

TORIES MAKE US POORER

KICK THEM OUT!



PHOTO: NICK CLARE

Working-class people need our own voice

Inflation is going to fall! Isn't that wonderful? "Pressure is starting to ease", says Sunak. The cost-of-living crisis will soon be over. Believe that when you feel it in your pocket!

While bankers are happy that the

UK could hit its target of 2% inflation within months, the British public is less optimistic. Who can blame them?

A fifth of households are struggling to pay their water bills which are set to jump above-inflation in the next few months. Energy prices have seen similar increases.

As costs shoot up, we're seeing more and more stories of the sacrifices people are making to get by. Parents missing meals so their children can eat, or families wearing coats on coats to avoid the cost of putting the heating on.

Whatever happens with inflation rates, unless our wages go up and funding for our services is restored after a decade-plus of cuts, the cost-of-living crisis for ordinary people won't be ending any time soon.

Low-paid workers and others on benefits won't get the £900 of cost-of-living payments they have received again. As a general election looms on the horizon, people will correctly want to see the back of the Tories.

But is the Labour Party any alternative? Labour leaders argue with one side of their mouth that they

will be 'pro-worker', then reassure big business that Labour's on their side with the other (see page 3).

Starmer's dropped pledges

With countless dropped pledges, Keir Starmer's Labour wants caps on benefits for families but not on banker's bonuses.

Labour councils give a glimpse of a Starmer government, as they have made massive cuts to services up and down the country rather than fight for what's needed.

The cost of living is too high now!

We can't just wait for a 'better economic climate' to mean the parties of big business give us some crumbs from the table.

We've seen through the months of strikes the power working people have, and the victories we can achieve when we fight for what we need. We need to keep that fight up and expand the struggle to the ballot box. A new, mass party of our own fighting for our interests would be a major step forward.

MICHAEL JOHNSON
LEEDS SOCIALIST PARTY

the Socialist formerly Militant

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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.

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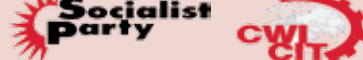
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"The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it." Karl Marx

Help us build the socialist, anti-war election stand



PHOTO: NICK CLARE

A general election could be called at any point between now and the end of the year. The Tories are absolutely hated, but through the strike wave and the huge Gaza protests, Labour has failed to stand firmly on our side. As it stands, the working class will go into the election with no mass force contesting on its side against the bosses.

We need a new mass workers' party, and an important step forward in that process would be a workers' list of candidates for the general election. Why not Jeremy Corbyn and others ousted by Starmer standing under the same banner as socialists, trade unionists and anti-war campaigners? Even better if the best anti-Tory fighters of the last 18 months - the trade unions - gave their backing too. That is what Socialist Party members are

campaigning for.

But concrete preparations can't wait. That's why the Socialist Party sent delegates to a convention organised by TUSC (Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition), to which socialist groups were invited to discuss preparing the broadest possible left-of-Labour stand at the general election.

For the local elections in May, Socialist Party members will be standing for TUSC, and we encourage all who want to fight the cuts and help build a working-class political voice in their area to stand with us.

- The TUSC steering committee has begun approving candidates to stand under its banner. You can find the core policy platform that all TUSC candidates sign up to at tusc.org.uk

Starmer disciplines MP Kate Osamor for Gaza genocide stance

PAUL KERSHAW ENFIELD AND LEA VALLEY SOCIALIST PARTY

In a letter to constituents on Holocaust Memorial Day, Labour MP Kate Osamor referred to events in Gaza as a genocide and rapidly had the Labour whip suspended by the party. Effectively, she now sits as the independent MP for Edmonton.

There has been widespread local support for Kate. Representing local unions, Enfield trades council immediately wrote to Kate offering to work with her and local union branches have also written expressing support.

She was suspended on 28 January, and days later local Palestine campaigners demonstrated in Edmonton Green with banners reading "we stand with Kate Osamor." They issued a statement saying "Kate's stand on these matters is in accordance with the wishes of many of those she represents. In fact, over 250 people took to the streets of Edmonton on Saturday 27 January to peacefully march for a ceasefire and for the end of the violent occupation of Gaza and other Palestinian areas. The vast majority of the people in the UK want an immediate ceasefire."

Kate has issued an apology for her statement but many in the labour movement believe that it is those who fail to take a stand against the brutal state violence against Palestinians who should apologise.

Politics Home reports that, "while previously an apology or period of reflection could result in the whip being reinstated, with the general

election looming, whip losses are now likely to be final and MPs who are suspended prevented from standing for Labour and new candidates will be selected instead."

The judges at the International Court of Justice in The Hague felt obliged to concede there is reason to consider whether the war on Gaza could be a genocide; for Labour the suggestion is reason for disciplinary action.

Birmingham Labour MP Tahir Ali was reportedly ordered to apologise after accusing Prime Minister Rishi Sunak of having "the blood of thousands of innocent people [in Gaza] on his hands" in a speech in Parliament. But it is striking how few Labour voices have been raised in protest and how muted they have been.

Opinion polls suggest that Labour is on course to win the next election, riding on a wave of disgust at Tory austerity and corruption. Yet Labour plans mean more austerity. Similarly, there is a tide of opposition to mass killing in Gaza, yet Labour offers no opposition to Tory warmongering.

These issues are too important for public representatives to allow themselves to be silenced. Even a small group of workers' MPs in the next government resisting cuts and war would have a huge impact. Kate and other MPs, such as Jeremy Corbyn, Diane Abbot and others, could stand together under the same banner at the general election and with other socialists, trade unionists and anti-war campaigners too. What is there to wait for? Let's start the preparations now!



Edmonton protest in solidarity PHOTO: IAN PATTISON



Kate Osamor PHOTO: OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE/CC

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LABOUR PITCHES TO BIG BUSINESS BUT WORKERS NEED OUR OWN VOICE



WHAT WE THINK

Labour Winter Business Conference 2024, like last year's Labour Party conference, represented a further tightening of the ties between big business and the Labour leadership. Sponsored by HSBC and Bloomberg, £1,000 per head tickets sold out in a matter of hours last October. 400 corporate business executives from companies like AstraZeneca, Barclays, HSBC, Goldman Sachs, Google, and Shell attended to hear Labour's plan for economic growth.

Shadow chancellor Rachel Reeves set the tone in the morning when she announced that Labour in power would cap corporation tax at 25% for the duration of the next government. This was after commenting that Britain currently has the lowest rate of corporation tax in the G7. When Thatcher came to power in 1979 it was 52% and she never got it lower than 34%. Reeves even implied it could be cut further 'should our competitiveness come under threat' - read, 'if the capitalist class wants us to'.

Policy shifts

The conference came and went with more rumoured policy shifts demonstrating Labour will defend the interests of British capitalism, including the axeing of the proposal to scrap the House of Lords within Labour's first Parliament. When a Starmer government comes under pressure from workers' struggle, the House of Lords offers a line of defence of the interests of British capitalism. The Lords have the formal power to block measures that a mass workers' movement could force on an unstable Starmer government. Labour has also retreated from its pledge of £28 billion green investment.

Starmer demonstrated his ambition to set the British economy on track to achieve the highest sustained economic growth in the G7, by creating an environment of economic certainty and stability for big business - a 'safe space' to invest their wealth into. "Time and again, you tell me it's the chopping and changing, the sticking-plaster politics, the growing concern that our government will rip up its international commitments, that's holding back investment in our country."

No doubt big business would like such an environment. And no doubt Keir Starmer and the rest of the Labour leadership are keen to give it to them. Just days before the business conference, Iceland boss and former Tory donor Richard Walker announced that he was backing Labour. He also predicted others will follow in his wake, including "plenty of businessmen and women who are sick to death of the lack of stability, the chaos, and the unedifying infighting" within the crumbling Tory government.



PHOTO: TOMMY LIVERPOOL

Starmer and Reeves' robotic mantra of 'fiscal responsibility' will sound a welcome change for the capitalist class from the economic uncertainty which has reigned in Britain since Liz Truss' mini-budget in Autumn 2022. Nonetheless, economic and political stability will be the last thing they find under the next Starmer-led government.

Capitalism is an inherently blind, chaotic and unplanned system, driven by maximising the profits of a tiny handful at the top of society. The low-growth, stagnant and crisis-prone British economy which Starmer is set to inherit, with the highest debt-to-GDP ratio since 1961 and against the backdrop of a brewing world economic crisis, will mean more instability and more brutal attacks on the lives and futures of working-class and young people.

Citing the need to "get underneath the bonnet and fix an unprecedented stagnation in British productivity", Starmer did make reference to cutting NHS waiting lists, reforming skills training, building 1.5 million homes and scrapping zero-hour contracts as part of a strategy to boost the confidence of big business to invest

in Britain. The question is who - or more specifically which class - in society does Starmer and the Labour leadership take their marching orders from?

Which class?

Keir Starmer answered that question himself during his speech at the Oval. And which class will pay the price - the working class.

"We haven't just opened our doors, we've taken decisions together as equal partners in the venture of national renewal. Your fingerprints - on every one of our five missions." It was an echo of what he told 200 business leaders at the Labour Party conference in Liverpool that "if we do come into government, you will be coming into government with us." Labour is just as committed to protecting the interests of the rich and powerful as the other capitalist parties are.

Confirmation of this was the inclusion in Starmer's speech of step five of Labour's plan for growth, "in some ways the most important step of all, the foundation it all rests upon - [the] commitment to always put economic stability first. We cannot and we will not allow public spending needs

- however important - to threaten the stability of our finances."

