak's government and the MSL laws. The strategy must be rooted in the idea that, if any union or worker is attacked by their employer, the whole union movement must come to their defence with solidarity action.

Keir Starmer has stated that, in power, his New Labour will repeal the MSL laws, as well as Cameron's 2016 Trade Union Act. But it would be a fatal mistake for any union which finds itself in the firing line - which could be the case in the NHS and on the railways - and the rest of the unions as a whole, to believe that they could make a pragmatic tactical swerve to comply with the laws, safe in the knowledge that Starmer is a shoo-in for office and will save the day.

Given Starmer's record on refusing to support strikes, his warnings to unions that in office he will make 'tough choices' about public spending, and now his disgraceful role over Gaza, the unions have to launch a serious fight to defeat the Tories' attack on the right to strike.

The TUC's statement, passed unanimously at the Special Congress, states that unions will "refuse to tell our members to cross a picket line" and if any union faces being sanctioned under the MSL law, "an emergency meeting of the Executive Committee" will be convened "to consider options for providing practical, industrial, financial and/or political backing to that union" and the TUC will call "an urgent demonstration".

It is therefore welcome that the Congress called the national TUC demonstration on Saturday 27 January. The reason given for it being staged in Cheltenham is because it is the 40th anniversary of Thatcher's outlawing of trade unionism at GCHQ, which saw the sacking of a number of union reps (see pages 12-13).

However, this doesn't preclude the TUC calling a national demonstration in London that could mobilise hundreds of thousands of workers, particularly if it links the need to defend the right to strike with the struggle against the attack on living standards. In March

2011, upwards of 750,000 workers marched through London on the TUC demonstration against the Tory-Lib Dem coalition's austerity offensive. That led directly to the two million-strong mass stoppage on 30 November 2011, effectively a public sector general strike.

If continued and escalated, that

struggle could have defeated the government. The strike wave of the last two years has been on a higher and far more sustained level. Last year, there were at least two days where over half a million workers went on strike together. On 18 January this year, there was a Northern Ireland-wide public sector general strike (see page 15), and a week earlier the RMT forced Labour London mayor Sadiq Khan to find an extra £30 million for tube workers, or face strikes on London Underground.

The Tory Evening Standard couldn't contain their venom at this retreat by Khan, warning that it will send a clear message that striking gets result. It lashed out at the mayor, saying that he should have used the MSL legislation against the RMT. But, alongside the economic effects of the tube workers stopping London and Khan's concerns about such a serious industrial dispute in the run-up to the mayoral election, he may well have wanted to avoid being the first employer to use this Tory anti-union legislation.

Unions must now seize upon this to demand that all public sector employers run by Labour and the SNP, Plaid and the Greens publicly commit to refusing to implement the MSL in any dispute. The unions should also demand that Starmer pledges now to not only repeal the MSL laws in office, but to reinstate any worker sacked, as well as reimburse any union fined.

But if Sunak and any employer moves to use the MSL, as Aslef has shown this week, the Tories can be defeated now and, with mass action, can be thrown from office. Such action would also send a clear message of intent to Starmer, that workers and their unions will defend themselves from any pro-business government. It also poses the need for workers to fight for a political voice that stands on our side against the bosses.

The main points of the statement against the MSL that was agreed by the Special TUC Congress in December were:

- We will develop practical solidarity plans for unions actively engaged in strategies of non-compliance
- Support any worker subject to a work notice, including with support from across the trade union movement, if their employer disciplines them in any way
- Ensure that where any affiliate is facing significant risk of sanctions because of this legislation, we convene an emergency meeting of the Executive Committee to consider options for providing practical,

- industrial, financial and/or political backing to that union
- Call on all employers and public bodies with oversight to oppose this counterproductive legislation. Employers and public bodies from across the public sector and the country have already signalled their opposition to the Strikes Act. All employers and public bodies must reject it
- Refuse to tell our members to cross a picket line
- Call an urgent demonstration in the event a work notice is deployed and a union or worker is sanctioned in relation to a work notice

“Sunak, Starmer, shame on you” – still protesting months into horrific war

Camden, London – war not quelled determination

Despite 15 weeks of war and protest, the mood was determined and angry. Hundreds marched on Camden Council on 20 January.

“What do we want? Ceasefire! When do we want it? Now!” was chanted. And the answer to the question ‘How do we get it?’ was contained in the material that the Socialist Party distributed.

We called for united mass workers’ struggle in Palestine, and a new socialist intifada, to overthrow the capitalist regimes responsible for the carnage.

Demonstrators were angry at the complicity of the British government in the war on Gaza, and the bombing of Yemen. A popular chant was “Rishi Sunak shame on you! Keir Starmer shame on you!”

At the closing rally, an elderly Jewish speaker, who was a Holocaust survivor, explained, to great applause, how he resigned from the Labour Party after being threatened with investigation by Starmer’s machine.

But if Labour is no different from the Tories, who should people vote for in the London and local elections in May, and the general election this year? This question was not answered, or even asked, by any of the speakers at the rally.

But Socialist Party placards, with the slogan ‘Build a mass workers’ alternative to Sunak and Starmer’ were eagerly carried by demonstrators, turning the demonstration into a sea of Socialist Party placards.

ANNON COHEN

Enfield, north London – what’s the point of Labour?

It was meant to be a small campaign stall organised by the local Palestine solidarity group. But so many people turned up that it turned into a protest of 100!

Enfield Trades Union Council is organising an event outside the full Labour council meeting on 24 January to protest its silence. Socialist Party member Sarah Sachs-Eldridge got the crowd chanting: “Enfield Council, hear us say: Staying silent, no way!”

Sarah also said: “What is point of the Labour Party? They don’t show up to protest the slaughter in Gaza. The same way they don’t show up to fight poverty, homelessness, or the cost of living.”

“We need a council that will be part of the anti-war movement with us. That will be part of the trade union movement fighting back”

This promoted another protester to get up and speak. “Some say the Labour Party is the lesser evil. But I don’t want to vote for Tory-lite. What about homelessness, children, mothers, and babies that need help?”

IAN PATTISON



Bristol protest NICK CLARE

Southampton – socialist ideas snapped up

It was mainly young Asian and Middle Eastern women leading the chanting. Many shoppers stopped along the route to take pictures, clap, and take part in the chanting. Some even joined the march.

A new Socialist Party member, Francis Coultas, was giving out our leaflets to onlookers. One man called his friend over to read it with him, excitedly pointing to the heading. Another middle-aged couple had one of the leaflets. The man was engrossed in it, and wanted to share its contents with his partner.

At the end, people lined up to give speeches. I went forward to speak, but I was told by an organiser that the protest was not political, and that they were not allowing political speeches! At other protests, including in Southampton, Socialist Party members have had a fantastic response when we’ve got up to speak previously.

I was not deterred. I spoke with people in the crowd, explaining that we wanted people to help us field candidates in opposition to the pro-war and pro-cuts politicians in Labour, the Tory and Lib Dems. I got an overwhelming positive response – 12 signed up within 20 minutes.

One particular speaker encouraged us to write to our MPs and councillors, claiming that local Labour MP Alan Whitehead voted against the Tories’ boycott bill due to the pressure of petitions (see ‘London protests anti-boycott bill’ at socialistparty.org.uk).

However, this speaker ignored the fact that Whitehead did not vote for a ceasefire in Parliament, instead voting for an amendment that only allowed a ‘pause’ in the slaughter. But Whitehead proudly voted against the Labour whip in Parliament when Jeremy Corbyn was leader.

CATHERINE CLARKE

Bristol – trade union solidarity

Before the march began, Sheila Caffrey gave a rousing speech on the importance of trade unions in solidarity activism.

Sheila is a Socialist Party member, part of the National Education Union (NEU) executive, and is standing to be the union’s vice-president (see page 7).

She highlighted the power that industrial action has shown in the past, having limited, or even prevented military aggression. Dockers’ strikes, refusal to manufacture weapons, and even general strikes, for example.

Such action proves that the trade union cause is international. Sheila called for workers to discuss the war on Gaza with their unions and colleagues, to strengthen the movement.

NICK CLARE

Exeter – Labour refusal

Over 1,000 people. As part of the rally, the call was made for local Labour MP Ben Bradshaw to support an immediate ceasefire, which he has refused to do.

Trade union presence was strong, with banners from nearby trades union councils and the National Education Union (NEU) all being proudly displayed. And there was a Socialist Party stall at the subsequent rally.

ASLEF UNION MEMBER



We need a council that will be part of the anti-war movement with us. That will be part of the trade union movement fighting back

The Socialist Party is fighting for:

- End the siege – for the immediate permanent withdrawal of the Israeli military from the occupied territories

- For a mass struggle of the Palestinians, under their own democratic control, to fight for liberation

- For the building of independent workers’ parties in Palestine and Israel and links between them

- For an independent, socialist Palestinian state, alongside a socialist Israel, with guaranteed rights for all minorities, as part of the struggle for a socialist Middle East

- No trust in the capitalist politicians, internationally or in Britain. Fight to build a workers’ party in Britain that fights for socialism and internationalism



Birmingham – ‘Corbyn should launch new party’

“That man should launch a new party!” The rally MC said what everyone was thinking after Jeremy Corbyn spoke in Birmingham. Despite criticising fellow MPs for abstaining on a ceasefire, he stopped short of offering a way forward for people who are disgusted with Labour’s stance.

On the Socialist Party campaign stalls, we were frequently asked: “Who can I vote for in the next general election?” Many said that they may end up voting for the Green Party.

We countered this by asking: “Where is the Green Party today?”, as well as raising how, where the Greens are in power, they have still carried out cuts and attacks on the working class and communities.

We urged the need for a new mass party based on the working class and trade unions, that will stand in solidarity with Palestinians and other oppressed people, to offer a socialist way out of crisis, both in Britain and internationally.

