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# the Socialist

Issue 1263

22-28 February 2024

formerly **Militant**

**The horrors inflicted on Palestinians in Gaza by Israeli state forces are indescribable. Firing on queues of hungry people waiting for food, launching brutal raids on hospitals, a 'case to answer' on genocide. Tens of thousands dead, many more injured, and more than a million driven from their homes.**

Anger and revulsion continues to drive hundreds of thousands on to the streets to protest, week after week.

Through the months of slaughter, capitalist politicians have either wholeheartedly backed the actions of the Israeli state, or mouthed mealy words of faint opposition, with conditions attached.

Most people expect the Tories to give backing to cruel violence. After all, they have taken the axe to our services and living standards through 14 years of rule. But Labour leader Keir Starmer has almost exactly echoed the Tories. Both Rishi Sunak and Starmer have been branded "waste-man" by thousands of protesters.

When the Scottish National Party (SNP) brought forward a motion for a ceasefire in November, working-class pressure forced a quarter of Labour MPs to back it. Ten lost their frontbench position as a consequence.

"We're not going to be pushed around by protesters," Labour frontbencher Wes Streeting has said. But it is clear that Labour has come under big pressure from the huge and determined protests. How many Labour MPs have had their offices picketed by angry constituents?

As the Socialist goes to press, Starmer faces another SNP-led motion and the prospect of thousands outside Parliament as the vote takes place.

Mass, organised working-class opposition to Israeli state terror increases the pressure on the Israeli regime which looks to US and British capitalism for support. The protest movement can be strengthened further by the trade unions adding their considerable weight fully behind it. And further still if steps towards working-class political representation are taken.

'I'm not voting Labour, but who can I vote for?', protesters ask.

A workers' list of candidates to take on the Tories and Labour at the general election would add to the pressure. That is what the Socialist Party is fighting for, and for the biggest-possible number of TUSC (Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition) candidates in May's local elections - fighting for a socialist alternative to cutbacks and war (see pages 2-3). Would you consider standing with us?

The bosses' politicians offer no alternative to war and crisis. A working-class-based mass party, fighting in our interests against the super-rich bosses, would be a big step forward.

To point the way towards what is needed to bring an end to endless wars, and to meet the national aspirations of the Palestinians and other oppressed people, it would need to be armed with a fighting socialist programme. One based on taking the levers of power out of the hands of the super-rich elite by bringing the big corporations and the banks into democratic public ownership. If you agree, join the Socialist Party.

## Another Gaza ceasefire vote

# TORIES OUT

# 'But who can we vote for?'

## We need our own workers' candidates

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SAVE OUR STEEL >>> p7**

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Issue 1263  
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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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"The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it."  
**Karl Marx**

# Left-wing coalition backs the 'Rochdale insurgency' against establishment politicians

The left-wing Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) has announced its support for George Galloway's 'insurgent campaign' against the establishment politicians in next week's Rochdale by-election.

The TUSC national chairperson Dave Nellist, a former Labour MP backbench colleague of George Galloway from 1987-1992, said:

"On 29 February there is no other choice that trade unionists, socialists, and all those that want to protest at the slaughter in Gaza, could make in the Rochdale by-election than to vote for George Galloway, the only pro-Palestinian, anti-austerity alternative to the establishment parties appearing on the ballot paper."

"The recent Kingswood and Wellingborough by-elections showed the hatred that exists towards the Tories but there was not enthusiasm for Sir Keir Starmer's Tory-lite New Labour Mark II party. That would have been shown in Rochdale too, even if Labour had not withdrawn its support for its own candidate after the official nominations had closed."

"Even the Guardian newspaper, the house journal of the New Labour revival project, was forced through gritting teeth to report the views it found on the ground in Rochdale, quoting a life-long Labour supporting lorry driver who said that he 'wasn't going to vote for them this time anyway, because Keir Starmer is taking it too far to the right for me. It's just becoming a pale imitation of the Conservative Party'."

"This voter went on to say of George Galloway that 'I don't agree with 10% of what he says, but 90% I do agree with. He's got an appeal to the workers... whereas the Labour Party now are not representing the workers anymore.'"

"What better summary of the situation could there be? An insurgency against the capitalist establishment and their tame politicians is brewing in Rochdale, and not just there. It's obvious which side trade unionists and socialists should be on."

The TUSC national election agent Clive Heemskerck, added: "The Workers Party of Britain, on whose ticket George Galloway is standing in Rochdale, has participated in the TUSC all-Britain steering committee since they were given observer status at its meetings in March 2022."

"This decision drew criticism of TUSC at the time by some on the left, who could not see beyond their opposition to some of the policy positions adopted by George Galloway and the Workers Party, important though such policy differences undoubtedly can be."

"But TUSC was always conceived from its foundation in 2010 by Bob Crow and others as an inclusive coalition, around the goal of building a working-class political alternative to, at that point, Tony Blair's New Labour, now Sir Keir Starmer's."

"A broad coalition, rather than a closed one, inevitably has to involve collaboration - and robust debate



PHOTO: NICK CLARE

- between organisations and groups within the working-class movement holding often sharply different views. It needs to be a 'united front', marching separately but organising to strike together at the ballot box. That's what the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition strives to be."

"While it is still possible that Sunak may go for an early general election, the next definite set of elections taking place are the local polls in May, including for the London assembly and seats in 105 councils across England."

"TUSC already has over 120 candidates in place for these contests with likely more than double that to come - and will be the biggest working class left-of-Labour challenge on 2 May."

"Whatever the result is in Rochdale on 29 February, the stand being made is already showing in action that it is possible to challenge the capitalist establishment politicians at election time. Let's make sure we build on it."

● The present TUSC candidate list, and the seats they are contesting, is available at [tusc.org.uk](http://tusc.org.uk)

## TRADE UNIONIST AND SOCIALIST COALITION



TUSC, the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, is the electoral coalition under which the Socialist Party stands in elections. It was set up in 2010, co-founded by the late Bob Crow - then general secretary of the RMT transport workers' union - with the primary goal of enabling trade unionists, community campaigners and socialists to stand candidates against pro-austerity establishment politicians.

● Find out more visit: [tusc.org.uk](http://tusc.org.uk)

# WORKING-CLASS PEOPLE NEED OUR OWN VOICE! JOIN THE SOCIALIST ELECTION STAND

The Tories have spent 14 years in government attacking our services and living standards. Most working-class people can't wait to see the back of them. Many, in desperation to get them out, will either stay at home in a general election, or hold their nose and vote for Keir Starmer's Labour.

In all likelihood, Starmer will be the next prime minister. And we know what to expect. More cuts, branded as 'fiscal responsibility'.

Like in his support for the Israeli state's brutal offensive on Gaza after 7 October, Starmer sings from the same hymn sheet as Rishi Sunak - and will ultimately act in the interests of big business too.

Working-class people need our own voice! And in the 2024 elections, local and general, Socialist Party members will do everything we can to help the process of establishing one.

### A workers' list

We are fighting for a workers' list of candidates for the general election. Such a list could include suspended and expelled Labour MPs, as well as trade unionists and anti-war campaigners. Figures such as Claudia Webbe and Emma Dent Coad, both ex-Labour MPs who were supportive of Jeremy Corbyn's leadership, are already preparing to stand as independents. Jeremy himself and others are likely to do so too. Why not bring these campaigns together under the same banner?



PHOTO: TOMMY LIVERPOOL

The Socialist Party is campaigning in the trade unions to win support for candidates standing to fight in the interests workers. (See trade union motion below)

A victory for George Galloway in the Rochdale by-election would raise many people's sights, of the possibility of a handful of MPs elected as a left-wing opposition to a future Keir Starmer government (see left).

### Prepare for May's TUSC stand

The next definite opportunity to take a stand at the ballot box nationwide will be at the 2 May local elections. Around 2,040 councillors will be elected to 105 local authorities in England. It offers a huge opportunity for trade unionists, anti-war and community campaigners to take a stand.

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) banner offers the opportunity for anyone prepared to sign up to the core platform of minimum demands to stand with hundreds of others opposed to war and cuts.

254 candidates stood under the banner of TUSC in the May 2023 local elections. Since, the question of a political challenge has grown even more urgent in the minds of even more people.

We call on all those who want to pick up the electoral weapon to fight the Tories and Starmer's Labour - stand with the Socialist Party and others under the TUSC banner.

To have your TUSC candidacy approved by the next TUSC steering committee, submit your completed application form by Saturday 9 March.

● More information at [tusc.org.uk](http://tusc.org.uk)

# Model motion to encourage trade unionists to stand

With the vacuum of working-class political representation so thoroughly revealed by recent events - but also the absence of a clear answer to this from most trade union leaders - the TUSC steering committee has agreed to promote a model motion to encourage trade unionists to stand themselves as candidates in this year's elections. As local election candidates, but also to discuss with others what needs to be done to ensure there are general election candidates representing workers' interests too.

The motion, drafted to be amendable to take account of different trade union rules and relationships to the Labour Party, is published below.

1. This [union branch] notes that 2024 is highly likely to be the year that we finally see the back of the Tories, after five Tory prime ministers and 14 years of devastation inflicted on our services, communities and living standards generally.

2. Millions hope against hope that a government led by Labour's Sir Keir Starmer will be different. What is needed is money for council services, investment in our NHS, and a fully funded decent pay rise for public sector workers.

3. But Starmer has promised none of that. His watchword is 'fiscal discipline' - cuts. The backing given by Starmer's Labour Party to Israel's barbarous war on the Palestinians, meekly following the Tory government's lead, is another indication of what we can expect from them in office. If they won't protest against the mass murder and the destruction of Gaza, what confidence can we have that they will fight to protect local services, jobs, wages and benefits here?

4. We agree that we oppose Labour councils continuing to carry out Tory cuts and note that the council elections that will take place on 2 May will be the last round of local elections before the general election. The councillors elected will effectively be our communities' negotiators with the new government - for the funding we need to protect, improve and expand our vital local public services. But this will be against the backdrop of a funding crisis for councils, and clear signalling from all the establishment parties in parliament that the austerity squeeze on public spending will continue.

5. We acknowledge that our

union [is affiliated to the Labour Party]/[does not currently have any political affiliation] and this frames what our branch can do within our union's rules to ensure that workers' interests find representation in the elections taking place this year.

6. Nonetheless, and within those rules, this branch resolves that, where they are taking place, our members should be encouraged to consider standing themselves as anti-cuts candidates in the local elections scheduled for May, noting that there is nothing in the rules that prevents them standing as candidates, in a personal capacity, for any party which truly supports trade unionist and socialist principles.

7. In addition, this branch resolves [as a branch to join]/[to support individual branch members acting in a personal capacity joining] with other local trade unionists, campaigners and socialists, where opportunities arise, to meet and discuss further what needs to be done to ensure there is a workers' voice in the general election on the ballot paper, that defends the basic policies and principles of trade unionism and socialism.



