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the Socialist

Issue 1264

29 February - 6 March 2024

formerly **Militant**

FIGHT BACK AGAINST WAR AND CUTS

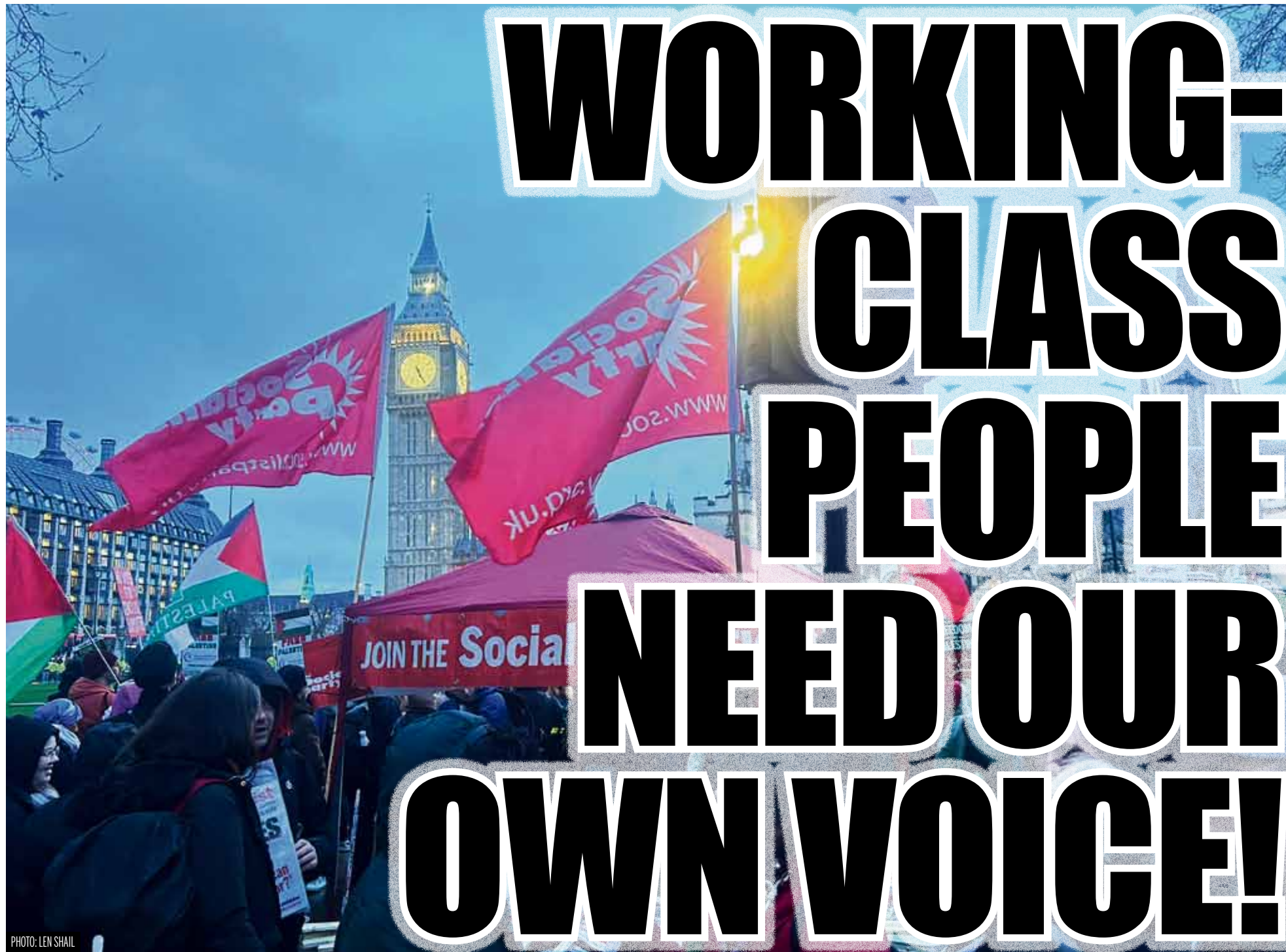


PHOTO: LEN SHAIL

AMY SAGE
BRISTOL NORTH SOCIALIST PARTY

Households are set to become another £100-a-month poorer from April, as councils prepare to put up council taxes yet again.

Even more in places like Birmingham, where the Labour council has been given special permission by the Tory government to raise it by 21% over the next two years.

Working-class communities are being forced to pay, again, with even more cuts to vital public services. In many local authorities there is simply nothing left to cut. Councils are selling

off anything they can, attempting to balance budgets after over a decade of Tory cuts.

We need politicians prepared to stand up and fight. To demand that ordinary people aren't forced to pay for the mess that the Tories and the bosses have put us in.

Sir Keir Starmer's Labour Party is not building that fightback. In councils up and down the country Labour councillors are passing on the Tories' cuts for them.

As councils meet to discuss their budgets for this year, we call on councillors to set budgets that reflect the real needs of our communities, and to do this as part of building a campaign for the money from central government. After all, the money is there - the super-rich keep getting richer!

After a decade and a half of Tory rule, people are desperate to get them out by any means possible. Many will vote Labour through gritted teeth for that reason.

Millions will have watched the disgraceful shenanigans of the Gaza ceasefire vote in parliament and drawn the conclusion that all the mainstream politicians, including Starmer, are only there to act in the interests of themselves and their rich mates.

Well, we need our own workers' representatives in parliament and in the council chambers. Working-class people need our own political voice.

We need workers, trade unionists, community campaigners and students who are willing to stand up and say 'no to war', 'no to cuts' and 'yes to a socialist society run in the interests of all, not the few'.

Help us stand as many working-class fighters as possible under the TUSC (Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition) banner in the 2 May local elections, and fight for a workers' list of candidates to contest the general election when it comes.

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

Post Office scandal continues with compensation delays and blame game

KEVIN PATTISON
CWU RETIRED MEMBER

The latest ignoble chapter in the Post Office Horizon miscarriage of justice saga beggars belief.

As the Tory minister, ex-chair of the Post Office and civil servants argue over who said what, hundreds of sub-postmasters and mistresses are still waiting for adequate offers of compensation. We have also learned that Post Office bosses still support the totally false allegation that half of those convicted were guilty! The Post Office seems to have the attitude that all its staff are crooks rather than dedicated pillars of the community.

The facts speak for themselves. The BBC reported that the Post Office board knew Fujitsu technicians had backdoor access to Horizon terminals in Post Offices, as they tried fruitlessly to fix a system riddled with errors.

How did we get into this mess? Privatisation was originally pushed through by the Thatcher government. However, it was gleefully supported by Tony Blair and Peter Mandelson. Horizon was introduced by the 1997 'New Labour' government and 525 prosecutions were carried out under Labour ministers. Even then, there were concerns over Horizon. Geoff Mulgan, special adviser to Blair in 1998, wrote a memo heavily criticising the Horizon system, stating that it was "possibly unreliable".

Privatisation has been a disaster for workers and consumers in water, gas, rail and electric as well as the Post Office, serving only as a cash cow for rich shareholders.

Privatised industries must be re-nationalised but this time under democratic workers' control and management, and run in the interests of workers and the wider community.



Hang up on the Tories

Right-wing former deputy chair of the Conservative Party, Lee Anderson, was "wrong". Apparently that's the message from Tory HQ. But minister for illegal migration Michael Tomlinson doesn't know why.

Before being sacked, Anderson had claimed that Islamists have control of Sadiq Khan, Mayor of London. Presumably because Khan himself is Muslim.

"What Lee said was wrong, and as a result of what he said he had the whip removed from him", the minister told LBC radio host Nick Ferrari.

"What was it specifically... why was it wrong?"

"...It was wrong. What Lee said was wrong. As a result of what he said, the whip was removed from him"

"But why was it wrong?"

"...It was wrong, Nick, because of what he said..."

"Was it Islamophobic?"

"What he said was wrong..."

"But minister, was it Islamophobic?"

"Nick, it was wrong"

"Was it Islamophobic?"