An editorial in the capitalist mouthpiece the Financial Times reflected some remaining concerns about what Labour in power will mean for the rich and powerful. "Reducing insecurity and curbing zero-hour contracts are hard to argue with. Yet granting basic individual employment rights from day one will limit employers' flexibility. After a surge in industrial action in the past year, many bosses will also balk at a repeal of key Conservative trade union legislation, making it easier to go on strike."

The capitalist class, rightfully very worried, is not surprisingly trying to exert its pressure again on the Labour leadership to drop one of their last remaining commitments to workers. Entire sections of the working class in 2023 felt the power of their collective strength, taking on big business and the Tory government to win pay rises the establishment, in all its guises - from the government to the media - said were impossible to achieve. As a result, a whole new generation of young workers have joined the ranks of the trade union movement, many

becoming workplace reps and activists. All of that experience and confidence to fight back will be carried over to a Starmer-led government.

The task of the workers' movement is now to prepare to turn the fears of big business into a reality. With an incoming Starmer-led government in hock to the capitalist class, we have to exert pressure the other way. That means industrially, by campaigning in our trade unions for an independent and militant strategy to repel any attacks from a Starmer-led government.

But without a political arm, working-class and young people will be stuck at just fighting the capitalist bosses and their politicians rather than challenging for power themselves. Our class desperately needs its own mass party, in which the workers' and trade union movement can actively participate, deciding policy and programme. The kind of reception that Starmer's Labour Party today offers to big business and its networks and organisations!

"National renewal"

Starmer in his speech spoke of a decade of national renewal; "decade - because, frankly, that's how long it may take." If that's really the best that capitalism has to offer us, then it needs to go. Another decade would put us a quarter of a century clear of the 2007-08 financial crisis. In reality, on the basis of capitalism, there is no prospect of sustained healthy growth in the British economy no matter how long we wait!

And in a decade millions of working-class and young people will have suffered financial hardship, our right to a secure and happy future slipping away, in an increasingly unstable and war-torn world, all while the rich continue to get richer in Britain and globally. The 'renewal' Starmer talks about is similar to the 'recovery' at the end of the rainbow Cameron and Osborne lied about when they took their axe to public services and wages - a recovery for the super-rich, and pain for the rest of us.

That's why the Socialist Party campaigns for a new mass workers' party, armed with a socialist programme to break with the capitalist system and build a democratically planned economy. We fight to take the levers of economic power out of the hands of the capitalist class by taking the major corporations, banks, and monopolies which dominate the economy into democratic public ownership. That would lay the basis for the socialist transformation of society here in Britain and internationally. Join us to fight to build the working-class organisations we need to achieve that transformation.

ANOTHER HUGE GAZA DEMO AS BRITAIN BOMBS MIDDLE EAST

OSCAR PARRY
LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Up to 100,000 people marched on 3 February, from BBC Portland Place to Whitehall, to demonstrate against the Israeli state's brutal ongoing occupation and bombardment of Gaza. The police, who initially wanted the march to end at Trafalgar Square, had to grant the protest organisers' requests to finish outside Downing Street. The death toll in Gaza now stands at over 27,000, and the UN has warned of the imminent risk of a famine due to the lack of aid being allowed into the Strip.

The US and UK have stepped up their joint airstrikes in the surrounding area, and are now targeting not only the Houthis in Yemen but also targets in Iraq and Syria, massively increasing the risk of a regional war. The capitalist politicians in Britain are calling for the military to be strengthened and defence spending to be ramped up, with Starmer's Labour backing the Tories at every turn.

At the demonstration, Socialist Party newspapers and placards were eagerly snapped up, emblazoned with the slogans 'Mass united workers' struggle to stop Israeli state terror', and a call for a 'Socialist intifada.' Our slogans point the way forward for the struggle for Palestinian national self-determination - for a democratic mass movement of the Palestinian people. The first intifada, a mass movement in Palestine from 1987-93, showed the potential power of the Palestinian masses to challenge the Israeli state occupation.

By raising the idea of a 'Socialist intifada' we point to the necessity of the struggle for Palestinian liberation to fight for a socialist alternative to the misery of endless war. Due to its role in production and distribution, the working class is the decisive social force in society capable of challenging the capitalist system. Capitalism, a rotten system based on a tiny minority owning and controlling the resources in society, is incapable of providing a solution to national conflict and oppression. That is why we point to the need to build independent organisations of the working class in both Palestine and Israel, with links between them, as part of the struggle for a socialist Middle East.



Hundreds signed our petition to help stand candidates against both the Tories and Starmer's Labour

The most popular slogan on the march was our call for a 'new mass workers' party' based on the trade unions, that would stand in solidarity with the Palestinians and oppressed peoples worldwide. Hundreds of people signed our petition to help stand candidates as part of the Trade



Protesters in London on 3 February

Unionist and Socialist Coalition in the local and general elections, against both the Tories and Starmer's Labour.

This illustrates the enormous disenchantment with the capitalist system in Britain which provide political cover for the ongoing war, and the potential popularity of a new mass workers' party, including amongst the 70% of British

people who support an immediate ceasefire.

A workers' list of 100 candidates for the general election, backed by the trade unions and anti-war demonstrators, would be a massive step towards the formation of a new party. If you want to be involved in mounting a working-class challenge in the elections, then join the Socialist Party today!

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



ended in bitter acrimony and a walk-out by two independent councillors, followed by all the Palestinian Solidarity supporters in the public gallery. One of the independents, Councillor Akbar accused Wakefield council of having done absolutely nothing about the slaughter in Gaza for the past three months - until he put down a motion.

Rather than pass Councillor Akbar's motion, which had the support of protesters present, an alternative, inferior motion was moved and carried. It would have been a courtesy to have taken the Gaza motions as the first item on the agenda rather than last. Instead, we had to sit through two-and-a-half hours of ceremony, unexplained reports of reports, self-congratulation and, amazingly, not a single criticism during the entire meeting of the Tory government, the orchestrator of the council's strained finances and cutbacks to local services! Perhaps rehearsing for a Starmer government?

During the debate, sundry Tory councillors showed their true colours: ' Hamas started it and Israel is defending itself'; 'Gaza is foreign affairs not local government business' etc.

Our community needs a political party to represent our interests. Clearly it isn't the Tories, but it is increasingly clear it's not the Labour Party either. The sooner socialists and the trade unions get a genuine workers' party off the ground the better.

ROGER BRADLEY

Building student walkouts in Cirencester

There is growing political unrest amongst college students around the UK. Students, members of the Socialist Party in Swindon, proposed the idea of a local students against war initiative to our branch. With agreement we set out to organise students at local colleges, Saige on the Cirencester College end, and myself on the New College Swindon end.

We found there was an appetite for a way to voice our concerns regarding the genocide in Gaza. To prepare, Saige made digital posters to be sent around Cirencester College via air-drop. We got some contact details of individuals who wanted to be kept in the loop.

Socialist Party members visited the college in advance to hand out leaflets. We did face a minor hurdle as we were not allowed on the campus, however students met with us outside.

We were initially expecting quite a low turnout for the walkout on the 26 January. However, by the end of the event, there were over 20 students getting involved in discussions, and some bought the Socialist newspaper. It was a very successful day, and has laid the foundations for future

work building a Socialist Students group in the college. We are also hoping that in the coming weeks we can organise an event of similar proportions at one of the campuses of New College Swindon, and build other groups of young socialist revolutionaries in the area.

ERIS



Tottenham shuns Starmer and Lammy

Tottenham residents and people from all over London turned up to take a stand against Keir Starmer and local Labour MP David Lammy. Both were speaking at the Bernie Grant Arts Centre. People were horrified that - in the hall named after an ex-Labour MP who stood and fought for the people of Tottenham - Starmer and Lammy were there to stand in the interests of 0.1%. There was general disgust and horror at what is going on in Palestine, and the role of the Labour leadership supporting actions of the Israeli state. Speakers explained how the history of Tottenham is to stand up, that it stood up against South African apartheid, and will stand up against the Israeli occupation until Palestine is free.

FARHANA MANZOOR

Wakefield Council: 'We need a party to represent our interests'

You might think that Wakefield Metropolitan District Council's approval of a motion on 24 January in support of Palestinians should be a cause for celebration. In fact, the meeting

Universal Credit reforms hit workers paid poverty wages

SAM MORDEN
SOUTH TYNE AND WEAR SIDE SOCIALIST PARTY

Universal Credit (UC) reforms, announced in Autumn 2023, are another attack on working-class people. Those receiving UC while working and earning less than the Administrative Earnings Threshold of £812 a month (roughly 18 hours a week at minimum wage) are now required to take part in an Intensive Work Search as if they were unemployed.

This means that they will be forced to find more hours to work, or a better-paid job, alongside meeting regularly (often weekly) with a Jobcentre work coach. They can also be mandated to spend up to 35 hours a week looking for work, or attend compulsory support and training courses. Claimants are being forced to accept any employment, no matter how exploitative or unscrupulous. Failure to meet these demands will result in sanctions of up to £10.40 per day for 11-12 weeks.

Meetings with job coaches often fall during existing work hours, meaning that an affected worker must choose to either attend work and face benefits sanctions, or meet their work coach and face losing their current employment! Four in ten of the 6 million people on UC are in work. The victims of this policy will be women, the disabled, the ill, carers, young families; the list goes on.

Attacks on UC strengthen employers' hands. It helps attempts to

force substandard wages on workers. Many workers, not seeing an opportunity to fight collectively, will feel they have no choice but to put up with low wages, knowing the alternative of UC would be even worse.

