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the Socialist

Issue 1260

1-7 February 2024

formerly **Militant**

JAMES IVENS
LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Who stands for us?

The three-quarters of us who oppose the massacre in Gaza. The two-thirds of us more worried about our household finances than a year ago.

The Tories back the Israeli state's onslaughts - but so does Labour. The Tories refuse to restore funding for wages, homes and public services - but so does Labour. In this general election year, who stands for us?

A global movement is crying out in horror against the Israeli state's onslaught on Palestinians. The power of mass action shone through when the outgoing Tory prime minister, 'Sinking Sunak', had no choice but to sack hated home secretary Suella Braverman.

The anti-war movement's furious calls have even reached the ears of the International Court of Justice in the Hague. Its judges felt obliged to admit there is reason to consider whether this could be a genocide. Millions whose voices are cut out from the mass media and establishment politics will have felt vindicated.

But what now? The Hague previously ordered Russia's government to stop military action in Ukraine without delay. Nothing happened.

And it can't even muster a call on Israel's government for a meaningful ceasefire - just like the Tories and Keir Starmer's Labour. Even ITN's footage of a Palestinian civilian shot dead while flying the white flag couldn't get condemnation out of 'Slippery Starmer'.

Starmer's "case-by-case" support for Tory collaboration with US air strikes on Yemen has accepted every case so far. The atrocity in Gaza risks spiralling into a regional inferno - yet when the warmongering capitalists say 'jump', Sir Keir asks: 'in this case, how high?'

Polls show the Tories on a collision course with 13 years of stored-up anger at austerity, inflation and war. None of us can wait to see the back of them. But Starmer's Labour wants to carry it all on! If none of them stand for the working-class majority, we have to stand up for ourselves.

In the mass Gaza protests and months of strikes we've seen some of the power of working-class struggle. Imagine the extra pressure if the anti-war movement and strike wave put up a challenge at the ballot box too.

The working class needs a new, mass party of its own. A workers' list of candidates in the general election would be a big step towards it. Let's not leave it to the warmongers: help us stand candidates against war and the cost-of-living crisis.

TORIES OUT



But we need our own voice

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The Socialist is written, read, sold and bought by ordinary workers, trade unionists, young people and Socialist Party members. We want you to write for the Socialist.

Send us reports of your workplace and community campaigns, short letters on working-class issues, or ideas for other articles.

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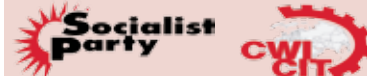
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"The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it."
Karl Marx

BUILD THE MOVEMENT AGAINST ISRAELI STATE TERROR

Days after the UN International Court of Justice in the Hague ruled that Israel must take all measures to prevent genocidal acts in Gaza, Israeli forces continue their murderous bombardment from land and air. "Hague Shmague", Israel's far-right National Security Minister posted on X following the interim ruling.

Israel has also been ordered to get basic aid into Gaza. Since, British and other governments have followed the US in suspending payments to the UN's aid agency for Palestinian refugees. How many more Palestinians will die as a consequence?

Now, with three US servicemen killed on a US airbase in Jordan, US President Joe Biden is promising to "hold all those responsible to account at a time and manner of our choosing". The spread of war and instability in the region means further misery for working-class and poor people.

The sight of awful horrors carried out by the IDF exposes the rotten brutality of the capitalist system and is radicalising whole sections of workers and young people worldwide. The threat of mass movements developing in the Middle East, like those of the Arab Spring in 2011 that overthrew dictatorships, terrifies the ruling classes in the region and worldwide.

The millions-strong anti-war movement adds to the pressure on the Israeli government to stop its brutal assaults. In Britain, mass protests have already taken the scalp of hated Home Secretary Suella Braverman. They feature in the calculations of the Israeli ruling class too. "There are huge demonstrations in Western capitals... we need to apply counter-pressure", Benjamin Netanyahu has said.

The Socialist Party is helping to build and strengthen the movement, and increase working-class pressure on all the capitalist politicians contributing to the horror.



PHOTO: NICK CLARE

Organise for trade union action

The strikes that have swept the country in the last 18 months gave a glimpse of the power that the organised working class has. The over 6 million-strong trade union movement in Britain is yet to put its full weight behind the anti-war movement. Trade union blocs on the national demonstrations have been modest, although inevitably tens of thousands more trade union members have been among the hundreds of thousands marching.

A 'workplace day of action' has been called for 7 February, encouraging lunchtime protests and meetings. Trade union leaders are coming under pressure. NEU, UCU and PCS unions have given their support nationally, PCS leaders had previously voted down proposals to do more (PCS Broad Left Network: 'Our union must be stronger on Gaza' at socialistparty.org.uk).

Discussions in the workplace are a good starting point towards

preparing for further workers' action. There have been a series of protests outside of arms factories in the last months aimed at stopping production, but so far, this has been limited to protests outside and not workers themselves organising stoppages.

There is a history of workers' action against war in Britain. Examples include: London dockers refusing to send weapons for use against the Russian revolution, Rolls Royce engineers refusing to work on jet engines destined for use by Chilean military dictator Pinochet, and oil refinery workers in Ellesmere Port refusing to offload Russian oil after Putin's invasion of Ukraine.

A next step towards developing future workers' action would be to bring together shop stewards in the arms, logistics and transport industries, which could handle goods destined for the Israeli regime, to discuss and plan what can be done.



PHOTO: MARK BEST

Build student walkouts

Already, school, college and university students have organised walkouts and protests against the siege on Gaza. Socialist Party members are part of Socialist Students, a nationwide organisation which is helping to organise further walkouts.

Can you organise a protest at your school or college? Get in touch!

Come to Socialist Students national conference in Birmingham on Saturday 10 February to discuss with others how to build the fightback. (see page 4)

Scan here:



School students walk out in Newham, east London in December 2023. JAMES IVENS

Help us build the socialist, anti-war election stand

At every stage through the 100+ days of Gaza horror, Labour leader Keir Starmer has echoed Tory Rishi Sunak, who in turn has followed US president Joe Biden backing Israeli state terror.

Sunak has also joined Biden in bombing Yemen - putting yet more civilian lives at risk. The strikes will not achieve their stated aim of stopping Houthi attacks in the Red Sea, Saudi Arabia has been bombing them for nearly a decade with US and UK backing.

MPs in Britain didn't get a say on the airstrikes, but Starmer was in on it and gave his approval. No wonder hatred of both him and Sunak is so widespread on the Gaza protests. People are asking: Who can I vote for at the general election?

The Socialist Party is campaigning for a workers' list of candidates to stand, backed by the trade

unions, which could include people such as Jeremy Corbyn, Dianne Abbot and Emma Dent Coad, as well as anti-war and community campaigners. We are starting preparations now for our stand as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition in the general election when it comes, and in the local elections in May. And we are calling on other anti-war campaigners to stand with us (visit tusc.org.uk for the core policy platform).

● Delegates from a number of different campaign groups and socialist organisations, as well as trade unionists, will attend a 'Convention to organise a working class challenge at the general election', in Birmingham on 3 February. The event is organised by the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC)



PHOTO: PAUL MATSSON

Join the Socialist Party

War, poverty and national oppression are inevitable consequences of the profit-driven capitalist system, based on the exploitation of the vast majority of the world's population by a tiny minority. The capitalist elites maintain their minority rule by fermenting divisions and conflict - and compete with each other for the spoils.

By replacing the private ownership of the world's vast wealth and resources with democratic public ownership, under the control of the working-class and poor masses, it would be possible to end poverty for all.

On this basis it would be possible

to start to build a socialist society free from war and oppression. Join us to fight for socialist change!



Join the fightback

- Visit socialistparty.org.uk/join or call 020 8988 8777
- or text your name and postcode to 07530429441

to find out more about joining us today!

Enfield Labour council refuses to hear out trade union-led campaigners

Enfield Trades Council organised a lobby of Labour-controlled Enfield Council on 24 January, calling on councillors to support the demand 'Gaza ceasefire now!'

Enfield Trades Council had individually written to all elected councillors ten days prior, asking for support for the call. Shamefully, not one had replied by the time of the meeting.

There were speeches and lively chanting outside Enfield Civic Centre. Security initially insisted protesters remove their keffiyehs (Palestinian scarves) before entering the public gallery, they were forced to back down on that. Scandalously, security locked out some of the protesters with the false excuse that it was full up.

The council meeting started with Hindu prayers, which (hypocritically)

had all councillors praying for such things as 'Peace' and 'Health'.

At the start of the meeting, a Trades council officer stood up and asked the mayor to be allowed two minutes to address the council about Gaza. The mayor initially agreed to this after a testimonial and minute's silence for a recently deceased councillor, respectfully observed by all.

The mayor then changed her mind. The request for a deputation and moment of silence for victims in Gaza was rejected.

It was clear then that the Council



had no interest in hearing what we had to say which provoked angry and loud public gallery calls for a 'ceasefire now'. The mayor then suspended the meeting and all of the councillors upped and left to continue meeting in another room, without us!

The councillors departed with criticism ringing in their ears: "You've signed pro-Palestinian petitions!" "You're supposed to represent us!" "No ceasefire - no vote!"

One of the Tory councillors leaving the council chamber was seen making a 'cut-throat' gesture up to the public gallery.

In the public gallery, we expected to be removed - but the security staff were sympathetic to our cause! We ended up leaving at our own leisure.

Enfield Trades Council will not stop with this action. A delegation to call on Enfield North Labour MP Feryal Clark to publicly state her support for a Gaza ceasefire is planned for February.

JOHN DOLAN
SECRETARY OF ENFIELD TRADES COUNCIL

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

● Swindon marches

Swindon Socialist Party members joined a Palestine demo on 20 January. The first speech announced the latest statistics from Gaza. I personally believe that statistics can never fully quantify the horror. However, the next two heart-wrenching speeches made it completely clear. Tears flooded everyone. These speeches remind you that people are dying and families are being torn apart.

The march following behind banners made by children, representing the fact that Palestinian children in Gaza have been plunged into a horrifying war that they cannot escape. Throughout the march we stopped at multiple different banks, shops and restaurants to chants of "your profits are being stained in Palestinian blood".

EZRA BELL



● Oxford - It is political

200 people attended a Palestine solidarity meeting in Oxford. Speakers included an Oxford socialist independent councillor, who recently resigned from the Labour Party in protest over the Labour leadership's position on the issue. She spoke of her experience in apartheid South Africa and drew parallels with Palestine.