"Nick, it was wrong"

Ferrari hung up. Wouldn't it be great to have the power to silence politicians every time they talk nonsense! Then again, TV and radio producers would have a hell of a lot of space to fill.

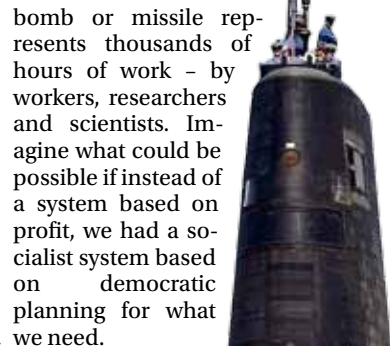


Trident costly failure

Trident missile fails to launch, phew! Testing the nuclear missile launch system, which costs £17 million a go, ended up with the missile ploughing into the sea. Trident costs £3 billion a year to run and maintain the British government's ability to plunge the world into a nuclear winter.

At a time when millions of pounds worth of bombs and missiles are being dropped across the Middle East, working-class people here are forced to tighten our belts as the price of food and rents go up while our services are cut to the bone.

Producing weapons is certainly profitable at a time of war and crisis across the world. Each bomb or missile represents thousands of hours of work - by workers, researchers and scientists. Imagine what could be possible if instead of a system based on profit, we had a socialist system based on democratic planning for what we need.



Bank profits up

Speaking of misused wealth and resources, Britain's 'big four' banks - Lloyds, HSBC, Barclays and NatWest - made £44 billion of profit last year. While people saw their mortgage payments jump, fell into arrears on bills and were told to get by on less, we certainly weren't 'all in this together'.

Imagine what that £44 billion could do if it wasn't going into the back pockets of bank shareholders. It could be ploughed into Britain's crumbling infrastructure, put to use building a high-quality free public transport network, or fixing the staffing crisis in the NHS. The £5 billion budget black hole facing local councils could be filled eight times over with a few billion to spare!

The resources and knowledge kept locked up in these companies could be taken into democratic public ownership and used to deal with the real problems facing us - solving climate change or the housing crisis to name a few.

The wealth is clearly there, but it's in the wrong hands - we need the banks to be nationalised alongside big business and put to use as part of a democratic socialist plan.



PARLIAMENT IN 'BAWLING BEDLAM' FACING WEIGHT OF ANTI-WAR FEELING



WHAT WE THINK

The shambolic end to the parliamentary debate on Gaza on Wednesday 21 February reflected the pressure being felt from the anti-war movement on the Tories and Labour, and the widespread anger at their refusal to call for a ceasefire.

Headed by Keir Starmer, Labour's leaders were desperate to avoid a potentially larger rebellion than happened in November in a similar vote, when 56 Labour MPs voted for a Scottish National Party (SNP) motion calling for an immediate ceasefire. Faced with another SNP motion, Labour altered its stance to itself call for "an immediate humanitarian ceasefire," while at the same time continuing to satisfy western capitalist interests by applying caveats, including that "Israel cannot be expected to cease fighting" without "assurance that the horror of 7 October 2023 cannot happen again".

Amidst clashes over voting protocol, the Tories ended up withdrawing their own amendment and Labour's position was carried by default. It was certainly not an unqualified demand for a ceasefire which is so urgently needed in Gaza, nor did it propose any actions to apply pressure on Israel's government. However, parliament's bending to the anti-war mood in society needs to be noted and responded to by forcing them much further, through stepping up anti-war protests and actions.

Today's thoroughly pro-capitalist Labour Party, Blairism mark two, is showing its right-wing political character on the issue of the Gaza war, as on all other issues. But this doesn't mean its elected representatives are immune from the views of those who elected them, which is the underlying cause of Labour's internal divisions regarding the war.

The mass anti-war demonstrations need to be built even larger and strengthened by the trade unions entering fully into the movement - encouraging and mobilising their members to participate and making practical arrangements for them to do so, and calling on young people, students and others to turn out in support. Workers' actions against the supply of arms and military components being used in the war can be democratically discussed, agreed and implemented, which, together with similar moves internationally, can have a real effect towards forcing an end to the horrific death and destruction being inflicted on Gaza.

Overriding the protocol

Parliamentary protocol was that only the Tory government's amendment to the SNP's 'Opposition Day'

ceasefire motion would be voted on, and not Labour's. Starmer's pressing need to prevent Labour MPs from voting for the SNP motion led him to lobby the Speaker (chairperson) Lindsay Hoyle, urging him to break with protocol and allow a vote on Labour's amendment, which Hoyle dutifully did. Later, under attack for his decision, Hoyle grovelled and apologised, echoing Starmer's contrived argument that he had only wanted all views to be heard.

In reality, Hoyle was well aware that Labour is on course to form the next government, with the Tories in massive disarray and widely hated, and no doubt he saw it as in the interests of the capitalist establishment and parliament to help Labour's leaders avoid the setback of a major Labour group division. The tawdry manoeuvring meant that the SNP's motion wasn't put to the vote at all, showing that 'wanting all views to be heard' was bogus. A few days after the debate, Hoyle withdrew a promise to convene another Gaza debate that he had made to placate the SNP, a further huge relief for Starmer's Labour.

Accusations of intimidation

A desperate argument put forward by many Labour MPs and echoed by Hoyle was that, if they hadn't been given the opportunity to vote for their own form of words that included 'immediate ceasefire', their personal safety would be at greater risk from a terrorist or other violence. Some referred to the shocking killings of MPs Jo Cox in 2016 and David Amess in 2021. Yet the mass demonstrations, as well as the smaller protests against the Gaza war, have been overwhelmingly peaceful, without injury to any MP during the five months since the war began.

MPs have particularly condemned protest lobbies outside their offices and surgeries as intimidatory, with an incident in November of red paint put on the office of shadow Welsh secretary, Jo Stevens, often cited. But those lobbies are a fully legitimate form of protest and of expressing views to elected representatives. Socialists, along with the overwhelming majority of other anti-war protesters, oppose any threats to the safety of MPs or other elected representatives. At the same time, we firmly reject any attempts to curb the democratic right to protest.

We also oppose accusations of 'safety threats' being used as a political machination to paper over support for the war by most Labour MPs, as happened in relation to the debate in parliament. Incidentally, greater involvement by the trade unions in the anti-war movement would help to maintain its peaceful character, as the organised working class would be able to reinforce and play a leading role in the democratic stewarding of protests and demonstrations.

The main source of dangerous division in society is in fact not coming from the anti-war movement and



PAUL MATTSSON



The main source of dangerous division in society is in fact not coming from the anti-war movement and other protests but from the decadent arena of the pro-capitalist parties in parliament itself

other protests but from the decadent arena of the pro-capitalist parties in parliament itself. This can be seen in the present turmoil at the tops of the Tory party over inflammatory racist comments made by previous Tory home secretary Suella Braverman and recent Tory deputy chair Lee Anderson (now suspended).

Many MPs have also complained about being told they have 'blood on their hands' or are 'complicit' in the slaughter of civilians in Gaza. MP Tan Dhesi said: "Some people are looking to blame somebody - their MP, councillor, anyone." Their argument at root - spelt out clearly by some - is that anger against their stance is unjustified because they themselves aren't in a position to influence the war. That standpoint is at worst outright deception and at best naive. With over 200 MPs, Labour could exert very strong pressure against the Tory government's policy on the war if it put up real opposition instead of cravenly echoing the Tories. And as Labour is highly likely to win a general election this year, any statements of intent against the war would carry great weight.

As journalist Nesrine Malik pointed out in a recent article published in the Guardian newspaper: "Israel relies on its allies, particularly those with a high international profile and status, to maintain its campaign within the realms of the reasonable and legal" that is, reasonable and legal in the eyes of those same allies. Israel's ruling class can't pursue the war in Gaza regardless of the stance of its allies,



None of those pro-capitalist parties have any solutions to offer on international conflicts such as in Israel-Palestine, or regarding any of the domestic concerns and pressures faced by workers in Britain

including the UK, which are helping to boost Israel's military arsenal and continuing to support normal trading with Israeli big business.