The effects of over a decade of Tory cuts and austerity - the assaults on civil servants' pay and conditions mean that retention and recruitment of Jobcentre staff is far below the thousands of workers that will be required to carry out these changes and enforce them. PCS, the civil servants' union, members have reported that they have even had to sanction their own co-workers who are on UC, because their wages are so low!

Unite the Union, in its Unite Against Sanctions campaign, is correct that this is fundamentally a class and trade union matter and have attempted to forge links with PCS members. But it is limited, not calling for a clear political alternative. We can't trust Starmer's Labour to reverse Tory attacks on the welfare system when in power. Labour politicians have criticised the government's welfare policy from the right, claiming that it doesn't go far enough in some cases!

Unite should be working with other unions and left groups to form a new mass party of working class, capable of fighting for a minimum wage of £15 an hour regardless of age, and for the complete overhaul of the welfare system and the removal of sanctions and conditionality once and for all.



Poor Tories

Make a list of people who you feel pity for, a Tory minister would be bottom. Ex-science minister George Freeman cried poverty about his £120,000 ministerial salary, stating it as a major factor in his decision to stand down. He wants to be an MP part-time (for £86,584 a year) and find other work to top it up.

Frugal Freeman says his mortgage increased from £1,200 to £2,000 a month. Average rent in the UK is £1,260 a month, much more if you live in London. And the median household income is about 35 grand - a fraction of Freeman's ministerial pay.

Being a minister left him "exhausted, bust and depressed". Imagine how he would be feeling if he faced the stark financial reality facing most working-class families! Maybe he would have thought twice before voting through over a decade of cut backs under five different Tory prime ministers?

MPs should be paid the average wage of the workers they are elected to represent, without the option to skip parliament to do lucrative second jobs either. If the likes of Freeman aren't prepared to do it, good! There are undoubtedly thousands of working-class people in his constituency far better qualified to represent their communities.

Government not 'outstanding'

Workers whose bills have gone up while their wages don't stretch as far. Students getting into a lifetime of debt without enough money to pay their rent. People stuck for hours waiting in hospital to be seen by underpaid, overworked NHS staff. Ask any of them what they think of the government and "requires improvement" or "inadequate" might be putting it mildly.

But you'd expect a senior government minister to have something better to say! Gillian Keegan, Education Secretary, when asked on LBC radio how she rates the Tory government's performance said it was "good", not the top Ofsted rating of "outstanding". But she should know. Our schools are literally crumbling, teachers leave the profession because of sky-high workload, and attempts to expand free childcare have ended up reducing places on offer.

Time for special measures - kick out the Tories and build a working-class political alternative!

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Mark Zuckerberg gets \$700 million payday while we struggle to pay our rent

ROSE KWIECINSKA
EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Tech company Meta, owner of Facebook, Instagram and Whatsapp, reported that it will pay \$1.25 billion of dividends to its shareholders every quarter. Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg, who has about 350 million shares, will get an unimaginable payout this year of \$700 million!

But is this really surprising? Billionaires are getting richer and richer every minute, while most of us are getting real-terms pay cuts. During the Covid pandemic, a time when people lost their jobs and struggled to pay rent, the ten richest men in the world doubled their fortunes, according to Oxfam.

In the USA, in no state can someone working full time and paid the minimum wage afford an average one-bedroom apartment without over 30% going to rent.

So how much are the richest people in the world paying in taxes? A lot less than you probably.

In 2007 and 2011, Jeff Bezos, the world's wealthiest person and Amazon CEO, didn't pay a dime in

income taxes. Similarly, in 2018, Elon Musk, the second-richest man and the founder of Tesla, did the same.

The average American earns in their entire lifetime less than what Bezos accumulates in just 15 minutes.

Is better taxation a way to deal with this massive inequality?

Taxing billionaires is getting tougher in the globalised economy, where avoiding national taxes is easier than ever.

These billionaires don't just hold power just because of their wealth; the economic weight they have

behind them means they make important economic decisions without being elected or accountable to the public.

The wealth of these people is generated by the workers they employ. Workers generate more value than they're being paid. And this is the basis of capitalism. Without this exploitation there are no billionaires.

Socialists fight for the wealth and resources of society, including the means of production (factories, patents logistic chains etc) that produce goods and services everybody needs to be put into public ownership. It has to be put under democratic control of working people, to produce what we all need, not what makes a profit for a few.

Imagine for a moment a world without billionaires, where you could actually get a full value of your work, not have to worry about juggling rent and bills, and live life to the full.

Join us in that fight.

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



NHS pay: The struggle is not over

UNISON MEMBER

Covid and now the cost-of-living crisis have brought home to health workers how much they had lost in real wages after a decade of Tory austerity, and workers began fighting to try to win back some of what they had lost.

With hospital consultants in the BMA rejecting their recent pay offer by 51% to 49% and asking the Department of Health to get back to the negotiating table, they join the junior doctors who are continuing their struggle for improved pay.

The consultant pay offer was on average approximately 9% for 2023-24. Junior doctors have been offered on average 12%. This demonstrates that by putting firm demands and being clear that strike action is needed, pay offers can be improved.

These offers compare to a 5% pay rise for all other NHS staff. The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) remains in dispute over the 2023-24 offer and is talking about rebalancing.

However, Unison and GMB unions accepted the 5% after not reaching the anti-trade union ballot thresholds for strike action. Unite rejected it and, although a smaller union in the NHS, has conducted local disputes linking the national offer to additional local demands – for example at Barts Trust (see below).

2024-25 pay

Now the NHS unions, including Unison, are beginning to discuss their demand for the 2024-25 pay round. Have the lessons of last year's ballots been learned, or are union leaders waiting for the likely



Ambulance workers in Unison on strike in 2023. MINK LUFF

incoming Labour government to bail them out?

It appears once again that Unison will be asking members to support a substantial rise but aren't clear on what that will mean.

Unison leaders will be linking this to a shorter working week with no loss of pay, and other pressing issues such as overtime and cost-of-living supplements. These are all legitimate and pressing concerns and need to be fought for. But they don't affect all staff in the way that pay does, and so without a clear pay demand it will make it harder to build a united fight such as the doctors have had.

What it risks is professions such as the nurses considering going alone and accepting a separate pay spine from the rest of NHS staff. Nursing, like other professions, has seen significant reductions in real-terms pay.

With 130,000-plus staff shortages in the health service, pay is a crucial issue and can't be left to wait for the next government. We need to fight now, and demand a commitment now from Labour leader Keir Starmer, which would increase the pressure on the weak Tories.

Many staff work over their 37.5 hours a week to make ends meet and employers rely on this to make up

for the shortfall of staff. This can't go on indefinitely, as it leads to burn-out in an increasingly stressful work environment.

Unison's potential role

Unison, as the largest health union, could play a major role in uniting the workforce and laying down key demands to assist in coordinating the pay struggles. A bold and serious campaign could prepare members for the action necessary.

However, the leadership's approach, despite recognising the growing pay differentials, does not appear to involve talking about

The following Socialist Party members are seeking nomination for the 2024 Unison service group elections

Local Government
Mathew John,
Angie Waller

Health
Steve Bell,
John Malcolm,
Adrian O'Malley

Community
Helen Couchman

Police and Justice
Amy Sage

Angie, Steve, John and Adrian are all sitting SGE members

achieving a decent pay rise through industrial action.

Thus the upcoming health service group elections could play an important role in changing the direction of the health leadership and of the union as a whole.

Socialists in the health service demand pay rises that actually reflect the cost-of-living rises, of at least RPI inflation. We should be demanding a minimum of £15 an hour for the lowest paid, who in April will only be earning 1p above the minimum wage! We demand a 35-hour working week with no loss of pay. But we say this will have to be fought for.

Barts strike: 'We take strike action because it wins!'



Marching round the Royal London. IAN PATTISON

IAN PATTISON
LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Unite the Union organiser Onay Kasab had a message for striking NHS workers in east London. "The employer says it can't pay you because it sets a precedent for other workers. That's the bloody point!

"We take strike action because strike action works. Not because we're desperate. But because it works. Because it wins."

The noise was deafening as 100 striking Barts NHS Trust workers marched around Royal London hospital.

Domestics, porters, catering workers and more, who a year ago won being taken back into the NHS from private employer Serco, are now in their sixth tranche of strike action fighting for, among other demands, the lump-sum Covid bonus payment that was paid to NHS workers last year.

Onay brought a message from the union's general secretary, Sharon Graham, saying: "You can be absolutely sure that Unite will do absolutely everything to ensure you win this dispute"

He added: "The letter from the employer [saying it can't pay the lump sum], is rubbish. We're going to carry on. We're going to continue, and not stop until we win!"

Strikers speak

Len Hockey, Unite branch secretary at Barts NHS Trust, had a message from a worker who had just joined the strike: "I haven't been on strike up until now. But the way they're treating us in there on strike days, I'm joining the strike."

Len also said: "Of course we're setting a precedent. We're raising the sights of other healthcare workers. We're not going away. This issue is not going away. Our union is blazing a trail."

"For the employer, paying the money - it's a choice."

Striking worker Millicent said: "Everyone else got the lump sum. Why not you? We're going to fight for it."

Another striker Ellen said: "Don't give up. You're all legends. Continue to stand up and fight!"

Socialist Party member Rob Williams brought solidarity support from the National Shop Stewards

Network (NSSN). "You're sending a message that you want to be treated like all NHS workers. It's time the NHS delivered on that promise."

"I've just come via train from a protest opposing the closure of Port Talbot steelworks, my hometown. On both ends of that rail line, I see workers, Unite members, that are going to win a victory."