There were three separate workshops, in the 'trade union' workshop Socialist Party members were told by an organiser that "people should not use this meeting to raise a political platform. We need to build support for Palestine, it shouldn't be political." But politicians are deciding to drop bombs on the Middle East!

I attended the student workshop and discussed with others about their experiences campaigning. I was able to build links with students from University of Oxford to work with our Socialist Students group at Oxford Brookes University.
JAMES GIRALDI



Car insurance price rises drive workers up the wall!

ALEX SMITH
LIVERPOOL SOCIALIST PARTY

If you ask anyone who has recently had to renew their car insurance about how much they had to pay, they're likely to explode in anger. UK motorists are now being quoted, on average, a record sum of almost £1,000 for their annual policies (in London the average price is even higher at £1,607). This is an eye-watering 58% increase compared to the previous year.

Young people are particularly hard hit. 17-year-old new drivers, now pay an average of £2,877, nearly double last year's cost!

Where is the money going?

Insurance firms and the Financial Conduct Authority claim that the growing cost of repairs has caused price hikes. But a number of insurance experts have poured scorn on that excuse, and pointed out that the real issue is the insurance firms' pursuit of profit. One, speaking to the Independent, said: "There is a lot of smoke and mirrors going on. Through Covid, insurers made massive profits. Now we have come out of Covid into a very different economic climate, insurers want their profit and are not absorbing the increased cost of inflation." We say, open the financial books to scrutiny from trade unions and workers' representatives to show where the money is going.

58%
average car insurance price rise over the last year

We already know one place it is: executives at the top five motor insurance firms have been given six- and seven-figure salaries and bonuses. Admiral Group reportedly gave a total of £2.15 million to its chief executive and £1.23 million to its chief financial officer. Meanwhile, Aviva's chief executive is reported to have got £5.52 million.

These fatcats can't be trusted not to rip us off. Banks and insurance firms should be nationalised, under democratic workers' control, with compensation paid to shareholders only on the basis of proven need. Banks and insurance firms can then operate within a democratically planned economy, based on a socialist plan of production - in which investment in high-quality public transport and green technology would reduce the reliance on personal cars - and where working-class people's needs are prioritised, not bosses' profits.

Real terms cut to student loans - Fight for free education

CHARLIE JARVIS
LIVERPOOL SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Nearly 50% of students experience financial hardship during their studies, according to the latest Department for Education statistics. The crumbling Conservative government, anxious as ever to create a good headline, has now pledged a one-off £10 million hardship fund for students in the 2024-25 academic year, alongside an increase of 2.5% to maintenance loans.

To call this an 'increase' is disingenuous given the high inflation over recent years, thanks in no small part to the financial chaos caused by multiple Tory prime ministers and the unaccountable 'markets'.

In other words, this pledge is a real-terms cut to maintenance loans, which are already too low for many students to live on. 99% of the average loan is spent solely on rent.

Students in recent years have often felt undervalued and ignored by politicians, and the current cost-of-living crisis has exacerbated this issue. Compare this to the electrifying effect Jeremy Corbyn's pledge for free education had on campuses.

On top of the inflation crisis, in



2023 the Tories announced that the student loan repayment threshold would be reduced by nearly £3,000, alongside the length of repayment being increased from 30 to 40 years, for students beginning their courses last September.

Of course, this is not an issue of lack of funds, rather, another example of the capitalist class attacking the 'social mobility' they purport to promote. We must call for an end to

extortionate student loans, for fair maintenance grants for all students, and for this to be paid for by those at the top. An educated population is beneficial for everyone, and this should be recognised by ensuring the right to free education for all.

The cost-of-living crisis is one that is artificially created by the bosses, and the burden shouldn't fall on the shoulders either of students or the working class.

Socialist Students conference Chance to discuss how to make change

Gaza - capitalism and war

NANDI SHALITA
QUEEN MARY SOCIALIST STUDENTS

The death and destruction perpetrated in Gaza has resulted in millions of people taking to the streets across the world, marching for peace and liberation. And students are protesting, on and off campus, for their schools and government to take a stand and condemn what is being done to the Palestinians.

The Tory government has tried to stop the discussion of this on campuses. This shows the potential power we hold - they're scared of what we're capable of!

At Socialist Students national conference there will be discussion about how we can wield our power for real change. We'll discuss how we can build the student walkout movement against the siege on Gaza.

13 years of austerity, as well as the Tories' attitude about the horrors being committed against Gazans, has all but ensured that they will not be re-elected. Is Keir Starmer's Labour any better? Starmer, and many other Labour MPs, have refused to call for a ceasefire or condemn the actions of the Israeli state. For a long time now, Labour has not been a party for working-class and young people. Starmer showed no real support or solidarity towards the unions during the

strike wave, and he went back on his pledge to get rid of tuition fees.

Join us to discuss how to organise a voice for youth and students at the upcoming general election. We need a government that represents us.

Join us for our Socialist Student conference to discuss how to maximise our power to demand better.

You're not alone thinking everything is broken

HOLLIE BUSSON
SHEFFIELD SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Britain is a broken country. Skyrocketing poverty, crumbling public services, the never-ending cost-of-living crisis. The Tories, instead of helping the working class, look to divide us with anti-union laws, xenophobic immigration propaganda, and stoking 'culture wars'.

It's a lot to take in. And, as a young person, it can make you feel powerless.

But since joining Socialist Students, it's reassuring that you're not alone. It's given me the space to talk to like-minded students about issues that are affecting us.

We know this isn't unique to Britain, but this is capitalist society working as intended. We know that a Labour government under Keir Starmer won't fix these issues, and will continue to create policy that only benefits the 1% - because he keeps telling us so!

At the Socialist Students conference last year, we all agreed it is time for change. The formation of a new workers' party would be a big step forward in the fight for systemic change needed to beat cuts to social services, replace student loans with grants we can actually live on, fighting to scrap anti-union laws, and for a better socialist future for all.

Socialist Students conference 2024
A world in crisis and the struggle for socialism!
Saturday 10th February Birmingham
Birmingham and Midland Institute,
9 Margaret Street, Birmingham, B3 3BS
socialiststudents.org.uk
SCAN TO REGISTER

Ethnicity pay gap - fight for pay rises for all

AKHALYA
BIRMINGHAM CENTRAL SOCIALIST PARTY

Women of Bangladeshi and Pakistani heritage earn 28.4% per hour less than white British men on average, according to the Ethnicity Pay Gap report released in November 2023.

Women of ethnic minority background in the UK are more likely to be underpaid in comparison to their white male counterparts. This is partly due to the jobs women of Black, Asian and other ethnic minority groups have easier access to.

UK government figures show that staff from the Black ethnic group had lower monthly basic pay than white staff doing equivalent jobs - Black men were paid 84p for every £1 paid to white men, and Black women were paid 93p for every £1 paid to white women.

BAME workers experience more of a discrepancy in pay in the public sector, including healthcare, where there have been real-terms pay cuts since 2010 due to austerity.

This is also worse for BAME women workers who have caring responsibilities. Women are more likely to take on part-time work or be stay-at-home carers for children, parents or family members who require additional care due to them being the lower-paid members of the household. Statistics show that one in eight BAME women are not working due to their caring commitments, compared to just one in 100 men.

As the ruling class benefits from the unpaid labour provided by carers towards children, the gender pay gap deepens as women in lower-income households struggle to find regular work with flexibility for child and other caring responsibilities.

The pay gap is a conscious decision from the capitalist bosses to try and pay workers as low a wage as they can get away with to maximise their profits, using any divisions they can to push workers apart. While members of parliament see yearly pay rises, workers who work long hours and difficult jobs see real-terms wage cuts.

Capitalism thrives from splitting workers based on ethnicity, gender, disability and more. It is a system that forces people to work multiple jobs, and work themselves to exhaustion but still be unable to earn a sufficient income to support their family.

We need trade unions to fight for decent pay rises for all. For trade union oversight over pay and hiring practices, and unions to actively fight against sexism and racism in the workplace.

However, to permanently remove inequality and discrimination, we need to overthrow capitalism, the system responsible for them. And replace it with an economic system where not only is everyone paid a decent living wage, but housing is truly affordable and education and healthcare is free. That system is socialism.



Council funding - black holes and tax hikes

The Tories, facing an electoral black hole, have made attempts to deal with another - the £5 billion void in council budgets. More and more councils, after accepting over a decade of austerity, are cutting their services to the bare legal minimum. The Tories have announced an extra £600 million of funds.

You don't have to be Albert Einstein to work out that won't plug the funding gap.

But the Tories have another solution - making you pay for it! Michael Gove, 'Levelling up secretary', has

instructed all councils to raise council tax by the maximum without a referendum - 4.99%! That's an extra £2 billion of tax, mainly paid by working-class people, while the Tories are set to announce giveaways for the richest later in the year.

We need councillors and MPs that will stand up and fight for the resources council services desperately need. A united fight, like what happened in Liverpool in the 80s (see pages 8-9), could save our services and put the Tory government and cutting councils into the bin.



Postal Universal Service Obligation under threat

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

Communication Workers Union (CWU) postal members, just through the most bitter dispute in the 508 years of Royal Mail, are now faced with proposals to change the Universal Service Obligation (USO). At present, Royal Mail has a legal obligation to deliver to all 32 million households, six days a week at a uniform price.

Even before privatisation in 2015, Royal Mail CEOs have tried to get out of the USO. During the pandemic it was amended to Monday to Friday for letter traffic. But since, Royal Mail has not even tried to meet the USO, even asking the CWU to go jointly to the government to change it!

Postal workers have seen massive changes to the type of mail that's being delivered, going from 12 billion letters in 2017 to around 8 billion in 2022. This decrease in the number of letters, with the rise of email and social media, has come at the same time as a massive increase in parcels delivered.

Despite casualisation and an increase in agency workers, postal workers care about the service. Once posties worked so there was never a

letter left in the office. Now, it's reported constantly that people aren't receiving letters.

Ofcom, the government regulator which covers the postal service, has launched a consultation on the USO, with plans proposed for a five-day or even three-day postal service. Not one postal worker has been spoken to about this, and thousands of CWU members will be feeling uncertain about their futures.

Ofcom has correctly said that the USO is unsustainable at present, but what they fail to say is that its only unsustainable due to privatisation and underfunding. CEO after CEO has run down services, including the destruction of customer service points where people collect parcels from. The RMT rail union campaign to save ticket offices shows that unions can fight, mobilise workers and service users to defend services.