PHOTO: TOMMY LIVERPOOL

## SOCIALISM TODAY

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Commuters on the Central Line PHOTO: CHRIS SAMPSON/CC



## Please mind the gap between breaking down Central Line trains

### Commuters pay for decades of underfunding

JULIETTE  
WALTHAM FOREST SOCIALIST PARTY

Travelling with young children and a buggy on the London Underground is never easy, but the ongoing disruption to the Central Line is making it a nightmare.

Since November 2023, there have been constant delays meaning we regularly see gaps between trains of ten minutes or more. The Central Line is the second busiest tube line, so the knock on effect of these long gaps is that when the trains do arrive they are even more overcrowded than usual. Trying to squeeze on to these train carriages with a buggy and two young children is a difficult task. And there are many times I've dropped the children off at nursery late due to the disruption.

Frustratingly, it does not look like it will be improving anytime soon. Transport for London (TfL) says the

delays are likely to last until the summer, or even for years! The trains are 30-years old and a high number of their motors have been developing faults, meaning trains are taken out of service while they are repaired. This is due to years of underfunding of the tube network as a result of Tory austerity and Labour mayor Sadiq Khan's unwillingness to fight for the resources needed to transport people around the capital.

The regular overhauls needed have not been taking place over the last few years. Tube bosses have admitted this means that similar



**Trying to squeeze on to these overcrowded train carriages with a buggy and two young children is a difficult task**

problems could occur over the next few years on other tube lines, potentially causing even more misery for passengers!

The old motors on Central Line trains are due to be replaced with more reliable ones by the end of the decade, this is still not what is needed. What is really needed to maintain a regular service for tube passengers is a new fleet of trains which the Tories will not pay for. Khan puts the blame on the government but is not prepared to fight the Tories to get the funding that the underground network desperately needs. Instead, passengers continue to pay the price with a substandard service!

The Socialist Party calls for a democratically planned, massively expanded and free public transport system in London and across the country.

## Arts Council England attacks 'political' artists funding

RAIN  
ARTIST AND RESEARCHER

Recent policy updates from Arts Council England (ACE), the body responsible for allocating government funding for the arts, have caused considerable unrest within the creative community. These revisions call for ACE-funded entities to exercise caution regarding "explicitly political or activist" comments made by associated individuals, even in personal contexts. Many in the arts sector, which has seen diminished funding under successive Tory governments, view this as a thinly veiled attempt at censorship, posing a significant threat to artistic freedom and expression.

By pressuring organisations that depend heavily on ACE funding, the policy would indirectly impact individual artists. The risk of funding being withdrawn for non-compliance, would foster a climate of caution against collaborating with artists known for their political engagement. Such a situation could, in extreme cases, lead to the shutdown of organisations due to financial pressures, further exacerbating the challenges faced by the arts sector.

ACE has since announced its intention to revise these guidelines in response to the backlash. However, the concern remains that the initial damage might be irreversible. ACE wields substantial influence within the arts sector as a primary funding body. This near-monopolistic grip on arts funding ensures that any guidance or policy revisions issued by the Council command the attention of the entire sector.

This scenario is particularly

disconcerting for "political" artists like myself, who, even before ACE's recent announcement, have encountered pressures to alter our work to meet the expectations of funding bodies. Such demands compromise our work's integrity and intended impact and diminish it to a fraction of our original vision. This suppression of creative diversity and the ensuing questions about power dynamics and control within the arts sector are cause for concern.

The role of a social media presence in professional opportunities introduces further complexity. Social media vetting has emerged as a significant gatekeeping mechanism, influencing artists' chances of selection for various opportunities. This is incredibly challenging and restrictive for artists from working-class and marginalised backgrounds, for whom these opportunities are often crucial sources of income. The imperative to cautiously navigate social media adds another constraint to our freedom to express authentic viewpoints or else get put on an unofficial 'blacklist'.

As the implications of these policy changes begin to materialise, there is a growing apprehension that the situation may deteriorate further,

compelling artists to navigate a precarious balance between financial security and artistic freedom. The increasing tendency to monitor and potentially penalise artists for their personal and professional expressions could intensify, further compromising creative freedom. Such a trajectory undermines the arts' capacity to challenge established norms and inspire change.

The artistic community's response to these proposals underscores the necessity to reevaluate the undemocratic structures and practices within the arts sector. It is imperative to foster an environment that champions artistic integrity and autonomy, ensuring the arts remain a vibrant and dynamic field that accurately reflects society's myriad voices and perspectives.

**WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?**

• editors@socialistparty.org.uk  
or write to the Socialist Inbox, PO Box 1398, Enfield EN1 9GT

### The Socialist Party says:

- No to censorship and blacklisting - for all workers' right to free speech and organisation without threats to livelihoods
- Democratise arts funding - end austerity and expand public funding across all cultural activities, including reviews the cuts to council arts departments, under the democratic oversight of culture sector workers and local communities

## Croydon refuses to house disabled family and loses in court!

BEN GOLDSTONE  
CROYDON AND SUTTON SOCIALIST PARTY

Croydon Council has spent over £300,000 pursuing a legal case it had already lost in the courts. Ruba Imam uses a wheelchair, and her family has been living in accommodation that Croydon Council deemed unsuitable back 2014.

In 2022, the Appeal Court found that the council had "accepted that it was in breach of its duty, as it had failed to secure that suitable accommodation was available". Nevertheless, the council still thought it was necessary to pursue it further, spend more money on the case, and prolong the misery.

Croydon council is meant to be 'bankrupt', and continues to cut back on necessary public services. But it still found £300,000 to pursue the case!

Recently, Croydon-funded private

building developer 'Brick by Brick' collapsed. The council had previously loaned it £200 million.

Croydon Council has 5,000 households on its housing register, with many people waiting over ten years. The council has been forced to apologise and pay compensation to residents, after one experienced racial harassment, and some had to wait years for their housing complaints to be resolved. These issues don't stop even if you are housed!

The funding crisis for councils is getting worse. And Labour councils continue to pass on Tory cuts. That's why trade unionists, socialists, and community campaigners should stand against the Tories and Labour in the local elections, and ensure that there is a working-class alternative at the ballot box.

- To read more on the fight against council cuts see pages 12-13



Socialist Party members campaigning against Croydon council cuts

## Recession – Get ready to fight back against more bosses' attacks

MELANIE DENT  
READING SOCIALIST PARTY.

Once again, we find ourselves in economic recession. This comes on the back of the punitive cost-of-living crisis and endless Tory austerity which have driven down wages, pensions, benefits and living standards at a rate not seen since the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. The Tories will try again to make us pay for the capitalist system's crisis.

It's already obvious the Chancellor's forthcoming Spring statement will hold few, if any, surprises for ordinary working-class citizens and public-sector pay will attempt to be frozen below the rate of inflation.

Once again, the hated ruling class does not care about life on or below the poverty line. With their offshore accounts, and lucrative bonuses, why would they? We are about to enter another season of bitter struggle. Minimum Service Levels laws will be held as a threat over the heads of those workers preparing to revive the strike wave.

The Tories attempt to divide workers because they fear ordinary people fighting back, saying: 'No more!' The Tory ship is sinking fast and Starmer's Labour 'lifeboat' offers working people little alternative than a New Labour Mark II.

Socialist Party members will be standing alongside workers fighting back, on picket lines and at the ballot box, to say we won't pay for their crisis.



Bank of England building PHOTO: DAVID LUFF/CC

## Interest rates – accept lower pay while banks make bumper profits

The UK has entered a recession and interest rates set by the Bank of England will remain high unless there is "moderation in pay pressures", according to the bank's monetary policy report. That means - while the prices in supermarkets, bills, and mortgage payments keep going up - you're supposed to accept getting paid less while bosses get richer. And if you do fight back to get a bit more of the pie, its not those making profits that are the problem is you!

Some have done very well out of the high interest rates. Natwest bank made £6.2 billion in profit last year. This is the highest since just before the crisis in 2007, a crisis which caused the bank to be bailed out by the government and nationalised. The Tory government has a stake of 35% of the bank, but will we see any benefit from this? We need the banks and the big companies nationalised and put under our democratic control, to run the economy for us, not for profit.

## Big business drains much-needed cash from hundreds of schools across the country

WORCESTERSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBER

School Private Finance Initiative (PFI) debt repayments are set to soar. Already they rise by the higher measure of inflation - RPI, not CPI - but now finance companies warn that they could go up by 10% and more.

It was the Tories in the 1990s who launched PFI, but it was New Labour 'Mark 1' under Tony Blair and Gordon Brown that greatly accelerated its use, effectively mortgaging our future. Over a decade on from the proliferation of these schemes, we are facing the consequences.

Under PFI schemes, big business consortia were contracted to build schools, hospitals, prisons and more. These companies raised finance on the open money markets, at a much higher rate than could have been done by public sector entities like local authorities, with all the risk handed over to the public sector. Local authorities, health trusts, etc were tied into 25-30 year schemes to repay that money. Many big business consortia factored in a huge mark-up on the cost of repayments over that period.

In Bromsgrove, Worcestershire, in 2008, global investor Invesis financed the building by BAM Construction of seven new schools, catering for over 2,000 pupils, at a cost of £80 million. But by 2038, the council will have paid £300 million (up from a 2017 estimate of £240 million). Last year, the multi-national big-business Royal BAM Group, of which BAM construction is part, made €350 million profit, and paid out over €44 million in dividends

to its shareholders. This is big business profiting from our cash-starved public services!

Education has faced massive real-terms cuts since 2010. Primary class sizes are the highest in Europe. And secondary class sizes are the highest since records began almost fifty years ago (1977). More than a million children are taught in classes with more than 30 pupils.

### £22 million deficit

Worcestershire local authority schools now have a combined deficit of £22 million, and the 'high needs block', which funds provision to

pupils with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND), has a £40 million deficit. 30 schools in Worcestershire have year-on-year deficits, and 86 are projecting a deficit this year.

With the shortage of places in special schools, local authorities are frequently forced to commission places in independent schools set up expressly to cash in on the crisis. Yet places in independent sector SEND schools often cost more than double the places in council schools or academies.

The Tories stopped the use of PFI after Carillion went bust in 2018, so

embarrassed were they by the Frankenstein's monster they had created, which had been galvanised into life by New Labour.

PFI schemes should be ended and the buildings handed back to local authorities at no extra cost to them. However, these schemes have huge penalty clauses factored in and the big business consortia have never shied away from triggering them.

Our solution is simple: if they won't go without triggering those penalties, they should be brought into public ownership with compensation given only on the basis of proven need. We call on a future Starmer-led

government to end all PFI contracts in this way and to refund the huge amounts of debt that have grown up over the last 20 years to public sector bodies as a result of PFI.

### Starmer's Labour

However, the Labour Party has ditched all the policies it had under Jeremy Corbyn. We can't trust any of the main parties to eradicate profiteering by big business from the public sector. That's why the programme for dealing with PFI schemes will be part of the campaign by Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidates standing in this year's local and general elections.