On 1 February, Barts workers joined with low-paid security guards at Guys and St Thomas's who are also fighting to beat back attacks on their terms and conditions

STOP PRESS: East Kent win - now Barts must pay up!

On Tuesday 6 February, strikers protested at Barts Trust HQ in Canary Wharf. Len Hockey told the rally that the health trust in East Kent has just settled with its workers who were fighting for the same lump sum, and has agreed to pay it.

There is now no reason why Barts workers cannot be paid the lump sum - nor all other health workers round the country who missed out!

NEU LGBT+ conference: Let's build a union that fights for all

EMILY
NEU MEMBER

How can LGBT+ educators fight for our union to offer a lead in the struggle for LGBTQ+ liberation from oppression - and win on pay, funding, workload, and the future of education?

On 3-4 February, the National Education Union (NEU) held its annual LGBT+ conference, which I attended as a delegate. Throughout the workshops and discussions, the lack of support from both the Tory government and Keir Starmer's Labour Party was reflected. The need for an alternative in order to secure the future of education was clear.

Comparisons were drawn between the proposed harmful Tory guidance on trans and non-binary children and the suffering caused by Section 28 in the 1980s and 90s. One delegate highlighted the importance of collective organisation, referring to the solidarity between the LGBT+ community and miners in the 1984-85 miners' strike, and the relevance to the class struggle today.

Many delegates were angry about pay, funding and workload. Socialist Party members leafleted and put forward a fighting strategy to help arm them with a way to fight on those issues and for LGBTQ+ liberation.

DfE 'Guidance'

As the Tories head towards electoral annihilation, they attempt to whip up hatred and division in the desperate hope that some people might still vote for them. This is the context of their consultation on guidance for schools on gender-questioning children. It threatens the rights and safety of a tiny minority of young people and will escalate the crisis in schools. It will contribute to the instances of transphobic attacks and LGBTQ+ phobia in general, and we



PHOTO: PAUL MATTHESSON

Aslef strikers buoyed up by MSL victory

Train drivers in the Aslef union have been taking part in a rolling wave of strike action at the end of January and beginning of February across 14 train operating companies (TOCs) in England.

Iain Dalton reports that on the LNER picket line in Leeds on Friday 2 February there were larger numbers present than on other recent strike days. The mood was buoyed by the victory over the attempt to use the minimum service levels legislation against them. The government-owned LNER was defeated by Aslef's preparedness to escalate action.

Aslef members have now been on strike as part of this pay dispute for 18 months. Pickets in Leeds have a sign marking each strike day so far

currently on 16.

As pickets explained, they are calling for a pay rise after not receiving one since before the Covid-19 pandemic - around five years ago! They say they cannot accept what was last put on the table by the government and TOCs as it contained unacceptable attacks on their terms and conditions. The bosses have refused to negotiate with them since.

Some strikers were looking towards the general election for a possible break in the situation, although Starmer's lack of support for the strike action did not inspire much confidence! Aslef should call on Starmer to commit to meeting the union's demands - but be prepared to fight no matter who is in government.



Swansea PHOTO: SWANSEA AND WEST WALES SOCIALIST PARTY

must oppose it.

Given the civil war between the wings of the Tories, it is not guaranteed they will get this through. A commitment from Labour leader Keir Starmer that the guidance will be immediately scrapped by a Labour government would kill off this divisive policy now. Our union should demand this, and fight against the guidance and all the Tory measures that will accelerate the crisis in our schools.

The Blair New Labour government, which Starmer sees as a model, did not repeal Margaret Thatcher's murderous Section 28 for six years, and did not implement measures that could undo the damage. Without clear demands and pressure from the unions, we cannot just hope Starmer will act. But the strikes last year showed that taking collective action can push governments to act even when they don't want to.

NEU needs a clear fighting programme

The Equality Act, like all positive legislation, is a by-product of campaigns that have been waged by ordinary people and their organisations, including the trade unions. Without our union developing a clear programme of what we're fighting for and how we fight for it, we cannot defend our rights and improve them.

In recent years, issues around discrimination, particularly transphobia, have been on the rise. This is not just as a result of the Tories and their policies, but the failure of the trade union and labour movement leaders, and the absence of a mass workers' party, to answer Tory lies and build a mass movement to fight cuts and division, with mass action and a

socialist programme.

Tory propaganda, which Starmer doesn't oppose, attempts to scapegoat trans people - like they do migrants and asylum seekers - for oppression and the lack of services, housing and jobs. Keeping us divided is in the interests of the bosses; it weakens our ability to fight back.

The Socialist Party fights for the right of trans and non-binary people to self-identify - but also for the rights, resources and public services we all need. We also fight for democratic control of our public services, and that includes in education.

For example, ending academisation could lay the basis for genuine democratic control of schools through elected representatives of the local community, parents, staff and their trade unions, and school students' unions. Those kinds of committees would provide the forum for discussing and arriving at decisions on areas of controversy, feeding into national policy. That would need to include policies on relationships, sex and health education, as well as provision for students and staff of all faiths.

It is essential that the trade unions link the fight against all forms of oppression, including racism, sexism, homophobia, biphobia and transphobia, to the fight against class exploitation and capitalism.

Under Jeremy Corbyn, Labour stood for an end to academies. Starmer has committed to "make multi-academy trusts subject to Ofsted inspections"! It is necessary to build a new workers' party with a socialist programme of fighting for jobs, homes, services and rights. In such a party, different struggles can come together in solidarity.

Elect a determined and inclusive campaigner as NEU vice-president: Vote Sheila Caffrey #1

From the start of her time on the NEC in 2021, Socialist Party member Sheila Caffrey has been a supporter of motions brought by the LGBT+ executive member on behalf of marginalised members. She has listened to equality groups and striven to be a voice for all members - teachers, support staff, supply, early years, post-16. Sheila has consistently argued for national action on pay and workload. She campaigns for the union to lead a national fight for a new national contract that sets an overall limit on hours worked.

Get in touch: sheila_caffrey@hotmail.co.uk

Train driver says: 'MSLs - We must resist'

Our dispute is one of the longest running in Aslef. No one wants to be on strike. But the Tory government is behind the train operating companies (TOCs). We've been through three or four prime ministers and three or four transport ministers. The current one hasn't met anyone in the union.

Now the latest scenario is minimum service levels (MSLs), attacking workers' rights and democracy. The first instance of a TOC suggesting they would use MSLs resulted in us escalating our action. LNER retreated. This is a victory. If we give an inch they'll take a mile. Any time the MSL law raises its head we must resist. Make it unenforceable. Non-compliance, escalation - we can't just allow it to take place.

Birmingham school victory

CLIVE WALDER
BIRMINGHAM SOUTH SOCIALIST PARTY

The strike by National Education Union (NEU) members at Benson Community School in Birmingham has ended with a complete victory.

The school agreed to all the strikers' demands on 21 December, but failure to implement the agreement in full led to three more days of strike action in January.

The key was determined and resilient union reps, support from the members, and the wholehearted backing of parents. Union membership increased during the strike.

If there is any backtracking from management, the members say they will strike again!

WHY SOCIALISTS CALL FOR NATIONALISATION

MARTIN POWELL-DAVIES
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

Successive governments, starting in earnest with Margaret Thatcher, continuing under Blair and the rest since, have embarked on mass privatisation of previously nationalised industries in Britain. What has been the outcome?

Water privatisation has seen bills rocket by 40% above inflation, while firms dump raw sewage in our rivers and lakes and pay out billions of pounds in dividends to shareholders. Our fragmented, privatised railways have similarly seen fares soar but services decline. The big energy firms are being subsidised to maintain their profits while millions struggle to heat their homes. Instead of being run to provide a universal service, the postal regulator Ofcom is proposing that privatised Royal Mail might only deliver letters for three days a week in future. The list goes on...

And yet the main capitalist parties are still wedded to privatisation. Outrageously, it's now being pushed as the supposed solution to the critical state of the NHS! Labour's shadow health secretary Wes Streeting is talking about a Labour government "holding the door wide open" to the private sector. But workers, and the middle class too, know from bitter experience that NHS privatisation will, once again, just see the private profiteers put 'greed before need'.

So, while Labour politicians may have bought into the idea of privatisation, a clear majority of Britons polled by YouGov in 2022 agreed that public transport, water, energy, social care, and the NHS should all be run in the public sector. That was even the most popular opinion expressed by Conservative voters!

Corbyn

So, in contrast to the claims of Labour leader Keir Starmer and his pro-capitalist crew, the manifesto pledges in the Corbyn-led Labour 2019 manifesto for public ownership of rail, mail, water, telecoms and power, and to reverse privatisation in the NHS, were popular demands with most voters.

Corbyn's critics warned that the cost of compensating shareholders made renationalisation unviable. The bosses' CBI put on the frighteners by calculating the cost of buying back rail, mail, water and energy as being almost £200 billion! But these fat cats have already made a killing at our expense, why should we pay them a penny more? The Socialist Party says that compensation should only be paid where there is a proven need, for example to safeguard workers' pension investments or small shareholders.

But Corbyn's nationalisation demands were actually still quite timid compared to those raised by the left wing of the Labour Party, under previous Labour governments, including by Militant, the forerunner of the Socialist Party.

In 1945, pushed forward by a working class demanding real change at

the end of World War Two, Labour was elected with a landslide majority, promising to nationalise the 'commanding heights' of the economy. As well as launching the NHS and a massive council house building programme, a fifth of British industry was nationalised, including gas, coal, electricity and steel, as well as the Bank of England.