After the end of the last dispute, both Royal Mail and the government will know postal workers' heads are down. But the CWU must now launch a campaign to save the USO, drawing support from postal workers and the public. In other parts of Europe, countries subsidise their postal services because it is important. No other service can deliver to 32 million households six-days-a-week. During

the pandemic, the importance of this was clearly shown, where we delivered and collected vital mail and test kits. For many people, a postal worker is the only person they see, postal workers could be delivering medical prescriptions and other services by looking in on vulnerable people.

This can't be done while the company is being run for profit, sucked out by the shareholders. Keir Starmer in October pledged that a Labour government would invest £3 billion to save the UK steel industry. Why couldn't he pledge, in accordance with policy passed at the 2022 Labour conference, to renationalise Royal Mail and uphold the USO?

Royal Mail must be taken into public ownership but, as the Post Office Horizon scandal has shown, if a publicly owned service is still run like a private company, then the public and workers won't see much of a difference. That's why Royal Mail should be nationalised, properly funded and run under the democratic control and management of postal workers and the communities they serve.

Do you agree?
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TUC demo against the anti-union laws

Marching to defend the right to strike - Prepare to strike together!

CHRIS MOORE
UNISON GLOUCESTERSHIRE LOCAL GOVERNMENT
BRANCH, PERSONAL CAPACITY

The centre of Cheltenham came to a standstill on 27 January. A town usually noted for its horseracing was a sea of colour as thousands of trade unionists came to defend the right to strike.

Carrying hundreds of union banners, alongside scores of trades councils from around the country, the demonstration gave a glimpse of the potential power of the 5.5 million workers represented by the Trades Union Congress (TUC).

Aslef victory

All were marching against the most recent menacing Tory anti-trade union legislation, the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act (MSL). A vicious but weak and split Tory government is starting at election meltdown, after a decade of destroying public services and wage levels. Sunak wants to force workers in health, education, fire, transport, border security and nuclear decommissioning, who have voted to strike, to cross their own picket lines. The legislation empowers bosses to issue striking employees with 'work notices', with the threat of the sack, or union funds being sequestered, if they don't comply.

The demonstration came just days after the train drivers' union Aslef defeated the threat by the government-owned train operator LNER to impose MSLs. This victory boosted the whole demonstration.

The strike wave of the last two years has terrified this government. The mood of determination on the demo was buoyed by other recent events too, including the RMT on London Underground forcing Labour mayor Sadiq Khan to find an extra £30 million, and the Northern Ireland-wide public sector general strike.

Sharon Graham, Unite general secretary, said at the rally: "This legislation puts the government at war with workers." Mick Lynch, general

secretary of the RMT transport union, called for "non-compliance and non-cooperation".

Resist

The TUC Special Congress in December set out a strategy to resist MSLs. It made a commitment to refuse to tell members to cross picket lines and to organise solidarity action across the trade union movement if a worker is disciplined by their employer.

The Cheltenham march, on the 40th anniversary of GCHQ workers losing their trade union rights (see GCHQ ban 40 years on' at socialistparty.org.uk) was a welcome start, but a national London demonstration would build on this momentum. Union members maintaining pressure on their leaders is essential to turn a statement of intent into defiant action that could defeat the MSL and also Sunak's government.

When the Tory government is starting at election meltdown, after a decade of destroying public services and wage levels. Sunak wants to force workers in health, education, fire, transport, border security and nuclear decommissioning, who have voted to strike, to cross their own picket lines. The legislation empowers bosses to issue striking employees with 'work notices', with the threat of the sack, or union funds being sequestered, if they don't comply.

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secretary of the RMT transport union, called for "non-compliance and non-cooperation".



PHOTOS: NICK CLARE



backtracked on so many? With his refusal to support strikes and his warnings of "fiscal responsibility" and "tough choices" on public spending, it would be a mistake to wait.

Unions should demand that all public sector employers run by Labour publicly commit now to refusing to implement MSL, as the SNP has done in Scotland. And Starmer should pledge now that a Labour-led government would reinstate any sacked worker and reimburse unions facing fines.

Mass action can defeat MSLs and throw out the hated Tories, but the reality of a Starmer government poses the need for workers to fight for their own political voice.



PHOTO: MARTIN REYNOLDS

Barts NHS strikes: Unite will leave no stone unturned

LEN HOCKEY
BARTS NHS TRUST UNITE BRANCH SECRETARY

Members spirits were good on the picket line at Whipps Cross Hospital on Monday 29 January, as Unite members began their sixth phase of strike action since September 2023. As well as pickets at three east London hospitals in Barts NHS Trust, a strike rally will take place. Among other demands, ex-Serco workers,

whose strike action a year ago won them being brought back into the NHS, are fighting for the 'Covid bonus' lump sum paid to other NHS staff last year.

Before Christmas, we took the fight to the door of the Department of Health, staging a lively demonstration. Our national officers do not accept the argument that the trust has no authority to pay the lump sum. Our branch has called on Barts bosses to escalate the issue to NHS England.

We will leave no stone unturned in the fight for justice for our membership. The fight for properly resourced patient care is intrinsically linked with the fight for properly rewarded and respected health workers.



Marchers spoke to the Socialist

DAWN BRANCH, CANCER SUPPORT WORKER AT CHELTENHAM HOSPITAL; A UNISON MEMBER WHO JOINED THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF NURSING (RCN) SO SHE COULD TAKE STRIKE ACTION

"After decades of Tory mismanagement and underfunding, it would make me feel sick to break a strike. The trade union movement must come together to fight this legislation. But I don't trust Starmer at all, we've also got to look at political alternatives now."

PAUL KERSHAW, CHAIR OF UNITE L1111 HOUSING WORKERS BRANCH

"If you fight you can get results. But there's no scope for complacency. Sharon Graham gives an absolute commitment to supporting any group of workers attacked under MSL. We should see this demo as a start of the campaign. The TUC should build for a really big demo in London linking defeating MSL to the cost-of-living crisis."

SHEILA CAFFREY, STANDING FOR NEU VICE-PRESIDENT

"The TUC should be calling

unions together to coordinate and prepare a 24-hour general strike in the event of work notices being deployed."

SEB MICHNOWICZ, SECRETARY OF ASLEF BRISTOL BRANCH AND PRESIDENT OF BRISTOL TRADES COUNCIL

"We sent a clear message to the train operating companies. In the end, only one of them wanted to impose the MSL and we knocked them back with the threat of five extra strike days in our pay dispute. "We can't trust Starmer. What we need is a new workers' party."

SIMON EDWARDS, BRANCH SECRETARY OF UNITE CARDIFF

"We've been on strike for 15 weeks against Labour-led Cardiff City Council over bullying and poverty pay. They're trying to break our strike. I can't stand Labour."

MIKE PARFITT, CARDIFF UNITE REP

"Labour in Cardiff has turned Blue." What do you think about workers' needing our own political voice? "Go for it."



Aslef train drivers' rolling national strike 30 January - 5 February

Waterloo picket PAUL MATTSSON

NEU vice-president elections: Vote Sheila Caffrey - 1



London strike day demo July 2024 PAULA MITCHELL

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The elections for vice-president of the National Education Union (NEU) open on 1 February. Around half a million teachers, support and supply staff, from early-years to post-16 education in England and Wales, get the chance to vote for two people who will form part of the leading team in the union for the next four years. Those elected vice-president this year will become president and then past-president.

In a general election year, when we faced the prospect of a Keir Starmer-led Labour government, and following historic strike action by teachers in 2023, these elections have rarely been as important.

If NEU members want a leadership that is prepared to speak up for them no matter who is in government, and who will insist the union stands firm to win lasting gains on pay, funding and workload, then they need to vote first preference Socialist Party member Sheila Caffrey.

Sheila Caffrey says

In the last year, we have truly shown the fighting strength of the NEU. I have been proud to play my part as a striking primary teacher, and as a member of the NEU National Executive, re-elected last year on a fighting programme. From my first Exec meeting, I have spoken up, and put forward motions calling for a united, national strategy.

As we prepare again to ballot this year, I argue that we need a serious

strategy that prepares members for the determined action needed to win on pay, funding, and workload reductions. Token strike action is not an option - we need to fight to win!

As a lay-led union, we must build strong union groups in every workplace. But fighting school-by-school on national issues can leave members isolated and reps vulnerable. We need to ensure - from the largest college to the tiniest primary; whether we're teachers or support staff; in early years, schools, FE, or sixth-form; have a permanent contract or agency supply - we all win together!

Workload

This year is also our chance to fight for a meaningful workload contract for teachers and support staff. This must include actual limits on hours staff can be expected to work. It should include stopping management forcing support staff to do work far above their pay grade, and an instant doubling of PPA (preparation, planning and assessment) time for anyone who delivers direct teaching. We must campaign to replace the exam factory regime with a curriculum that is created by - and reflective of - staff and students and the communities in which we work, part of a fully funded public education system accountable to local communities. The NEU should lead on coordinating action with other unions, especially other education unions. That includes fighting to make the new Tory anti-union laws unworkable

- I moved an amendment at our Exec calling on the Trades Union Congress (TUC) to implement its agreements. Our union now has the position of demanding that an incoming Labour government immediately repeals the legislation; but also that our members who wish to take action receive the full backing of the union.

Starmer

We all want the Tories out. But Starmer has promised "tough choices", so we must put demands for fully funded education, with decent pay for all staff, on a likely incoming Labour government. I would also welcome anti-cuts general election candidates who support NEU policies.

I will be a vice-president who truly believes in building a lay-led union. This means I will be a leader who genuinely listens, including to marginalised voices; who responds to all communication and questions - whether I agree or not; who motivates and instils confidence. I will be a leader who is confident to take on the government, and the media, when they're using education workers as a political football. I know half a million education workers can win what education needs if we adopt a bold strategy, and I will be a leader who will galvanise the membership to make sure we do!