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). We encourage all those who want to be part of this working-class movement to join us now. A workers’ list of MPs, made of trade unionists, campaigners, anti-war demonstrators, and backed by the trade unions, would be a step towards a new party.

WILLIAM DOWNS

West Yorkshire – marching from every direction

In Batley, several hundred assembled to march to Dewsbury. But as they set off and marched, people joined from every direction. At the end rally, it was spilling out of the square outside the town hall.

Our leaflets were rapidly snapped. People were particularly interested in our appeal for people to support, or stand themselves as Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidates in opposition to Keir Starmer’s Labour. Dozens of people have left their details with us over recent demonstrations.

Many of those buying copies of the Socialist paper in Dewsbury were first-time readers, grabbed by the front page headline calling for a new workers’ party. Having seen us on demonstrations previously, they wanted to find out more about what we thought.

And the now weekly march in Leeds swelled to over 1,000. Up from hundreds the week before.

IAN DALTON

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

\$2.7 billion a day

the rate at which the world’s billionaires are increasing their fortunes



\$257 billion

Profits for food and energy companies in 2023, more than double the year previous

\$1.7 trillion a year

could be raised by even just a 5% tax on multi-millionaires and billionaires

Figures from Oxfam ‘Survival of the Richest’ report

Childcare promise meaningless without funding the full costs

LINDSEY BRISTOL SOUTH SOCIALIST PARTY

As part of a blatant attempt at pre-election populism, Tory chancellor Jeremy Hunt pledged in the 2023 budget to extend the amount of childcare working parents can claim free from the government. It will be rolled out over the next year and a half until it will be up to 30 hours per week during term time for children from the age of nine months.

For parents who need the extra income, independence, and everything else gained from work, this sounds welcome. But, under the Tories’ plans, it is unfeasible. For each ‘free’ hour of childcare, the government pays the childcare provider about £4.80 an hour when the actual cost is around £7.50. This shortfall has led to decreases in childcare available because childminders and nurseries can’t afford to cover that gap.

“Between 2018 and 2023, the number of childcare providers fell by 15%” according to the Financial Times.



PAUL MATSSON

The gap between what the government pays and what it costs is being plugged by extra nursery charges which have to be paid by parents. And that is with it being as it is now. Extending free childcare without plugging that gap only means that places will decrease, especially for those who are trying to get the ‘free’ childcare.

If you’ve got a new job or you’re returning back to work it is already intensely difficult to find decent childcare that will fit in with your job. Trying to do that, get childcare lined up in time, then foot charges and everything else will add huge pressure on parents already struggling with the cost of living and excessive housing prices and rents.

The extension of childcare will also only be available to families where both parents are working more than 16 hours. If one parent is out of work due to disability or illness then the family will not be entitled to extra childcare; adding more pressure on struggling parents and holding back the life chances of children to thrive within a childcare setting. And, yet again, single parent families are penalised and hindered from being able to go to work. Trips to the job-centre will also mean work coaches telling parents they now can work because they have free hours, despite the fact parents still won’t access them because of a lack of places.

Years of chronic underinvestment and closures of council-funded childcare providers has meant stress, pressure, and parents – predominantly women – being stuck at home when they want to work but can’t find childcare.

We need fully funded, free, high-quality, flexible and safe childcare for all. What is stopping Labour councils expanding their provision and presenting the Tory government with the bill? If they can’t afford to invest in our children’s future, then we can’t afford them and their rotten system.

WHAT’S YOUR VIEW? editors@socialistparty.org.uk

Birmingham City Council to axe 600 jobs

Build united trade union action – make no cuts

A BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL UNION REP

Birmingham City Council, the largest local authority in Europe, is to send 600 employees to the dole queue. It has issued a Section 114 notice and will cease all non-statutory spending.

This is the same local authority which in 2010 employed over 26,000 people and now employs only 9,500! Wasteful overspending on vanity projects includes a botched new IT system called Oracle at a cost of £100 million and the Commonwealth Games to which Birmingham City Council contributed £184 million, just to name a few. At the same time, just months before the games, the council reported a £25 million black hole in its funding for the event and said that the shortfall would be made up of contingency funds.

Well, it seems that the contingency fund the council had in mind was to kick loyal staff, some of whom have worked for the authority for decades, to the dole queue and forcing them with their begging bowls (with their kids in tow), to the nearest food bank to make ends meet!

‘Consultations’ with employees

and trade unions are taking place at pace to consult with those whose jobs are now at risk to plug the £300 million black hole in the council’s finances.

Trade union action needed

Talks and cooperation between the three main council trade unions (Unite, Unison and GMB) must start in earnest to fight these cuts. Coordinated action needs to move with haste before it is too late. Unions cannot stand by and allow these cuts without a fight.

Since the Tory government came to power, 27% in real-terms cuts in core spending, and a lack of councillors prepared to fight these cuts, has left councils across the country without the resilience they need to meet new challenges. By this time next year, demand pressures will have added £15 billion (almost 29%) to the cost of delivering services since 2021-22.

Since 2018, six councils (Labour and Conservative) have effectively declared themselves bankrupt: Slough, Croydon, Thurrock, Woking, Birmingham and Nottingham, and many other councils across the length and breadth of the country have reported that they may have

to do the same. (see ‘Nottingham council cuts: Fighting section 114’ at socialistparty.org.uk)

What can councils do?

But what are local authorities doing about it? Nothing! Councils need to organise mass campaigns, working with trade unions and community groups rather than fighting them, to put pressure on central government to reverse and demand that that more money be provided to protect the most vulnerable citizens in our society.

Labour councils like Birmingham continue to carry out cuts on behalf of central government. But what is stopping them spending to save services and getting funding reimbursed by an incoming Starmer government. This is what public sector unions must be demanding of the Labour leader, and if not be prepared to take steps to launch a new party that can take on the pro-austerity politicians at the next local and general elections.

- Birmingham GMB is currently balloting for strike action over £760 million of unpaid equal pay claims.

- Birmingham Socialist Party public meeting: Socialist change is possible – but not with Starmer’s Labour! How can we get a voice for the working class Monday 29 January, 7pm, Top floor, The Wellington, 37 Bennetts Hill Birmingham city centre, B2 5SN

No council tax rise!

Birmingham Labour council leader John Cotton has, instead of standing up and fighting the cuts, asked permission from Westminster to raise council tax by 10% every year for the next two years



Rally of the three main council unions lobbying the council against cuts in September 2023 BRIAN SP

PCS elections BLN conference lays basis for a fighting, democratic, socialist-led PCS in 2024

PCS MEMBER

Activists from across the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) met on Saturday 20 January to hold the annual conference of the PCS Broad Left Network (BLN), the socialist group in the union in which the Socialist Party participates.

In 2023, following massive strike mandates and brave action by members, the current leadership of PCS, including the 'Left Unity' grouping, dismantled the union's national strike campaign on pay, pensions, rights and jobs.

From September until December, elections were held for general secretary and assistant general secretary.

Marion Lloyd, Socialist Party member and BLN supporter, stood for general secretary and came within 800 votes of defeating the then president of the union and candidate of the current leading group, Fran Heathcote, winning 48% of the vote.

Marion stood on a joint ticket with John Moloney, a supporter of another left group, the Independent Left (IL), who successfully retained his position of assistant general secretary.

Marion and John stood on a worker's wage, pledging not to take the £70,000+ salary but to return all money above their civil service wages to the union's strike funds. They stood on a programme of rebuilding the



PCS members in BEIS on strike ROB WILLIAMS

national campaign on pay, pensions, rights and jobs, of strengthening support for branches and group-wide campaigns, of making the union more accountable and responsive to members.

BLN Conference 2024 endorsed this programme again, and the need for a continued united front - not just with IL but with others who also want a democratic, fighting union.

Strong left challenge

Marion's general secretary campaign has laid the basis for a serious, principled challenge in the elections for the National Executive Committee (NEC), which start in April.

BLN is working with independent socialists across PCS and with the new 'Alliance for Change' in the Revenue and Customs group, which has been formed by activists leaving Left Unity in droves, to secure the election of a left NEC.

The BLN conference heard from activists about bureaucratic, undemocratic manoeuvres by the current union leadership to undermine the current group structure of the union. This includes dismantling the BEIS group, of which Marion is president, and the Scottish Government group, without any consultation with the elected group leaderships.

The number of PCS reps has fallen in recent years. BLN supporters are determined to replace this

leadership and to re-build the fighting, democratic traditions of PCS.

Fighting policies

In addition to the election programme, BLN supporters debated and voted on motions covering key policies for the union, which they hope to see passed by branch AGMs and by the union's annual conference in May, including on Gaza and the anti-trade union laws (see bln.org.uk for more details).

Members across PCS face falling pay relative to inflation, high pension contributions with low end-of-career benefits, rising workloads and stress levels, and a government hell-bent on getting rid of offices that ensure that people can access local services. On top of this, the Tories have announced 66,000 job cuts. BLN conference agreed to launch campaigns to mobilise members to defeat these attacks. Activists also agreed plans for restoring union democracy, including the need to elect more of the union's paid senior officials.

BLN, which only ran candidates for election for the first time in 2021, has rapidly developed into the linchpin in the fight for democracy in PCS and for a combative strategy. While we will work with all forces who want to achieve this change, we urge all socialists in PCS to consider joining the BLN.

bln.org.uk

Usdaw elections For a fighting strategy on pay, jobs and closures

RYAN ALDRED

PLYMOUTH SOCIALIST PARTY AND BROAD LEFT CANDIDATE FOR THE SOUTH WALES AND WESTERN SEAT ON USDAW'S NEC

Members of retail union Usdaw are voting for a new National Executive Committee (NEC) in a ballot from 22 January - 16 February.