Reforms such as the NHS and council housing transformed the lives of millions of working-class people, but the capitalists have been clawing them back ever since. Nationalisation also included significant benefits for workers employed in those industries. In reality however, this was not socialism but the state acting as a prop to capitalism. The wealthy former owners of these nationalised firms were generously paid off. They were happy to be given the cash to switch to profiteering from the real 'commanding heights' that remained in capitalist hands - in the manufacturing and financial sectors, as well as exploiting cheap labour globally.

State ownership

The firms brought into state ownership were largely unprofitable essential basic industries that capitalism was happy to see the state take responsibility for. They continued to be run like private companies, without the working class having any genuine control or management. As the ongoing Post Office scandal has shown, a nationalised firm that still follows capitalist business methods will operate just like any other cut-throat private company.

But the post-war economic boom couldn't remove that stubborn idea from workers' minds, that putting 'people before profit' required taking firms out of the hands of the profiteers. In response to the 1974 Labour government caving into the pressure of big business, the 'Tribune' Group of Labour MPs proposed an 'Alternative Economic Strategy'. A key element, still echoed by what remains of the Labour left today, was a plan for selective nationalisation of perhaps 25 manufacturing firms, and to gradually extend state ownership over different sectors of the economy.

Tribune argued that this core of state-run nationalised firms would act as competitive encouragement to force private capitalists to invest, thereby creating jobs and boosting economic growth. But Militant correctly warned that the capitalists would only invest if they knew they could sell their products into profitable markets. More fundamentally, Militant warned that if the capitalists concluded that a left-led government was serious about seizing its profitable assets, they would use their majority control over the rest of the economy, including the banking and finance sectors, to sabotage it and bring it down.

That sabotage had already been played out in the most brutal way in Chile, where the Allende government had sought to compromise with capitalism, including over the speed and



Ty Crist Colliery in Tredegar, South Wales following nationalisation in 1947 PHOTO: BIG PIT/CIC



The Socialist Party is demanding 'nationalisation not devastation' to save steel PHOTO: SCOTT JONES



Marching to demand the nationalisation of P&O PHOTO: ISAI MARUJELA

extent of nationalisation. In contrast, the most militant workers occupied factories, especially where employers were sabotaging production, and demanded workers' control of the whole economy. Allende's attempts to placate capitalist reaction were answered by the 1973 military coup.

In 1981, the Parti Socialiste in France was elected to power on a left programme promising radical reforms and partial nationalisation. But French and global capitalism went on the attack and within a few months the reforms went into reverse. The Parti Socialiste eventually became so infamous for its austerity policies that its support collapsed to just a few per cent.

Capitalist reaction

Socialists need to learn the lesson that any attempt to gradually nationalise our way to socialism will be blocked by capitalist reaction. Instead, a socialist government would need to bring under public ownership all the major monopolies and banks that dominate the economy. That would be about 150 companies in Britain. That wouldn't be the only step needed to stop capitalism trying to crush such a transformation, a mass mobilisation of workers in defence of its government would certainly be needed too, but it would strike a serious blow against any attempted economic sabotage.

Neither should nationalised companies just be left in the hands of their previous managers. They must be run under democratic workers' control and management. That means much more than just having some seats on the board for workers to be consulted over how the company is run. It means that workers should have real control over the day-to-day running of their workplace, over working conditions and hours, over production methods and initiatives. These steps would lift the dead-hand of top-down management and enable the insight and creativity of workers on the 'shopfloor' to both reduce workload and improve productivity.

Such democratic measures should be enacted in any individual firm that is nationalised. For example, in Port Talbot right now, nationalisation of the Tata steelworks under democratic workers' control and management is the only way to save jobs in the long term, stop the devastation of the local economy, and implement a transition to green steel production. Only nationalisation can ensure that economic and environmental needs are put first. A global capitalist corporation like Tata is only ever going to prioritise what is necessary to maximise its profits.

But democratically run nationalisation of the 150 or so 'commanding heights' of the economy allows so much more than just protecting individual industries. It is the key to implementing full democratic planning of a socialist plan of production for the whole economy.

A socialist plan would put an end to the anarchy of capitalist economics, dominated by the need to generate

short-term profit and, increasingly, by financial gambling rather than investment in useful production. It could put an end to the waste of unemployment, identical competing brands, inbuilt obsolescence, arms spending, and the luxuries of the super-rich. It could harness all the best elements of existing commercial planning for the benefit of society as a whole, instead of being used to work out what adverts to put on your phone or how best to avoid paying tax.

Workers' control and management in the workplace would be part of a wider system of workers' democracy, agreeing local, regional, national - and international - plans and priorities. Such a system would allow mass participation in genuine democracy, rather than just the chance to put the occasional cross on a ballot paper. What transport and energy policies, nationally and globally, should be followed to urgently act on climate change? How should housing needs best be met and where? How wide a choice of consumer products should be provided? Which ones need to be better quality? What investment is needed to switch from unwanted to wanted production? All of these questions, and more, could be worked out on the basis of a democratically agreed socialist plan of production, a plan that could then be applied in practice thanks to the nationalisation of the major banks, companies and corporations.

It was the lack of such a democratic input that led to the collapse of the centrally planned economies of the former Soviet Union. These states had degenerated into top-down dictatorships without genuine workers' democracy. Privileged leaders erected statues of Lenin to pretend they were 'communists' but ignored what Lenin had insisted was required for a socialist state: for elected representatives at every level, subject to democratic recall at any time; for their pay not to exceed the pay of the workers they represent; for workers' control by all, "so that all may become 'bureaucrats' for a time and that therefore nobody may be able to become a 'bureaucrat'". Those are the ideas that a genuine workers' democracy would be based on.

The Socialist Party stands for a socialist plan of production that meets everyone's needs, based on public ownership combined with democratic working class control and management. Achieving that would at last allow all the hopes and dreams of generations of socialists and working-class fighters to finally become a reality.

Come to a Socialist Party meeting near you

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

If you would like to participate:

- Go to socialistparty.org.uk
- Or text 07761 818206 with your name and postcode.

Clause IV and the Communist Manifesto

Nationalisation, the taking of major industries, utilities and banks out of the hands of private profiteers and into public ownership, to be run under democratic workers' control and management, has always been a cornerstone of socialist ideas.

Marx and Engels explained in the Communist Manifesto how, to bring an end to capitalist crisis, private ownership of industry and commerce needed to be replaced by state ownership. In Britain, reflecting the influence of Marxism on the pioneers of the labour movement, the demand for public ownership was widely supported as the way to build a better, socialist, society.

For example, the Independent Labour Party, a predecessor to the Labour Party, adopted an 'ABC of Socialism' which explained that "The fight against private ownership of land and capital, the fight for Socialism, for the nation's control of its own resources, is the last fight in the age-long struggle of humanity for freedom... That is Socialism: The nationalisation of the land and of the means of producing and distributing wealth; and the organisation of industry as a civic service under public ownership and control for the benefit of all, instead of, as now, under private ownership and control for private profit".

In 1918, the Labour Party adopted the famous 'Clause IV' of its constitution. It called for "the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange, and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service". That 'socialist clause' remained in place right up until 1995, when Tony Blair finally managed to persuade a Special Conference to ditch any reference to common ownership, as part of his drive to turn 'New Labour' into a fully pro-capitalist party.

Whereas the original adoption of Clause IV had been taken under the influence of the Russian Revolution successfully abolishing capitalism in 1917, its removal came in the wake of the collapse of the nationalised, planned economies of the Soviet Union and other Stalinist states. Their demise dealt a powerful ideological blow to the workers' and socialist movement.

A triumphant capitalist class asserted even more vociferously that private ownership and the 'free market' was the only way to run an economy. That capitalist ideology took a firm grip of the leadership of former workers' parties, like Blair, across the globe.

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

● **Walthamstow, east London – we haven't vanished**

Waltham Forest Socialist Party was back at its usual Saturday spot outside Sainsbury's on the High Street. We wanted to reassure our regulars that we hadn't vanished!

Socialist Party members Nancy Taaffe and Paula Mitchell explained over the mic that we had been away at the Gaza demonstrations most Saturdays for the past couple of months. But we are still fighting to build a party to represent the working class in Walthamstow.

Building on the theme on the cover of the Socialist newspaper we were selling, we talked to market shoppers about how tight their money is compared to bosses of the corporations, who have already made more money this year than most people will in a lifetime.

It seemed to strike a chord with passersby – 37 of them bought the Socialist paper in a busy hour. And we had lots of engaging conversations, with familiar faces and new ones.

The only real hostility came from a woman who mistook us for the Labour Party! We are building recognition for when we stand in the general election in Walthamstow later this year.

CHRIS CORNEY

● **Swindon – gulf between people and capitalist parties**

Even while we were setting up our Socialist Party campaign stall, we already had people coming up and asking to buy a Socialist paper. Our 'Tories Out!' posters always meet a good response, and the anti-Tory mood has grown particularly resolute, as a general election gets closer.

"Who do we vote for?" is a question on most people's minds – an enthusiastic Labour voter is even more rare than an outspoken Tory! We had plenty of opportunities to discuss our plans to run as widely as possible in the local elections, part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC).

We met one man who said he wouldn't describe himself as a 'socialist'. But he supported nationalisation of energy companies, Royal Mail, and public transport, and a fully funded public NHS, saying: "These things aren't extreme, they should be seen as normal."

This led to a discussion about how the bosses wouldn't just hand these things over, and how the working class needs to fight for them.

Another man lamented the decline of decent jobs and industry, and agreed with us that we need to nationalise the major industries if we're going to rebuild manufacturing, and guarantee decent jobs for all.