Contact me: sheila_caffrey@hotmail.co.uk or Facebook: Sheila Caffrey for NEU vice president

As president, I will campaign for a union that

- WINS ON PAY, FUNDING, WORKLOAD**
- An above-inflation, fully funded pay rise for all
- Reverse decades of funding cuts, including SEND and Early Years
- Win on workload: a new national contract that sets a firm limit on the hours we can be expected to work. A contract for all education staff binding on all employers
- End supply staff exploitation: re-establish Local Authority supply pools with full access to teaching and support staff pensions and terms and conditions

DEFENDS SUPPORT STAFF

- Build a union that unites all school workers
- Defend all jobs against funding cuts
- Return term-time to full-year contracts. End low pay and unrealistic demands
- Win negotiating rights to win for support staff
- PROTECTS CHILDREN'S LEARNING CONDITIONS**
- Abolish Ofsted, SATs and league tables
- Break the 'exam factory' mentality
- End academisation, bring all schools into genuinely democratic control
- Create an inclusive curriculum challenging bias and prejudice

'Amazon is now getting jittery' as strikes spread

GMB members speak to the Socialist



Sutton Coldfield picket line BIRMINGHAM SOCIALIST PARTY

GMB members at Amazon's BHX4 Coventry site have once again voted for strike action. The vote followed an intense campaign to get the turnout required by the anti-strike laws. Phone banking made sure every member knew how to vote, and hadn't forgotten to. Socialist Party members backed up the campaign, along with other supporters, leafletting at the site.

A year after official action began at Coventry, strike action has started at the recently opened Minworth site in Sutton Coldfield, Birmingham. For at least six months there will be two Amazon sites with live mandates for action. Coventry isn't on its own any more, Minworth won't be alone, and Amazon workers at sites across Britain and overseas will see that wider organising against Amazon is possible.

HOW DID YOU WIN THE BALLOT?

We had a hard campaign. Managers put posters targeting the union in the toilets, flyers on boards and in the canteen, saying: 'We want to hear your voice'. Managers said: 'We want to talk with you, the union wants to talk for you'. But the bosses have heard our voices plenty of times, and nothing's changed! There's an anti-union vibe to everything.

We had to keep reminding the members. They do 60-hour weeks, so they have enough to live on, and don't have the energy or time to post the vote. You wake up, go to work, go home, eat something quickly, then sleep. After a 12- to 14-hour day, plus travel, it's easy to forget or not have time to post a ballot.

There's the added difficulty of many members who speak different languages, plus some members who

Two Coventry reps spoke to the Socialist

are very new to the concept of a trade union. But months of struggle has helped break through those barriers. More reps and activists with different languages and backgrounds have stepped up.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE NOW YOU HAVE TWO SITES WITH LIVE BALLOTS?

Amazon are now getting a bit jittery!

Socialist Party members supported the Sutton picket line. Some had worked at the Coventry warehouse previously and so had been on picket lines there. One told the Socialist that the conditions at the Sutton warehouse are worse. Staff are discouraged from even talking to colleagues while on shift, and if people end up having a bit of a chat while they work, they are separated. Another told us that, as in Coventry, Amazon was taking on extra workers to reduce the proportion of union members.

Today, nearly one in five councils are at risk of bankruptcy, according to the Local Government Association. Twelve have issued a 'Section 114' notice in the last three years – declaring that they will limit spending to 'statutory services' only. Significant recent examples are Europe's biggest local authority Birmingham City Council, and Nottingham City Council. Thousands of jobs are under threat.

In the 1980s, Liverpool Labour councillors, faced with Tory central government cuts and a financial hole left over from a previous Liberal administration, fought back and won. Working-class people in the city today still benefit from the homes, leisure centers, schools and parks the council built. **Dave Walsh**, Secretary of Liverpool Trades Union Council, and one of three hundred apprentices taken on by the council in the 1980s, looks at the lessons of Liverpool's Militant socialist council.

The Labour council in Liverpool was elected in 1983, but the conditions which led to its victory had been developing for 20 years. Liverpool's economy boomed post World War Two, but started to decline in the late 1960s.

Containerisation destroyed thousands of jobs on the docks, up until then Liverpool's biggest employer with around 100,000 dockers. De-industrialisation in the 1970s saw many large manufacturers move their production overseas. Liverpool, being an industrial city, was hit hard.

Many of these companies had received public funding which paid for the machinery they were taking out of the country. The city's population collapsed, from 740,000 in 1960 to 480,000 in 1980. Those leaving tended to be younger and in good health, with skills or an education; this left the city disproportionately older, sicker and poorer.

In 1979, Margaret Thatcher's Tory government introduced massive austerity cuts across the public sector. Her government also changed the local government funding formula, reducing government grants that had previously redistributed funds to poorer cities with greater social need like Liverpool.

In 1980, the Liberals took control of Liverpool council with the support of a few Tories. This administration went even further than Thatcher with an underspend which saw them send money back to central government! The Liberal leader Trevor Jones was knighted in 1981.

When the Liberals lost control in 1983, they left £10 million of unallocated cuts, which equated to 2,000

redundancies. You might wonder how a city with such poverty and deprivation had a Liberal-Tory administration? But Liverpool's working class had experienced Labour administrations, elected on radical manifestos that failed to deliver, resulting in apathy.

Labour was then a workers' party but with a pro-capitalist leadership controlling the levers of power. Mass participation of workers and trade unionists in its structures was able to apply pressure and influence party policy. Members of Militant (the Socialist Party's predecessor) campaigned within the Labour Party for a Marxist programme and to transform the democratic structures to make the leadership fully accountable to members. In the conditions that existed in Liverpool, these ideas became increasingly popular. By the early 1980s, Militant was the dominant force within Liverpool District Labour Party.

In May 1983, Labour gained 12 more councillors and a majority. At that time, there were few expectations beyond the activist layer that this Labour administration would be any different from the others; but those thoughts were short-lived. Immediately after being elected, the Militant-led council cancelled the £10 million of unallocated cuts and set a needs-based budget.

Instead of more redundancies, every department saw increased funding based on its needs. Six new nursery schools were built, and five new sports centers – all in working-class areas. Social services, schools, and youth and community services all got extra funding, enabling them to employ more staff and expand vital, front-line services.

In September, the council took on almost 100 apprentices in various departments, I was one of them. These jobs were a lifeline to many young people like me, in a city gripped by hopelessness. In housing maintenance where I worked, there was new funding for planned maintenance projects. This was much more effective than the previous reactive maintenance process which required tenants to phone to report a repair and then wait for months on end for a response. Planned maintenance allowed whole estates in areas that had been neglected for years to be modernised in one fell swoop; providing improvements such as new roofs, windows, bathroom extensions and central heating.

The first site I was sent to at the end of 1983 replaced metal-framed, single-glazed windows

with uPVC double glazing. I'd never even heard of uPVC frames before then. The properties were also fitted with gas central heating. The residents told us their homes went from being ice boxes to warm and comfortable overnight. The council also began to deliver on its main manifesto pledge, to address the city's housing crisis, clear slums and build new council houses.

The councillors were met with resistance from a senior layer of council management. The director of finance told councillors he was unable to release the city's reserves because of his fiduciary responsibility to the city. Previous Labour administrations had hit this barrier before and used it as an excuse to break their promises. But the Militant-led councillors were ready, and told all the directors they must follow the instructions of the democratically elected council or resign. All the directors fell in line.

Liverpool residents were noticing the difference, but so was the capitalist class. The media by this time was full of 'red scare' stories, with headlines accusing the council of reckless spending that risked bankruptcy for the city. But Militant was well organised. Hundreds of volunteers delivered hundreds of thousands of leaflets to homes explaining they were using reserves and prudent borrowing to fund vital services, clear slums and build new homes, and the aim of the campaign was to win back funding that had been stolen from the city by the Tories. This was the battleground during the local elections of May 1984.

The media's biased coverage did result in an increased vote for the Liberals and Tories, but their vote was buried under an avalanche of working-class votes for Labour.

Shockwave

The victory sent a shockwave across the establishment and the following month the Tories sent their environment minister Sir Patrick Jenkins to the city. He was taken on a tour of the city's worst slums by councillors. Tony Mulhearn, one of those councillors, a Militant member and Chair of the District Labour Party, often described Jenkins as an old money, patrician Tory. Jenkins later said at a press conference, "I have seen housing in Liverpool the likes of which I have never seen before". Tony often remembered to people how the shock was etched on Jenkins' face at the site of these terrible slums.

The Tories, who were fighting on two fronts with the 1984-85 miners' strike still raging, were

COUNCILS CAN RESIST THE CUTS LESSONS FROM LIVERPOOL'S SOCIALIST COUNCIL 1983-87



PHOTOS: DAVE SINCLAIR

forced to retreat and released £30 million of funding (£120 million adjusted for inflation). This money allowed the council to continue to implement its manifesto. Other Labour councils, seeing the victory, joined the campaign. This became known as the 'The Rate Capping Rebellion'. In March 1985, the miners' strike came to an end. The Tories now turned to concentrate on the council rebellions. Soon after, district auditors began legal proceedings against councils refusing to set a compliance rate.

The Shop Stewards' Committee at Liverpool Council was well organised, with experienced Militant organisers in leading positions. I remember as an apprentice we were moved around different projects for experience, but the one constant was at every site there was a shop steward's report every Monday morning, reporting back from the previous Friday's Shop Stewards' Committee.

Not all the shop stewards were Militant members, but they were militant workers, elected by us in the workplace, they helped shape the strategy and tactics of the joint union campaign and they relayed information to the workforce very effectively.

When the council took the tactical decision – aimed at pressuring Thatcher's government to release vital funds – to distribute technical 'redundancy notices', it was understood and supported by the majority of council workers as a formal procedure to release short-term funds. Not a single council worker was made redundant during this period.

Eventually, with the Tories still refusing to provide the additional national funding needed, Liverpool council went outside the normal borrowing procedures and took out loans directly with banks.

These were secured on lower interest rates than if they had gone through the usual government channels. This is how the council continued its campaign, clearing slums and building new homes and communicating this via leaflets, public meetings and huge rallies.

The council explained that the slums were the real burden on the city, with high maintenance

costs, low occupancy rates and low rental income; they were the cause of poor health and education outcomes as well as crime and social problems. The rental income on the new homes would pay for the loans, and the improved conditions would reduce costs on other services dealing with the social problems that arise in slum areas, and working-class people understood these arguments very well.

There were many public meetings, union meetings and rallies in the city, and our shop stewards called on union members to attend and make our voices heard. Many thousands of us responded to the call for action by joining mass rallies on a regular basis with up to 50,000 demonstrators; close to 10% of the population.