The pandemic made clear that our members are key workers and yet we still don't receive wages which show this. We need a strategy for action to secure the wages we deserve. I have campaigned for this to taken up by the union, including moving a composite proposition for £15 an hour at the 2022 ADM.

With Wilko joining a whole list of retail chains that have collapsed in the recent period, we need a bold strategy to defend high street retail jobs and protect members' terms and conditions, including calling for nationalisation.

It has been hugely emboldening to see millions of trade unionists taking industrial action over the last 18 months, securing better pay in the process. I believe the Usdaw leadership should prepare a campaign of industrial action to deliver what our members desperately need.

With the Tories introducing Minimum Service Level (MSL) legislation, our right to strike has been threatened. Usdaw general secretary Paddy Lillis moved the Trades Union Congress (TUC) General Council statement at December's Special Congress. Now we need to put that into practice, with a strategy of

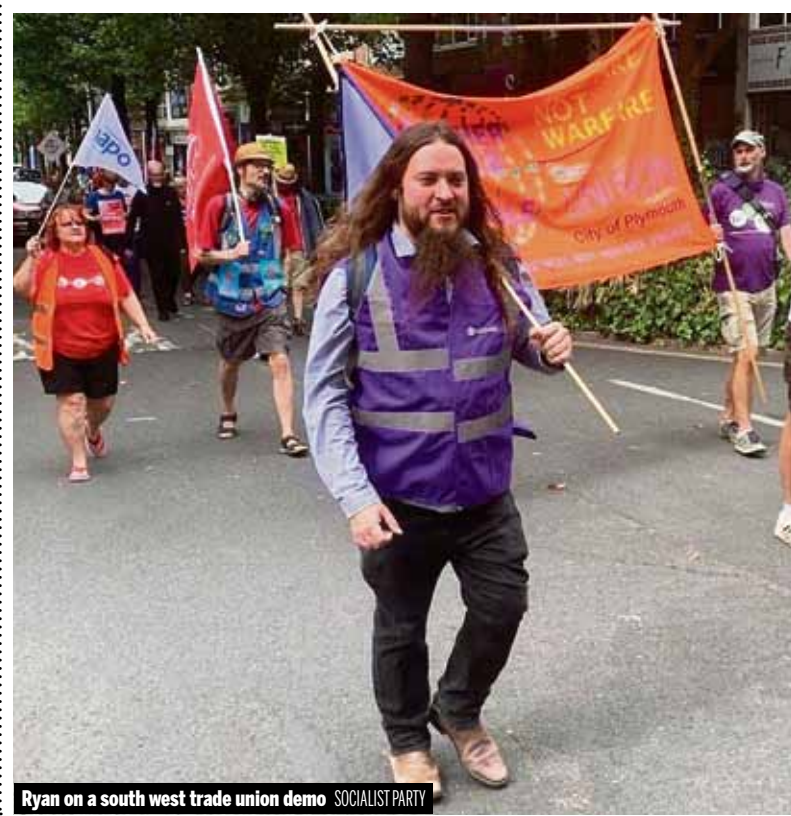
non-compliance and action to make MSLs unworkable.

Usdaw Broad Left also demands

- No retreat on health and safety
- Organise the unorganised workers in the discounters and gig economy
- No to 'partnership approaches' which only benefit the bosses

- A democratic and accountable union
- An anti-austerity political voice for workers

If you would like to help campaign for a socialist, fighting and democratic union, contact Ryan on Facebook: Ryan Aldred for Usdaw NEC or email rjalred@hotmail.com



Ryan on a south west trade union demo SOCIALIST PARTY

Barts strike: 'Bosses better step up!'



Unite members at Barts NHS Trust is taking to the picket lines again, from 29 January to 9 February.

Workers in portering, cleaning, catering and other 'soft services' across five east London hospitals, plus members working for Synergy (a company providing linen services), plan to be out for all 12 days. Other Unite members such as nurses and pathologists will be out for four days.

Unite reps met on 11 January to reaffirm their commitment to fight for members who did not get the lump sum for working through Covid that other health workers received.

Since the ballot in August 2023, more workers have joined the union and more have become reps.

The union is also campaigning for safe staffing levels and the employer has now been forced to discuss this more seriously. Unite reports some

progress on the several other issues that workers have been fighting over - such as bank rates and unsocial hours premiums - but more is needed.

Strength of action

Just before Christmas, Len Hockey, Unite branch secretary, told strikers:

"The Trust is beginning to respond in a more meaningful way because of your strike action. From nothing, 14 reps have come forward in Pathology, such is the strength and confidence gained from your action.

"But the lump sum issue has still to be resolved. We said to the employer: You've got a workforce in the second-biggest trust in England, overwhelmingly female, overwhelmingly migrant workers, who are grossly discriminated against. You better step up."

Sheila Caffrey for NEU vice-president NEU NEC discusses plans for action

For a consistent, bold national lead

JAMES ELLIS

HASTINGS NEU MEMBER

There was a clear message coming out of the Sheila Caffrey for VP campaign meeting on Sunday 21 January: we need a combative socialist voice in the National Education Union (NEU) leadership!

Introducing the meeting, Sheila laid out a programme to win lasting gains on pay, funding and workload through consistent and bold leadership. She has been a member of the union's National Executive (NEC) since 2021 and has used that position to argue for a serious national strategy of strike action to win better pay and conditions for all NEU members.

Sheila explained how proud she was of the action taken by NEU teacher members last year, and how with bold leadership even more could have been won. In the autumn, Sheila had argued at the NEC to use our existing ballot mandate to strike over broken funding promises. She has argued for preparing an escalating programme of action this academic year to win better pay and funding, and to fight on workload.

All members

It has also been important to speak up for support staff and supply staff members, and Sheila has argued that the upcoming ballots should aim to bring out all our members in a joint campaign.

Her commitment to building a lay-led union was emphasised, where members are both listened to and trusted to take the necessary action to defend education. The NEU needs a leadership that has confidence in our members and that can galvanise them around a bold, clear strategy.

Another recurring point in the meeting was the need to stand up for

education workers' terms and conditions regardless of who is in government. Sheila warned against scaling back action in the event of a Labour government coming to power. Quite the opposite in fact, with Starmer warning of 'tough choices' ahead, it is essential that the NEU is willing to maintain any strike action and put pressure on a future Labour government to properly fund education.

There were many supportive contributions from the floor, with Sheila's record of following up words with action being noted by several speakers. Both supply and support staff members thanked Sheila for her unwavering support for the lowest-paid members of the union.

Get involved

If you agree that the NEU needs a bold socialist vice-president, who can lead from the front and build from below, then help us campaign!

- Order leaflets for your school or your district: Sheila_caffrey@hotmail.co.uk
- Give them to members, hand them out in meetings, put them up on noticeboards and in staff rooms. Talk to everyone!
- Share online resources from Sheila's facebook page: Sheila Caffrey for NEU Vice-President

- The ballot runs 1 February - 1 March



Sheila (centre) on the picket line as part of the national action in 2023 SOUTHWEST SOCIALIST PARTY

UCU NEC elections

For a serious, fighting strategy for UCU, vote Duncan Moore for FE



Plymouth FE strike 2023 DUNCAN MOORE

DUNCAN MOORE

PLYMOUTH SOCIALIST PARTY, AND UCU MEMBER IN ADULT AND COMMUNITY EDUCATION

The elections to the National Executive Committee (NEC) of the University and College Union (UCU) come at a critical time for our union and for further education (FE). I'm standing to represent FE members on our NEC.

The NEC elections take place at the same time as the election for general secretary. See 'UCU elections: serious fighting and democratic leadership needed' at socialistparty.org.uk

Last year UCU members faced the worst cost-of-living crisis in living memory, coming on top of ten years of below-inflation pay rises. Our members responded magnificently, smashing the strike ballot thresholds and taking action in greater numbers than ever, often winning more than college employers originally offered.

But FE pay continues to fall in real terms and is now £9,000 a year less on average than in schools. Many staff

are on insecure, casual contracts. They have unmanageable workloads, causing burnout and stress. There are severe staff shortages. Now FE faces fresh cuts from the Tories.

We need to prepare our members to fight back, and we need a NEC which will lead a sustained, serious campaign for above-inflation pay rises, full funding and an end to casualisation and marketisation.

As it stands, college principals in England are free to ignore the pay recommendations of the employers' association. Disaggregated ballots have succeeded in forcing individual college bosses to concede better pay deals. We can build on this in future pay rounds with a dedicated campaign for binding national pay bargaining alongside a pay campaign.

This should be as a step towards reversing privatisation and bringing colleges back to local authorities, under genuine democratic control.

'Tough choices' The Tories have devastated FE and we want them out, but Starmer's

funding, to be able to fight alongside teachers. But the majority of the NEC voted to wait until the other support staff unions announce their plans, to take action in support of those unions' pay claims.

General election

General election Daniel Kebede said that we all want a change in government, but while some unions may choose to wait, we need to take action to show Labour that we want an improvement to pay and conditions in schools. Socialist Party members welcome this approach.

In meetings around the country, Sheila Caffrey has made this point as part of her vice-president election campaign, and electing a vice-president who understands the need to fight for members no matter who is in government will be vital in helping ensure this approach is maintained.

The 'workload taskforce' set up by the government has published an initial set of recommendations - this is a direct result of the pressure of our industrial action. There will be a list of tasks that teachers cannot be asked to do. Performance-related pay will not be compulsory from next year - but we need to campaign against schools still using it.

Feelings on the ground is that members in the NEU are ready to fight again, and that we need to send a strong message, particularly to a potential Starmer-led Labour government.

Get all the latest union news



with the NSSN bulletin shopstewards.net

Labour only promises "tough choices". We should demand that they will fully fund FE, alongside supporting other UCU policies. But we need to be ready to defend our members no matter who is in government. We can put pressure on Labour by declaring that we will support any candidates who support our members and policies.