Education unions need to make these demands in the elections. That is why National Education Union (NEU) members should vote for Sheila Caffrey for vice-president. With a fighting socialist at the head of the third-largest union in the country, the fight to expose the damage PFI has done to education and the need to end all schemes will remain a central part of our fight to secure full funding for all schools and colleges.

## Vote Sheila Caffrey #1 for NEU vice-president

See 'NEU vice-president elections: Vote Sheila Caffrey - 1' at socialistparty.org.uk to read Sheila's fighting programme.

- Get in touch: sheila\_caffrey@hotmail.co.uk



NEU members striking in July 2023 PHOTO: PAULA MITCHELL



PCS NEC makes plans for national campaign

## A fighting, democratic, socialist union leadership is needed now more than ever!

Nominate Marion Lloyd for PCS president, and a fighting NEC



PCS members striking in Watford MARK O'CONNOR

### EDITED STATEMENT BY THE BROAD LEFT NETWORK

The National Executive Committee (NEC) of the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) met in February to consider the next steps in the union's national campaign on pay, pensions, jobs and redundancy rights.

Broad Left Network (BLN) supporters elected to the union's NEC continued to put forward the need for a serious national campaign, not the half-measures put forward by new general secretary Fran Heathcote and acting national president Martin Cavanagh.

Heathcote and Cavanagh and their Left Unity grouping, which currently holds a majority on the NEC, spent June to September 2023 demobilising and dismantling the national campaign. They cancelled strikes, rebalots, and the union's strike levy, which had built up a fund to support targeted strike action.

They hid behind the ballot organised last summer, arguing that "members had endorsed the NEC strategy". But in order to get this endorsement, the NEC majority had told members that a 'yes' vote continued the campaign.

But February's NEC proves that there has been no campaign for the last nine months, and that a new campaign must be built.

### Pay

New research shows that the position on civil service pay is truly terrible. Prices have risen by around 20% in the last two years. On top of that, since 2010 we have faced pay freezes and 1% caps to rises. To undo pay austerity since 2010, the average pay rise we actually need is 32.9%, which will vary slightly depending on grade and department.

This throws into sharp relief just how weak the NEC was, cancelling last year's campaign on

receipt of a £1,500 non-consolidated payment.

This is to say nothing of the other issues: on pensions, where we are over-paying contributions by 2% of salaries each year; and on jobs, where the Tory government has announced 66,000 job cuts.

When the action was ended in June, the BLN called for the national campaign to be reinstated immediately. But now, after a nine-month gap in activity, a serious approach would recognise that we must rebuild the campaign from the ground up.

We must reiterate the demand, agreed by the 2022 conference, of a 10% pay rise, and add to this a demand for a framework to progressively undo the erosion of our rates of pay since 2010. We must explain this to members and prepare them for a serious fight.

### Job cuts

And pay cannot be the only issue on which we build a dispute. Cancellation of the 66,000 job cuts and a no-compulsory redundancy guarantee must feature, among other vital issues.

We support launching a consultative ballot, but we think the NEC's decision is less to do with seriously building a campaign, than with the Left Unity NEC majority being able to pose, during branch AGM season, as having done something meaningful.

The NEC met on 14 February and launched the ballot on 20 February. No time was allowed for branches and groups to confer, or even for a senior lay rep forum to ask questions.

Instead, the NEC opted for a stage-managed Facebook live event on 19 February, featuring the acting, unelected, national president, which will boost his profile ahead of the April elections.

A serious campaign would hold meetings across the union to mobilise members, and raise pressure on the government as we head into negotiations on the civil service-wide

pay remit. Emails, leaflets and noticeboard posters would help recruit people to the union and win new activists. A consultative or even statutory ballot could then be launched in March, coinciding with the decisive part of any talks, and with any announcement being used to fuel the vote in the ballot itself.

Actively going out to members in this way would also allow reps to field questions about a renewed strike levy.

What is also still missing is any serious analysis of the targeted strike wave that ran from December 2022 until June 2023.

No doubt selective action with strike pay has a role to play – but we are fighting a national dispute and that requires national strike action, as with all the other strikes in the strike wave, such as teachers and railworkers.

### Vote 'yes' in the ballot

Notwithstanding our concerns about the unclear pay demands and lack of strategy for winning these demands, we must nevertheless campaign for a 'yes' vote in the ballot. The bigger the vote, the more the pressure on the NEC to do something concrete, and the more the pressure on the government.

The union should also demand that Keir Starmer commit an incoming Labour government to the union's demands on pay.

The current leadership has proven that it is not up to the task. Nominations have opened for the president and NEC elections. We urge all reps to nominate and campaign for a change in the leadership of PCS. The Broad Left Network, in alliance with the Independent Left, is working with other independent candidates in the forthcoming NEC elections in April, ready to seriously lead our union.

● The NEC slate can be found here: 'PCS leadership nominations – Fight for a campaigning NEC' at [socialistparty.org.uk](https://socialistparty.org.uk)

## Usdaw election reveals growing support for a fighting leadership

### SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN USDAW

The results of the Usdaw National Executive Committee (NEC) elections show the potential that exists for a shift in the shop and distribution workers' union leadership, as the anger of members at eroding conditions looks for a fighting lead.

Ryan Aldred, a Socialist Party member standing as the Usdaw Broad Left candidate for the South Wales and Western NEC seat, lost by just 57 votes, polling 886 votes against a former NEC member.

Compared with the last NEC elections in 2021, membership in the region was down by over 2,500 and turnout even lower, which makes it even more significant that Ryan was able to increase his vote by more than 50%.

Despite a huge wave of strike action that has involved a large number of trade unions over the last 18 months, Usdaw has been one of the few which hasn't seen major industrial action.

Given this, it is not surprising that there is a lack of engagement by members in the leadership elections. There were exceptionally low turnouts of 3.5-4.6% across all seven regions. Two regions had candidates elected unopposed, and nobody contested the right-wing incumbent president Jane Jones.

### Fighting strategy needed

However, things can very quickly change and the prospects for building the Usdaw Broad Left and support for the Socialist Party's platform are clear.

Ryan stood for a fighting strategy to secure inflation-proof pay rises, against store closures and job losses, and against 'partnership' approaches which only benefit the bosses.

We met a number of Usdaw members at the Trades Union Congress (TUC) demonstration in Cheltenham who were enthused by seeing a fighting left candidate on the ballot.

Delegates unanimously supported Usdaw Broad Left members' call for a £15-an-hour minimum wage at Usdaw's 2022 Annual Delegate Meeting (ADM), with growing support for industrial action reflected in propositions passed in 2023.

Now, with a potential dispute brewing as Morrisons bosses announce a major attack on pensions, it is clear that the leadership will very quickly be tested, especially as a future Keir Starmer-led government will be offering continued Tory austerity.



Ryan SOCIALIST PARTY

## Tenth round of junior doctors' strikes

Junior doctors have been fighting for pay restoration since March 2023, trying to repair some of the damage resulting from over a decade of austerity. The tenth round of strikes will take place 24-28 February. Then a re-ballot of members will be necessary, as demanded every six months by Tory anti-union laws.

Their union, the BMA, says that progress was being made in talks but the Tory government, yet again, has failed to make a credible offer.

With the NHS on its knees, under the blows of Tory cuts and

privatisation, those that work in it battle to provide an essential service every single day. This strike action is part of that fight to save the NHS.



Get all the latest union news...

[nationalshop](https://nationalshop.org.uk)  
[stewardsnetwork](https://stewardsnetwork.org.uk)  
with the NSSF bulletin [shopstewards.net](https://shopstewards.net)

## Marching to save our steel: Nationalisation not devastation!

GARETH BROMHALL  
SWANSEA SOCIALIST PARTY AND SWANSEA TRADES COUNCIL

Saturday 17 February saw steel towns of South Wales take to the streets in defiance of the multinational company Tata that is choosing to decimate them, and the Tory government that is paying them half a billion pounds to do so. Marches took place in Port Talbot and Newport.

### Port Talbot

At least 1,929 jobs in the plant in Port Talbot are at risk, but the unions estimate there could be up to 15,000 more, taking into account contractors and those servicing the workforce, including catering, taxi drivers, barbers and the like. The steelworks is literally and figuratively at the heart of town, and without it only devastation will follow.

The square outside Port Talbot civic centre was filled with union delegations and the local community. Hundreds took part in a short march that filled the main shopping street.

### Labour

The rally was addressed by Labour Party politicians and union leaders. Local Aberavon MP Stephen Kinlock insisted that the promised £3 billion from an incoming Labour UK government is contingent on the support for the Community/GMB unions' 'Syndex' plan for the future of the steelworks.

This in itself would see hundreds of jobs lost, and has been rejected by Unite the Union, whose own 'Workers Plan' offers positive steps toward a green transition while maintaining jobs and steel production.

Vaughan Gething, campaigning to be Welsh Labour leader (and thereby Welsh First Minister), attended both this and the Newport marches, keen to be seen to be supporting the unions which have supported his campaign. But he recently ruled out



Port Talbot SCOTT JONES

nationalisation in a Senedd (Welsh government) debate.

Tom Hoyle, GMB Wales and South West political officer, finished his speech with a call for unity between the unions involved and the wider community.

Closing speaker Sharon Graham, Unite general secretary, got the most support and applause for the union's fighting stance. While she described Labour's £3 billion pledge as "a good start", she said: "They must do more. Tinkering around the edges is not enough. We want a Labour government. But we want one that is going to make real change!"

But it is essential to call for nationalisation, especially to put demands on the Labour Welsh government, and Keir Starmer, who is likely months from being the next prime minister.

Tata Steel and the UK steel industry must be nationalised under

democratic workers' control and management, with compensation only in the case of proven need, to save the jobs and the community from the decimation of industrial decline. A green transition which maintains jobs, terms and conditions can be achieved, as part of a planned wider economy.

### Action

On the eve of the marches, both Community and Unite unions announced plans for industrial ballots, and organising to win these ballots is now essential. Warning strikes, 24-hour stoppages, longer-term all-out action, and tactics such as occupation if necessary, must all be on the table.

The eyes of the working class are on the steelworkers in this moment. It's not just about the jobs on site right now, it's about the wider effects, the loss of well-paid skilled work, the loss of virgin steel

production, vital for infrastructure, and for the next generation of workers in the town. A win will embolden workers in other industries and show the potential power of the organised working class.

Socialist Party members from Swansea, Cardiff and Bristol, including those involved in the trades councils from these cities, took part in the march, as did representatives of the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN).

The Socialist Party's "Nationalisation Not Devastation" placards, featuring a cartoon by the late Alan Hardman, were popular, and hundreds of those in attendance bought of copies of the Socialist. One steelworker, carrying our leaflet, was overheard telling his partner that it was very important. Several steelworkers and local community members signed up to find out about joining the Socialist Party.