It is those capitalist interests, and their collusion with the interests and views of the majority in society, that lie behind the 'bawling bedlam' in parliament on 21 February, a description used by Andrew Rawnsley in the Observer. Tory and SNP MPs ended up walking out of the parliamentary chamber amid vitriolic shouting and cursing, in scenes labelled as 'hyper-partisan politics' and 'point scoring' by much of the capitalist media. However, much deeper than that, it reflects the fact that none of those pro-capitalist parties have any solutions to offer on international conflicts such as in Israel-Palestine, or regarding any of the domestic concerns and pressures faced by workers in Britain.

George Galloway could receive a sizeable vote in the Rochdale by-election this week as the only anti-war, anti-austerity candidate (see 'Rochdale by-election: A chance to shake the establishment' at socialistparty.org.uk). Crucially, beyond that, the Socialist Party is calling for a workers' list of candidates to be put forward in the coming general election, with the aim of a bloc of MPs being elected who would mark a complete departure from the rottenness of pro-capitalist politics. A bloc that would genuinely represent the views of those who elect them, standing firm on representing workers' interests in Britain and internationally.

Blairite Welsh Labour leadership campaign takes thousands from polluting business

JOHN WILLIAMS
CARDIFF EAST SOCIALIST PARTY

Even by Welsh Labour's standards, the current leadership election, that will determine the next First Minister of Wales, has been uninspiring. Vaughan Gething is the Blairite front-runner, the other candidate is Jeremy Miles MS. Gething has been in the news for all the wrong reasons. It was revealed that his campaign accepted a £200,000 donation from a waste disposal company whose director has been convicted twice for environmental offences, including illegally dumping waste on a conservation site! Hypocritically, Gething's leadership manifesto pledges to strengthen enforcement action to protect the environment with stricter penalties! Gething has been silent on the recent Welsh Water pollution scandal where, last year, the company dumped untreated sewage for nearly 600,000 hours. The obvious answer is to bring Welsh Water into democratic public ownership and fully fund it.

Steel

At a recent demo in support of Tata steelworkers in Port Talbot, Gething spoke. He provided no solutions, apart from waiting for a Starmer-led Labour government. That was it! Surrounded by Socialist Party placards, demanding 'Nationalisation not devastation', he didn't even take up that issue once or support steelworkers' upcoming strike ballots. There was little enthusiasm from the crowd; a heckler shouted: "Pay our nurses properly!"

This was in reference to the wave of NHS Wales strikes that took place last

year. The Welsh government went to war with the health unions, opposing the strikes and blaming public sector pay, in part, for some of the cuts they have made. In the end, the Labour-led Senedd (Welsh parliament) offered an additional 3% one-off payment for 2022-23, and a 5% consolidated rise for 2023-24, not too dissimilar to what the Tories in England offered.

Gething is currently the Minister of the Economy for Wales, and the upcoming Welsh government budget cuts will ruin lives (see 'What is point of Welsh Labour if it passes on UK Tory cuts?' at socialistparty.org.uk). Because of inflation, the budget is worth £1.3 billion less now than when it was originally announced in 2021. And the real value of the Welsh budget is £3 billion less than it was in 2010.

Gething and Miles haven't once supported the call for a socialist Welsh government to fight cuts, privatisation and to demand the necessary funding from Westminster. Both abstained in a recent vote in support of a ceasefire in Gaza. You can't tell the difference between these two candidates and Keir Starmer, whose likely next government will attack working-class people and make cuts, just with the Labour banner. Many members of unions who can vote in this leadership election will simply not bother.

But we're not just going to complain about it. We'll be holding a Wales Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition public meeting later this year, to bring together Welsh socialists, strikers, campaigners, and everyone who wants to build a working-class political alternative in Wales.



Vaughan Gething (right): 'Wait for Starmer or nationalise now?' PHOTOS: THEO, SENEDD CYMRU/CC

Assange extradition trial displays vicious nature of capitalist 'justice'

ADAM HARMSWORTH
COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange is due to be extradited to the US, unless his latest court appeals succeed. His legal team has argued that the US wants him for politically motivated reasons and "state retaliation", which would breach the extradition agreement between the UK and US.

What doesn't appear politically motivated about the treatment of Assange? Since WikiLeaks released documents and videos detailing horrendous war crimes, he has been chased by the US government. Few other individuals have been hounded and publicly attacked in such a way.

Chelsea Manning, a former US soldier who leaked information to WikiLeaks about war crimes in Iraq, was sent to a maximum-security prison for 35 years. Following public outcry for her release, Obama pardoned her. But even once she was freed, she was dragged back to jail briefly and landed a \$256,000 fine for refusing to testify against Assange.

The goal of the US is to use them as examples, and terrify anyone who wishes to show the world the horrendous actions of the US military. Assange spent seven years in Ecuador's UK embassy claiming political asylum. Since being arrested, he has been held in Belmarsh prison - normally reserved for terrorists and serial killers. He has been confined to his cell for 23 hours a day for five years.



Protest outside High Court
PAUL MATTHEWSON

He didn't attend the latest trial due to ill health.

If anyone has more evidence of war crimes being committed by the US or its allies, including in the current Middle East conflicts, they may well hold onto or even destroy the information for fear of being treated like Assange or Manning. Meanwhile, there hasn't been a single prosecution against anyone who committed

or helped commit a war crime revealed by WikiLeaks, be it murdering civilians, torture, or anything else. This is the grotesque reality of justice under capitalism.

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Woking council plans give away of local services to cut costs

DAN WARRINGTON
STAINES SOCIALIST PARTY

In the wake of the 'section 114' notice declared by Woking council last year, many so-called 'discretionary' services are at risk of being cut or defunded, including Citizen's Advice, community centres, parks and playgrounds, public toilets, leisure and cultural facilities, and subsidised meals and transport for vulnerable residents. One of the proposals from Woking council to 'save' these services has been the adoption of a Community Asset Transfer (CAT) policy. Under such a scheme, services currently owned and run by the council will be leased out to charities and community organisations that can demonstrate a viable business plan.

The council is presenting CATs as "the first step in ensuring the doors to our valuable community spaces remain open and can continue to serve residents" whilst it will also "allow the council to make essential budget savings and focus its resources into financing core services." After months of threats that services will

have to be closed, some local residents may be inclined to support the policy as a way to preserve their local services.

However, the transfer of services out of public ownership and control is not sustainable and represents a continuation of former Prime Minister David Cameron's 'Big Society' austerity politics. Services will face the huge challenge of securing long-term funding whilst being obliged to maintain service levels. The likely results will be that these services will become more expensive for users and without democratic oversight. Workers within these services will be at risk from worsened pay and conditions, or being replaced outright by volunteer labour. The most deprived parts of the community will be the least able to fund the services that they rely on. Rather than preserving local services, CATs throws their long-term future into considerable doubt.

The deliberate throttling of funding for local government by the Tories over the past 14 years has wreaked devastation to local services across

the country. But if councillors across the country organised together and refused to implement further cuts, the government would be forced to listen, just as public sector strike action forced them to improve pay offers last year.

Save Our Services in Surrey called on councillors, while lobbying their meeting, to vote against the austerity budget and to campaign for increased funding from national government. Instead of being complicit in the carving up of the towns public services, Woking councillors would do well to focus their efforts on a concerted campaign for proper funds alongside other councils around the country.



Nottingham: No unelected commissioners! No cuts to jobs and services!

After issuing a Section 114 notice, committing to only fund the bare legal minimum of services, Nottingham Labour council has had commissioners sent in to run the council by the Tory government. Socialist Party members in Nottingham, where members play an active role in Nottingham Save Our Services, have campaigned against the cuts, we publish extracts from the leaflet.

The Socialist Party condemns the imposition of unelected commissioners onto the city. We want a democratically run council making decisions to protect services and jobs not cutting them.