Bristol MIKE LUFF

These discussions demonstrate the gulf between what is actually popular policy among workers, and what's on offer from the establishment parties. A new mass workers' party is desperately needed to harness this mood, and fight for a socialist programme.

SCOTT HUNTER

● **Bristol – 'bollocks to all of them'**

"Excuse my language, but bollocks to all of them!" This nicely summed up the mood out on our stall in Kingswood, where the latest by-election is being held, following the resignation of the Tory MP.

A father with his child in a pushchair, asked who he should vote for. It didn't take him long to conclude that he would prefer to stay at home.

Another woman, who also bought the Socialist paper, said that she had supported Jeremy Corbyn, and how Keir Starmer had reversed all his policies. There isn't a workers' candidate standing in this by-election. She was going to vote Labour to get rid of the Tories who are destroying the country.

Leaflets publicising the protest by the National Education Union and Unison – 'Stop the cuts! Enough is Enough' – for the coming council budget meeting on 21 February went down well.

MIKE LUFF

● **Didsbury, Manchester – dismay and encouragement**

We enjoyed much support from passersby, while we campaigned against the war on Gaza, and for council homes with fair rents. The people who stopped were dismayed at the level of violence perpetrated against Gaza by the Israeli state, and also the bombing of Yemen by the US and UK.

A number of young people stopped to sign both petitions, encouraged by the thought of an affordable standard of living and an end to capitalist war, showing a good deal of interest in joining the Socialist Party.

CATHERINE TRIBUTSCH

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Drag Queen Story Hour
Carnival atmosphere at Swindon protest to counter far right



MARY QUATE

SWINDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Imported outrage, plain and simple. That's what the mob, calling themselves Patriotic Alternative, have been bringing to Swindon these past few weeks.

Southern and South East Socialist Party conference
– confident after growing in new areas

CALLUM JOYCE

SOUTHERN AND SOUTH EAST SOCIALIST PARTY ORGANISER

50 Socialist Party members – trade unionists, students, and community campaigners from across southern and south east England – kicked off the new year with our regional conference. We had delegates from new areas where the Socialist Party has built groups in the last year, including Hastings, Crawley, Aldershot, and Guildford.



NICK CHAFFEY

AREA	£ RECEIVED	£ TARGET	Q1: JANUARY-MARCH 2024	DEADLINE: 31 MARCH 2024
South West	1,665	2,100		79%
Southern & SE	1,471	2,400		61%
Northern	445	800		56%
West Midlands	1,179	2,700	44%	
North West	485	1,200	40%	
London	1,934	5,000	39%	
Wales	800	2,400	33%	
Yorkshire	573	2,650	22%	
East Midlands	385	2,050	19%	
Eastern	216	1,300	17%	
Other	1,361	2,400		57%
TOTAL	10,515	25,000	42%	

We can take heart that even after bussing in bigots from all over the country, they were only able to find a dozen people who cared enough to spew hatred outside a harmless 'drag queen story hour' theatre event. This motley crew were handily outnumbered ten to one by a counter protest, including members of our own local Socialist Party branch.

Their hate speech would've been drowned out by a wave of loud party music interspersed with chants of solidarity, even if any of them had enough brains to figure out how to work their own megaphone.

Show of force to take a stand

Showing up to events like this in force, and proving we are willing to fight for LGBTQ+ people is important, especially when not even the Labour Party is willing to take a stand for trans rights, or anyone else that is being left in the lurch.

The crowd made way to allow the drag queen story hour audience access to the building, before continuing the festival atmosphere during the event itself. Parents, children, and even a drag queen, author and performer Aida H Dee, stepped up to the mic to thunderous applause.

A splendid time was had by all. Well, except maybe a dozen bigots with nothing better to do. Hopefully this makes even one of them rethink why they're so eager to blame downtrodden minorities for all their problems.

Campaign to save Hackney children's centres kicks off with protest

This is shortened version of a press release from the campaign

Parents, carers, and the community gathered together outside Sebright Children's Centre in on 29 January to protest the proposed closures of nurseries by Hackney (Labour) Council.

Yulisa Keselman, spokesperson for the group, and parent with a child at Sebright, said:

"We will do everything to fight the decision to close our beloved nursery and children's centre, which is at the heart of our community.

Beaten cuts before

Natalie Aguilera, a parent with a child at Fernbank nursery, who was involved in the last campaign to stop the closure of Fernbank and Hillside, said:

"We are devastated to be here, once again, fighting to keep these vital services that offer a lifeline for many low-income families in particular, open. Unfortunately, just like last time, the data and evidence included in the rationale for proposed closures is incorrect, incomplete and, in places, actively misleading. The data on occupancy rates, that so much of their case for closures rests on, is deeply flawed.

"Hackney Council has still not presented a long-term plan to safeguard remaining children's centre nursery provision, so we strongly believe more closures will follow if we allow them to go ahead with these. We call on Mayor Woodley to stop



SAVE OUR SEBRIGHT

these closures – that the community clearly rejected only two years ago – and to invest in quality, affordable childcare in Hackney."

Matt Paul, joint branch secretary of Hackney Unison trade union, said: "Our members make up the majority of affected staff. Dedicated to the children they work with and help flourish, the staff – many of whom are Hackney residents themselves – clearly see the impact of these cuts: the personal pain of losing their jobs, and the uncertain futures they face, but even more so the loss of such vital services to those that need it most.

"That's why it's vital that everything possible is done to protect key services for our community like our children centres, something we are not convinced has happened in this instance."

Closures will result in the loss of 149 council-subsidised places for quality, affordable childcare, more than 25% of the total currently on offer at Hackney's children's centre nurseries. Children will not be guaranteed places in another children's centre nursery.

Staff

Over 50 children's centre staff and support workers (cleaners, caretakers, catering staff) across Fernbank and Sebright will lose their jobs should the centres close. There may be further redundancies at the two other sites – Hillside and Oldhill – where changes to their admission criteria is proposed.

Hackney Council tried to close Fernbank and Hillside nurseries in 2021. But the community led a successful campaign to stop the closures.

Chair of Hackney Unison and Socialist Party member Brian Debus said: "Hackney Labour council should be expanding childcare services, and sending the government the bill!"

● See 'Labour's sneaky cuts spark mass resistance' at socialistparty.org.uk



Beth Winter (centre) and the food marchers. MARIAM KAMISH

Corbynistas should stand

MARIAM KAMISH

RHONDDA CYNON TAF SOCIALIST PARTY

Corbynista Labour MP Beth Winter's 'Right to Food' march and rally – organised in coordination with the local trades union council – drew 100 people in Pontypridd. Trade union flags from Unite, GMB, Bakers' Union and the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) were out in strength.

Our Socialist Party petition on Gaza – 'Help us stand candidates against Starmer's warmongering Labour' – went down well. A couple of people donated flowers to support what we're doing.

Tony Winter spoke witheringly of waving his father off to London in 1936 on a march just like this. "We should not still be doing this in 2024". Beth Winter is popular, and well

beyond her own constituency too. She describes herself as a 'socialist'. The crowd was clearly aware she'd been deselected by the Labour Party in favour of a Keir Starmer stalwart. We think Beth should stand as an independent socialist at the next election.

Without a doubt, we need a new party", one woman told me as she bought a copy of the Socialist.

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
socialist students
SCAN TO REGISTER

Vital services threatened by Mansfield Labour cuts

This is an edited version of the Socialist Party leaflet handed out when Mansfield Labour council voted for cuts.



Protesting outside Mansfield Labour council's cuts meeting

After years of past cuts, Mansfield District Council's £5 million more cuts in the next three years are all to vital services – Shopmobility scheme, public toilets in Warsop and Woodhouse, and even grants to local community groups providing some of the services cut in past years!

It will be the elderly, disabled and poorest in Mansfield hit hardest. But the whole town will be poorer, with cuts to the market, events, and floral displays that bring people into the shopping centres.

Like every other council, Mansfield has had its money slashed by years of Tory government cuts. Our taxes have been handed out to big business and the super-rich, while working-class households struggle to pay their basic bills.

The council in Mansfield is run by Labour. Mansfield councillors have a choice – they can meekly pass on Tory cuts, or fight for the money our community needs.

Councillors have a choice

Councillors should refuse to vote for any cuts, council tax or rent rises, or increased charges. They can set

a balanced budget for the next year using the council's reserves and borrowing power, and use the time to build a campaign with trade unions and the whole community to demand the money needed from central government.

Many councils are in financial crisis (see 'Nottingham City Council issues 114 notice' at socialistparty.org.uk). The Tory government is weak and divided.

Labour councillors could lead a campaign to speed the end of this rotten government of the rich. But Labour under Starmer is making clear there will be no more money for our vital services.

If Labour won't fight for us, we need councillors and MPs who will.

● Read 'Lessons from Liverpool's socialist council 1983-87: Councils can resist cuts' socialistparty.org.uk

Liverpool students welcomed back by campaigning socialists

DEAN YOUNG

LIVERPOOL SOCIALIST STUDENTS

We have been active on campus for the beginning of the second semester, winning more students and young workers to the ideas of socialism. We got 15 people to our 'welcome back' meeting, a nice surprise when many students were not even on campus yet.

We held several campaign stalls for the 'refreshers week', which

welcomes back students after the January exams. On 7 February, we will hold an open meeting on the Liverpool City Council struggle from 1983-87 (see socialistparty.org.uk), and the lessons we can learn from it for today amidst the pending bankruptcy of over 25 local authorities.

Students need a voice, a socialist voice, defending their interests. Let us build Socialist Students for the upcoming semester to provide that voice.



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.