I am not a supporter of any of the current electoral factions within UCU but will work with all serious activists who want to organise together for a democratic, fighting UCU.

For a serious national campaign and a leadership that is democratically accountable to members, vote Duncan Moore #1. You can use your second and third votes for the sitting left NEC members Naira Kent and Dharminder Singh Chuhan.

- The ballot runs 25 January to 1 March
- To find out more or get involved, contact mooredalex@googlemail.com or find me on Facebook: Elect Duncan Moore UCU National Executive

LENIN: A REVOLUTIONARY LIFE - AND THE RELEVANCE OF HIS IDEAS FOR TODAY

NICK CHAFFEY
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

In January 1917, the world was in flames amid the barbarism of the first capitalist world war. Yet within months, the Russian revolutionary socialist Vladimir Lenin was the elected head of the first democratic workers' government in history.

Today, the capitalists speak in fear of the coming 'pitchforks' – the billions-strong global working class seeking an end to the crisis-ridden profit system.

For those looking for ideas and a way forward, the revolutionary life of Lenin, who died 100 years ago on 21 January, is rich with inspiring lessons for socialist struggle today.

First workers' state

The victory of the working class and poor peasants in the 1917 October Revolution, with the Bolshevik Party led by Lenin and Leon Trotsky, remains the greatest event in human history. It liberated millions from the reactionary, feudal yoke of Tsarist Russia, and brought an end to the slaughter of 3.6 million Russians, out of a total of 20 million dead in World War One.

It was the first workers' government. And in its first years the most democratic form of government in history, formed by the soviets or workers' councils.

The soviets were based on the election of workers' delegates from the factories to local and regional councils, and to an all-Russian council. Delegates were subject to recall and only paid the average wage of the workers they represented. Its executive powers oversaw the abolition of capitalism and the first steps towards the development of a socialist planned economy.

As Lenin foresaw, the Russian revolution was the opening chapter of world revolution that swept across Europe and the world in the following months and years. Lenin died in 1924, aged just 53, but by that time the new revolutionary Communist International, formed in 1919, was to have the support of millions of workers across all continents.

The October victory was based on Lenin's two key foundations: confidence in the working class as the decisive force to overthrow capitalism, and the need to form mass revolutionary parties, rooted in the working class, with a clear programme to achieve workers' power.

Scientific socialism

Victory was not an accident nor was it inevitable. Lenin was politically developed by the conditions that surrounded him – a reactionary feudal Tsarist dictatorship and an emerging working class, forged in the rapid development of industry in Russia at the turn of the 20th century.

Lenin's historic leading role

included forming the first all-Russian workers' party, the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP), through the strikes and workers' struggles of that period.

Lenin's ideas were firmly based on Marxist ideas, the ideas of scientific socialism. His writings explained the class nature of capitalist society from the point of view of the working class; producing workers' newspapers to report on the living struggle of the working class, and also providing a clear programme for workers to fight for the socialist transformation of society; and building a party based on these ideas.

While these ideas ultimately triumphed in October 1917, during the period from 1903 to 1917 Lenin and his co-thinkers were in constant debate over how the revolution would unfold, and which forces would lead the overthrow of Tsarism.

Would it be the liberal capitalists, placing themselves at the head of the workers' struggles, in alliance with the poor peasants; limiting the revolution to carrying through the 'bourgeois-democratic' tasks, ie ending feudalism, an elected national parliament, land reform, etc?

Or, would the workers push aside the capitalist class and lead the peasants in a revolutionary government that would begin the socialist transformation of society?

Lenin, in the numerous debates during the pre-revolution period, attempted to navigate a narrow path between the opportunists, who looked for an easier route to reforming capitalism, and ultra-lefts who turned their back on the patient tasks to win the masses, such as standing socialist candidates in the limited electoral bodies, Dumas, that Tsarism was to concede in the course of the struggle.

The battle for clear ideas led to splits and mergers in the workers' movement. The break between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks in the RSDLP occurred first in outline in 1903, then became formalised in 1912. This split between the 'hard' and 'soft' party members was the result of the differences that emerged in the heat of struggle and revolution – first in the 1905 revolution (the 'dress rehearsal' for 1917 as Lenin described it), and again through the two revolutions of 1917.

While Lenin and the Bolsheviks set a clear course towards the working class, the Mensheviks were to take a reformist road, seeking support from the weak, liberal, capitalist elite.

Party organisation

From the outset, Lenin understood that correct ideas were not enough. Enormous determination, courage and sacrifices were necessary.

Lenin and the Bolsheviks faced a brutal, repressive Tsarist state machine that persecuted the workers'

movement, and those seeking to establish independent political organisations.

Enormous sacrifices were made by hundreds of party workers, its 'cadre', in establishing the network of links between the embryonic groups and party cells, the circulation of papers, and the vital collection of funds. Lenin fought for a professional, combative party rooted in the working class.

The party 'cadre', a French word for frame, was the structure around which the party would grow: a party not only built through struggle, but out of intense democratic debate and discussion, through which decisions could be reached in party congresses, and then collective action agreed upon.

These methods of 'democratic centralism' were the key to building a strong force that would not weaken or compromise under the pressure of the revolutionary events that were to follow.

The infant RSDLP organisation was quickly tested by the revolution of 1905. The deep-rooted anger of the workers rose in a mass demonstration of over 400,000 in Tsarist Russia's capital St Petersburg. This was suppressed brutally by the Tsar, on Bloody Sunday, 22 January.

Protesting at the slave conditions in the factories of long hours and poverty wages, workers demanded

an eight-hour day, trade union rights, democratic elections to a constituent assembly, and an end to the economic crisis brought about by the war with Japan.

Thousands of demonstrators were killed and injured. This opened up a revolutionary crisis in society that put to the test all political ideas and methods, and confirmed, in general, the correctness of Lenin's ideas and strategy.

The working class, despite being a small minority of the population, came together as the only cohesive class in society, capable of uniting those opposed to the autocracy, and able to mobilise behind it the radicalised middle classes and the mass of the poor peasants.

The huge sweep of the revolution saw a spontaneous strike movement develop that led to a general strike in St Petersburg in November.

This tested revolutionaries with an opportunity to find the road to the masses and win their support. Lenin had to press his small forces to turn out and open the door of the party to the working class, especially young workers.

The Bolsheviks, with small resources, saw their newspaper, *Vypered* (Forward), rise to a circulation of 50,000 by December 1905. Other revolutionaries came to the fore in this period, notably Leon



Trotsky, whose newspaper was to reach a circulation of 500,000. With Trotsky elected as president of the powerful St Petersburg Soviet, Lenin commented: "Trotsky has earned it by his brilliant and unflinching work."

Soviets established

The soviets were forged by the workers themselves in the course of their uprising, bringing together elected strikers from the factories to democratically organise the struggle. Lenin, still in exile, was quick to recognise the soviets' potential, describing them as a "provisional revolutionary government."

But despite the heroic efforts of the working class, and the courageous struggle of the Bolsheviks to point the way forward with their programme, by December 1905 the revolutionary energy of the urban industrial masses had peaked before support for an all-Russian insurrection had matured.

Despite this, the events of 1905 had demonstrated in a few short months how a small party was able to become a mass force, through its party cadre, to draw in the most combative leaders from the working class and organise them into a cohesive political movement that would be decisive in the revolution of 1917.

Everything that Lenin had prepared, the programme, the party apparatus and its paper, now proved to be decisive in assembling the forces and leadership that offered the working class and poor peasants a route to victory.

While Lenin's forces were tiny, given the scale of the task, the clarity of ideas and the programme attracted the support of the most class-conscious workers, first in their hundreds, then more rapidly in their thousands.

Following the mass strikes and demonstrations of February 1917, the overthrow of the Tsarist monarchy, and the establishment of a provisional government headed by the capitalists, Lenin recognised that the only basis for ending the crisis of war, the starvation of the masses, and the resolution of the land question for the mass of toiling peasants, was to establish a workers' government.

This had to be based on the soviets – workers', peasants' and soldiers' councils thrown up by a renewed revolutionary wave engulfing the whole of society. A soviet government would begin the socialist tasks of transforming society.

Lenin recognised that without this victory the revolution in Russia would be smashed under the iron heel of Tsarist counterrevolution, assisted by the capitalists who feared the revolutionary working class more than Tsarism.

"Absolute distrust"

Others in the leadership of the

Bolshevik Party inside Russia, notably Stalin and Kamenev, mistakenly backed the soviets' conditional support for the new provisional government headed by Kerensky (as did the Mensheviks). From his exile in Switzerland, a furious Lenin demanded of the Bolsheviks: "Our tactics: absolute distrust, no support for the new government, suspect Kerensky above all, arming of the proletariat the only guarantee..."

Lenin, returning from exile in April, stood in a minority within the Bolshevik Party, but went to the ranks of the party, to the worker Bolsheviks, and won them to his position, with his short ten-point programme, *The April Theses*.

Lenin's goal was clear and explicit: "No support for the provisional government, for a republic of soviet workers', labourers' and peasants' deputies, nationalisation of all lands, land to be disposed to the peasants, nationalise the banks, bring social production and distribution of products at once under the control of the soviets, for a new international!"

This programme, and the organised forces in the Bolshevik Party, were the decisive, 'subjective factor' in ensuring victory to the revolutionary power of the workers. Lenin drew others towards him, all those genuine revolutionaries seeking a route to workers' power.

The clarifying of ideas, of a clear programme in the white heat of revolutionary events, brought Trotsky, with his supporters organised in the *Mezhraiontsy*, together with Lenin in the same party. They were agreed on the central role of the working class and the socialist tasks of the revolution.