The commissioners are there to do the bidding of the Tory government and push through cuts, sell assets and privatise services. 554 full-time equivalent posts are at risk.

The three commissioners will cost up to £510,000 each year if they 'work' the 150 days allocated, just in 'salaries' plus expenses. The lead commissioner - Tony McArdle - will be on £1,200 a day!

The secretary of state's intention is the powers he is providing to the commissioners be used "to ensure the authority takes the necessary steps to achieve the best possible outcome for Nottingham residents and the public purse". The best outcome is better jobs and services, not cuts.

Nottingham's overwhelmingly Labour council, with 50 out of 55 councillors, was clearly feeling the pressure from council trade unions, the Nottingham Save Our Services Campaign (supported by the trades council, unions and campaigners) and other campaigns.

Rumours exist of arguments amongst Labour councillors, with a proposal to find more money to stop some closures including libraries and to prevent charges for the Greyhound Street toilets.

But the current council leadership clearly has little intention of protecting all services.

Further protests will take place outside the Council House on the council's budget day, Monday 4 March and Nottingham Save Our Services is organising a demonstration on Saturday 9 March.

Rather than fight the government for more money, for years the council had a failed commercialisation strategy costing tens of millions of pounds. It has passed on Tory and ConDem cuts - over £300 million since 2010 with more than 1,000 jobs gone.

554 full-time jobs at risk

This Tory government has robbed Nottingham of around £1 billion over the past decade! A needs-based no-cuts budget should be put forward by any of Nottingham's Labour councillors who really want to fight the cuts, combined with an appeal to other councillors elsewhere in a similar position.

If Labour councillors won't fight, they should step down so candidates who will can stand.

In the 1980s Liverpool City Council stood up for the residents of the city and fought Thatcher's Tory Government. In 1984, they won back the equivalent of £120 million in today's money, in the process creating new employment, building council houses and public amenities and protecting existing jobs and services.



Campaigning against council cuts in Nottingham PHOTO: PAUL TOOLEY-OKONKWO

Birmingham council budget cuts proposed We won't accept our city's services being destroyed



Joint Unite, Unison, GMB protest against cuts in Birmingham PHOTO: BRUM.SP

CORINTH WARD
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

Birmingham City Council has finally released its much-delayed draft budget after issuing a Section 114 notice in September 2023 and before taking over by six, £1,500-per-day, commissioners.

One reason for the council's financial mess is the overspending on its new IT system Oracle. It has already cost £130 million and is still not fit for purpose, with invoices and payments not documented accurately. Some newly retired council staff have been waiting months to have their pensions released!

The draft budget has sent fear through the city as the proposed cuts will hit deeper than those carried out following central government funding cuts since 2010. Birmingham residents are much worse off than they were 14 years ago, these attacks will be felt across all aspects of the city. 43% of Birmingham residents are living in areas that are ranked in the 10% most deprived areas in the UK and 37% of children are living in poverty.

The budget will completely reshape the entire council service with 600 jobs to go, cuts to youth services, closures of adult day centres, reduction of bin collections and road maintenance, cuts to SEND support, library closures, 100% cuts to arts and culture, further dimming of street lights and council tax increased by 21% over two years. The list goes on.

These cuts are set to plug a £300 million budget shortfall over two years but will not cover the £867 million equal pay claims. The equal pay issue is something that could have been resolved decades ago if the council leaders had worked with trade unions on updating the pay and grading job evaluations. Instead, the council is using it as a divisive

tactic between council employees and Birmingham residents as the reason behind this financial mess.

This crisis is the result of a decade of underfunding. Since 2010, Birmingham's funding from central government has been slashed in half. When the Labour Party took control of the council in 2012, they could have set a no-cuts budget and started a mass campaign to demand more funding. Instead, they implemented the Tory-imposed cuts.

Asset stripping

Now, instead of demanding more from central government, council bosses are only prepared to beg the Tories for a £1.2 billion loan - on the government's condition that Birmingham be asset stripped and raided to pay it back. This will include the flogging of the £500 million 'athletes village' flagship housing scheme which, two years on, isn't even finished, and hasn't housed a single person! Birmingham has a chronic housing and homelessness crisis with over 23,000 households on its housing register.

There needs to be a mass campaign

Birmingham council: if they want a fight, they've got a fight!

Birmingham Socialist Party members attended a public meeting organised by council unions against Birmingham City Council's planned budget cuts. These budget cuts would harm the most vulnerable in society who are already in a precarious situation.

Over 100 people attended from unions and organisations including Unison, Unite, GMB, Friends of the Library campaign, SEND parent's campaign and DPAC (Disabled People Against the Cuts). Participants agree that the cuts are unnecessary when the government has more than enough to fund the local councils. 65 councils across the UK are also facing the risk of effective

involving local unions and community organisations to fight back against cuts to frontline services, to pay workers fairly, and to stop the city being run by unelected commissioners. The unions representing council workers; Unison, Unite and GMB, held a public meeting on the 22 February (see below) which is a welcome step in that direction. They have announced a protest on Saturday 2 March and a council lobby on Tuesday 5 March, when the council will vote on the budget.

The call to fight should include other unions, which, while not representing council workers, will also be affected by the cuts, such as the teachers, firefighters and health-care professionals. The council still had £668.4 million in reserves as of March last year, and extensive borrowing powers that could be used to buy time while fighting for the funding our city needs.

Labour government

Labour's Keir Starmer is expecting to win the general election - the unions should place demands on him and Angela Rayner (shadow secretary for levelling up) to demand they pledge now that an incoming Labour government will reimburse all councils that have had to use borrowing powers to prevent cuts to jobs and services.

If they refuse, and if local Labour councillors and MPs collaborate with the Tories to bring ruin on Birmingham rather than stand with their workers and communities, then local trade union branches need to back workers' candidates in any upcoming elections - candidates who will support their members.

This crisis has come from a council with a Labour supermajority. Therefore, it's clearer than ever that working-class people need a party of our own.

This is why Socialist Party members will continue to stand in elections as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition. We want to work with all genuine working-class forces to build the fightback against austerity in Birmingham, including standing as an alternative at the ballot box to capitalist parties that put profits before workers!

'bankrupt' due to funding withdrawn from central government.

Ted, a local RMT Rep and Socialist Party member, raised the need for an alternative: "Rather than voting any Labour candidates, we need to vote for councillors that stand with the workers." This message is especially important when the options presented in the next general election are an unelected Tory prime minister and 'blue Labour' Keir Starmer. Birmingham council shows that, even if we get a Labour government, we need a workers' party who will fight against austerity!

JONATHAN OSAKO, BIRMINGHAM NORTH SOCIALIST PARTY

Building a strong, fighting union - An appeal to the left of the 'NEU Left'

SHEILA CAFFEY

CANDIDATE FOR NEU VICE-PRESIDENT

I have stood for election as vice-president of the National Education Union (NEU) because I believe we need a strong, democratic, fighting leadership for our union.

That is particularly important now as this is a general election year. It is essential that we have a leadership that builds on the magnificent action and growth of our union last year; that puts forward clear demands and prepares members for the serious action necessary to win them, no matter who is in government.

The current leadership of our union comes from the 'NEU Left' grouping. Members of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in the NEU have campaigned for Ed Harlow and Sarah Kilpatrick for vice-presidents, the candidates backed by the NEU Left, of which they are a part.

Dishonest

Rightly in an election, members ask questions about the record of candidates. SWP members have justified their support for the NEU Left candidates, against me, by using the fact that I was the only National Executive member at its December meeting to abstain on the proposal for the indicative ballot that is about to start - without saying that this was because I did not believe that the leadership was presenting a serious, strong enough strategy to win our campaign.

I spoke in the meeting to raise my concerns about spreading out the ballots, which would result in action not being taken till late in the summer term. I abstained when it was clear that the indicative ballot was going to be agreed, as I wanted to register my determination for a real fight. This is reflected in the fact that I am campaigning hard for the biggest possible 'Yes' vote in the indicative ballot. The SWP is dishonestly trying to justify its support for those in the union who aren't really up for a fight.