Liverpool District Labour Party meetings had an entirely different character to Labour Party meetings today. Meetings were hundreds-strong and included scores of delegates from the trade unions in workplaces from across the city, taking part in intense discussion and debate. It was this body, effectively acting at the height of the struggle as a city-wide workers' parliament, which determined council policy. At no stage in the struggle were a majority of Labour councillors Militant members. Instead, workers and activists were politically convinced by Militant members putting forward a fighting programme and strategy.

Meetings were often very heated, with right wingers complaining they felt intimidated. A group of six right-wing Labour councillors broke the whip and wanted to give in to the Tories; they were labeled by the media as the 'Sensible Six'. But their proposals were met with hostility in working-class communities where they were given a less flattering label with the same alliteration! These right-wing councillors complained about intimidation at public meetings and the media accused Militant of whipping up anger and aggression, but this was the natural reaction of working-class people unwilling to give in to Thatcher's plan to place the city into 'managed decline'!

'Rate Capping Rebellion'

The 'Rate Capping Rebellion' at this stage had the potential to achieve a huge defeat on the Tory government. However, Thatcher had an important ally in this fight with support from Neil Kinnock, Labour Party leader. There were no elections in Liverpool in 1985, which was unfortunate as it would have shown support for the council's campaign still growing.

At Labour Party conference that

year, Kinnock lambasted the whole campaign; his treacherous speech revealed him to be a conscious agent of the ruling class and was a threat to other Labour councils not to join the rebellion. One by one, the other councils caved in, leaving Liverpool isolated. At the same conference, Kinnock, the son of a miner, who gave no support to their strike, also condemned the miner's leader, Arthur Scargill.

In 1986, Kinnock followed up on his threats, orchestrating a witch-hunt of the left, expelling many leading Militant members. But in Liverpool that year, the vote for the Militant Labour council went up again and we continued to struggle. At the beginning of 1987, in the final stage of the appeal at the House of Lords, they ruled in favour of government auditors in a highly political decision. 47 democratically elected Labour councillors were removed and banned from office for five years. They were also surcharged, under laws that no longer apply today.

However, the Militant-led movement in Liverpool remained solid. Labour candidates were again elected on the same Militant programme, and again the vote for Labour in Liverpool went up! In reality, the courts weren't Thatcher's best weapon, that prize goes to the treacherous, undemocratic Labour Party leadership. In the general election of that year, Kinnock, having moved the party further to the right, led Labour to its third successive defeat. If the voting trend in Liverpool had been replicated nationally, Labour would have won a landslide.

None of the fighting Labour councillors were removed by Liverpool's voters; they were removed undemocratically by Kinnock and Thatcher. Even after these attacks, Militant still had the organisation and authority within the movement to defeat Thatcher's hated Poll Tax, with a nonpayment campaign which resulted in millions of people refusing to pay, and Thatcher was forced out of office. Kinnock continued the witch hunt and Labour lurched even further to the right. In 1992 he led Labour to a fourth successive defeat.

5,000 council homes

The lasting legacy of the Militant-led council is the 5,000 council houses that were built to replace the slums, they are now well-established estates among the most popular places to live in the city.

Also, there are the important lessons of the struggle; Margaret Thatcher couldn't fight one union and one council at the same time; imagine if just a handful of Labour councils and unions had joined the struggle.

As for the fines of £350,000 faced by councillors – this money was raised by working-class supporters with a huge surplus of tens of thousands of pounds which was later donated to the Liverpool docks strike between 1995-98.

The Socialist Party stands strong today, fighting for the same Marxist programme and combative strategy, proven in Liverpool and in the anti-Poll Tax campaign. We continue to be the only party offering a clear and consistent programme capable of leading workers to a democratic socialist future.

Sparks dispute on Everton's new stadium site

ROB WILLIAMS
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL WORKPLACE AND TRADE UNION ORGANISER

Up to 200 electricians working on the new £500 million Everton FC stadium in Liverpool are in dispute over pay and overtime rates. The skilled workers at the Bramley Moore Dock site are angry because they feel that they are being disadvantaged compared to the other trades on the 1,200-strong site. "We want parity with everyone else," said a worker.

The main contractor is Laing O'Rourke, but the electrical work is being subbed out (sub-contracted out), with the electricians on a self-employed basis rather than directly employed. This means that they miss out on basics such as sick pay, redundancy and other union-agreed 'JIB' terms and conditions.

One of the main issues is that they only get single time for working overtime. Workers report that the job is a non-union site. Laing O'Rourke was one of the construction companies which were taken on in the courts by blacklisted workers and Unite the Union, leading to a settlement in 2016.

A worker, Michael Jones, an Everton supporter, tragically died on the site last August. Everton fans paid a touching tribute to Michael and his family at the team's next home match.

Walkout

But this hasn't stopped the electricians fighting for their demands. The Liverpool Echo reports that: "Electricians working on the Bramley Moore Dock stadium site walked off site yesterday (24 January) 'after working their legal hours' due to what they said were issues over pay and working overtime."

The electricians walked off again on 26 January at 12.30pm, at the end of their scheduled hours. They left the site at the same time as workers from the other electrical firm, half an hour earlier than normal.

Everton fans will be furious that these practices are going on at their new stadium. They call their team the 'Peoples Club' and would demand that the workers, many of whom come from the local area, be treated properly. The rest of the Merseyside trade union movement, and construction workers across the country, will be supporting any action that the workers take.

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'Escape persecution, only to be evicted'

Friday 26 January was the deadline for 400 asylum seekers to "exit" hotels in Waltham Forest, east London. They were given just eight days' notice. Local residents and campaigners gave support, including vigils outside the hotels.

One asylum seeker told Socialist Party members: "I came here from Iran, because of political persecution. I have been here 18 months, sharing a room with another single person - so small there is no floor space. I was moved out a few days ago and given temporary accommodation by the council, but I've been told I have to leave that by 21 February!"

Hospital

Another showed us photos of his wife and newborn baby, born at the local hospital just the day before they had to leave the hotel.

Neighbours spoke at a vigil, saying: "Our children have played with the children from the hotel for the last year. They have gone to school together. We are heartbroken that now they have to leave without even knowing where they are going."

The local community has been standing outside all week. Neighbours cried and waved goodbye to who-knows-where.

A council volunteer told us he has been working with asylum seekers here for two years and knows them all by name. Waltham Forest is a 'Borough of Sanctuary'. When asked what help councillors had given, he told us their response was "we can't offer more than our presence." Not even that was on show, let alone any attempt to fight the government.



Socialist Party member James Ivens speaking at the vigil. PAULA MITCHELL

Socialist Party member and recent election candidate Nancy Taaffe sent this statement to the local press:

Defend asylum seekers and campaign against war

We stand in solidarity with vulnerable asylum seekers given just eight days' notice of eviction from a Walthamstow hotel. This includes parents and children.

side, that a Labour-led government would carry out virtually the same policies as the Tories on refugees.

And we ask them - where do they stand on the onslaught on Gaza and the bombing of Houthis in Yemen? Do they back these actions, like the leader of the Labour Party does - actions which not only slaughter thousands of people but also create yet more refugees?

Homes for All

There are 9,000 families in housing need in Waltham Forest, while private renters get evicted due to poverty and the council sends them off to places like Stoke-on-Trent rather than provide them with homes in our borough.

Socialist Party members have stood with others outside working-class people's houses to prevent evictions and have helped families stay in the borough; we have campaigned for eight years against monster blocks of expensive flats; and instead call for council homes on secure tenancies and genuinely affordable rents.

Socialist Party members have stood in council and London elections to fight for these demands, as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), and will stand in the general election too. We want the Tories out, but we need MPs and councillors who will fight for us, not for the rich! Join with us!

- Defend asylum seekers
- Stop the onslaught on Gaza and bombing of Houthis in Yemen
- No evictions due to poverty - and stop sending people hundreds of miles away
- Fight for homes for all - build council homes on secure tenancies and low rents
- Stop and reverse austerity - fight for the resources to meet all our needs

It is disgusting that the Tory government uses vulnerable people as a political football.

The Tories are completely divided and face losing the upcoming general election, and play with the lives of traumatised and desperate people in the hopes of a boost in the polls.

We welcome that the leader of Waltham Forest Labour council says they will give support to asylum seekers.

But we ask them to come out clearly against the policies of their leader Keir Starmer, who is so determined to prove to the bosses that he is on their

Don't let the Tories divide us Fight for council homes

GRACE HUGHES
LEEDS SOCIALIST PARTY

Rents are too high, council housing waiting lists are longer than ever, and if you're in social or council housing good luck getting repairs or mould sorted out.

The Tory government's desperate response to the housing crisis - proposing to prioritise British people for council housing, dubbed 'British homes for British workers'. A cynical attempt to pit working-class people against each other.

If the Tories are so concerned about people being housed, why have they sold off council homes and refused to build more?

Waiting lists

The decline in the number of socially rented properties in England is a major concern. The number of new socially rented properties added to the market dropped from nearly 40,000 in 2010-11, to a mere 9,561 by

2022-23. This shortage has resulted in homeless families enduring years on waiting lists without any hope of finding a stable home - the housing waiting list is 1.2 million long and many aren't even allowed to join. Instead of fighting for the resources needed to provide services, councils have sold off land to balance the books. Between 2014 and July 2018, more than 12,000 assets, worth £2.8 billion, had been offloaded by local councils. Many of these assets, such as leisure centres and community centres, should not have been sold, but using suitable land for council housing would be a more viable option than losing them forever to private buyers.

Scapegoat

The government's proposal attempts to scapegoat foreigners, unfairly blaming them for the housing crisis. Social and council housing is only available to people eligible to claim UK benefits - over 90% of socially

rented housing has lead tenants who are British citizens.

This is why the government proposals are flawed on multiple levels. Instead of increasing divisions and perpetuating discrimination, a mass council house building programme is urgently needed. It is crucial to prioritise the construction of affordable housing for all, in order to ensure

that everyone has access to safe and stable homes, regardless of their nationality or immigration status.

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AREA	£ RECEIVED	£ TARGET	Q1: JANUARY-MARCH 2024	DEADLINE: 31 MARCH 2024
South West	1,325	2,100	63%	
Southern & SE	1,257	2,400	52%	
West Midlands	847	2,700	31%	
Wales	690	2,400	29%	
London	1,257	5,000	25%	
North West	242	1,200	20%	
Yorkshire	446	2,650	17%	
Eastern	164	1,300	13%	
East Midlands	237	2,050	12%	
Northern	45	800	6%	
Other	1,054	2,400	44%	
TOTAL	7,565	25,000	30%	



Labour's sneaky cuts spark mass resistance

We saved Hackney children's centres before, we'll save them again

BRIAN DEBUS
HACKNEY UNISON CHAIR AND SOCIALIST PARTY

The bombshell that Hackney Labour council is closing two children's centres, and changing two others, has upset the staff and parents, but also generated a groundswell of opposition. Jobs are under threat at all of the centres.