Still, the door to revolution was obstructed by brutal repression. Here the great strength of Lenin and the Bolshevik Party became clear. Steeled in struggle, their militant leaders in the factories and soldiers' garrisons played a decisive part in mobilising mass support to the side of the revolution. A majority in the factories, workers' districts, and army and naval garrisons were won to the side of the revolution, reflected in their overwhelming majorities in soviets across Russia.

By October 1917, Tsarism and the capitalist forces around the provisional government had evaporated. They were quickly dispersed by the revolutionary Red Guards, with barely a shot fired in St Petersburg.

News of the world's first workers' government travelled swiftly around the world, with revolutions unfolding in Germany 1918-23, Hungary 1919, Italy 1920 and later the 1926 general strike in Britain, and China in 1927-29.

Stalinism

Lenin's death came at a critical period. Soviet Russia, isolated after the defeat of the aborted 1923 German revolution, impacted by

the loss of many workers' leaders in the civil war, struggling under a war-devastated backward economy with limited resources, created the conditions of retreat. A bureaucracy emerged that was ultimately to triumph under the leadership of Joseph Stalin.

Stalin, once in control of party and state, justified an end to world revolution with his counter-revolutionary ideas of 'socialism in one country', and the brutal suppression of workers' democracy and political opposition.

The monstrous development of Stalinism was used in the capitalist West to undermine the genuine ideas of Lenin and Bolshevism. But nothing could stop the 'mole of revolution' burrowing at the weakened foundations of the crisis-ridden capitalist system in the 1920s and 1930s.

Leon Trotsky took up the heroic defence of the Russian revolution, fighting for the ideas of workers' democratic state planning and internationalism, that would lay the basis for the development of the world revolution under more favourable circumstances.

Since then, there have been the revolutionary events of Spain in the 1930s; France 1936; the global revolutionary wave that followed the end of the second world war; the colonial revolution, and the 1959 Cuban revolution; France 1968; Chile 1973; Portugal 1974. More recently we've seen the Arab Spring of 2011, along with the significant intense working-class struggles on every continent.

All of these movements, which unlike 1917 did not succeed in establishing genuine socialism, highlight the importance of Lenin's ideas: the power of the working class, its leading role in the struggle for socialism, and the need for a mass party rooted in the working class and based on Marxist ideas.

Leninism today

Today the capitalist system fails to deliver decent living standards for the mass of the population. We stand on the shoulders of Lenin and the Bolshevik Party. We have a huge advantage in drawing on the lessons of the past in preparing for the huge battles to come. The Socialist Party has important roots in the working class and the trade unions, past victories, and international links to co-thinkers across the world.

We're confident that the radicalised working class and youth of the world will seek a way forward, and look for ideas and organisation to solve their problems.

These are the ripening conditions through which Marxist ideas and organisation will flourish in completing the urgent task of creating a socialist world that Lenin dedicated his life to achieve.

● **This article was originally published on the 150 anniversary of Lenin's birth**

A new Socialist Party branch in the Welsh Valleys

MARIAM KAMISH
RHONDDA CYNON TAFF SOCIALIST PARTY

We are reclaiming the fighting traditions of our party in this famous ex-mining area of south Wales.

Two nurses, two young workers, three students – one of them from Nigeria – and a college lecturer we met during the recent strikes, are among those attending the brand-new Socialist Party branch.

Since the pandemic – like Socialist Party members all over the country – we've put in a lot of early mornings on the picket lines. And the horrors of the siege of Gaza have speeded up

the growth of appetite for struggle locally.

"I'm seeing genocide livestreamed on my phone," says one of the nurses. "The world is a shit show. But I think you're doing a really wonderful job of creating solidarity and a sense of community in Pontypridd."

Solidarity and community

Staff at the Arts Centre where we meet agree. "We love the Socialist Party", a staffer told us this week.

A Nigerian student took another angle. "Ever heard of motion without movement? We need to see drastic change. That's why I'm here."

But Eira, 22, put it most succinctly: "I'm a socialist. I told you that the minute we met!"

Inspired by how rapidly the Socialist Party has grown in Sheffield, where over 50 people have joined over the last 18 months (see 'Packed out Sheffield socialist meeting' at socialistparty.org.uk), we've been organising a public meeting every month in the lead up to the launch. And we intend to continue.

We are full of enthusiasm, and eager to fight to change society. See socialistparty.org.uk/events for our meetings.



Mariam (second right) with the rest of the new Rhondda Cynon Taf Socialist Party branch

Movianto, Bedford: Unite members strive for union recognition

TREVOR PALMER
STEVENAGE SOCIALIST PARTY

Unite the Union members are in dispute with their employer Movianto, over union recognition for hourly paid staff. The company flatly refuses to agree, which has led to an increase in membership as well as an appetite for action.

The union has been in discussion with management since June. Membership began at about 65 members among the staff who carry out functions such as pickers and forklift truck drivers. Since the beginning of the action, that has grown to around 90, reported to be 65-70% of the warehouse floor.

Nearly 80% voted for action and a strike was held from 8-12 January. The pickets and rally were very well supported by at least 60 of the members, the majority never having been involved in such action before. They were in high spirits and making a tremendous noise with almost no breaks. The pickets were supported by other Unite members, Stevenage

and Watford Trades Councils and the Socialist Party.

Notice now served, the members are due to strike for another full week from 29 January to 2 February

Movianto is a specialised medical warehousing company with a presence across Europe. Strike action is likely to cause significant disruption to their operation.

Strikers have told us that the

management response has been to bus in workers from their other sites.

They have referred to their in-house committees for raising staff concerns, as if this means there is no need for a union. They argue that the members Unite represents are not much of the total workforce, but the demand is to represent the hourly paid shop floor staff, not the whole site. They even argue that no one is hourly paid – but if you are paid a rate per hour, and clock on and off, then ...!

● Please send support to the Luton Unite Office, for the attention of Rumi and the workforce, via lutonstaff@uniteunion.org



TREVOR PALMER

Socialist Students conference 2024

socialist students



Includes:

OPENING PLENARY: A world in crisis - and the struggle for socialism



Scan QR code to see full agenda and to register for more information



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

Join us for Socialist Students conference

● The rich say change is impossible – it's not

The wealthiest 1% hope to make social change seem like an impossible goal. But the various capitalist crises are taking their toll on young and working-class people in a way that cannot be ignored. This is why more and more young people consider themselves socialists.

This is why the Socialist Students conference is a great opportunity for anyone who wants to get involved, but doesn't know where to start. It is an opportunity to link up with others to share and develop ideas.

It is very easy to feel politically isolated, that every effort made to fix the system is meaningless. By attending Socialist Students conference you get to see how a democratic organisation operates.

It is also a great opportunity to meet and socialise with other young socialists from up and down the country.

Socialist Students groups have a lot to prepare for.

As the Tories continue to splinter and break apart, Keir Starmer's Labour looks set to run the country. This government will not be run in the interests of students. Starmer has shown himself to be no friend of the working class.

It's imperative that we discuss how best to tackle capitalist policies, and defend our right to an education that doesn't cause a mountain of debt once we're finished.

Starmer's Labour doesn't just threaten students. His refusal to promise to scrap all the Tory anti-union laws means that workers will still find their rights under attack. Students and workers need to link our causes together.

The majority of Labour MPs voted with the Tories against a ceasefire in the brutal and relentless war on Gaza. Many MPs that did back a ceasefire, only did so because of the

immense pressure felt by the continuous protests.

Rishi Sunak was also forced to sack ultra-right-wing home secretary Suella Braverman. This proves our actions have results. The next step forward is to discuss what we can do to put pressure on this government, with student walkouts and more.

Socialist Students conference will be informative, educational, and enjoyable, for both newcomers and existing members. I cannot recommend it enough.

TOM PORTER-BROWN
BIRMINGHAM SOCIALIST STUDENTS

● Reality of education has made us socialists

Teachers can't teach lessons properly because they are way too overworked and underpaid. Because there aren't enough teachers, PhD students are heavily relied on, which drives the wages even lower.

Students enter higher education to experience what it is like to live like an adult for the first time, and to discover themselves. But they can't even afford that. At 18 years old, they have to take a loan, almost equivalent to a downpayment for a house. It's a predatory practice.

They then have to deal with accommodation. In the first year, you are lucky if you get a place that doesn't smell of mould, or isn't the size of a coat closet.

After that, you have to fight every year to get a basic room that won't cost you your life savings. Almost all educational institutes in the UK give no support to students either, from meals or tutoring, that the teachers have to do off-hours. The system has beaten everyone. This is why students should be socialists.

FAISAL ALJENAIID
SURREY SOCIALIST STUDENTS

I joined the Socialist Party because of war and cuts

Now you should join too

NADIA DITTA
SOUTHAMPTON EAST SOCIALIST PARTY

When the war on Palestine started, I felt helpless. I started going to the London protests.

I would hold up placards with the Socialist Party sign. I would see campaign stalls everywhere. When I attended vigils in Southampton, I saw the same placards.

At the time, the call for a ceasefire was being asked. Being from Bevois ward, I had already emailed our Labour councillors and MP asking where they stand. Out of the four, only two replied. The same generic email most people were getting nationwide.

My MP voted 'no' for the ceasefire, which further added to my frustration.

No one was listening. No one was listening to the people who voted them in. At this time, a friend invited me to a Socialist Party meeting.

After the meeting, I realised that I had finally found a party that was for the working class. Who were out here fighting for our basic rights. Whose every single policy I agreed with.

Here in front of me was an amazing alternative. I started telling all my friends and family about the Socialist Party.

Stuck

We don't have to constantly be stuck between Labour and Tories. People either don't vote or go for who they feel as the lesser of the two evils. The more I attended meetings, the more I understood. The more I came to the realisation that my area, and people of my area, needed this positive change.