I am the only vice-president candidate who is an elected Exec member. Neither Ed nor Sarah were re-elected to the Exec that took office in September 2023. But both Ed and Sarah were on the Exec from 2021-23, as was I.

Serious strategy

Since I was elected on a fighting programme in 2021, I have, along with other Socialist Party members on the Exec, consistently argued for a serious strategy to prepare for national action. That has included campaigning for the inclusion of support staff - we have to be a union that fights for all our members.

This followed the campaign of Martin Powell-Davies for NEU Deputy General Secretary in 2020-21, under the slogan 'Leading from the front, building from below'.

At that stage, particularly under the blows of the Tory anti-union legislation which insists on high turnout



NEU strikers march past parliament 2023 PAUL MITCHELL

thresholds in ballots for action, others on the left in the NEU, including the SWP, essentially believed that national action would be effectively impossible and were arguing that what was necessary was to increase organisation at a local level, and to take action locally.

But in the Socialist Party we believe that building density and action at a local level cannot be divorced from a bold lead from the top as well, which has a big effect on building confidence and membership. The magnificent strike action of last year shows what's possible.

More could have been won

When, in the summer of last year, following our brilliant and historic strike action, the leadership of the union wanted to settle for 6.5%, we in the Socialist Party believed that more could be won. We understood that

no education worker takes action lightly and that our action had managed to force the Tories back, but we warned that, contrary to what the Tories and the union leadership in the NEU Left were arguing, the pay rise was not fully funded.

The NEU Left leadership was split. The SWP agreed with our position and launched 'Educators Say No'. But Ed Harlow and Sarah Kilpatrick were on the other side of the split. They both voted to prematurely end the pay campaign.

After we returned to school in the autumn of 2023 to the news that the Tories had made a 'mistake' and the funding was even less than promised, in the September Exec I proposed that we should use our existing strike mandate to prepare to fight again. Again, the SWP agreed with this, but the NEU Left was split and the majority rejected this approach.

Covering for serious mistakes

The SWP decided that, notwithstanding these serious mistakes of the NEU Left leadership, they would still back its candidates in this vice-president election, against me. In our view it is wrong of the SWP to continue to cover up for mistakes, and particularly to turn their fire instead on the voices in the union who are campaigning for a more serious fighting lead, deliberately distorting our record.

SWP members will say that it is important to keep a 'left' together in the union. Yes - but is this a true left force?

We agree that bringing together those who want a serious and fighting union in a democratic broad left body is very important - even when a left leadership is elected. A left force in the union, organised at all levels, would be able to explain and fight for the agreed policies of the union, and would ensure a genuine flow of discussion and debate among and between the members and leaders.

Also, the leadership of any union comes under enormous pressure from the employers, the government, and the bosses' media, to hold back the members. With the prospect of a Starmer-led Labour government at some point this year, the leadership of the union will come under tremendous pressure to water down demands and not 'rock the boat' by fighting for its members - before and after a general election. It is vital that even a left leadership feels the organised counter-pressure of the members, and is held to account.

New left needed in NEU

But when a 'left' leadership is split and proves itself unable to offer a lead at the most crucial of moments, it raises the need for a new left to be built. In 2023, when there had been the biggest strike action in the union in decades, that succeeded in mobilising thousands more education workers into the union and stepping forward as reps; that had the weak and divided Tory government on the ropes, forced into four 'final' offers - for the left to be split, to not be able to give a lead at that point, demonstrates the fact that a new left grouping is needed.

In the PCS union, where a similar situation has been posed, and where Socialist Party members have been working with other activists in the union to build a new broad left that can challenge for leadership, the SWP has eventually come out of the ruling 'Left Unity' group (the equivalent to NEU Left). That led to all SWP members who were on the PCS National Executive Committee resigning from the party, but at least the SWP as a party recognised that it could not go on providing a left cover for the mistakes of the union leadership.

Instead of deliberately distorting my record to justify staying in the NEU Left, the SWP should withdraw from NEU Left and join with us and others in campaigning to build a genuine, democratic left in the NEU.

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'Social partnership' aims to shackle trade unions Lessons from Wales



Cardiff bin workers striking and protesting at the Senedd (Welsh parliament) SOCIALIST PARTY WALES

MARK EVANS
SWANSEA AND WEST WALES SOCIALIST PARTY,
AND PRESIDENT SWANSEA AND DISTRICT TRADES
COUNCIL

An article in February's Labour Research magazine, 'How will new partnership law strengthen workers' voice?', highlights that some unions have hailed the new Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023 as "historic" and "momentous".

Wales Trades Union Congress (TUC) policy officer Nisreen Mansour said the new act "is a huge win" for unions and is "hugely important." Later Nisreen claimed: "It is recognised in law that worker voice through trade unions should balance out the interests of their employers."

Both Jess Turner, regional secretary of Unison, and GMB regional political officer Tom Hoyles claim that social partnership builds on how partners worked together during the pandemic and made for better decision making. However, this ignores the fact that the Labour Welsh government dismissed the advice of trade unions and reopened schools far too early during the pandemic, clearly a decision made in the interests of big business. This gets to the rub: is it in the interests of trade union members to be in partnership with their employers and Welsh government?

Do the trade unions and the employers have 'shared priorities' and

a 'shared vision', as claimed by the Wales TUC? How can trade unions that are defending their members' interests share a vision with a government and councils that are administering devastating Tory cuts?

The answer is the strike action taken by a number of unions against the Labour Welsh government on pay. Having a seat at the table is not enough. Facing a horrendous ongoing cost-of-living crisis and vicious cuts to public services, workers will want to know what so-called partnership puts on the table. Workers will want more than to be 'heard' - they will want tangible benefits from negotiations or will be forced into taking industrial action.

1974-79 Labour government

Those of us longer in the tooth recall this is not the first time social partnership has been pushed. What about the 'social contract' under the 1974-79 Labour government, supposedly a contract between the Labour UK government, industry and the unions. There was workers' participation, workers were on company boards, and all three were expected to compromise. Trade union members, because of their leaders accepting an incomes policy, ended up with real cuts to wages while inflation soared.

That government ended up acting in the interests of big business and international capitalism and attacking working-class people's living standards. Pressure from below

forced trade union leaders to take strike action, leading to the 'Winter of Discontent' (1978-79).

There can be little doubt that Labour leader Keir Starmer, who has spent the bulk of his time courting big business, will also act in the interests of the super-rich and accept the spending limits of capitalism in crisis. Social partnership therefore means 'compromising' with public sector employers by accepting cuts, job losses and further losses of services.

When Swansea and District Trades Council put forward a motion opposing social partnership at Wales TUC in 2021, a third of conference supported the motion. In Cymru/Wales, public services are on their knees, with high levels of poverty. There can be no collaboration with Welsh Labour or Starmer-led Labour governments and public service employers who do not oppose Tory spending limits and that act in the interests of big business by underfunding and cutting public services.

The aim of social partnership is to create the illusion that there is an alternative to taking industrial action. Like King Canute, they will not be able to hold back the tide as workers are forced to take action against the ravages of capitalism. One of the consequences of the recent strike action by many unions is that members can see that strike action works, and that we must rely on our collective strength to defend our interests. That is far more powerful than having a 'seat at the table' of the employer.

Unison NEC discusses local government financial crisis - Fight the cuts!

APRIL ASHLEY

UNISON NEC MEMBER, PERSONAL CAPACITY

At its February meeting, Unison's National Executive Committee (NEC) debated the financial crisis in local government, as councils face a huge funding gap of £3.5 billion in 2024-25.

This dire situation means that council leaders warn that one in five councils could face 'Section 114' notices within the next couple of years.

Unison criticised the recent Tories' emergency cash bailout of £600 million as not even a 'short-term fix', as more councils face effective bankruptcy.

In Birmingham, swingeing cuts to the council budget could mean up to 600 job losses and up to 25 libraries closing. As one NEC member said: "It could be the end of local government as we know it", as a tidal wave of Tory cuts is coming to all local councils in the next few years.