Hundreds of steelworkers from Llanwrn, their families and Newport workers marched through the city to defend jobs at the steelworks.

Despite minimal publicity, about 200 joined the march. 300 jobs are threatened at Llanwrn as part of Tata's cutback plans, yet another cut to the works. Before the march, a steel flower was planted for every job set to go, a powerful visualisation of the destruction on the horizon.

There was a great response to the Socialist Party's demand for nationalisation, which was studiously avoided by the Labour Party politicians, who merely repeated that the jobs could be saved if a Labour UK government was elected, without explaining what it would do.



Newport DAVE RED

### 300 jobs threatened in Newport

DAVE RED  
WALES SOCIALIST PARTY

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## Unison women's conference: Women are fighting back and need a campaigning union

### CONFERENCE DELEGATES

Several hundred women activists attended a thought-provoking Unison women's conference. Hearing from vibrant delegates is a powerful reminder that women are fighting back, but need to be part of building a strong leadership at all levels so that we can do that effectively.

Unison general secretary, Christina MacAnea, on the Starmer-supporting right wing of the union, had no choice but to reflect the mood to fight among women members and referenced the major strikes in Glasgow, Birmingham and Northern Ireland.

Labour's shadow minister for health, Abeba Apong Asare, gave a bland speech with nothing about fighting back, but anger and mistrust against Starmer's Labour broke through, especially over Gaza.

There are some great women union reps pushing back against management, including fighting for the



Glasgow Unison members fighting for equal pay MATT DOBSON

rights of those in the privatised sector. We can have no trust in profit-hungry private providers, so we need to fight for public ownership of services, such as nurseries, and decent pay and conditions for workers.

We discussed the need for free, flexible childcare for all, including special needs provision, so women can afford to work! The cost of childcare is often more than the mother is paid, meaning they have to give up work and fall into poverty.

There were motions on pregnancy and maternity leave, and baby loss. We heard of employers disciplining women because they have had time off after miscarriage! We discussed sexual harassment in the workplace.

It was felt there is a higher risk of sexual harassment in offices that are less populated due to home-working.

Socialist Party member Helen Couchman spoke on a motion about work-life balance and the right to 'disconnect'. Working from home since the pandemic has blurred the line between work and personal time.

Discussions included council cuts

and 'section 114' notices, including the impact of these cuts on women.

A fringe meeting gave accounts of horrific treatment of Black and migrant women. Black and Asian sisters suffer more violence and abuse, tougher sanctions at work, poverty and low pay, and more child and neonatal baby death than white women.

We heard harrowing stories of abuse at home and at work – eight women a month are killed due to domestic violence, and thousands of children and their mothers are homeless, having lost everything as they escaped.

Many reps pointed out that as the biggest union of women workers, Unison should lead on all these issues. Unfortunately, none of the actions in the motions called for industrial action, only to ask 'Labour Link' (the union committee which represents Labour Party members) to help lobby the government.

Unison should put clear demands on all these issues on Starmer's Labour, including no cuts and full funding, and prepare for action if necessary to fight for them.



# HOW TO WIN WORKERS AND YOUTH TO SOCIALIST IDEAS?

## LEON TROTSKY'S TRANSITIONAL METHOD TODAY

CALLUM JOYCE

SOUTHERN AND SOUTH EAST SOCIALIST PARTY

The last two years in Britain and internationally have seen a big increase in struggle, 2024 will be no different. There has been the historic strike wave in response to the cost-of-living crisis and the huge protests against the Israeli onslaught on Gaza, with none of the issues driving these movements having been resolved.

A common feature has been people not just responding to immediate attacks on their living conditions or oppression as single issues, but more and more linking these problems together, starting to develop an understanding that capitalism is the root cause of them.

That is why an increasingly large number of young people (and many older workers as well) identify themselves as socialists, according to a recent study by the Institute of Economic Affairs. This represents part of the process of the development of what Marxists call 'class consciousness' - the conscious understanding that capitalist society is run on the basis of the exploitation of one class by another (the workers by the bosses) and that the organised working class will play the decisive role in the struggle for a socialist alternative.

At this stage, while many people see the problems with capitalism, a minority agree explicitly that socialism is the solution. Even for those who do, there is still a lower level of understanding around exactly what socialism means in practice and how it can be achieved.

### Consciousness

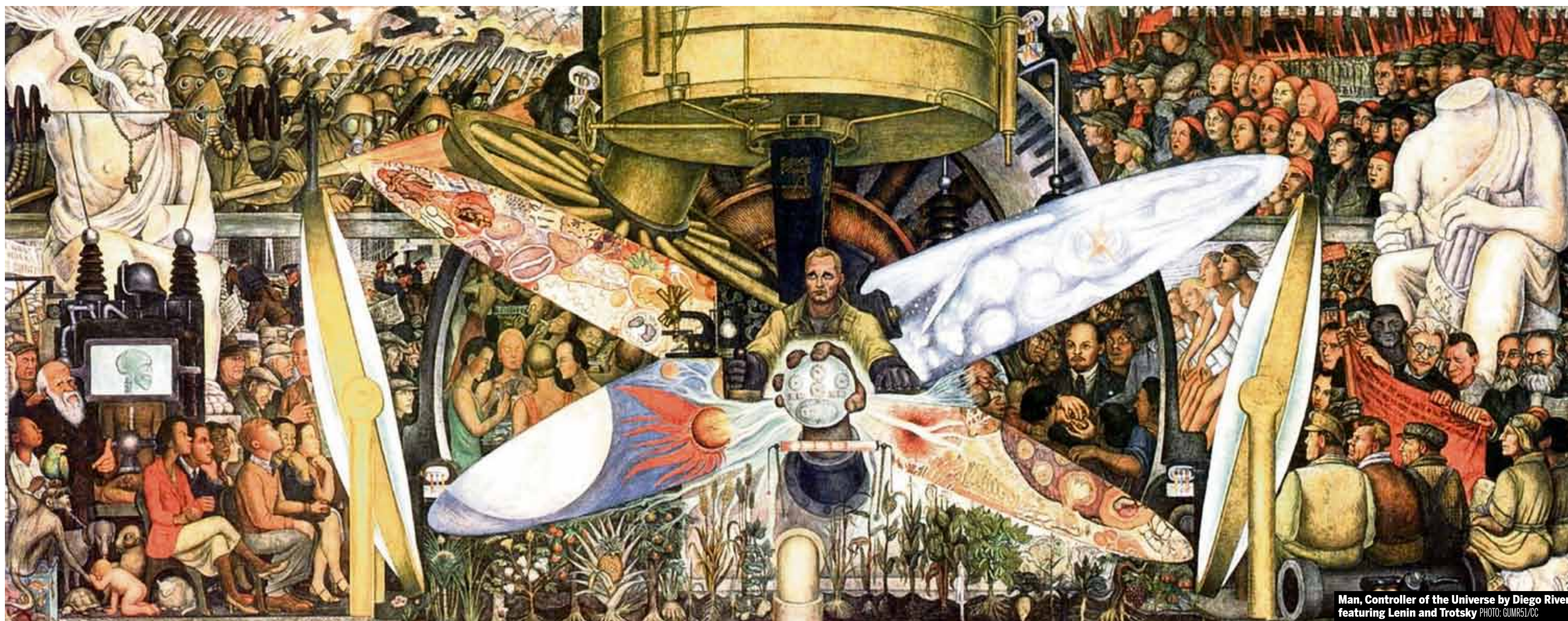
Fortunately, consciousness is not fixed. It can develop very rapidly in the face of great events and struggles. The key question for socialists in this period is: how can we accelerate the processes by which the mass of workers and youth draw the necessary conclusions about the steps needed to transform society?

This same question was taken up by co-leader of the Russian Revolution Leon Trotsky and his international collaborators when they published the 'The Transitional Programme' in 1938 as the founding document of the Fourth International.

The text opens "The world political situation as a whole is chiefly characterised by a historical crisis of the leadership of the proletariat [the working class], highlighting that, despite the countless mass movements and revolutionary situations that had spread across the world in the first part of the 20th century (and since), these movements had ultimately not been able to do away with capitalism due to the lack of mass, revolutionary parties with far-sighted leaderships and socialist programmes to establish a new socialist society. The one exception to this was the Russian Revolution of 1917 that brought the working class to power for the first time in history under the leadership of the Bolshevik Party and key figures within it like Lenin and Trotsky. (See '100 years after his death: Lenin's revolutionary



**Trotsky and his supporters drafted the transitional programme as a conscious break from the Stalinist Comintern, and in anticipation of a revolutionary wave that would follow a new world war**



Man, Controller of the Universe by Diego Rivera featuring Lenin and Trotsky PHOTO: GUMIS/CC

legacy' at socialistparty.org.uk)

By the 1930s, the workers' state in Russia had degenerated into a bureaucratic dictatorship under the leadership of Stalin. The communist third international (Comintern) acted not to push forward revolutionary movements internationally, but to preserve the narrow interests of the privileged Soviet bureaucracy.

Trotsky and his supporters drafted the transitional programme as a conscious break from the Stalinist Comintern, and in anticipation of a revolutionary wave that would follow a new world war.

The task of the Fourth International was to prepare for such events, to build new mass revolutionary parties of the working class, and overcome the fact that consciousness among most working-class people was not yet at the stage where they had drawn the conclusion that it was necessary to join and build such parties.

### Transitional demands

'The Transitional Programme' set out a number of 'transitional' demands that aimed to deal with the current level of consciousness by taking up the immediate issues facing

the working class at that time, while drawing a bridge from those immediate struggles to the need for the socialist transformation of society as the only way to permanently secure the interests of ordinary people.

Some of the demands included were: a sliding scale of wages that would increase automatically in line with inflation, the abolition of commercial secrecy or 'opening the books' to inspect the finances of companies that claimed they could not give pay rises to their workers, and the need for workers' control of production in failing industries.

Taken individually, these demands only constituted reforms rather than being 'revolutionary' in themselves. Their power being that, taken as a whole, in a period of economic crisis, capitalism would be unwilling and unable to grant them all. The ensuing struggle over them would show the working class that its material needs cannot be satisfied within the bounds of capitalism. In the process of struggling for them, workers would draw conclusions about the need for the socialist reconstruction of society.

As Trotsky explained, the aim was "not to engage in abstract formulas,

but to develop a concrete programme of action and demands in the sense that this transitional programme issues from the conditions of capitalist society today, but immediately leads over the limits of capitalism".

### A blueprint?

The programme outlined was not intended as a blueprint for every situation however, but was tailored specifically to the world situation in the 1930s. Not every demand raised would necessarily be relevant for us today, although those around wages that rise with inflation and for opening the books of private companies will become increasingly popular in this period of economic downturn.