Instead of five working days' notice, the council broke its own rules by smuggling the report onto its website after 7pm on a Friday evening, to be railroaded through at a council cabinet meeting three days later.

The reason? A by-election concluded on the Thursday, the day before, in the ward where two of the centres are located, and bordering another.

Labour

Labour's problems were compounded after its candidate was suspended a week before the election for anti-trust social media posts, but then reinstated hours before the poll closed! The manoeuvring didn't work. Labour lost to the Tories.

The by-election was caused by the election of the previous Labour councillor - Caroline Woodley - to the position of Hackney mayor. Woodley had led proposals to close two of the children's centres in 2022!

Two years ago, we successfully fought the closure of Fernbank and Hillside, after a massive campaign by parents, the workers' union Unison, and the Socialist Party. Now Fernbank and Sebright are threatened with closure, while Old Hill and Hillside face changes.

The Tory government has announced a supposed expansion of free childcare (see 'Childcare promise meaningless without funding the full costs' socialistparty.org.uk). For Hackney Labour council to reduce its provision is one more example of the consequences of meekly implementing Tory central government cuts. It should be expanding childcare services, and sending the government the bill!

Strike

The workforce at Fernbank has already indicated that it is prepared to ballot for strike action. There will be meetings of Sebright workers on 6-7 February.

There was a parents' protest on 29 January. And there was a Zoom meeting of parents from different centres on 30 January.

All this in less than a week from the council's decision.

- See how we won before - 'Victory! Hackney children's centres saved' at socialistparty.org.uk

Council pays commissioners to destroy services

Woking needs councillors prepared to fight



Paul Couchman is secretary of Surrey Unison (personal capacity), Save Our Services in Surrey, and a Socialist Party member.

Woking Council has an annual budget of £24 million, but a debt of £1.9 billion! This is a result of Tory government austerity, and previous Tory council leaders gambling on real estate.

This was all approved by the Tory government. Now the government is demanding the current Lib-Dem council make the people of Woking

The Tory government has imposed commissioners on the town. Each

commissioner is paid over £1,000 per day out of council funds to oversee the destruction of local public services. The proposed 10% rise in council tax will just about cover the £3 million estimated cost of these unelected butchers.

The council has been told to cut nearly half its budget this year - it's eye-watering. Then another 25% cut year-on-year for at least the next five years.

This means hundreds of council jobs - along with the knock-on impact on the local shops and businesses. Parts of Woking could become wastelands - bereft of services.

What is being cut?

All 'discretionary' services will need to be provided by someone else, or cut, primarily those needed by the most vulnerable. So-called discretionary services include: parks and green spaces; art, sport and culture; a swimming pool; public toilets; grants

for things like Citizens Advice Bureau and community transport; translation services; day care and hot meal services!

What can we do?

Councillors have been told to "work at pace" to make cuts. Sadly, the government's own report states: "Members and officers have been very cooperative". Councillors from all the capitalist parties say that they cannot act.

Councillors should continue to provide all these desperately needed services. At the same time, they should demand the shortfall is covered by central government. This would galvanise the local population, bring the unions on board, and pressure the government to put its hand down the back of the sofa. The government should write off the vast debts run up by previous Tory councillors.

Save Our Services in Surrey, supported by Socialist Party and many local trade unionists, is lobbying the council on 8 February when it finalises its cuts budget. Come along and join us.

Also, consider standing as a candidate in May's local elections. If we had a dozen fighting, socialist councillors prepared to make a stand, we could offer a real campaigning leadership, and push back the cuts agenda.

Southampton meeting says: 'We are together, join us, and speak out'



CATHERINE CLARKE
SOUTHAMPTON WEST SOCIALIST PARTY

At our People's Budget meeting, The Venny was on everyone's mind. This little park has played a big part in the lives of many. Over 50 people packed into a small room at St Mary's Leisure Centre, that we helped save from cuts previously.

Socialist Party member Nadia Ditta said: "We need youth services. If they take the Venny, there is nothing for 57 streets, and how many children?"

"The council have got used to us saying nothing. Like lots of us, I was sitting at home complaining.

"Now we are coming together as

a community. Join us, come out and speak out."

Socialist Party member Declan Clune is secretary of Southampton Trades Union Council. He highlighted that when we are organised, we can force the council to find the money. This has been clear through the strike action taken by workers over the past two years.

These problems are not new, but there is a new mood now - "we have had enough!"

We demand our public money is spent on jobs, services and housing, not bombs, war and destruction, so no one goes cold, hungry or homeless here, in Palestine, and throughout the world. That is what Nadia will fight for when she stands as a TUSC candidate in Bevois in the council election in May.

Cuts hit hard

The Bevois ward is the poorest in the city. A decade of cuts have hit the area hard. The streets are filthy. Fly tipping is a big issue.

Many houses are multiple occupation, when tenants move, furniture is

dumped. The council used to have a free service to collect large items. Now it costs £85 to take away a fridge. We need these services restored. Housing is a massive issue. One small house has at least 15 tenants.

Karen, a housing adviser, explained that the Tory government has dismantled all renting regulations. We call for rent controls, and the council regulation of all landlords.

The Tory central government has cut over £500 million from Southampton since 2012. We demand that back!

Pressure Tories

If the Labour council set a no-cuts budget to meet the needs of the city, using its reserves and borrowing powers, instead of passing on Tory cuts, it could build huge support, and, linking with council trade unions, put massive pressure on this weak and divided government to restore funding.

"These problems are not new, but there is a new mood now - "we have had enough!"

We demand our public money is spent on jobs, services and housing, not bombs, war and destruction, so no one goes cold, hungry or homeless here, in Palestine, and throughout the world. That is what Nadia will fight for when she stands as a TUSC candidate in Bevois in the council election in May.

• Read more from Nadia 'I joined the Socialist Party because of war and cuts', and about the Venny campaign, at 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

Do you agree? Join the fightback!

JOIN THE SOCIALISTS

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

Help fund the fightback!

DONATE TODAY

socialistparty.org.uk/donate

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.

Memories of Alan

We first met Alan Hardman in the late 1960s through some comrades living in Maidenhead. He was already a confirmed socialist, and always ready for lively discussions on politics and art. But it was 1971, when the Militant Editorial Board decided it was necessary to go to a fortnightly paper and to buy our own press, that became a real landmark in Alan's contribution.

We moved into new premises bought from the Independent Labour Party in Cambridge Heath Road, London. To become habitable, the building had to be completely renovated from top to bottom: drains had to be laid, joists put in, floors completely rebuilt, walls plastered. This was made possible only by the devoted and strenuous efforts of our supporters in carrying out massive improvements and repairs to the building.

Many comrades helped, including myself (Peter) doing the digging, with Ted Mooney from Liverpool, and others, adding their knowledge of construction work. Into the back shed was packed Militant's first precious printing press, acquired through the diligence of Militant's first printer, Alan. Also cramped in the shed was an archaic folding machine. Eventually the first fortnightly Militant was produced and sold with no more than 217 committed supporters throughout the country. Alan played a crucial role in this early development.

He was not only an extremely talented comrade, practical in every way, skilful, and curious to learn how to mend machines and create useful components; he was also an artist. He often talked about the need to unify the arts and engineering, rather than separate them, as he had observed was happening to the curriculum in schools.

He was fascinated by the work of George Grosz, a German artist in the 1930s who was able to depict in his drawings the power of the working class and the despicable greed of



VIETNAM PEACE! ...To robbery, butchery and rapine, they give the lying name 'government', they create a desolation and call it peace... "GROSZ TO BE ABLE, IN THE BARRON REPORT"

the boss class. The influence of Grosz could be detected in many of Alan's own drawings, and his cartoons began to be featured regularly in Militant.

As an ardent socialist committed to Militant, he enjoyed discussing whatever the current political situation presented us. The 1970s and 1980s, when a Labour government was followed by the vicious Thatcher government's attacks on the unions, were particularly full of all kinds of events like strikes, anti-redundancy campaigns, unemployment, wars and more - providing the basic stuff for satire and political comment.

Especially when we moved our premises to a bigger building in Hackney Wick, Alan had the opportunity to discuss with a whole variety of comrades; but Alan and I would get together weekly - sometimes daily - to exchange ideas about what he might focus his cartoon on that week. He recognised that a clear class analysis was a vital ingredient for an impressive cartoon. He needed to assure himself he was getting the message right.

Sometimes a visual cartoon can encapsulate written political points in a more dynamic way. Other times he could pick up an action or a phrase and develop a whole point. I once mentioned to him a quote that Linda had shown me. It was a comment by a Roman historian about the crimes of imperialism. Alan turned this into one of his most popular cartoons in a condemnation of the USA's Nixon government waging ruthless devastation on the Vietnamese peasants (above).

Comrades looked forward eagerly to his cartoons. Some people even bought the paper just for the cartoon! When Alan moved back to Yorkshire with his family, and as he got older, his cartoons were sorely missed.

In a world today, where visual tech images are ten-a-penny, Alan's cartoons stand the test of time. For us they are outstanding because they speak for our class. They speak about the power the working class possesses to change society by getting rid of the cruel, greedy, corrupt, ruthless capitalists and imperialists. His memory will live on in his cartoons, but his younger comrades will continue to fight on for the socialist change to which he was so committed.

Farewell Alan, friend, and comrade. We salute you.

PETER AND LINDA TAAFFE

OBITUARY: ALAN HARDMAN 1936-2024 MILITANT CARTOONIST AND PRINTER



Socialist Party and Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) members are saddened at the loss of Alan Hardman, who passed away in hospital on Thursday 18 January in hospital.

Alan became politically active in the 1960s, joining the Labour Party and as an active trade unionist. He was a trained lithographic printer, having done a six-year apprenticeship in his home town of Barnsley. Alan moved down south after completing his national service, his distaste for the hierarchical nature of the officer caste added to his developing class consciousness. Here he came into contact with the ideas of Militant (now Socialist Party), becoming its first printer.