NEC reps described the profound fear and dread of members facing job losses, and who need to know that their union stands with them. This pushed general secretary Christina McAnea to finally agree to speak at the Birmingham anti-cuts rally and send a message of support to the members.

The NEC debated the role of a

potentially forthcoming Labour government. The anger of members means that Starmer-supporting Christina McAnea had to emphasise that Unison is not the Labour Party and is challenging Labour in many areas, and would not be dropping any of its policies.

But Unison is supporting Labour's 'new deal for working people' programme, and so I raised, what will Labour do about local government funding under this programme?

We should be demanding an incoming Labour government provide emergency funding to local councils - not just those under 'Section 114' notices but all local councils, to stop huge cuts to jobs and services.

Indeed, the union should be exploring how we can take national industrial action, or at the very least coordinated action between councils facing bankruptcy.

I suggested we should call for councils to 'do a Liverpool' and set a no-cuts budget and fight the government for more council funding.

● An update on the 2024 pay claims was also discussed, with a review of the lessons learned of 2023 industrial action campaigns due to be reported on shortly (see what we think 'Unison's role on local government pay and cuts' at socialistparty.org.uk).

Junior doctors' strike still determined

Junior doctors in the British Medical Association (BMA) held three 'super-pickets' on the Monday of their tenth tranche of strike action, from 24-28 February. Big crowds of doctors came together at St Thomas's Hospital in central London, Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham, and Manchester Royal Infirmary.



QE Birmingham OLIVE WALKER

At Queen Elizabeth Hospital, dozens of doctors from across the Midlands gathered with a determination to win a level of pay reflecting the demands of the job.

One BMA member told us: "We're losing doctors - everyone is training here then going to Australia or Canada for a better quality of life." By way of comparison, one doctor commented: "I earned more working as a carer through uni than as a junior doctor". Another added: "On some

shifts, porters earn £5 an hour more than we do. They deserve every penny, they keep the hospital running - all we're asking for is the same".

Reflecting the deep scepticism towards the existing pro-capitalist parties' willingness to solve the staffing crisis, one picket said they had no plans to vote for the local Blairite Labour MP - despite being a card-carrying Labour member!

BIRMINGHAM SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS

WHAT WILL A KEIR STARMER-LED GOVERNMENT MEAN FOR LGBTQ+ LIBERATION?

SARAH SACHS-ELDRIDGE

SOCIALIST PARTY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

“Of all the weeks to say that, when Brianna’s mother is in this chamber. Shame.” This was Labour leader Keir Starmer’s response to an attempt at a cruel joke by Rishi Sunak about trans women during Prime Minister’s Questions. Trans teenager Brianna Ghey was 16 when she was murdered in February 2023.

Does this give grounds to hope for clear ‘rainbow’ water between a Starmer-led government and the Tories, bringing much-needed improvements for LGBTQ+ workers and young people?

LGBTQ+ workers and young people have experienced the failure of Starmer’s Labour to support their pay strikes, to oppose Tory attacks on the right to protest, their failure to express the basic solidarity of calling for a ceasefire and a permanent end to the occupation of Gaza, and the party’s retreat on Jeremy Corbyn’s anti-austerity commitments, including scrapping tuition fees. Labour in power, in Wales and in councils, is not a voice for workers and youth, but a vehicle for Tory austerity and privatisation.

Sunak wasn’t wrong when he listed trans rights as one of Starmer’s many U-turns. In July 2023, Anneliese Dodds, the party’s chair and shadow equalities secretary, set out that Labour was retreating on its commitment to the right to self-identify, a key demand of trans and non-binary people.

However, it is inevitable there is hope that a Starmer-led government will represent an improvement on the disastrous situation over which the Tories have presided for 14 years. The previously widespread idea that we were on the road to LGBTQ+ liberation has been severely damaged by experience in the period since the 2008 world economic crisis - for which working-class, poor and young people have been paying since.

Tory hypocrisy

Since 2010, Tory-led governments have sought to use LGBTQ+ rights to gain support, while their attacks on living standards have driven an historic erosion of their party’s base and authority. For example, while implementing vicious austerity, the David Cameron-led coalition government introduced equal marriage in 2013, amid hypocritical talk of ‘compassionate conservatism’. In 2016, Theresa May, faced with the enormous popularity of Corbyn’s anti-austerity programme, sought to win some favour by announcing (but not achieving) more far-reaching reform of the 2004 Gender Recognition Act than Labour is today committed to.

In recent years, with their party crisis intensifying as the capitalist system they represent fails to even offer the next generation better living standards than their parents, a growing ultra-right section of the Tories has tried to use LGBTQ+ rights in the opposite way.

The ‘nasty party’ is attempting



The ‘nasty party’ is attempting to whip up suspicion and division among workers, including anti-trans hatred

to whip up suspicion and division among workers, including anti-trans hatred. It is no coincidence that this takes place as Tory support plummets in the polls - and as the working class is back, striking, protesting, and increasingly seeing the need to get organised and fight the bosses and the politicians that represent their interests.

Divide and rule

Such divisive ideas are always a tool that capitalist politicians are prepared to use when a threat to their right to rule is posed. The working class shares collective experience of the exploitation at the heart of capitalism and has a shared interest in ending it. The role of the working class in producing society’s wealth means we have enormous potential power.

But throughout its existence, the capitalist class has sought to use all the differences between workers - race, gender, sexuality, religion, ethnicity, etc - to set us against each other. In other words, they have sought to use ‘divide and rule’ to prevent us realising our potential to take power and replace capitalism with democratic socialism, a society planned to meet the needs of all.

The 2022 Tory leadership election, in the midst of the cost-of-living crisis, was dominated by the candidates’ attempts to outdo themselves on anti-trans rhetoric. Six cabinet ministers used their moment at the podium at the October 2023 Tory conference to attack trans rights. Others concentrated on ‘small boats’.

Open one of the right-wing billionaire-owned newspapers and you are likely to see a trans-hostile article that reinforces this division. There was a four-fold increase in press coverage between 2015 and 2020, according to the Independent Press Standards Organisation.

Inevitably, this has had a horrendous impact. Statistics published by the Office for National Statistics in October reveal that hate crimes on the basis of sexual orientation are up by 112% in the last five years, with a 186% rise when it comes to hate crimes against trans people. The Scottish teachers’ union EIS found that three quarters of primary school teachers hear homophobic language among students.

Tory right-wing divisive rhetoric is combined with Tory austerity to bring enormous suffering. Housing charity ‘akt’ estimates that as many as 24% of young homeless people are LGBTQ+, with the overwhelming majority facing homelessness as a result of being forced out of their family home after coming out or being outed. But their homelessness is caused by the absence of council homes. A Stonewall/YouGov report found that one in eight LGBT people have experienced unequal treatment in a healthcare setting and one in seven have avoided treatment because they are LGBT. The crisis in the NHS compounds the situation.

So there is a real need for improvement in the lives of LGBTQ+ people. But a Starmer-led government, while it may not use such intolerant



IMAGES: SCOTT HUNTER, NUMBER 10 DOWNING STREET/CC, WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM/CC

rhetoric and may even pass some positive legislation, will not deliver the transformation in the situation that is needed to end oppression. However, in the run-up to the general election we will be invited to place our hope in Starmer’s Labour - or accept that it’s the only option available.

Illusions in Starmer

In 2021, veteran campaigner Peter Tatchell’s Reclaim Pride event received significant support from young LGBTQ+ people in London. It is a mistake that Peter has not built on this success, campaigning to build mass Pride events that demand rights and all the resources and public services needed, with which the Socialist Party LGBTQ+ members group offered to help.

However, a greater mistake was the illusions he sowed in Keir Starmer when he told Attitude magazine that:

“There’s no doubt Starmer took a strong stand in response to Sunak’s trans jibe. It came from the heart. It felt sincere. And that’s what we need from a Labour leader to reassure the LGBTQ+ community and win their support.”