But the key idea outlined in the text was the method needed to energetically take up the fight for every immediate reform in the interests of the working class, while also skilfully explaining that only a socialist society could guarantee these reforms permanently. This was not a specific innovation of Trotsky and his collaborators, but was built upon the same methods used by Lenin and other Bolsheviks in the previous period, and those raised by Marx and Engels

even earlier. As far back as 1848, Marx and Engels explained in 'The Communist Manifesto': "The Communists fight for the attainment of the immediate aims, for the enforcement of the momentary interests of the working class; but in the movement of the present, they also represent and take care of the future of that movement."

This transitional method is just as useful for socialists today to connect with those workers who are not yet conscious of the need to change society but are forced to engage in day-to-day struggles to protect their wages and living conditions in the face of attacks by the bosses. For any serious socialist to separate themselves and their politics from these immediate issues and to only raise the ideas of 'socialism' and 'revolution' in an abstract way would be equivalent to separating themselves from the working class, and would fatally compromise any attempts to build a serious, fighting, socialist party.

The transitional method guides the Socialist Party in its orientation towards movements today. For example, throughout the strike wave, we put forward demands for coordinated strike action between unions

where possible, including calling for a 24-hour general strike at one point. In battles for better pay we have raised the need for a £15-an-hour minimum wage - this demand on its own is not transitional, but it becomes so when taken with the rest of our programme calling for the need to open the books of companies that all its refuse to pay and for the nationalisation under democratic workers' control of companies. In the anti-war movement we have raised the need for a 'socialist intifada' in Palestine, and here in Britain called for workers' candidates to take on the war-mongering Sunak and Starmer at the general election.

In each of these cases we have aimed to point out the next concrete step in the struggle while always highlighting the need for it to be part of the broader fight for socialism. This way we point out what can win the immediate demands of the movement while also increasing the political cohesion and confidence of the working class in preparation for future battles.

### Connecting with workers

But how do we decide which demands are correct to put forward?

How can we make sure that our programme connects with the immediate struggles of the working class and appears relevant to their situation without having to hide the socialist content of our programme?

Part of what influences our demands is the current consciousness among the working class, with all its diversity and complications. But also important is our perspective - what we think will develop politically and economically in the next period. Marxists do not have a crystal ball that we can use to predict the future, but we can analyse the trends in society and determine which issues and demands we think will become central in the future. By understanding the trajectory of current struggles we can then best position ourselves to engage with the working class when it moves into action.

A good example of this is our demand for a new mass workers' party. This demand is not a matter of principle for us but a tactic chosen to suit the situation. In the past, when the Labour Party still maintained its working-class base (albeit with a pro-capitalist leadership), it would have been incorrect to call for a new party, as the working

class already felt it had an organised political expression at that time. Members of the Militant (the Socialist Party's predecessor) were able to fight to win support for Marxist ideas among this working-class base.

But with the shift to the right of the Labour Party during the 1980s-90s, culminating with the election of Blair and the scrapping of Clause IV, which had at least nominally committed the party to the ideas of socialism, the working class in Britain found itself without a political voice.

During the 1990s, we raised the idea that in the next period the working class would have to pose the question of the need for a new party - because the industrial and political battles to come would require this as a concrete step in taking the struggle to the next level.

The experience of Blair's New Labour government did pose the question of working-class political representation. After a bitter pay dispute with Blair's government through 2002-03, the Fire Brigades Union voted to disaffiliate from Labour in 2004. Months before, transport union RMT had been expelled after its decision to allow its branches



**The transitional method is a crucial tool to be studied and taken up by all those who want to fight back against the war, poverty and oppression meted out by capitalism**

independent working-class party that would allow workers in Britain to have a significant impact on events - not as a distraction from trade union and other forms of struggle, but as a complement to them.

A new party that was genuinely democratic could act almost as a 'parliament' of the working class, allowing the most conscious and combative layers to debate the tactics and ideas needed to go forwards - in such an arena, the Socialist Party would be able to effectively put forward our programme and reach a wider layer of workers. Whether this new party had a reformist or a revolutionary programme would not be fixed from its inception but would be decided in the course of struggle and under the pressure of events.

The question of the need for a new party will be posed by the working class - as has been seen especially during the current anti-war movement - regardless of whether or not we raise it. Therefore, to attempt to oppose such a demand or to refuse to engage with it would mean trying to hold back the working class just as it begins to take steps in the direction of a political struggle for power.

Many young people and workers can be convinced quickly of the need for revolutionary politics and to join our revolutionary party, we fight hard to build the forces of the Socialist Party. But as a transitional demand, addressing the majority of working-class people and youth, we put forward concrete steps forward to increase the level of organisation and combativeness of the working class - including the need for a new mass workers' party.

### Relevance

The relevance and correctness of these demands and our method will be sharply tested in the next period as capitalism lurches from one crisis to the next with no way out of the blind alley into which it is taking society.

For socialists who seek to build upon the legacy of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Trotsky, our key task is to fight for the leadership of future mass struggles of the working class and to build a party that is capable of pointing the way forward to transform society.

The original 'Transitional Programme' was formulated in an extremely difficult time for the ideas of socialism against a backdrop of world war, economic catastrophe, and numerous defeats for the international workers' movement. But the genuine Marxists at that time were confident that, armed with the right ideas and approach, they would be able to build the forces necessary to end the rotten system of capitalism.

That same task is posed just as sharply today and the transitional method is a crucial tool to be studied and taken up by all those who want to fight back against the war, poverty and oppression meted out by capitalism. It is through these ideas put into practice that the working class will be able to carry out its historic task of building a democratic, socialist world - if you want to be part of that fight, join the Socialist Party!

to support other parties. Then RMT general secretary, Bob Crow, played an important role in the campaign for a new mass workers' party, and helped to establish the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition with that objective in 2010.

Can we be sure that the call for a trade union-backed new mass workers' party is correct though? Is there not a danger that if Marxists call for a new mass party that may have a reformist program initially, that this will foster illusions in reformism among the working class and hold back a layer that may be starting to look more towards revolutionary politics?

A similar debate was held between Trotsky and some of his American collaborators in the 1930s as they formulated 'The Transitional Programme'. To the question of whether or not the call to form a new party would risk being a negative step, Trotsky replied "Are we in favour of the creation of a reformist labor party? No. Are we in favour of a policy which can give to the trade unions the possibility to put its weight upon the balance of the forces? Yes."

Similarly today we make clear that we do not call for the formation of a new reformist party, but for an



## Valentine's Day delivery and Uber strike

Thousands of delivery drivers and riders in cities around the country turned off their apps for Deliveroo, UberEats, Just Eat and other food companies between 5-10pm on Valentine's Day. Similar action took place in the US.

Riders told the press that they had seen about a 12% drop in pay while company profits had increased.

### TOM BALDWIN REPORTS ON ONE PROTEST IN BRISTOL

In Bristol, Uber cab drivers also joined the strike action. Around 40 gathered to protest outside Uber's office, followed by a slow drive around the city centre.

The strike had been organised by

the drivers themselves, to coordinate with the Valentine's Day action of delivery workers.

Drivers told us why they were striking, listing a number of grievances with the company. Uber has put up the cost of journeys for customers, while cutting the share going to the workers who actually make them possible.

We were told that it's the drivers themselves who bear the costs of running their cars, which have all risen, while Uber skim up to 40% off the fares. Flat fares mean they don't get paid for waiting times and lose money while sat in city traffic.

### Sacked

Drivers told us that, under Uber's disciplinary procedures, they can be suspended and even dismissed on the basis of complaints, without them even being investigated. The strikers explained that, unfortunately, some customers make false claims against drivers in order to try and get free rides.

App companies like Uber like to pretend that they are innovators, reinventing an industry. In reality, all they are doing is ramping up the exploitation and racking up the profits. The strikes are proving that it's the workers that create the wealth for them. We support their demands to keep more for themselves.

## Coventry Amazon strikers face down police aggression and bosses' bribes

MILA HUGHES  
COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

Amazon strikers were back again, strong as ever with another three-day stint! With the added strength of another site also successful in their strike ballot - a 'Valentine's Day' present for Bezos! In spite of the cold, hundreds were on the Coventry picket line from 6am.

Many of the temporary workers had told GMB union reps that if they were made permanent, they would join. After being made permanent on Wednesday, queues formed on the Thursday picket line, as the new permanent staff made good on their promises.

One worker told me how he saw working class strength: "One man can break one stick, but if you put ten sticks together, ten men cannot break them".

### Labour

One local Labour councillor made a passing five-minute visit on the first day of strike action to take photos, but they're nowhere to be seen now.

Union reps and officials told us that police and private security have been more threatening, and had grabbed and shoved them.

One Socialist Party member saw a striker put a single foot in the road - to reach the window of a car that stopped willingly - and an officer almost ran up to shout his lungs out at her, bleating about safety, when ten minutes later he directed cars onto



One of the Amazon picket lines MILA HUGHES

the wrong side of the road to cross the picket! She shrugged it off and started leafleting further along.

A union official was eagerly shouting down a megaphone "No work today" and was handing out leaflets - this was met with two police officers buzzing around her for the entire morning picket.

In efforts to strike-break, Amazon even offered workers vouchers to abandon the union! Bosses even offered a chicken and chips meal voucher worth a £2.50 to cross the picket line. At 8am the same day, rally strikers joked about it over and over, chanting: "No chicken and chips!"

## Family, friends and comrades celebrate Alan Hardman's life

IAIN DALTON  
YORKSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY

Family, friends, neighbours and comrades gathered in the village hall of Laycock, near Keighley in Yorkshire, on Saturday 17 February for a 'Celebration of the life of Alan Hardman'. Alan was the first printer of Militant (now the Socialist), and for decades produced political cartoons for party publications.

Some of his most famous cartoons were on the walls and in frames, along with photos of his beloved family, and a book for personal remembrances of a very special man.

### Miners' strike

Alan was the son of a Yorkshire miner - a fact no doubt responsible for his sometimes gruff and stubborn approach! Alan saw and dramatised some of the most historic national and international events of the last century, not least the year-long miners' strike in 1984-85. A collection of his drawings and cartoons will be on display at an event in Yorkshire to mark the 40th anniversary of that

dramatic struggle being opened by Arthur Scargill.

### Never before

Old times were discussed by people who had not seen each other for many years, and in some cases, never before! Memories were exchanged about Alan - printer, engineer, cartoonist, husband and brother, father and grandfather, or simply neighbour. Members of the Socialist Party and Militant, who had worked with Alan over the years, were there to pay their respects.

There were a few formal speeches. First was Alan's son, Ben, followed by Anna, his daughter. They gave moving accounts of their father's life - their memories of him and some of the 'legends' from his youth. They spoke of the great love and affection between Alan and his grandchildren.

Jon Ingham spoke about work he has been doing with Alan to produce a book of his cartoons. A great amount of work has been done preparing them for publication and writing up at least some of the historical context which lay behind them. The book is due to be published in May.