My area has been neglected and deprived for 20 years. With every single cut, everyone was made to just accept all services being taken away.

It's been a Labour safe seat for decades, and no changes are made.

I arranged a meeting for the community, so I could introduce the Socialist Party and Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC). We spent weeks distributing leaflets, door knocking, and speaking to locals.

The sheer frustration is so relatable. During this, I realised if I wanted the best for my area, if I wanted change, I had to lead the way, and show people the change. The only way would be to stand as a candidate.

So, at the meeting in December that was attended by hundreds of locals, I was announced as a candidate.

This was welcomed by so many of my community. There has been a buzz of hope since then.

From that day, I haven't stopped. I have, as a local resident, been a part of the 'Save The Venny' campaign (see socialistparty.org.uk). It is



Nadia (bottom left) after the massive Bevois community meeting organised by Southampton Socialist Party AMJUD JABBAR

the only green space we have for our whole area. This has been fully supported by the Socialist Party.

It's been neglected, and not been invested in. Before the consultation to close the park ended, we protested outside, and held a community meeting. We were on two radio stations, and front page of the local paper, Daily Echo.

The Labour council claims it's closing The Venny due to antisocial behaviour. But the council is not providing an alternative. It actually needs investment to make it into a safe space for our children and youth.

This has made people of my community realise that unless we speak up, unless we demand our rights, then nothing will change.

My message to everyone is – listen to what we have to say. We finally have an alternative that fits with our needs.

In order for anything to change, we have to change. We need a voice.

This year will be an exciting year of change, and things are only going to get better.

● Read more 'Southampton Bevois – ready to support one of their own as TUSC candidate' at socialistparty.org.uk

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Outside Miller and Carter in Cardiff for national day of action against the company's tip policy JOHN WILLIAMS

Workers forced to pay out in unfair 'tips' policy

JOHN WILLIAMS
UNITE UNION HOSPITALITY AND SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBER

"Workers at some Miller and Carter restaurants have been told that they must 'tip-out' up to 2% of sales to the kitchen", according to Unite the Union. "Waiters who served £3,000 of food and drink that night would have to find £60. If they only made £45, [in tips] then they're in debt, with some losing £300+ per month in lost income."

This deeply unfair system has quite rightly been met with anger and disappointment from workers. So campaigners from Unite the Union hospitality have taken part in a national day of action at various Miller and Carter branches.

Debt

One staff member told The Guardian: "On a Monday lunch you can earn zero [in tips and service charge] and be in debt to the company."

Bryan Simpson, a Unite hospitality national organiser said: "This is an undemocratic and unworkable policy, which is designed to force low-paid waiters to make up for the failure of the company to pay their kitchen, bar and junior management enough."

In Cardiff, the local trades union council, as well as Socialist Party members, took part in the action, giving leaflets to every customer who left and entered the venue, with one man saying they were going to complain to the managers there!

Lots of passersby and a few diners were interested in the issue and stopped to discuss it, including union members. The solidarity from complete strangers was heartwarming to see.

A local Miller and Carter worker told us: "Thank you for organising the

protest outside M&C. It really created waves throughout upper management, and fingers crossed has really helped our case."

The union is adamant that this issue does not become a competition between front-of-house and kitchen staff, which is absolutely correct. The bosses are banking on divide and rule to cut across the campaign.

Democratic control

What we need to see is a democratic fair tips committee to be elected at every restaurant, to decide a fair system where no one loses out, without interference from the bosses. Tips are not the wages or a guaranteed form of income. The trade unions should struggle for a minimum wage of at least £15 an hour, that rises with inflation. Youth rates should be abolished too. And workers should get organised to win more.

As previously reported in the Socialist, the workers at the Cardiff Glee Club won their union recognition battle (see 'Hospitality workers fighting back' at socialistparty.org.uk). We are hoping to get a hospitality group going inside the Cardiff branch of Unite the Union – the result of constant campaigning by local trade unionists in hospitality over 18 months.

And now, with Brewdog rolling back on their 'living wage' policy, future campaigns and struggles within hospitality are definitely in the pipeline.

● See 'Brewdog pay cuts – No longer all about the people' at socialistparty.org.uk

WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?
editors@socialistparty.org.uk



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

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

DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

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

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

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



Marching through Cheltenham for trade union rights PHOTO: JOHN RAGLA/CC

GCHQ union ban 40 years on Heroic fight for trade union rights continues

CHRIS BAUGH
FORMER ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE PCS (2004-2019)

The Trades Union Congress (TUC) demonstration on 27 January in Cheltenham to defend the right to strike has been called on the 40th anniversary of the decision of Thatcher's Tory government to ban unions at GCHQ, the government's intelligence and security service, in 1984. This produced outrage from workers at GCHQ, a spontaneous wave of strikes by tens of thousands of civil service workers across all major departments, and a TUC-called day of action on 28 February. The Militant newspaper, forerunner of the Socialist, reported at the time that in towns and cities from Derry to Dover, from the north of Scotland to Cornwall, workers showed their anger at this injury to one set of workers.

It was seen as the thin end of a very large wedge, and civil servants were joined by trade unionists in public services and from industry on demonstrations and rallies which far exceeded the expectations of the organisers. Thousands marched in central London. In Glasgow, 3,000 people crammed into a meeting with another 3,000 having to join an impromptu rally at a nearby bandstand.

At least 5,000 demonstrated in Liverpool, with thousands of workers taking action at Vauxhall Ellesmere Port, Cammel Laird, bus workers, dockers, Pilkingtons and Plesseys. In Birmingham 5,000 rallied. BL Longbridge stopped work and in Coventry, well over 15,000 struck at Rolls

Royce, Jaguar, Massey Ferguson and Alvis. In Manchester, a rally at Free Trade Hall was packed solid, with doors closed a quarter of an hour before it started. Railways came to a standstill, the airports closed in the afternoon, and firefighters answered only emergency calls.

Similar rallies took place across Cardiff, Edinburgh, Dundee, Bristol and most other towns and cities. This included marches and rallies in Cheltenham, Gloucester, Bath, Weymouth, Bournemouth and Dover. In my hometown, hundreds packed Blackpool Trades Club to the rafters with civil servants joined by many other trade unionists. A rally not surpassed in size until the Anti-Poll Tax campaign and the successful Oyston Out campaign by local football fans

Thatcher's plan

As set out meticulously in the infamous Ridley Plan, Thatcher was determined to neutralise the power of organised labour and had started with a range of laws restricting trade union activities, including the right to take solidarity or so-called secondary action. By the autumn of 1983, the print unions were under attack at Warrington and Wapping. In 1984 the year-long miners' strike began, constituting an attack upon the most powerful union in Britain and an industry that provided jobs and had sustained working-class communities for decades.

The outcome and impact of this heroic strike was a turning point in modern British history. At the time, the film director Ken Loach was commissioned by Thames television

to make a documentary series about trade unions called 'Questions of Leadership'. The theme he chose was to show how the various key strikes in the early years of the Thatcher government were kept separate. There were nationwide strikes in steel, on the docks, in the car industry and in the NHS and civil service.

He revealed how this was achieved through the compliance of many union leaders. In one episode, the right-wing leader of the electricians' union EETPU Frank Chapple was interviewed. At one point he became so infuriated by Loach's line of questions he told him he would make sure it was never shown on television. Not surprisingly, this documentary series was dropped by Thames and has never been shown on terrestrial television!

It shows how there were many missed opportunities in the decades since Thatcher and the importance of holding union leaders to account. The GCHQ union ban heralded the start of many industrial battles and it is important we learn the lessons from the past as the trade union movement builds on a renewed confidence and confronts the latest threat to union rights from a Tory government. It was against this volatile industrial background that the Thatcher government decided to ban unions at GCHQ.

Trade union campaign

Although even more secretive than its sister services MI5 and MI6 which did not, GCHQ had always recognised trade unions. The civil service union for senior staff, FDA has since

secured recognition in MI5.

It was 25 January 1984 that the Foreign Secretary Geoffrey Howe told a shocked House of Commons that as from 1 March 1984, independent unions would be banned from GCHQ. As Mike Grindley, a Chinese linguist at GCHQ and who became one of the principled 'refuseniks' and leader of the campaign to restore union rights said: "It was carefully prepared in secret and came as a bolt from the blue - bang!"

In 1981, the director of GCHQ Brian Tovey strongly urged the Thatcher government of the need for a ban because of the involvement of union members in the major civil service pay strike in 1981. While GCHQ has little history of union militancy, in 1979 there was a strike of radio operators and there had been a series of ongoing contested pay and grading issues. The public reason given for the ban was that industrial action could have had serious consequences for national security. In fact in 1981, Sir John Nott, then defence secretary, insisted: "This dispute has not in any way affected operational capacity."

Cheltenham was effectively a vast factory that produced intelligence on an industrial scale. As in all factories, even secret ones, the conflict between workers and bosses applies. The close relationship between US and UK intelligence was an underlying factor in the decision. The US was unhappy with the strikes and argued they had an impact on GCHQ's growing role as the processor of information from the new US satellites. The US National Security Agency (NSA) was picking up a vast

amount of new information, not least following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1981, and relied on GCHQ and the Australian and Canadian security services. Neither could they understand the strong opposition to deploy Polygraph, a form of lie-detector test upon GCHQ staff.

The Radcliffe Report in 1962 raised concerns about the role of communists in the civil service. Lord Armstrong introduced a report to the Thatcher Cabinet in 1982 of a threat raised by MI5 of the growing influence of the Militant Tendency (now the Socialist Party) in the CPSA, a predecessor union to PCS. They were deemed as 'subversives' and a discussion took place on how they should be dealt with. The concerns of the secret state were always shared by the right wing so-called 'moderate' faction in CPSA.