On his sincerity or otherwise, we cannot judge. However, Keir Starmer is fundamentally a pro-capitalist politician whose opposition to inequality will never embrace the socialist policies that are really required to tackle it. LGBTQ+ workers and young people need rights and public services and homes, and Labour cannot be relied on to provide any of that for any of us.

In his pledge to make Labour the “party of business,” Starmer said to business leaders: “If we do come into government, you will be coming into government with us.” It is not possible to represent the exploiters in the capitalist class at the same time as

the exploited and oppressed working class. His choice is clear.

Conversion Therapy

Peter referred to Labour’s commitment to banning trans conversion therapy, under the pressure of campaigning. Described in a 2018 government equalities report as: “So-called conversion therapies, sometimes also referred to as cure, aversion or reparative therapies, are techniques intended to change someone’s sexual orientation or gender identity.” UN experts describe the practice as ‘torture’, yet 5% of people in a UK LGBT survey say they had been offered it. The figure was 10% for Christian respondents and 20% for Muslim respondents.

The Tories promised to ban the practice five years ago. But, on whether it is to their advantage to do so or not, the Tories cannot agree, as with many issues in their weakened and

divided state, and therefore cannot act.

But given the ideas promoted in society by the right-wing press and politicians, such a ban is far from sufficient to counter the suffering of LGBTQ+ workers and youth. Young people need youth clubs where support is available, they need council homes, and mental health support, and the chance to go to college and university without having to rely on their parents.

Instead of public funding of a massively increased and improved mental health services, Shadow health secretary Wes Streeting has made Labour’s commitment to continuing the role of private profiteers in the NHS clear. Lancet research from Oxford University shows every £10 million of NHS spending awarded to profit-seeking health companies could have led to three preventable deaths the following



LGBTQ+ workers and young people need rights and public services and homes, and Labour cannot be relied on to provide any of that for any of us

year - 557 preventable deaths between 2014-20.

It’s estimated that 231,000 deaths in England have been caused by savage cuts to all public services between 2010-18. Instead of destroying services and support for young people, Labour-led councils should fund them and demand that Starmer commits the next government to bail them out.

Schools guidance

One of the many ways the right-wing Tories are injecting their divisive poison into public services is with their plan to introduce guidance on ‘Gender Questioning Children’ into schools. It offers no guidance on supporting students, families and teachers regarding these sensitive issues. It offers no means of dealing with bullying or discrimination. Typical of capitalist politicians’ solutions, the emphasis is on proscriptions not resourcing support. It therefore invites tensions between teachers, school students, and parents to be increased - in the context of deep schools and mental health crises.

It is very far from clear that the Tories are capable of finalising this draft, under consultation until 12 March, before a general election takes place. As one senior Tory said following one Suella Braverman ‘dog-whistle’ speech: “This trash about gender ideology is making our Conservative Party look transphobic and homophobic. This is not what our Conservative Party is about.”

But what is clear is that it’s in Keir Starmer’s power to kill off the divisive guidance now. He could commit a future Labour government to repealing it and make it unworkable. Education unions, LGBTQ+ campaigns and students unions should put Labour under relentless pressure to commit to that.

However, it is not enough to simply repeal the legislation. Schools need full public funding and staffing. And they need a plan for action to confront LGBTQ+phobia and other reflections of divisive capitalist ideology in schools. How that is done cannot be left in the hands of capitalist politicians who have shown time and again that they cannot be trusted with our safety or our services. Schools need to be run in the interests of the communities they serve, which includes finding ways to overcome the division.

Like all our public services, it is necessary to fight for genuine democratic control. In schools, this would mean through elected representatives of the local community, parents, staff and their trade unions, and school students’ unions. Those kinds of committees would provide the forum for discussing and arriving at decisions on areas of controversy, feeding into national policy. That would need to include policies on relationships, sex and health education, as well as provision for students and staff of all faiths.

An essential demand is ending academisation, which represents a removal of elements of democratic control which exist for local authority-run

schools. Under Jeremy Corbyn, Labour stood for an end to academies.

In October’s national policy forum, Starmer has committed to “make multi-academy trusts subject to Ofsted inspections”!

What’s more, a Starmer government is going to be incredibly unstable. By attempting to stay within the limits of existing capitalism, it will come into collision with the demands of workers, LGBTQ+ people, women, all those suffering racism, anti-war protesters, young people, and more.

A workers’ voice

We need our own voice to fight for those demands! We need a new workers’ party that fights now for the rights of LGBTQ+ people and the whole of the working class, that is capable of drawing us together behind a programme that represents all our needs. The Socialist Party is fighting for every step towards building such a uniting force. That includes fighting for a workers’ list of candidates for the general election, involving the trade unions, anti-war movement, and MPs who Starmer has witch-hunted out of Labour.

Should such a list not come to pass, the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), the electoral coalition in which the Socialist Party participates, is offering its banner and platform for candidates. As a minimum commitment, voters should know that the TUSC general election platform includes, as well as support for trade unions and for nationalisation: “Full equality for LGBT people. Oppose transphobia, promote trans and non-binary rights. Support Gender Recognition Reform for all trans and non-binary people.”

The results of Reform UK in the recent by-elections show that, in the absence of a new workers’ party, the vacuum can be filled by right-wing forces that will apply pressure to a Starmer government. With the Tories likely to split after the general election, the ultra-right sections will be part of that process.

Part of fighting for LGBTQ+ rights is therefore the fight for workers to organise and fight in all our interests, including building a new mass workers’ party. To liberate humanity from the misery of capitalist crisis, including LGBTQ+ oppression, means fighting for socialism, a democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of all.

**Unite and fight for LGBTQ+ rights
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Royal Mail: Where's My Post? Renationalise to defend services

Gary Clark, retired Royal Mail worker, responds to recent BBC Panorama episode: 'Royal Mail: Where's My Post?' and the issues raised

It is now widely accepted that Royal Mail is constantly failing the Universal Service Obligation (USO). Royal Mail has been prioritising parcels over letters since the pandemic, when it got the go-ahead, in the short term, to change USO for letters from six days a week to five. At the time, Socialist Party members in Royal Mail warned that this was dangerous as it could become the norm.

Ofcom has now announced a review of USO, with a view to reducing it to either five days or even a three-day service. Ofcom says that, since 2011, the volume of letters has reduced from 14.3 billion a year to 7.3 billion, while at the same time parcels have increased from 2.6 billion to 3.6 billion - reaching 4 billion at the peak of the pandemic.

Socialists in Royal Mail are saying there should be a review of the role of what the postal service can be, that should instead include a 35-hour week for workers, which was agreed a number of years ago, but also that the wider role should be looked at.

No other service can deliver to 32 million households six days a week. During the pandemic, the importance of this was clearly shown, where we delivered and collected

vital mail and test kits. For many people, a postal worker is the only person they see. Postal workers could be delivering medical prescriptions and other services by looking in on vulnerable people.

The CWU, which represents Royal Mail workers, should call for the renationalisation of Royal Mail and demand that Keir Starmer implements this policy, that was passed at the 2022 Labour Party conference. But the union should go further and call for the whole parcel sector to be a publicly owned. This would lead to only one parcel van required to deliver to any delivery point, which would be a more efficient and environmentally friendly delivery service.

As the Horizon Post Office scandal shows, what is required is the entire postal and delivery sector to be integrated, which would support USO, and allow worker and community control of Royal Mail, for it to be run as a public service and not profit.

● **'Royal Mail: Where's My Post?' is on BBC iPlayer now**



PCS members in Liverpool museums still fighting for last year's payment



STEVE ION
MERSEYSIDE SOCIALIST PARTY

Over 200 PCS members, working in seven different Liverpool museums, delivered an overwhelming 94% 'yes' vote for strike action.

They are on strike because their management has refused to pay the £1,500 cost-of-living payment which was accepted by the national PCS leadership in settlement of the national pay strike last year. National Museums Liverpool (NML) is one department that has still not paid it.

Liverpool museum members are among the lowest paid. They remain

passionate about their work and the culture of the city. They are an invaluable source of information to visitors.