Clare Doyle, a veteran socialist and internationalist, was asked to speak about the early days of the Militant, and working with Alan. Clare described the arduous and long hours Alan put in developing the sheet-fed press and printing the paper - along with others - on top of drawing the cartoons used in our publications.

### Artistic skill

She admired not only the powerful messages of Alan's cartoons but also the artistic skill he brought to the drawing board. His distinctive style could drive home the ugliness, oppressiveness and cruelty of class rule, but he was also quite capable of drawing and painting beautiful subjects with great delicacy.

Clare conveyed the warmest condolences to Alan's family from all Socialist Party members, especially those who had worked closely with him in the early days - Peter Taaffe and Keith Dickinson.

In the course of the afternoon, the latest issue of the Socialist, with one of Alan's cartoons on the back page, was sold. The 'Memoirs' of Keith Dickinson also went down well.

Yorkshire Socialist Party members will be holding a memorial meeting for Alan later in the year.

• See 'Alan Hardman 1936-2024: Militant cartoonist and printer' at [socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk)

# Protesting against Israeli state terror

Dozens of protests continue, almost every day of the week, and in every town and city. Socialist Party members have been attending in support, putting forward our demands - for a mass democratic struggle of Palestinians to fight for national self-determination, and a working-class political alternative in Britain opposed to war and oppression.

## Wakefield - 'Starmer, you can't hide'

"Keir Starmer, you can't hide, we charge you with genocide" was one of a number of chants on the first march in Wakefield. 200 marched, with Socialist Party members amongst them, selling placards and copies of the Socialist, and marching behind our banner.

Along the route, one pub had a member of staff come out with glasses of water to quench the thirst of the marchers. Passing drivers tooted in support.

Anger at not just Keir Starmer and Rishi Sunak, but also the two Wakefield Labour MPs - Simon Lightwood and Yvette Cooper - who voted against a ceasefire in November, rang out on the march and from rally speakers.

Nadiyah Sharp resigned as a Labour councillor in opposition to the party's stance on Gaza. She also expressed her opposition to plans by the Labour council to increase charges for funeral costs, as well as highlighting the ongoing struggle taxi drivers have had with the council over licensing issues.

Our stall at the rally was swamped at times, with people coming up to sign petitions, including one encouraging people to help us stand candidates against Starmer's war-mongering Labour in the upcoming elections, with five confirmed the Trade Union and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidates in Wakefield so far, up from three last year.

IAIN DALTON

## Swindon - our own candidates

Scott Hunter reports that the mood on the Swindon march was more determined than ever. He explained how a new feature of this march was an increased awareness that elections will be coming soon: "I was not the only speaker to raise the issue. Another speaker, who said he had only recently become politically active due to the war in Gaza, talked about the need not to vote for candidates who haven't supported a ceasefire.

"I got a chance to speak and took the issue further: it's not enough just to withdraw support from capitalist politicians, we need to stand our own candidates on a programme of internationalism and socialism! I appealed to the crowd to join us in standing a broad workers' list in



Bristol ROGER THOMAS



Wakefield IAIN DALTON

local and general elections under the TUSC banner and the crowd chanted: 'No ceasefire, no vote!'"

## London - stopping isn't an option

At the end of the work week, I hear a voice inside saying: "Maybe I'll rest this Saturday". But that's not an option.

I have to do something, until Palestinians are free from the terror being

unleashed upon them. So I came to the protest at Marble Arch, handing out Socialist Party placards.

People of all demographics flooded past towards Hyde Park, noticeably more than the last march. So many were keen to take the 'End Israeli state terror' placards I held - people donated £130 to the Socialist Party for the ones I was carrying.

Many had signs of their own, all fighting for the cause. "I want to hear you singing later", I would say. Usually replied with a smile: "Oh, don't you worry, I will". They seemed more

ready than ever to shout in support of Palestinians.

The people passing me are in stark contrast to mainstream media that evening: "Ten people arrested"; "total chaos". I'm sure those who regularly police these marches are aware how false these accusations are.

A family from Palestine approached me, and we eagerly discussed what would end the Israeli state terror. They drew the conclusion that funding from the USA and other allies must stop.

"What happens then?", I ask. Everyone I say this to agrees that we live in a class system.

We need to go to the root of the problem. We must organise a political alternative to capitalism, backed by workers' action. Who funds terror? Not us, never!

RICHARD TILLEY

## Gaza protests continue

In Darlington, Daniel Forrest reports how Socialist Party members and others placed themselves outside of the office of Darlington's Tory MP Peter Gibson, a member of the Conservative Friends of Israel. "Someone popped their head out of the office door to strangely offer us a cup of tea whilst slyly taking a picture of us, as if we were doing something wrong by protesting outside the office of an MP!"

In Bristol, the march grew as it progressed, largely due to passers-by in the busy streets joining in. Nicholas Clare reported many of the placards and banners were directed at the UK's support for Israel in the form of arms sales and the recent bombings in Yemen. Bristol is home to multiple arms manufacturers, including a factory for Israeli arms company Elbit Systems.

The weekly demonstration that has been taking place in the predominantly Muslim district of Alum Rock in Birmingham turned into a march to the city centre branch of Barclays Bank on 10 February, to demonstrate revulsion at its role financing arms companies supplying the Israeli state, reported Clive Walder.



Bristol Uber drivers' strike TOM BALDWIN

## Justice for Oliver Campbell

TERESA MACKAY  
IPSWICH SOCIALIST PARTY

Oliver Campbell has been fighting to clear his name for 34 years and is back at the Royal Courts of Justice this month where it is expected to be overturned.

In 1990, he was picked up and questioned by the Metropolitan Police for the murder of a shopkeeper in Hackney, spending 11 years behind bars. Eric Samuel, who was prosecuted, insisted that Oliver was not his accomplice.

### 'Confession'

Oliver is 6'3" and Black, and known as 'the gentle giant', with severe learning difficulties. The two robbers were 5'10". He made his 'confession' after 14 police interviews, without a lawyer or appropriate adult present. He was convicted in 1991 and has been on life license since 2002.

Police found a baseball cap near the scene, matching one Oliver had recently bought, which had been stolen in Leicester Square. His co-accused, Mr Samuel, admitted to being involved in the robbery, identified the real killer to the police, insisting that Oliver had nothing to do with the murder. The jury were not told this, as it was judged "hearsay".

### Clear his name

Myself; Glyn Maddocks, Oliver's solicitor for 23 years; Sandy Martin former Labour MP for Ipswich; and his PA Maggie, have continued to fight to clear Oliver's name, with support from the Socialist Party and Youth Against Racism in Europe.

Hopefully 2024 will be the year that Oliver gets justice.

• See 'Oliver Campbell - 31 years fighting for justice' at [socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk)

Help fund the fightback  
**DONATE**  
[socialistparty.org.uk/donate](http://socialistparty.org.uk/donate)

SOCIALIST PARTY FIGHTING FUND						
AREA	\$ RECEIVED	\$ TARGET	Q1: JANUARY-MARCH 2024	DEADLINE: 31 MARCH 2024		
South West	2,090	2,100				100%
West Midlands	2,363	2,700				88%
Southern & SE	1,877	2,400				78%
Northern	584	800				73%
North West	772	1,200				64%
Wales	1,261	2,400				53%
London	2,443	5,000				49%
East Midlands	724	2,050				35%
Yorkshire	808	2,650				30%
Eastern	376	1,300				29%
Other	2,692	2,400				112%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>15,992</b>	<b>25,000</b>				<b>64%</b>





## 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](http://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](http://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.

- 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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## Save Nottingham free tram travel



GARRY FREEMAN  
NOTTINGHAM SOCIALIST PARTY

Des Conway – a leading Save Free Tram Travel activist – said about our successful lobby of the county council cabinet meeting: "We repeated our central demand, that Nottinghamshire County Council drop its heartless plan... to scrap free tram travel for those with a concessionary travel pass."

In May, there will be a mayor of the new combined authority for Nottingham, Nottinghamshire, Derby and Derbyshire. The mayor will eventually have funds and powers to control buses and trams across the new authority.

Unbelievably, Ben Bradley – a local Tory MP and also leader of Nottinghamshire County Council – says, if elected, he will "make the tram network financially viable and more integrated with other local services". Yet he leads the council that has been trying to end free tram travel!

The Labour candidate for the mayoral post, Claire Ward, refused to commit to funding free tram travel in the first year, if elected this May. Her justification was that the money for concessionary fares is not transferring to the new authority in year one. However, the cost of the free tram

travel is £900,000, and the new mayor is supposed to have a £1.5 billion budget to spend on local transport infrastructure.

Neither Ben Bradley, nor the cabinet member for transport, Neil Clarke, came to accept our 1,000+ signature petition.

Even service-cutting Nottingham City Council (see 'Nottingham Labour plans cuts on scale we've not seen' at [socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk)), has pledged to keep free tram travel for concessionary pass holders for now. So we see absolutely no reason why the 154,000 affected people in the county should not keep our free tram travel.

We'll be at the mayoral hustings on 21 February to put them all on the spot.

### Breaking news – victory!

Ben Bradley, Tory MP and council leader, now says: "We have never had a proposal to scrap free tram travel. We have had a consultation on options, one of which was 'no change to concessions'. Again, there are no plans for the county to cut concessions, because it is now apparent that this responsibility will pass to the regional mayor."

Despite what he says, this is a victory.

## Southampton

# 'Enough is enough' – all we've seen is cuts

### NADIA DITTA

TUSC CANDIDATE IN BEVOIS WARD

Our meeting in Northam had a good turnout, was very interactive, and had good but challenging questions from the audience.

Socialist Party member Karen Rogers spoke passionately about tackling the housing crisis that we are facing. The council is piling rising costs onto the working class.

Its decision to increase rents in council properties is a political choice. And the Labour council looks to sell assets that are essentially ours.

One person wanted to know where the money would come from, as all they've seen is cuts.

The council does have access to reserves. And over £500 million has been stolen from Southampton by the Tory central government. We want that money back.

Another member of the audience said: "Enough is enough". This is our chance for change. You will see us campaigning in Southampton, so watch this space.



Northam meeting PHOTO: SOUTHAMPTON SP

# South West firefighters beat job cuts

TOM BALDWIN  
SOUTH WEST SOCIALIST PARTY

A victorious campaign led by the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) has defeated plans to cut firefighter jobs. The Avon Fire Authority voted last October to cut 40 jobs, 10% of frontline staff. This serious threat to safety was fought by the FBU. The February meeting of the fire authority was lobbied by FBU members and supporters, including Bristol Trades Council delegates and members of the Socialist Party.

The rally was addressed by the FBU brigade secretary for Avon, Amanda Mills. On the previous Saturday night, only 69 firefighters were on duty in the whole of Avon, protecting over 1 million people across Bristol, Bath and the surrounding area. How could a further 10% cut in firefighter numbers possibly be safe? The fire authority had tried to justify the cuts by saying there would be no closures of fire stations or loss of fire engines. Amanda pointed out that these are useless without the firefighters themselves.