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A picket line during the mass strike on 18 January PHOTO: MILITANT LEFT

MILITANT LEFT (CWI IRELAND)

The decision by the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) to re-enter power-sharing arrangements at Stormont, after two years of boycott, followed claims by party leader Jeffrey Donaldson that he had secured major changes to proposed restrictions on trade and customs barriers between Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Unionists viewed the 'hard sea border' arising from these controls as posing a major step towards an economically united Ireland. Northern Ireland was left behind in the EU single market for goods as the rest of the UK left it.

The hard sea border arrangements were the result of direct negotiations between the British government and the European Commission to establish a post-Brexit trading arrangement between the two. The EU required the UK to impose restrictions on goods entering Northern Ireland to protect the integrity of the EU single market. This was because there was a risk that goods could pass to the Republic of Ireland over

the border. Due to commitments in the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement, an all-island economy was to remain frictionless and free.

A first nationalist first minister The 2022 Assembly election, which followed the DUP walkout of government for the first time in the history of Northern Ireland, returned Sinn Féin as the largest party – albeit with unionist political representation overall narrowly outnumbering that of nationalists.

The prospect of the first nationalist leader of the local seat of power in the 103-year history of Northern Ireland was a factor which acted to deepen the challenges of re-establishing the Executive. It is certainly a driving force for those unionists, a minority, who are virulently opposed to the restoration of power-sharing. This is reflected in the widespread 'stop the DUP sell-out' banners and posters which have gone up across the North.

For Sinn Féin, and for nationalists generally, the elevation of the first Catholic as first minister is undoubtedly a historic moment. For many, it heralds the possibility of

further change to the constitutional arrangements – in particular, Irish reunification. This aspiration is not currently supported by opinion polls which show a large majority for continued union with Great Britain.

That said, the election of a Sinn Féin first minister is likely to challenge that situation. Regardless of commitments made to be a representative of all communities in the north, the reality is that Sinn Féin is a party fixated on the goal of reunification. They will use the new position to advance that agenda and seek to enter government in Dublin with the same goal.

As part of their strategy to that end, the party has increasingly swerved to the right in both the north and south. When it came to choosing ministerial positions, the party refused health and education and instead chose finance and economy. The goal will be to project themselves as a 'safe pair of hands' with a view to sweeping to power in the Republic.

Trade unions driving political developments While the parties are fixated on questions relevant to the national

question, Northern Ireland's politics in recent weeks and months has been dominated by the struggle of workers. For the most part, the politicians were at best bystanders to the wave of strike action which has taken the north by force.

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Restored Stormont executive will not overcome economic and sectarian challenges



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the DUP leadership moved to indicate that they were serious about re-entering government. The dam had broken.

Future challenges

While the deal is being hailed by all sides, the reality is that it will neither resolve the national question and sectarianism in Northern Ireland, nor will it resolve the crisis in public services or public sector pay.

Northern Ireland faces profound change. Demographically, Unionists and Protestants are now a minority. While nationalists and Catholics are also a minority, there is a sense that they have the momentum behind them. The election of the first nationalist first minister will undoubtedly add a further sense of that momentum, as does the prospect of Sinn Féin being in government in the Republic.

Demographic changes coupled with the destabilisation arising from Brexit, the eclipse of British imperialism as a power, and the weakening of the British economy, are all major factors undermining both unionism and the northern state. That said, there is little enthusiasm from the ruling class in the south for any prospect of reunification. Most obviously because of fears of the potential backlash from unionists coerced into reunification against their will.

The new arrangements

Claims by the DUP leadership, that the deal has got rid of the hard sea border are overstated. No fundamental change to the EU-UK agreement governing the importation of goods from Britain to Northern Ireland has occurred. However, the DUP can certainly point to a series of tweaks, all of which will mean that, for the bulk of goods imported into Northern Ireland, there will ordinarily be no checks or duties imposed.

The arrangements do not extend – for the most part – to goods for industries involved in production. Manufacturers based in the north importing through Britain will have to provide disclosure on goods which transit to the south. They will also have to ensure goods are manufactured to EU standards. That said, the trade-off for these manufacturers is that they will get frictionless and tariff-free access to both the EU and UK markets – potentially a very beneficial arrangement. A similar situation faces agricultural producers in the north.

The deal will also see the EU effectively ignoring risks that consumer goods imported from Britain to Northern Ireland, which originate in free trade deals conducted by the UK, may cross the border. This in particular was touted as a major gain by the DUP leadership, and may indicate a wider willingness on the part of the EU to

accommodate challenges in a very flexible manner. Perhaps the most complex aspect of the deal, and the one with the greatest capacity to cause future controversy, is the arrangements to handle future regulatory divergence between the UK and EU. While this is not a problem now, as the UK remains largely tied to existing EU standards, there is potential for standards on goods to diverge over time.

This poses problems for goods manufactured to those standards in Britain which the EU would not want subsequently entering the Republic of Ireland. The arrangements provide a 'Stormont brake', which is a mechanism designed to be deployed by unionists if they feel that being tied to EU standards, is likely to cause a new sea border arising. Once the brake is deployed it is then for a joint UK-EU committee to find a resolution with final say residing in Westminster.

While the mechanism is clearly meant to avoid risks of future trading barriers between Northern Ireland and Great Britain – it leaves open the possibility that a future UK government might decide to enforce UK, as opposed to EU, standards on Northern Ireland – a situation which might open the prospect of north-south border controls. Alternatively, a decision to enforce the EU standard in Northern Ireland would mean a new hard sea border.

While this might look like a recipe for difficulty, the UK and EU authorities both appear intent on avoiding controversy and are likely to find compromises to mitigate the risk of such outcomes. What is more, it seems more than likely that an incoming Labour government under Keir Starmer may resolve such risks permanently with a decision to harmonise UK and EU standards into the future.

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PHOTO: WINNIEBAC



Fiction review: 'Prophet Song'



IAN HUNTER
NOTTINGHAM AND DERBY SOCIALIST PARTY

The annual Booker Prize for fiction is often rightly regarded as a publishers' marketing and promotional jamboree. It is, however, sometimes awarded to some remarkable works of fiction. I think this year's winner, 'Prophet Song' by Paul Lynch is one such work.

The novel, based in the Irish Republic, possibly sometime in the near future, describes the collapse of a society under a far-right government led by a new party called the National Alliance Party (NAP). The recently elected government has passed an Emergency Powers Act and is determined to crush all dissent and opposition. To this end, it has established a new and powerful secret police unit, now armed with extensive powers to achieve its aims. A nightmarish degeneration into societal collapse ensues as government officials and the administration quickly fall into line, and citizens who raise questions are regarded as 'inciters,' agitators, or 'enemies of state.'

Central to the novel is the Stack

family. Eilish is a research scientist and mother of four (ranging in age from a few months to seventeen), and Larry, a former teacher who now works as a full-time organiser for the teachers' union.

At the beginning of the story, two officers of the new police unit call at the family's home one evening to talk to Larry who has organised a teachers' union demonstration. The pressure is on him to call off the action, but after much soul-searching he decides to continue. He attends the demonstration but fails to return afterwards and, along with others, is taken into custody under the new emergency powers.

From then onwards, the situation descends further into a dehumanisation - a brutal state of confusion and chaos with further detentions, curfews and repressive state actions. Eventually rumours of resistance and a fightback throughout the country are confirmed. Despite some rebel success, the situation and outlook remains bleak and oppressive as a struggle slowly and stutteringly evolves.

Eilish has the unenviable task of

trying to navigate ways through all of this. She has to deal with the effects on both herself, her children, and her father's struggles with Alzheimer's disease. As all around her collapses into ever-deeper chaos and social anarchy, Eilish faces a constant range of agonising choices, most of which give little cause for hope and possibility.

The author has stated that the book took three years to write, and was a difficult and daunting task. Indeed, there are parts that are not a comforting read.

The parallels with many current issues facing many people and societies today are obvious: legislation restricting protest and debate, curbs on trade union activities, crises of liberal democracies and capitalism, economic and social meltdown, far-right populism, and breakdowns in civic society.

This is a timely and important work, which should, and will, cause many to reflect on the key themes and harrowing events.

● *Prophet World is available to buy from oneoworld-publications.com*

Dogbrew charlatans

Boarded up and gone without notice was how I found the Brewdog bar in Brixton last March 2023, a place I occasionally frequented to sample their okay but massively overpriced beer. I suppose we pay for the silly creative names rather than the quality of the pint.

Looking for an explanation for the sudden disappearance, I turned to the local press expecting articles lamenting the loss of yet another drinking establishment in the area. Instead, the local press rightly lambasted Brewdog for the corporate frauds they really are, masquerading as anti-establishment and even progressive, while their executives

harass and abuse female employees and generally treat their staff like dirt. It comes as no surprise this company is now trying to diddle its workers out of earnings by cynically manipulating differences between the 'real living wage' as opposed to the 'national minimum wage' (see 'Brewdog pay cuts - no longer all about the 'people' at socialistparty.org.uk).

Workers and trade unionists should of course support the Unite the union challenge to attacks on their members' pay at Brewdog, and support the call for a £15-an-hour minimum wage (as a bare minimum to live on). But, until Brewdog pay its staff fairly and resolve this issue I am calling for an unofficial workers' boycott of their beer and pubs!

Let them forsake Brixton for some trendy megapub hell in Waterloo. For the rest of us, Elvis has left the building!

ANDY TULLIS, BRIXTON



Brewdog bar PHOTO: BERNT ROSTAD/CC

Tamils protest Sri Lanka Independence Day



PHOTO: SENAN

ISAI MARIJERLA

The Sri Lankan government celebrated its 'Independence Day' as it normally does - repressing peaceful protesters and attacking the rights of the Tamil-speaking people.