Its founder and leader, a formidable and rabid anti-communist and anti-Trotskyist, Kate Losinska OBE, had long argued for implementation of the Radcliffe Report and, in the diaries of right-wing journalist Woodrow Wyatt, Losinska visited Thatcher at Number 10 on at least one occasion following the GCHQ ban. These secret meetings took place while the TUC General Secretary Len Murray, Alistair Graham General Secretary of CPSA, and other civil service union leaders, were in negotiation to offer a no-strike deal in return for a restoration of union rights, that was contemptuously thrown back at them by Thatcher.

Union-busting tactics

The ban meant the workers at GCHQ

were presented with a classic union-busting tactic. Each worker got a letter telling them that they must immediately resign membership of any registered, independent trade union or face the sack. In return, each worker was to be given £1,000 and invited to join what in the US they call 'yellow-dog unions', an employer-controlled entity called the GCHQ Staff Federation. Option B was to ask to be redeployed to another civil service department. Option C was face dismissal. Out of 8,000 staff, the overwhelming majority from fear of dismissal and seeing the reluctance of union leaders to build on the widespread support, went for Option A. Around 150 were redeployed leaving a group of around 150 GCHQ trade unionists, led by Mike Grindley and many others, who founded the GCHQ Free Trade Unions which waged an heroic struggle that eventually led to the restoration of union rights under the New Labour government. It represented an important step in enabling collective bargaining, individual representation and access to arbitration in the event of disputes over pay, grading or other employment issues. It also contains the 'no-disruption agreement' that was rejected by Thatcher.

Those who went for Option C either resigned or were eventually sacked. They deserve a special place in the annals of trade union history. A Judicial Review in autumn 1984

found in favour of the union case concluding the union ban was "invalid and of no effect". The three Appeal Court Judges overturned the decision and found that the ban "which had been carried out under the royal prerogative were not susceptible to a judicial review on the grounds of national security". After the initial Court decision, nearly 200 staff rejoined the union. They were eventually sacked alongside the original refuseniks. The GCHQ Free Trade Unionists conducted a long campaign of writing and lobbying. For many years the TUC organised an annual march and rally at Cheltenham.

History is more than nostalgia. The 27 January TUC demonstration is a chance to celebrate the struggle of GCHQ trade unionists to defend union rights. And it carries lessons for the immediate threat we face from the latest piece of Tory anti-union legislation - that an injury to one is an injury to all. Any employer contemplating using a work notice under the new Act must themselves be put on notice.

The use of the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act against any worker needs to meet the collective power of the unions, for all workers to join and get active in unions, and in future struggles to defend union rights and their place in the fight for socialist change.

- What we think: Prepare for minimum service levels defiance on page 3

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Nothing to lose about

THE MILITANT FRONT PAGE FEBRUARY 1984

Readers' opinion

'Deepfakes' just the latest in a long tradition of Tory and New Labour lies

"Call for action on deepfakes as fears grow among MPs over election threat". The Guardian reported on 22 January that 70% of MPs are concerned that "deepfakes and AI-generated content" will "undermine the integrity of the next general election."

Seriously? When misrepresentation is the go-to tool of the Tory cabinet? When only four days prior, prime minister Rishi Sunak was rebuked by the UK's statistics watchdog over his misleading claims on asylum? And in fact the whole farrago denying the human rights of asylum seekers fleeing wars is just a bunch of misleading, electioneering, dog-whistle politicking?

And this is supposed to be new? Forty years ago, when the Socialist Party forerunner, the Militant, led Liverpool council to take a fighting stance on housing, rents and jobs, misrepresentation poured daily from every capitalist newspaper, including the Guardian, every capitalist TV channel, the Tories, Liberals and the leadership of the Labour Party, and even the Liverpool Catholic church.

Nowhere were the genuine facts of the battle outlined except in the Militant newspaper (now the Socialist) - and in the pubs and coffee shops, the trade union meetings, and anywhere that ordinary people gathered. Our candidates won overwhelming electoral support, despite the 'deepfakes' of the day, forced concessions from the government, and improved the lives of ordinary working people in Liverpool to this day.

Look at the Labour Party leadership today and the chronic misrepresentation it poured down on former leader Jeremy Corbyn, who spent his entire life marching against racism and fascism on the streets and found himself accused of being an antisemite, which again was repeated by the capitalist media almost daily.

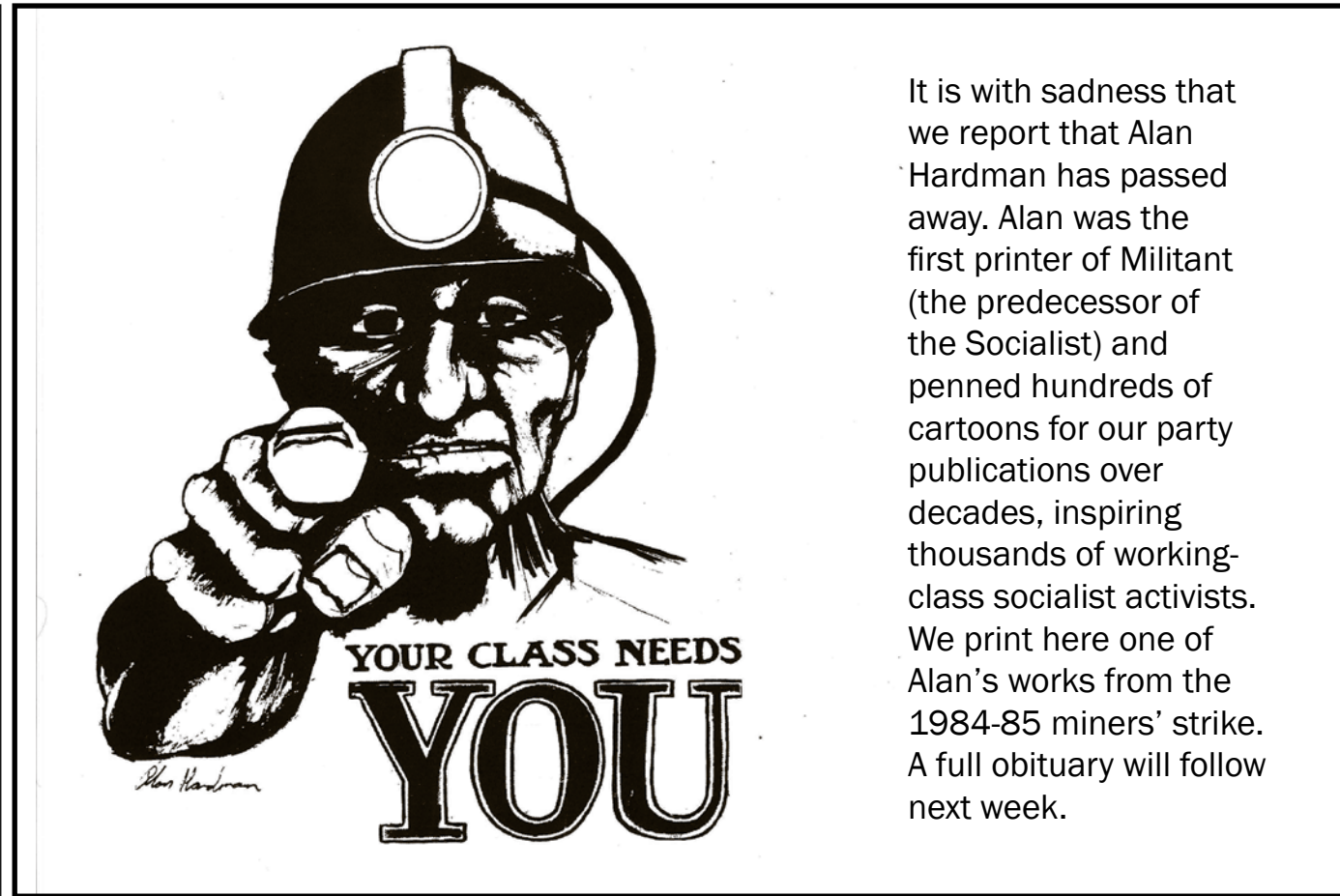
But who believes these daily deep-fakes from 'leaders' who refuse to stand against genocide? Just 6% of voters, according to one YouGov poll from 2022, the rest believing the government acts according to the wishes of party donors, business groups and corporations, newspapers and the media, and so forth.

No, people are not fooled.

PETE MASON
NEWHAM AND EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

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



It is with sadness that we report that Alan Hardman has passed away. Alan was the first printer of Militant (the predecessor of the Socialist) and penned hundreds of cartoons for our party publications over decades, inspiring thousands of working-class socialist activists. We print here one of Alan's works from the 1984-85 miners' strike. A full obituary will follow next week.

Obituary: Robert Owen 13 June 1962 - 24 December 2023

JAIME DAVIES
SOCIALIST PARTY WALES

I was deeply saddened, as were so many comrades in the Socialist Party and the wider labour movement, to hear about the untimely passing of Robert Owen on Christmas Eve, of a fatal heart attack at his home in Baku, Azerbaijan. Rob was born on 13 June 1962 to Gwynfor and Rita, and was the younger brother of Sian and Amanda. Rob grew up in Tumble near Llanelli - he would want you to know that! He affectionately referred to the small mining village as 'the centre of the universe.'

I first met Rob in 2011, when I was a student at university in Carmarthen. He was the first Marxist I had ever met and was one of the funniest and kindest people I have known. Rob patiently introduced me to the broad subject of sociology, he explained what capitalism was, and what it meant. Most importantly, he introduced me to an alternative, the ideas of Marxism and socialism.

Rob worked as a secondary school teacher and teaching came naturally to him. We found that we had more in common than our favourite football team, the mighty Everton, and we became good friends as well as comrades. Rob had the heart of an explorer and the soul of a poet; this humorous man, seemingly rough around the edges, who once described himself as a "seasoned veteran", loved English literature.