FBU brigade chair, Matt Senior, said fire authority members always claimed they'd been pushed into



PHOTO: BRISTOL SP

## Brighton Labour attacks TUSC for opposing cuts

### DAVID MAPLES

BRIGHTON SOCIALIST PARTY

An air of self-congratulation hangs over the town hall. Following on from Tory government cuts of £120 million per year, and cuts in Brighton services of £240 million per year, the Labour council is rushing through another £33 million of cuts!

The leader of the council criticised the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) – which the Socialist Party is part of – in her local newspaper column. "The TUSC candidate in the [South Portslade] by-election stood on a platform of opposing all cuts", stating that "declaring ourselves bankrupt would only mean handing control of the city's finances and decision-making over to Michael Gove".

This is not TUSC's position. We argue that the council should set a needs-based budget, and use reserves and prudential borrowing powers to fund it, whilst demanding that the incoming Labour government provides adequate funding. What is the point of electing a Starmer-led government unless it rebuilds public services?

Instead, the Labour council intends to:

- Reduce support for special educational needs children and their families
- Introduce charges for transport for young people between 16 and 18 with special educational needs
- Stop funding the pre-employment and placement scheme for disabled people
- Reduce supported employment and youth employability provision
- Reduce family contact for children in care and children in need



Brighton TUSC meeting PHOTO: BRIGHTON SP

- Close in-house community support for adults with learning disabilities
- End early opening of public toilets
- Reduce homelessness services
- Reduce library staffing
- Reduce funding to community and voluntary organisations
- Reduce services for domestic violence
- Reduce support for low-income households

And let's not forget that the Labour council is closing St Peter's and St Bartholomew's schools (see 'Brighton and Hove – councillors have a choice' at [socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk)), and reducing classes at draws. This reads very much like a list drawn up by Michael Gove!

Page after page, the proposals ignore the pressure on frontline staff, while including 180 job cuts. Labour even intends to cut trade union

support to staff by 25%.

The Greens were routed out of power in Brighton at the 2023 council elections, having presided over Tory cuts. The Greens' election agent admitted that, rather than use the recent by-election to galvanise opposition to the closure of St Peter's School, it ran a token campaign, because it was concentrating on the general election. Such contempt for working-class families!

We stand with service users, families and staff in opposing these cuts, lobbying the council budget meeting on 22 February. We call on Labour councillors to make the 'difficult decision' to get off their arses and stand with us in opposition to the cuts, or stand aside for the councillors who will.

● Read more – 'Labour and Greens punished for cutting Brighton services' at [socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk)

## Merseyside TUSC meeting

# Fighting war and cuts brings together youth and more

### ROGER BANNISTER

LIVERPOOL SOCIALIST PARTY

50 people attended the Merseyside Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) meeting to discuss standing left candidates in the municipal elections in May, and in the general election, whenever it comes.

Three speakers addressed the meeting. Dave Walsh on behalf of the Socialist Party, Sam Gorst, a member of the Community Independents group of councillors on Liverpool City Council, who had all been expelled from the Labour Party for refusing to vote for a cuts budget, and Dean Young from Socialist Students.

Sam Gorst has already announced his intention to stand against the

right-wing Labour MP for Garston and Halewood, Maria Eagle.

Whilst there are no council elections in Liverpool this year, there will be elections in Sefton and Knowsley, and it is important that TUSC fields candidates in as many wards as possible.

One noticeable aspect of the meeting was the number of young people in attendance, mostly members of Socialist Students, indicating that young people will engage in politics if they see the real possibility of change based on an anti-cuts, anti-war basis.

There was a good discussion, with plenty of contributions from the floor, boding well for TUSC electoral challenges on Merseyside.

## Join the student fightback: join...

socialist students

- Visit [socialiststudents.org.uk/join](http://socialiststudents.org.uk/join)
- or call **020 8988 8761**
- or text your name and school, college or uni to **07749 379 010**

## TRADE UNIONIST AND SOCIALIST COALITION

TUSC AGAINST CUTS

● Find out more visit: [tusc.org.uk](http://tusc.org.uk) and see p2-3



## TV review: The Space Shuttle That Fell to Earth

SCOTT JONES

Privatisation, cuts and horrible managers. All familiar in the world of capitalism and factors that even a government organisation whose remit is 'out of this world', like Nasa, is not immune to. They are factors which led to the Columbia disaster in 2003, resulting in the death of seven astronauts - the subject of the BBC documentary: *The Space Shuttle That Fell to Earth*.

The documentary is, in part, a moving tribute to those who lost their lives, featuring interviews with family members and home video footage of their training. It is also a hard-hitting look at what led to the disaster - brought out most strikingly by interviews with those involved in the space programme at the time who tried to raise concerns, but were ignored or 'shot down' by Nasa's quasi-military top-down hierarchy.

A hierarchy which failed to investigate properly a piece of foam that detached itself during take-off, damaging the left wing, meaning the space shuttle fatally disintegrated on re-entry. Nasa tops then tried to deflect from the cause in the aftermath, even when it became known that this was a dangerous long-term problem for the space shuttle programme since the 1980s.

After an earlier disaster when the Challenger shuttle exploded soon after launch in 1986, Nasa tried to cover up fundamental flaws in the shuttle's design. Then, under US President Bill Clinton, Nasa brought in private contractors to cut costs.

In 1996, the running of the shuttle programme was handed over to United Space Alliance, set up by private companies Rockwell International and Lockheed Martin. Nasa gave them \$6 million in bonuses for every flight that stayed up for its full

mission, with penalties if it did not. For every dollar slashed from the budget, the company received 35 cents. Workers were laid off then re-employed on a part-time basis, without benefits.

A few years earlier, in 1999, the Columbia itself suffered a near miss during a launch. The New York Times said then: "years of deep budget cuts in the shuttle programme - cuts that had shed more than 10,000 engineers, technicians and quality control employees - were potentially imperilling the lives of astronauts."

Some of the interviewees talk about how the astronauts gave their lives for humanity, and as well as exploring space, they were carrying out important experiments that could be applied to improve life on earth. Like all organisations and industries, Nasa and other space agencies should be fully funded, publicly owned and democratically managed and controlled by the working class, to ensure that space is explored and utilised, safely, for the good of all. A socialist world is possible, and so is a socialist universe.

● All three episodes of *'The Space Shuttle That Fell to Earth'* are on BBC iPlayer now



Columbia space shuttle taking off PHOTO: THE SPACE SHUTTLE THAT FELL TO EARTH BBC

## Avanti's menopause 'gift pack' no laughing matter

JANE NELLIST  
FORMER NUT NEC MEMBER

Avanti West Coast train company provoked quite a backlash over its menopause 'gift pack' given out to women employees recently. Hardly a gift pack, it contained a number of items, including a jelly baby, a paper clip, a fan, a pencil, one penny and a tissue - all with a supposedly humorous point to link the items to menopause symptoms.

Patronising statements such as a jelly baby 'If you need to bite someone's head off' or 'A pencil to write down things you might forget'!

But the menopause is certainly no laughing matter. It requires practical support from employers, with suitable policies to support women in employment, such as access to toilets, adequate breaks, and a sympathetic manager who has been trained to support women to remain in work during this time.

Both Aslef and TSSA unions rightly criticised the company for failing to take the issue seriously, and not ensuring adequate workplace policies and practical measures to support employees experiencing the symptoms of menopause.

A recent survey of 11,000 women union members, conducted by Unite the Union, found that 9,000 had no access to support for the menopause. That is disgraceful considering what we know about the menopause and how it impacts women.



Women workers are being forced to take early retirement due to the lack of support, impacting on their life as they retire. For most women, it is a temporary condition and, if supported, they can continue to work very successfully.

I'm really proud that through a motion Socialist Party members took to the National Union of Teachers (NUT - now NEU) conference in 2011, a union with the majority of the workforce being women, a campaign was launched to support women members, with model policies for employers and training for reps and union officers.

There is absolutely no excuse for women experiencing the menopause to be discriminated against because of the symptoms they may experience.

## Wales rugby fan says - 'don't let us lose our game'



PHOTO: MARC/CC

JOE FATHALLAH  
CARDIFF WEST SOCIALIST PARTY

In Wales, February means one thing - the Six Nations! The annual rugby tournament - in which the national team competes with England, Scotland, Ireland, France and Italy - is a highlight of the year.

Town and city centres are packed out on match days, with supporters basking in the occasion, taking in the game, and a few pints of course!

Rugby Union is a significant part of Welsh culture, with a strong base in working-class communities. The performances of the national team can have a significant impact on the mood on the street.

This year's competition has started out with the disappointment of two consecutive defeats. Although, in the context of the ongoing crisis engulfing the governing body, the Welsh Rugby Union (WRU), the mostly young team must take a lot of credit for their performances in two closely contested games. Wales lost 26-27 to Scotland on the opening weekend, before a 16-14 defeat to England in the second round of matches, despite Wales leading for most of the match.

The WRU oversees the whole game in Wales, from grassroots and youth rugby, through to the professional sides and the national team. The four professional teams, known as the 'regions', have faced a funding crisis.

The previously officially amateur game was professionalised in the 1990s. At the time, this was a step forward, as it provided working-class boys with the chance of becoming top-level players.

Since then, however, the financial model prevalent in countries such as France, Japan, and to a lesser extent in England, of big-business club owners unsustainably bankrolling clubs, has led to an exodus from Wales. Players are tempted by the much higher salaries on offer elsewhere. Most recently, talented young Cardiff-born winger

Immanuel Feyi-Waboso opted to represent England, where he is studying at Exeter University.

This model has resulted in clubs in England, such as Wasps, Worcester, and London Irish going bust in recent years.

In Wales, the four regions face the constant threat of merger into three, as the WRU desperately tries to compete with the player pay on offer elsewhere. This would result in job cuts, both to playing and non-playing staff, and mass disruption to the existing fan bases.

### Saddled with debt

The WRU secured an £18 million loan for the 'regions' from the Coronavirus Large Business Interruption Loan Scheme. But now each region is playing around £400,000 annually to service this debt.

The last round of funding negotiations, in March 2023, almost resulted in strike action by the players' union - in the middle of the Six Nations! In January 2023, the WRU CEO Steve Phillips was forced to resign after an investigation by BBC Wales unveiled a "toxic culture" of bullying and sexism.

This capitalist model of funding is unsustainable. The Wales team, once the pride of the nation, is suffering, as the domestic structures fail to provide enough top-level players. Community ownership of clubs would provide a socialist alternative.

International players are highly skilled workers, and are right to expect to be paid good wages. But not the enormous wages on offer in some leagues.

Highly paid executives should be replaced with democratically elected supporter representatives, with pay linked to that of a skilled worker. Ticket prices for international games, which can top £100 for some matches, need to be dramatically cut.

We can't afford to lose the game to the whims of the capitalist market.