As Keith Dickinson recalls: "His contribution ranged from doing the page layout, making the negatives for the offset plate-making, doing the printing and maintaining the machines, even engineering spare parts. After he had found and bought excellent machinery at bargain prices, it was all squeezed into inadequate spaces.

"When he had finished his full-time shift in the Thames Valley, he would drive to Militant offices in East London, complete the page layouts and negatives, drive to a plate-maker on his way back to Sonning Common, do his shift, then back to print the Militant the next day or night."

When that press was replaced by a bigger press, Alan helped pack it for shipment and travelled over to Spain to set it up for the then Spanish section of the CWI that was developing at the end of the Franco era to help them to properly utilize it.

Alan is best known among Socialist Party members for his cartoons. At first, these were produced while also making sure the Militant was coming out. He decided he ought to try to complete them in one take. Obviously the response to these first attempts was positive and the rest they say is history!

Alan produced a range of cartoons, sometimes expressing a simple idea in the most striking of ways. Of particular note are some of the cartoons produced during the 1984-85 miners' strike. Cartoons were drawn following discussions with miners and other Militant supporters, would be drawn within hours, and then appear

on the picket lines within days.

When Militant supporter Pat Wall was elected as a Labour MP in Bradford North in 1987, Alan drew a huge 12x8 foot cartoon which was affixed to a supporter's house, depicting the wrecking-ball approach the Tories were taking to local services.

In later years, despite Alan's output slowing, such was the lasting effectiveness of his work that ones drawn years or even decades earlier simply needed an updated caption. Over the last decade, his work began to get wider recognition with invitations to take part in exhibitions in Barnsley and Skipton.

Alan was incredibly humble and self-sacrificing - he knew how to find his place as part of a team to get the best results. It is to Alan's credit that he was prepared to put his considerable talents at the disposal of a revolutionary party and the struggle for socialism.

Alan didn't do things by half, when the Yorkshire Socialist Party region held a rally for mark 50 years since the founding of the Militant, we invited Alan to set up, an exhibition of his cartoons. Reluctantly, he agreed

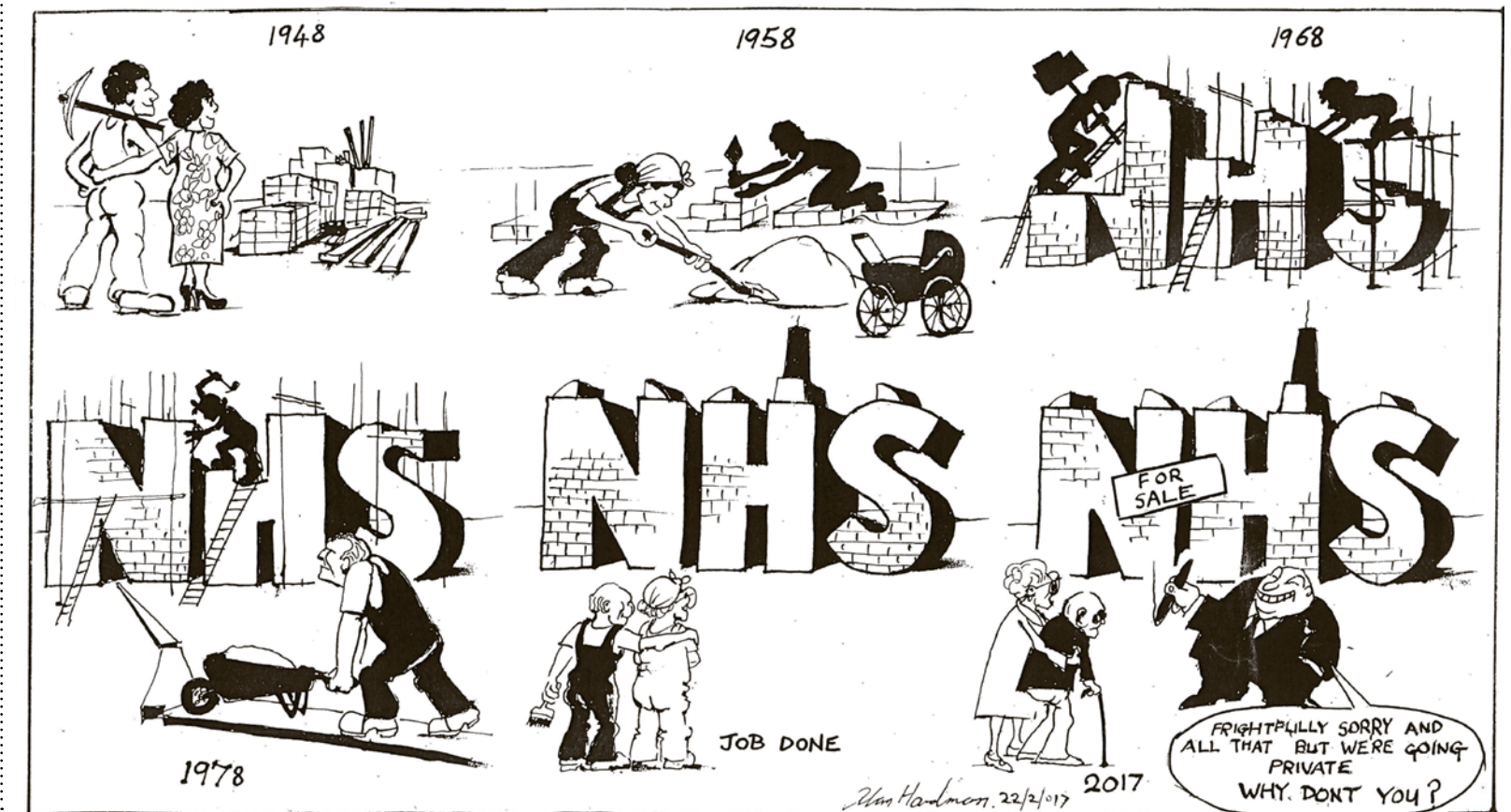
to address the meeting. When comrades arrived to set up, Alan had already covered the whole room with his artwork.

And never one to miss a trick, when a comrade asked whether they could get a print, Alan promptly started selling images from the walls of the meeting to raise money for the fighting fund! In the following years, Alan raised thousands of pounds for the fighting fund at national events.

In his last years, Alan was a carer for his wife Sue. Alan had always been acutely aware of the importance of the NHS and, in an interview for a book soon to be published of his work he aptly commented: "We've always been fighting to preserve our National Health Service and that's because anything that the capitalists can't make profit from eg education and health, the Tories detest. They can't wait to dismantle and make a profit from it"

Our condolences go to his family, his wife Sue, children Anna and Ben and his grandchildren.

IAN DALTON SECRETARY, YORKSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY



TV review: 'The Miners' Strike: Battle for Britain'

Striking memories from Shirebrook



Former Derbyshire miners remember the strike in The Miners' Strike 1984: The Battle for Britain PHOTO: CHANNEL 4

It's 40 years since the year-long miners' strike, but its passion and struggle stays vivid in the memories of those who lived through it. A storm ripped through mining communities but brought Thatcher's Tory government to the brink of defeat.

Socialist Party members Ronnie Rogers and Jon Dale watched Channel 4's documentary 'The Miners' Strike: Battle for Britain' first episode, set in Shirebrook, North Derbyshire. Ronnie was a striking Shirebrook miner for the whole year. Jon lived nearby and actively supported the strike.

Ronnie: "The film was more balanced than I expected, but it's disturbed me watching it and stirred up a lot of strong feelings. I'm proud we fought to save our community. And I'm glad it showed 'NUM' painted on a wall round the corner from me - still there after all this time!"

Jon: "It repeated the myth that Arthur Scargill, National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) leader, called the strike. He didn't. Cortonwood miners walked out when the South Yorkshire pit's closure was announced, breaking the National Coal Board's (NCB) commitment to keep it open. The announcement was timed by the NCB and government for the arrival of warmer weather."

Shirebrook NUM strike leaders described what the strike fought to save - a community and industry where "it wasn't every man for himself. It was every man for everybody." When anyone was injured, the pit and community looked after them. Social activities with facilities for all ages centred around the pit. All miners wanted was a warm home, food on the table, education for their kids, to go out for a few drinks, and a holiday once a year - but "government and those at the top don't want to give it to them."

Scargill is shown speaking to a

meeting packed to the rafters. To cheering, he says: "You've only got to do one thing to win this battle - to remain united and stay determined."

Also seen was Militant's (forerunner of the Socialist Party) posters outside the North Derbyshire NUM offices, where young miners waited eagerly to hear the Area was backing the strike. (The posters were Alan Hardman cartoons, see page 12-13)

Jon: "Tragically, despite tremendous solidarity and determination, this wasn't enough to win. With the future of Thatcher's government at stake, miners' leaders should have called for a 24-hour general strike over the heads of right-wing TUC leaders, as Militant argued at the time."

Ronnie: "The film didn't mention the support we got from rail workers. It showed a coal train passing through Shirebrook, but not the railworkers who refused to move coal. "Two local strike leaders interviewed were 28 at the time (same age as me). A miner's wife interviewed, active in the Women's Support Group, was 21. It was young miners and their families who fought hardest for their future."

At the end of the film, after the pit was demolished, there's a shot of Sports Direct's huge warehouse, built later on the site, with unions kept out.

The results of Thatcher's war on the working class were low pay, insecure agency work, poor working conditions and bullying management. The strike's defeat, and the trade union and Labour leaders who moved to the right afterwards, boosted bosses' profiteering. But a new generation of young workers and trade union militants are now emerging who can learn from this heroic struggle.

• All episodes are available to watch at channel4.com

Argentina general strike against the Milei government



Milei and his cabinet announce the new legislation PHOTO: PRESIDENCIA DE LA NACION/CC

TONY SAUNOIS
COMMITTEE FOR A WORKERS' INTERNATIONAL
SECRETARY

The election of far right Javier Milei as Argentine President, known as "El Loco" - the madman - has thrown down the gauntlet to the working class. The programme he has announced after taking office, if enacted, amounts to a tsunami of attacks on the working class. It is the programme of the 'Chicago Boys' on steroids.

Included in an emergency decree, and then a mega reform bill known as the 'omnibus law', are hundreds of explosive measures. They include a wave of privatisations, brutal spending cuts, a massive expansion of presidential powers, and attacks on the right to protest and strike.

Of 18 government departments, nine have already been closed, including those responsible for education, the environment, women's and gender rights. The Argentine peso has been devalued by more than 50%. Argentina had been at the forefront of progressing women's and gender rights in Latin America, but now Milei is threatening to roll back these reforms, and threatening a referendum to take away the right to abortion.