As for being an explorer, Rob wouldn't sit still, spending his final years teaching English in Baku. Rob dug out a life for himself in Baku, finding a partner and making friends, no doubt thanks to his bottomless charm and care for others, frighteningly quick and funny wit, and unique charisma.



During the campaign to defeat Thatcher's hated Poll Tax he was pivotal in building the confidence of the thousands of working people who refused to pay



Rob (centre) with his pamphlet on West Wales workers' struggles. Available at leftbooks.co.uk PHOTO: SOCIALIST PARTY WALES

I knew Rob for just over a decade but his political legacy goes far beyond that and is too extensive to lay out here. However his contribution, particularly in Wales, can't be overstated. As well as recruiting and developing a layer of younger activists, one of which is now an editor of this newspaper, Rob played an important role building the Socialist Party in west Wales and Cardiff before moving abroad, previously working full-time for the party. Rob also wrote a pamphlet about historic strikes in Ammanford and Llanelli.

During the campaign to defeat Thatcher's hated Poll Tax he was pivotal in building the confidence of the thousands of working people in Cardiff who refused to pay. The Poll Tax was beaten because millions of people refused to pay it, but to hold them firm it was vital to give them confidence that mass non-payment could win!

Rob spread the message on walls and bridges across the city. He was

a vital cog in the Cardiff Federation of Anti-Poll Tax Unions, acting as a 'MacKenzie Friend', advising people of their rights in court as they refused to pay. At the magistrate's court in Caerphilly, Rob was thrown out for being 'Mick Quinn', even though he had a passport to prove his identity!

Then there was the time he sold his favourite guitar, to raise money for striking miners, something that really spoke to his sense of duty and solidarity as well as his good-hearted and kind nature.

Rob will be deeply missed by his comrades, his friends and his family.

It is impossible to do justice to the man, writing on a single leaf, but perhaps Socialist Party member Robin Clapp's words sum it up: "I always enjoyed his company and respected his command of Marxism". Rob will not rest in peace, Rob will rest in power. Let this account be a comfort to those fortunate to have known him, and an inspiration to those who did not.

Northern Ireland's biggest ever strike

Hundreds of thousands of nurses, teachers, civil servants, and other public sector workers took strike action in Northern Ireland on 18 January in one of its biggest ever strikes. Below is the text of the leaflet used by Militant Left (the Socialist Party's sister party in Ireland) on the day:

The 18 January strike is historic for the trade union movement.

Workers from health, education, public transport and civil service are participating in the biggest strike in generations.

Chris Heaton-Harris, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, has attempted to use economic blackmail to force the parties back to Stormont. He is also seeking to exploit the failed politics of Stormont to deliver an anti-worker agenda. He seeks to squeeze public sector workers' pay, advance privatisation and impose brutal taxes and charges.

Today shows that workers here will not accept his agenda. But, while the politicians are hopelessly divided, workers across all parts of our community are standing together, united in determination to win a better future for everyone.

Trade union Militant Left activists have played a critical role within the trade union movement, alongside others, to bring about what is a powerful and united demonstration of mass working-class opposition to the Tory agenda.

Extending the struggle

We need to be aware that even if some funds are released for a pay increase for public service workers, the money being offered by the Secretary of State does not 'touch the surface' of what is needed to reverse the crisis and deliver decent public services here.

Our NHS services are at crisis point, our schools are facing chronic underfunding, and there is inadequate investment in public transport and other key services.

Regardless of whether Stormont



NIPSA strikers on the day PHOTO: MILITANT LEFT

sits or not, these threats will continue and workers will need to organise to defeat them.

Militant Left is working to extend and better coordinate strike actions between the unions to make them more powerful and effective.

We also call for working-class people from all backgrounds to mount protests and mass civil disobedience to help build a powerful struggle to beat back the attacks.

A political opposition

The 18 January strike is powerful and historic first step but if we want to change things in the long term then the workers' power demonstrated in this strike needs to be expressed politically.

We know the Stormont parties don't have any answers so, if we want

solutions, we need to do it ourselves.

We need a cross-community and socialist political party of labour which stands for the priorities and the interests of working-class people above anything else.

Militant left is actively engaging with other trade unionists, community activists and campaigners to discuss building such a cross-community political party - one that will reflect the politics of today's powerful strike action. Join us.

● **Militant Left members distributed the above leaflet at picket lines and at several of the main workers' rallies held throughout the North of Ireland on 18 January, including in Enniskillen, Magherafelt, Omagh, Cookstown and Belfast. Several Militant Left trade union members spoke on the rally platforms.**



Carmel Gates, NIPSA General Secretary and Militant Left supporter, addressed thousands of public sector strikers at Belfast City Hall on the day of the strike, below is what she said:

"Comrades, they've dangled some money in front of you before Christmas and they think, out of desperation, we will say 'give us the money'. We say: 'Is there enough to settle all the pay awards? Now and next year?' Because if there is not - then we will be back! If there are not inflation-busting pay awards then we will be back again and again. We say to the Treasury, we will not settle for less than we deserve.

We want the Assembly back but we want it fully funded, so there is no choice between paying public sector workers and feeding children. And we know children are going hungry! And workers are working two jobs or using foodbanks. And we say: 'enough is enough!'

Lives are at stake. Health waiting lists are so long that people go from curable to incurable. And we say: 'enough is enough!' We don't have enough money for services, we don't have enough money for pay, and we're not going to accept anything less than what we need.

If today does not make the Treasury take notice then we will be back, and get bigger and bigger. There has been a vacuum of leadership and the trade union movement has stepped into that vacuum. Workers are standing together and are united. We are as one, and workers united will never be defeated!"

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



Come along to a meeting near you:

- **Leicester** Tuesday 23 January, 7pm Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate, Leicester LE1 1WB
- **Peckham, London** Thursday 25 January, 7.30 pm, Pelican Plus Hall, Pelican Estate, Peckham SE15 5NF
- **Bristol** Monday 29 January, 7.15 pm, St Paul's Learning Centre, 94 Grosvenor Rd, Bristol BS2 8XJ. And Zoom code: 899 1011 5360
- **University of South Wales** Tuesday 30 January, 4.30 pm, Trefforest Community Centre, Dan-y-Bryn Road, off Kingsland Terrace, Trefforest, Pontypridd CF37 1AD
- **Cardiff** Tuesday 30 January, 7.30 pm YMCA Plas, 2 Shakespeare Street, Plasnewydd, Cardiff CF24 3ES
- **Manchester and Salford** Thursday 1 February, 7.30 pm Working Class Movement Library, 51 Crescent, Salford, M5 4WX

Argentina's trade unions fight back with a general strike

DANIEL
TEESSIDE SOCIALIST PARTY

Trade unions in Argentina have taken the bold step to call a general strike on 24 January to fight back against the country's new right-wing President Javier Milei. Taking office in December 2023, Milei's proposed economic reforms would make Margaret Thatcher blush, as he proposes to privatise vast swathes of state-owned enterprises alongside slashing workers' rights and protections.

Milei faced a setback recently as the labour law section of his reform package was rejected by Argentina's courts. This is undoubtedly a victory

for working people and trade unions in the country. However, it is equally undoubtedly only a temporary setback for Milei.

Trade unions, led by the CGT (General Confederation of Labor) representing around three million workers, have vowed to take the fight into their own hands. This is an important step in the fightback against Milei and his wild west brand of capitalism.

A grassroots fightback, led by the trade unions and armed with a socialist programme, could not only deter the government from further attacks on workers' rights, but also pave the way for a socialist transformation of society.

£1 / £2 solidarity price

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the Socialist

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formerly **Militant**

Risk of war spreading across the Middle East shows: We need a socialist alternative to

STOP ISRAELI STATE TERROR

SAMANTHA ERIN
TOWER HAMLETS SOCIALIST PARTY

Over 100 days since the start of the Israeli state's brutal assault on Gaza, over 25,000 Palestinians are dead and 63,000 injured. Others have been left destitute, without a home, medical support or drinking water. Actions, despite occasional mealy-mouthed words to the contrary, supported materially by the likes of Joe Biden, Rishi Sunak and tail ended by Keir Starmer.

On top of these horrors, the last

few weeks have seen what looks like a drift into regional conflict and more devastation for ordinary people in the Middle East. In response to Houthi forces seizing a number of western-owned vessels in the Red Sea, the Tory government has sent battleships to the Red Sea and Air Force jets to hit targets in Yemen, as the 'apprentice' in US president Biden's airstrikes against the Houthis.

These airstrikes show that the US and the UK can accept countless civilian deaths, but will act against a disruption to capitalist profits made

from shipments going through the Red Sea.

Memories across the region and across the world of the bloody interventions of US-led capitalism will stoke fear and anger, including the brutal bombing of Baghdad during the Iraq War in 2003, backed up by Tony Blair's New Labour.

The fight back

Since October, we've seen hundreds of thousands of ordinary people line the streets of the UK to fight back against the decisions of Sunak, Netanyahu and Biden.

The power of this force has also led to the disgraced ex-Home Secretary, Suella Braverman being kicked out of Government after she was spinning lies about the protests and criticising the police for not being tough enough punishing pro-Palestinian protesters.

This victory, alongside the exposure that both Sunak and Starmer support this bloody war, shows we need a working-class political alternative now more than ever. Under capitalism, conditions for the overwhelming majority of people in the Middle East and worldwide

are getting worse, as they are here with the ongoing cost-of-living crisis.

The Socialist Party demands an end to the Israeli state's massacres in Gaza and fights for a socialist Palestine, alongside a socialist Israel as part of a confederation of the Middle East on a free and equal basis, with all resources under the democratic control of workers and the poor.

• See page 4 for reports of demos against the war on Gaza

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



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