## Russia: Alexei Navalny's death arouses anger

CLARE DOYLE

Just days after news from Russia of the imprisonment of Boris Kagarlitsky (see socialistworld.net) comes the death in custody of Russia's most famous political prisoner, 47-year-old Alexei Navalny, reportedly after taking exercise at Penal Colony No 3, north of the Arctic Circle. Many Russians believe that the hand of the Russian state was involved in his death, if not directly, then due to the years of harsh prison conditions in which Navalny was held.

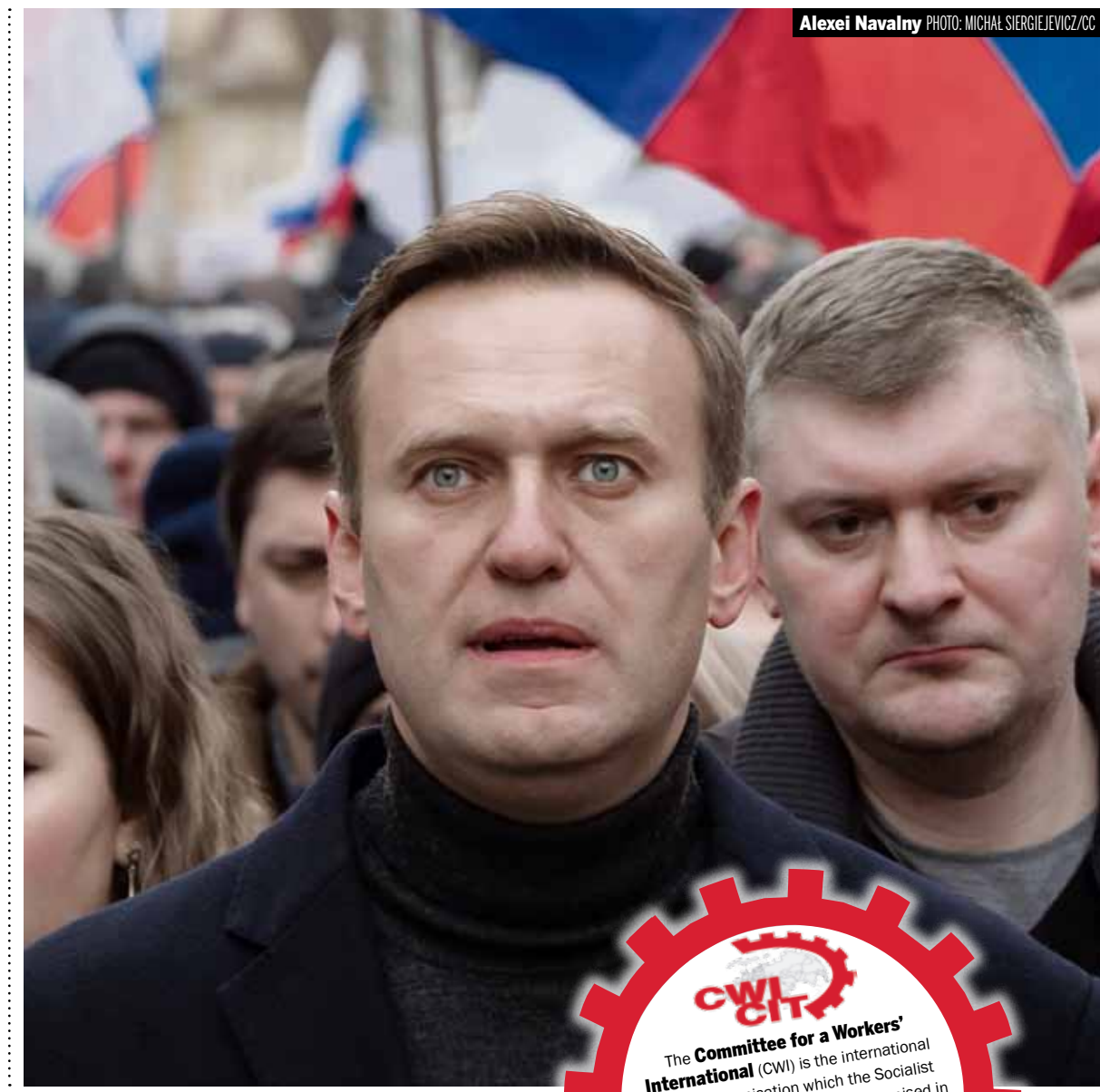
In a country at war, where protest has been brutally suppressed by the Putin regime, this death may see young people take to the streets to express their anger.

Navalny had recently been sentenced to at least two more decades of imprisonment after already having served years in jail. He was apparently poisoned on an internal flight in Russia in 2020 and survived only with the help of doctors and medical staff in Germany. On arriving at Sheremetyevo Airport in January 2021, to continue his campaigns against high-level corruption, Navalny was taken into custody and held ever since.

### Condemnation

In the run-up to what will be Putin's fifth presidential term, elections in Russia are a farce. Those who tried to qualify, like Boris Nadezhdin, were disqualified weeks before the contest on 17 March.

As socialists, we condemn the suppression of democratic rights in Russia and stand for the removal of the Putin government and the ending of



Alexei Navalny PHOTO: MICHAŁ SIERGIEJEVICZ/CC

## London protest against French interference in Senegal



PHOTO: JAMES IVENS

JAMES IVENS  
LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

"France out of Africa!" Senegalese protesters outside the French Embassy in London on 15 February demanded an end to imperialist interference, supported by members of the Socialist Party.

Senegal's hated president, Macky Sall, has outraged the West African country's workers and poor by postponing elections. This followed last year's imprisonment of opposition leader Ousmane Sonko and the dissolution of his party. Mass protests have been met with violent state repression.

Inflation and unemployment have hit Senegal's youthful working class - with an average age of 18 - very hard. French capitalism still superexploits this and other ex-colonies, including compelling use of the 'CFA Franc' currency, with banks in Senegal's capital Dakar its base for financial domination of West Africa. Sall represents pro-France Senegalese capitalism. Sonko has won mass support by attacking French imperialism's stranglehold on the nation, and hence his suppression - but beyond breaking with the CFA Franc, is not offering an alternative.

Senegal's huge material wealth could be put directly to use solving the urgent problems of the workers and poor. By nationalising the banks, major mineral resources, and other key parts of the economy, the thievery of French imperialism could finally be ended.

Protesters in London and Senegal are demanding the immediate restoration of free elections, which the Socialist Party supports. Senegal's proud tradition of mass movements continues. The power of the movement can be maximised by organising towards a mass party for the workers and youth to fight for their own interests, armed with socialist ideas for the future of Senegal and the whole region.

gangster capitalism.

Navalny, banned from standing in the election of 2018, was supportive in principle to private property and the market. He first made his name as a right-wing Russian nationalist, attending far-right events and making vile anti-Muslim statements, once calling for all immigrants to be deported.

He later protested against the obscene accumulation of wealth by a Kleptocracy - the oligarchs who dominate Russian society. He used drones to film their vast holiday villas, including that purportedly of Putin, said to be worth at least \$1 billion. This won him a large online following in Russia. Yet Navalny campaigned for 'clean capitalism' - a chimera!

Along with others, including the politician Boris Nemtsov, and the journalist Anna Politkovskaya, assumed by many Russians to have been murdered by the Putin regime for their opposition views, it appears that Navalny has paid with his life for opposing the Kremlin. But this death has aroused protests. Flowers have been laid at memorials to the victims of political repression across Russia. Demonstrations have begun at embassies in the capital cities of Europe and beyond.

The death of a high-profile figure like Navalny, notwithstanding his pro-capitalist and nationalist politics, can help to spark the beginnings of the awakening of the sleeping giant of the long-suffering working class of Russia, and a new generation of youth.

The lessons of history - the Russian Revolution and its betrayal - are as relevant today as ever for the working class. The foremost lesson is the need for the working class to build its own genuinely independent organisations, with a bold socialist programme, to overthrow the Putin regime and oligarchs, and to oppose all stripes of capitalist parties.



**Tamil Solidarity AGM**  
**Preparing for Sri Lankan election, building among youth**



PHOTO: SEMAN

The annual general meeting (AGM) of Tamil Solidarity (TS) was held on 18 February. The meeting was well-attended, with key members and supporters taking part.

Tamil Solidarity has always recognised the importance of the trade unions, and GMB and Socialist Party member Chris McNulty attended, alongside PCS NEC member Austin Harney who delivered a solidarity message and assuring continued support for Tamil Solidarity from the civil service union.

TS proposed to pass two resolutions at the AGM: one on TS's position regarding the possible presidential election in Sri Lanka, and the other on youth work. The election resolution was introduced by TU Senan, while the Young Revolutionaries in Solidarity (YRS) resolution was introduced by Rithiga and Saarangan. Following a discussion, both resolutions were agreed upon by the AGM.

Overall, it was an excellent meeting where members expressed renewed enthusiasm to carry forward the work of Tamil Solidarity.



£1/£2 solidarity price

socialistparty.org.uk



# the Socialist

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formerly **Militant**



## We need councillors who will fight

## Back the TUSC May local election stand

**DAN SMART**  
BRANCH SECRETARY, SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE UNISON  
(PERSONAL CAPACITY)

**W**e are in the midst of a social catastrophe. Multiple councils have now declared themselves 'bankrupt', opening the doors to government-appointed commissioners to make ruthless cuts.

Since 2021, six councils have issued Section 114 notices, including Birmingham and Nottingham in the past six months. One in five council leaders say it is likely they will also go under in the near future.

The notices commit councils to limit

spending to the legal bare minimum. Our vital services - such as social care for adults and children, housing for vulnerable people, domestic violence services, libraries, education and public transport - cannot take any further attacks.

In Birmingham, the commissioners are introducing a 21% council tax increase, while cutting a huge £300 million from the budget over the next two years. Residents will in no doubt be extremely angry at having to fork out huge tax rises for appalling levels of public services.

None of the main political parties are exempt from blame for this crisis. The Tories take glee in pointing out Labour's

'mismanagement' of local finances. While it is their party that has presided over a 40% real-terms cut to council funding between 2010 and 2020. Labour councils, on the other hand, have simply argued they have no choice but to pass on Tory cuts.

The Socialist Party points out that councillors do have a choice. They should set budgets that reflect the real needs of local communities, building a campaign for the resources required back from central government. The alternative, is to inflict even more misery upon ordinary people.

Ironically, Labour's argument against this approach has been that they have had to make cuts or government commissioners will come

in and take over. Instead they have done the Tories dirty work for them for years and ended up in exactly that situation!

It is clear that as well as councils going under, the whole political system in this country is bankrupt. There is more than enough wealth in society to fund quality public services for all. Bankers who caused the crash in 2008 have doubled their bonuses since then!

We urgently need councillors who will fight back and say no to all cuts. That's why Socialist Party members will be standing with others as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) in the local elections on 2 May.

• See more pages 2-3, 12-13

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



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