Argentina has been in the grip of a devastating economic crisis. It has worsened since Milei's election. Monthly inflation hit 25% in December, compared with 12% in November. Annual inflation is at 211.4% and is the highest in three decades. Over 40% of the population is living below the official poverty line.

Milei came to power following a devastating economic crisis which the outgoing corrupt Peronist regime was incapable of resolving. Support for the Peronists had slumped as corruption and attacks on the working class undermined its traditionally strong working-class base. The vote for Milei was a cry of desperation of the oppressed and ravaged middle class.

Yet the declaration of war thrown down by Milei is set to provoke massive class battles and struggles. After only 45 days in power, he has confronted a massive general strike. Up to 300,000 rallied in Buenos Aires and in other protests throughout the

country. The powerful Peronist-controlled trade unions were compelled by the pressure from the ranks to call action. The strong state sector, in which they have a powerful base, is under a massive assault.

The crucial question is what now? A 12-hour general strike to mobilise workers and the masses was an important step forward. However, this is not enough and a national plan of struggle is urgently needed to confront Milei's government.

The right wing are preparing for a bitter struggle. Although they do not have a majority in the Congress, they threatened the deputies of the Trotskyist FIT, which has five seats in the Chamber of Deputies, with "prison or a bullet", illustrating what lies ahead.

It is urgent that the bureaucratic leaders of the trade unions be challenged and a programme of struggle mapped out. The FIT needs to initiate a campaign to call a national congress of all those prepared to struggle against the reactionary programme of the government. The 12-hour general strike needs to be followed up with calls for further action, including a 48-hour general strike in preparation for action to challenge and defeat the government.

It is essential that the FIT also initiates a struggle to win the support of rank-and-file workers who are increasingly disillusioned with the bureaucratic and corrupt Peronist leaders, including in the trade unions which they control.

The crisis in Argentina is preparing the way for a social explosion and uprising. The FIT faces the task to build mass support for an alternative to capitalism and to raise the need for a government of the working class and poor that will enact a programme to break with capitalism.

Such a programme would need to include a refusal to pay the massive debt which is crippling the economy, nationalisation of the banking sector and key sectors of the economy under democratic workers' control and management, introduction of capital controls, and an emergency socialist plan to rebuild the devastated economy. The explosive events pending in Argentina will have a crucial impact in the struggles unfolding throughout Latin America.

The 12-hour general strike needs to be followed up with calls for further action, including a 48-hour general strike, in preparation for action to challenge and defeat the government

Over one million protest across Germany against the far-right AfD



Sol (CWI Germany) supporters on a recent anti-far right protest in Stuttgart

SASCHA STANICIC
SOZIALISTISCHE ORGANISATION SOLIDARITÄT (CWI
IN GERMANY) NATIONAL SPOKESPERSON

Well over a million people demonstrated against the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) in January. Huge demonstrations of hundreds of thousands took place in Berlin, Hamburg, Munich and Cologne. Large mobilisations took place not only in the major cities, but also throughout the country and in many small towns. Concern about the rise of the far right has turned into protest. That is good and important. But that alone will not stop the AfD.

The trigger for the protests was a secret meeting of fascists, AfD and CDU (conservative party) members, at which the participants discussed deportation plans for millions of people with a migrant background. This is in a country where 13.4 million of its 84 million residents are not

German citizens. As outrageous and dangerous as such extreme nationalist fantasies are, they were just the straw that broke the camel's back.

Many people were just waiting to be called out for a mass demonstration against the right. After all, the rise of the AfD has been steadily increasing in the opinion polls for months. It is currently the second-strongest party, and is causing concern, not only for those who would be the direct victims of AfD policies, but also for the powerful capitalist organisations and bourgeois parties. For the eastern German states, the possibility of ungovernability or coalitions between the CDU and Die Linke (Left Party) or the new Wagenknecht-led party, BSW (see more at socialistworld.net), is already being discussed for the period after the state elections in September this year.

Protest is not enough
Accordingly, these demonstrations



What we need is a mass socialist workers' party that does not play by the rules of the system and takes a clear stand

French farmers block roads and cities

TERRY ADAMS
SOUTH WEST FRANCE

Since the parliamentary elections in 2022, French president Emmanuel Macron has presided over a minority government.

His response to this has been to move even further to the right in an attempt to get his party's programme through the legislature, and to undercut the threat posed by Le Pen's far-right party in the European elections which take place later this year.

Against this background, a French

agricultural crisis has erupted. Farmers have taken to the streets (actually to the roads) with their grievances - "colère des agriculteurs", or farmers' anger.

The protests which echo the 2018 Gilets Jaunes 'yellow vest' movement have blocked major roads and some city centres, and have now been stepped up, to in effect lay siege to Paris with eight major roads into the capital blocked.

The farmers are protesting a planned increase in the diesel fuel tax (it is set at a lower rate for farmers), over-regulation, low prices

received for their produce and high cost increases.

The new French prime minister, Gabriel Attal, has attempted to pacify the farmers by putting off the diesel tax increase and promising to cut regulation and paperwork. It's unlikely this will be enough to satisfy the farmers who will want to press a weak government into making more concessions.

What is lacking in this situation is a generalising of the grievances and the protests. The plight of the small farmers is no different to others who are struggling to make a living.

were also characterised by the participation of politicians who actually pursue right-wing policies - if one understands right-wing to mean what it has historically been understood to mean: policies against the interests of the working class, women and discriminated minorities, militarism and the dismantling of democratic rights. In other words, policies such as those implemented by the CDU/CSU, but also by the SPD, Greens and FDP in the so-called 'traffic light' coalition government.

However, it is precisely these policies that are driving more and more people into the arms of the AfD, which - in complete contrast to the reality of this being a party of entrepreneurs and aristocrats - presents itself as a party of the 'little people' and against the establishment.

Fighting the causes

If you want to stop the AfD, you have to tackle the causes of its rise. If we demonstrate together with the perpetrators of unpopular policies - under a banner of unity across all classes - this is impossible and the effect of the mass protests will be limited. For the time being, the AfD has thus gained a headwind and its opponents will (hopefully) take a more self-confident stance against racism and the AfD.

However, those who have fallen for the right-wing populists out of justified anger at the anti-social capitalist conditions and arrogance of the ruling elite will hardly be convinced in this way that they are on the wrong track. At the same time, the traffic light coalition and the CDU/CSU are continuing to prepare the ground for the AfD with their anti-working class, anti-middle class and racist policies. Even if the AfD's poll ratings now fall by a few percentage points, this will not have a lasting effect.

Ban?

The discussion about banning the AfD points in the wrong direction. Firstly, a ban would not solve the problem, but would consolidate and probably even strengthen the AfD camp. At the same time, the AfD could quickly reorganise itself under a new name, just as the far-right Vlaams Blok did in Belgium - it is now called Vlaams Belang, and nothing else has changed except that currently it tops the Belgian opinion polls. Secondly, although there are many Nazis in the AfD, it is not a fascist party and the

vast majority of its voters are not fascists either. It must be defeated politically. A ban would be grist to the mill of AfD propaganda.

Class struggle against the right

The best means in the fight against racism and the AfD are, firstly, the joint struggle of German and non-German workers and socially disadvantaged people for their common interests - for adequate wages, better working conditions, affordable housing, investment in education, health and social services. The trade unions have the task of organising this struggle and consciously involving migrant workers in it. Secondly, there needs to be a mass political alternative from the left, a political representation of the interests of the working class.

When the leader of the Left Party, Martin Schirdewan, now calls for an 'uprising of those responsible', he is handing over responsibility for the fight against the right to those who cannot lead it because they are part of the problem, instead of confidently pointing out a way to fight the right from below. This adaptation of the Left Party to the establishment is one of the reasons why the AfD is able to rally the protest against 'those at the top' behind it.

What we need, however, is a mass socialist workers' party that does not play by the rules of the system and takes a clear stand - against the SPD and the Greens (as the Left Party does not do sufficiently), and against racism and hostility towards migrants (as the BSW does not do). And which leads the fight for a socialist democracy, because "you cannot have capitalism without racism" (Malcolm X).

Sozialistische Organisation Solidarität (CWI in Germany) is committed to this wherever we are active: in trade unions, the Left Party, social movements, workplaces, schools and universities. We invite everyone to do this together with us!



French farmers' blockade PHOTO: TERRY ADAMS

£1/£2 solidarity price

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SAVE OUR STEEL NATIONALISATION NOT DEVASTATION!



PHOTO: ALEC THRAVES

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

The fightback to save jobs and to ensure the survival of the local community in Port Talbot and the surrounding area has begun!

By proposing to sack 2,800 steel workers, alongside the impact to thousands of other subsidiary workers, Tata has declared a class war in South Wales to blatantly defend its shareholders' multi-million pound

profits.

This industrial butchery has brought the steel unions, small businesses, and the wider community together and united them in their battle to save steel.

A protest by Unite the Union outside the steelworks on 26 January highlighted the anger and determination of steelworkers and supporters to fight back.

Jason Wyatt, a Unite rep at the plant, said it was absolutely clear that: "Tata's plan is a devastation of the steelworks and to effectively

remove primary steelmaking"

Mike Rivers, a retired ex-Unite deputy convener at the steelworks, expressed his concern at the loss of future jobs for the younger generation: "I used to be an ex-miner before I joined the steelworks, the main difference then was that there were jobs to go to, there isn't now!"

The steel unions have highlighted the critical importance of primary steelmaking being retained in the UK. Stephen Kinnock, the local Labour MP, has 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."

So, If steel is so critical for the UK economy, then Labour should pledge now that a future UK Labour government, which could be just months away, will immediately renationalise the steel industry under democratic workers' control and management, with no compensation for Tata's billionaire executives!

To keep the furnaces firing, on an environmentally friendly basis, it is

futile to appeal to Tata's billionaire executives or any other private corporation to finance the billions of pounds required for a green transition. Profit is their only motivation!

In preparation for an industrial action ballot to save steel jobs, the unions, supported by the Wales Trades Union Congress, should call a mass demonstration in Port Talbot under the slogan of 'nationalisation not devastation' and demand a commitment off Labour leader Keir Starmer to prepare for that action now!

WHAT WE STAND FOR: THE SOCIALIST PARTY'S MAIN DEMANDS >>> see column on page 12