Tamil Solidarity has been organising protests outside the Sri Lankan High Commission - saying that, for us, this is not an independence day but a black day.

We condemn the Sri Lankan government and its continuous vicious policies of attacking the democratic rights of the majority in Sri Lanka.

In Britain, other Tamil diaspora organisations called the protest appealing to 'his majesty king Charles III' to win our basic democratic rights. We fundamentally disagree with this approach. No rights were ever just given by the capitalist state - they had to be fought for and won by the working-class masses and youth. For Tamil Solidarity, these are our natural allies.

We have no trust in the monarchy, a tool used by British capitalism, nor in the right-wing governments,

including the Conservative Party in power. Their interests are in direct contrast to ours.

We need to organise collectively with our natural allies - which is why Tamil Solidarity took an independent position and organised a separate protest.

We demand:

- Repeal the draconian 'Prevention of Terrorism Act' immediately, and all other oppressive laws
- Drop all charges on protesters
- Release all political prisoners
- Allow freedom of assembly and free speech
- Give back all the land occupied by the military and government authorities
- An independent war crimes investigation
- Withdraw troops from all occupied Tamil areas
- Stop privatisation in education and health
- Allow the right to self-determination for the Tamil-speaking people

SOCIALISM TODAY

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India: Protest against private university bill



SHRAWANI BUWA
NEW SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE, INDIA

Neoliberal assaults on public education in India have intensified in recent years, leading to a surge in private education institutions and a gradual decline in public institutions. Consequently, capitalist interests of the owners of these private institutions now exert influence over education policies. This influence is once again highlighted by a new bill related to self-financing private universities, passed during the winter session of the Maharashtra legislative assembly in December 2023.

Under this bill, students enrolling in private universities would no longer be eligible to claim scholarships from the state government. This compels them to pursue their education only if they can afford to pay the full fees. It is crucial to note that these private universities already impose exorbitant fees, making them unaffordable even for students from middle-class families. As a result, this bill

effectively prevents the enrolment of students from the vast majority of working-class families.

Against this backdrop, our student wing, the New Students and Youth Federation (NSYF), in collaboration with Satyashodhak Bahujan Vidyarthi Aaghadi (another student organisation), organised a protest against the bill. The event drew attendance from activists and students across various colleges in the city. Participants expressed their opposition to the bill by symbolically burning copies, denouncing its malicious motives.

I spoke to highlight how the bill exacerbates social inequalities, excluding Dalit and tribal students from the realm of education. Sachin Bagade, state president of Satyashodhak Bahujan Aghadi, elucidated on the severe implications of such legislation and called for the repeal of the law.

To conclude the protest, representatives of the organisations met with the district collector, presenting a letter of demands urging the repeal of the law immediately.

Greek students take to the streets against uni privatisation bill

TOM GIBSON
LEEDS SOCIALIST PARTY AND SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Last year, the capitalist class in Greece seemed to be in a secure position as the incumbent right-wing prime minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, who has been in power since the fall of the left-wing Syriza government in 2019, won the dual elections last May and June by a landslide.

Mitsotakis has maintained a solid grip on power. The incompetence of opposition parties Syriza and Pasok, has meant no meaningful parliamentary opposition against him. A series of ongoing student protests have provided proof that Mitsotakis can be opposed.

The main aim of the student protesters is to stop a new higher education bill. Greece, unlike much of Europe, has a fees-free university system. Even amid all the austerity this hadn't changed, until this year when Mitsotakis announced this bill to allow private for-profit universities, putting the system at risk. Mitsotakis claims that the bill will make universities more "relevant to the labour market". But the students of Greece have

not taken this lying down, instead they have taken to the streets.

These protests have been large, mobilising across Greek cities. As expected, the police has reacted violently, and Mitsotakis has resorted to smear tactics against the protesters. This brings back memories of the 1973 communist- and socialist-led student protests that caused the fall of the military junta.

As socialists we call for a higher education system that is completely in the hands of the public without fees or privatisation and fully funded, where the main goal is not the capitalist one of 'moulding students into tools of capitalism' but rather educating them, allowing them to pursue their passions.

We stand in solidarity with these brave protesters as they fight for their right to be educated. This struggle provides an inspiring example of students fighting attacks on our education. As our Socialist Students conference (see page 11) takes place in Britain, we understand the importance of the fight for free, public, fully funded, fair and student-focused education.

Meeting tour: Nigeria - how can the working class and poor win change?



Soweto speaking at the meeting

Leicester

A NIGERIAN SOCIALIST

On 23 January, the Leicester branch of the Socialist Party held a public meeting to discuss the crisis in Nigeria and how working and poor people can fight for change.

Hassan Taiwo Soweto, a leading member of the Democratic Socialist Movement (DSM) - the Nigerian section of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) - led this discussion on the need to organise politically to overthrow capitalism and fight for a working people's government

armed with socialist programme.

In the case of Nigeria, the crisis of capitalism in a neocolonial country presents a horrific situation with extreme mass poverty, skyrocketing inflation and mass killings and kidnappings perpetrated by armed bandits.

Poverty has also grown worse with statistics now stating that 12.9% of the global population living in extreme poverty can be found in Nigeria.

Amid these crises, there is a bottled-up anger which was partly reflected at Christmas when President Tinubu drove in a large convoy in Lagos and the crowd chanted "we are hungry". Unfortunately, the labour

movement in Nigeria has failed to galvanise this anger and lead the working class in a struggle for better living conditions and a concerted effort to organise a genuine political alternative that can challenge the current ruling and thieving elites.

Soweto concluded his leadoff by urging the Nigerians present at the meeting - who have been forced out of the country as a result of the unbearable conditions of living - to join and support the struggle to take Nigeria out of the doldrums by lending their financial support to the DSM and participating in the activities to campaign for a new mass workers' party armed with a socialist programme.



Trefforest meeting PHOTO: MARIAM KAMISH

Trefforest, South Wales

MARIAM KAMISH
RHONDDA CYNON TAFF SOCIALIST PARTY

You could feel the buzz this past week in Trefforest - home to a large number of Nigerian students.

It had taken ten days of hard work to generate, but now people were talking about our Nigeria meeting, advertised on posters around the streets.

We'd put a leaflet through every door. We'd stood on the university gates at lunchtime to talk to people.

On the day, 30 January, 23 filed into the hall to hear Abbey Trotski, one of the leaders of our sister party in Nigeria, the Democratic Socialist Movement - ten from Nigeria, one from Cameroon.

"Nigeria is stupendously rich both

in human and natural resources", Abbey told the meeting, "but instead of that wealth translating into a better life for all of us, it's always been stolen.

"90% of our income is derived from the sales of crude oil. But it's in the hands of Shell and Chevron with the remnants shared out among their friends.

"The first thing socialism is going to do is take away this source of wealth from the private billionaires - nationalise it and put it under democratic workers' management and control. And not only the oil - the banks. With every elected officer to receive the salary and allowances of a civil servant."

A number of Nigerian students came into the discussion - talking about the hardships they face in Nigeria, the Democratic Socialist Movement - ten from Nigeria, one from Cameroon.

obstacles to bringing their families over.

In closing, Abbey told the meeting: "Rest assured that if revolution was taking place in Nigeria today, world leaders would set aside their differences to ensure that revolution was crushed.

"To defeat them, we'd need international solidarity of the workers and the poor across the world.

"That is why we need an international socialist organisation. We are fighting for socialism not only in Nigeria, but across the world. That is why I urge you those of you attending a meeting for the first time to join the Socialist Party of England and Wales."

After the meeting, Nigerian students clustered around the table to buy the Socialist newspaper. They lingered outside the hall to chat to Abbey. Five have been in touch to say they're coming to our next local branch meeting.

£1/£2 solidarity price

socialistparty.org.uk



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END ISRAELI SIEGE ON GAZA

STOP BOMBING YEMEN

Fight for socialist change



PHOTO: NICK CLARE

British ships and fighter jets have joined US forces in striking Yemen.

The Tory government, that has spent more than a decade destroying our public services, is now firing millions of pounds of explosives into the Middle East.

Two million Palestinians in Gaza face daily bombardment from

Israeli forces, backed by US and British governments. Three million in the West Bank face worsening violence and oppression. The UN aid agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA), responsible for providing food, medicine and education to six million registered Palestinian refugees in camps across the Middle East, has had funding suspended by the US, Britain and others.

How many more thousands of Palestinians and others across the region will die as a consequence?

“The UK and US are steadfast allies”, Sunak’s Tory government said in response to a major US escalation bombing 70 targets in Iraq and Syria. Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer, whose hero Tony Blair unleashed his own murderous horror on the people of Iraq, has not uttered a word of criticism. He has already given the thumbs up for airstrikes on Yemen and the Israeli siege on Gaza.

The anti-war movement in Britain and internationally already features in the calculations of global

capitalist leaders. Mass protests in Britain ousted Tory home secretary Suella Braverman.

The movement would be strengthened further if the workers’ and trade union movement put its full weight behind it. This should include developing discussions between workers and their trade unions in the arms and logistics industries about workers’ action against the war.

It should also include preparing to back candidates in the general election prepared to fight for workers’

interests, and stand up against war and for the rights of Palestinians and other oppressed nationalities worldwide.

Capitalism is a system based on exploitation of the majority by the super-rich minority. War and conflict is an inevitable consequence of the bosses’ rule. And it is the working-class majority with the power to bring it to an end.

Fighting for an end to war means fighting for socialist change. Join us in that fight!

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



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