Culture remains underfunded and either the government Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) needs to pay over the extra money or the Liverpool Museum management does. We were told by strikers that, to settle the dispute, it is estimated they would need £750,000.

Management has allocated funding to new projects, yet argue that they have still not got enough money for wages. The effect on morale is clear, as workers feel undervalued.

As well as daily lively picket lines, a well-attended strike rally was held, which heard the general secretary of the Trades Union Congress agree to set up an online financial appeal for the strikers.

We were told that David Henshaw, chair of NML, is also chair of the Wirral University Teaching Hospital Foundation. Low-paid clinical support workers there, underpaid by nearly £2,000 a year, are also in dispute.

● **The dispute runs till 14 April. Please send messages of support to PCS@liverpoolmuseums.org.uk**

PCS Broad Left Network (BLN) and Socialist Party member **Marion Lloyd** is seeking nomination for PCS president, alongside a full list of activists from across the union standing for the National Executive Committee, who have come together to put forward a fighting alternative to the current PCS leadership. The BLN opposed accepting the one-off £1,500 payment last year, believing that with a serious national campaign, more could have been won. The BLN gives full support to the Liverpool strikers.

TV review: Miners' Strike: A Frontline Story

DAVE GORTON
CHESTERFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

The 1984-85 miners' strike changed the political landscape in Britain forever. Capitalism was laid bare, as a government of the rich sought to starve striking miners back to work - where many would face redundancy just a few months down the line - to reassert the primacy of their system, which had been rocked by the strike waves of the 1970s.

Forty years on, there will be repeated attempts in all the media recollections to portray the strike as between two sides - striking and working miners. In reality, it was organised labour and the capitalist state which faced a head-on collision.

BBC Two's 'Miners' Strike: A Frontline Story' did indeed spend considerable effort talking about ballots, Arthur Scargill, and Nottinghamshire miners' 'democratic rights' to try and slant history. But ultimately, it failed. The naked class battle - a civil war without guns - was too obvious for it to be completely expunged.

The documentary follows a well-trodden path. Opening with pieces on the closeness of mining communities and how growing up meant

"love, safety and security", moving on to the differences between the coal-field areas, then through to picketing, violence, the hardship, and finally, defeat.

What was missing was any analysis covering the role of the majority of trade union leaders, the Labour Party under leader Neil Kinnock doing little more than sitting on the fence, and why, in a dispute that had been systematically planned for years by Thatcher's government, simply relying on the tactic from the early 1970s of flying picketing was not going to be sufficient to lead to overall victory. It was going to take wider strike action involving other workers.

What was included was generally handled sympathetically. You will be stifling tears at the story of the striker who couldn't get a grant to bury his week-old son because the Tories changed the benefit rules to punish striking miners. Incredibly, his son was buried inside the coffin of an unrelated person whose family had agreed, seeing their plight.

Similarly, you will see the anger and probably tears again at the absolute violence faced, particularly from the police at Orgreave. The newsreels still shock today. One miner recalled

thinking at the time that nobody had tried to stop them reaching Orgreave. It was a trap. Eventually, 15 miners faced life imprisonment on charges from that day. But the prosecution case collapsed completely and all walked free.

Most interestingly, one of the key strikers and flying pickets featured in

the documentary is seen at the end wandering through a much-changed geographical landscape, expressing his support for wind power, only decrying that the people of the coal-fields had not been allowed to be involved in a managed transfer from fossil fuels to green energy.

For all its faults, Miners' Strike: A Frontline Story is worth the watch, but also read the political analyses which will be featured in the Socialist over the coming months.

● **'Miners' Strike: A Frontline Story' is on BBC iPlayer now**



PHOTO: MINERS' STRIKE: A FRONTLINE STORY/BBC

Memories of Orgreave

PAUL MARSHALL
STRIKING MINER 1984-85

Having forced myself to watch the episode of Channel 4's 'Miners' Strike 1984: The Battle for Britain' about the Battle of Orgreave, it still sends shudders down my spine, even after nearly 40 years. The brutality shown to us by the police will never go away. Lies spoken and printed by the so-called free press changed my outlook forever: never trust, never forget, never forgive.

We fought to save our industry, while others surrendered even before war was truly declared.

In the end, cowards and traitors, both outside our trade union and within it, alongside those who never lost a day's pay, gave the mining industry away without a fight. To those, eternal shame, for it is they who must shoulder the blame.

At least we fought all the way, so our heads will never be bowed in shame.

● **The whole series can be watched at channel4.com**

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

Gaza – Queen Mary uni management orders break-in of union office

NANDI SHALITA
QUEEN MARY SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Queen Mary university security raided the campus office of the University and College Union (UCU), on 20 February, on the orders of uni management. They removed all posters and messages around the office showing support and solidarity with the people of Palestine and Gaza.

The previous day, management had requested access to the office. Management claimed the posters were having a "chilling effect on freedom of speech".

The UCU agreed to allow them in, but explicitly said that all the posters and material should be left alone.

But instead, campus security broke into the office without permission and, before proper access was arranged, tore down any material in support of Palestinians or a ceasefire, damaging the office in the process.

Management's defence was that prominently displayed signs may be misconstrued as the stance of the university itself, rather than the UCU. This is not even possible, as all these posters had a clear UCU logo on them.

This is a blatant attack on freedom of speech and freedom of association. Queen Mary management is infamous for its continuous attack on the rights of staff and students.

Just last year, Queen Mary management threatened to deduct 100% of pay from teachers taking part in

a marking boycott, just one part of their job, and tried to have students snitch on striking lecturers. Queen Mary has a history of intimidating and threatening students protesting during rent strikes.

Queen Mary plays a national role for universities in testing and pushing these types of attacks. This serves managements on other campuses. They can say: 'We're only docking 50% pay, we're not invading your union offices. So you should accept our 'milder' attacks.'

Students have been protesting Queen Mary university's complicity in the slaughter in Gaza. Queen Mary invests in Barclays, a bank that provides financial services to arms companies supplying the Israeli army. In many on-campus student-organised protests, students have continuously called for our institution to divest funds from Barclays, and formally condemn what is being perpetrated by the Israeli state.

Of course, management just dance around these demands, and claim that this would be a 'conflict of interest', and that any condemnation of the Israeli state could be seen as antisemitic.

The Tory government has openly tried to stop students on campus from even talking about Israel-Palestine, not to mention protesting about it. And many institutions are following in their footsteps. SOAS university in London suspended several students who organised and participated in a

rally in solidarity with Palestinians, before management was forced to back down.

This is a very clear attack on the democratic right of workers to organise. Rash and extreme acts such as this show just how worried university management and the Tories are by the collective efforts of students and unions.

We will not stand idly by as they try and strip us of these rights. Jo Grady, general secretary of the UCU, has recently launched the union's 'Exposed' campaign, in order to challenge right-wing and Tory government attacks on free speech in education.

Jo Grady should go to Queen Mary, and tell the UCU branch that the whole of the union is behind them. Jo Grady should immediately release a statement, through the union, condemning this attack.

The UCU leadership should call and mobilise for a national demonstration in support of the Queen Mary branch, and against ongoing attacks on trade union organising rights and freedom of speech, as well as coordinating a solidarity campaign across the whole union. The student union should add its voice to mobilising people to oppose this attack too.

Queen Mary management can't be allowed to succeed in this attack, and the whole of the student and workers' movement must come to defend the UCU.

Staff and students protest

From the protest on 27 February, **Nandi** says:

"100 of us gathered. The actions of management shocked many people.

"Many people spoke of their disgust. Both myself and another member of the Socialist Party spoke. I talked about the pattern of this university management violating the rights of workers to organise

and protest, be it about their working conditions or about global politics.

"Hugo Pierre brought solidarity from Camden Union. Hugo talked about the importance of other trade unions to rally around and support Queen Mary UCU, and condemn the actions of management.

"Hugo also explained the need for education to be democratically run in order to protect our rights as workers and students, and for workers' representation in parliament to back that fight."



PHOTO: NANDI

The Socialist Party is fighting for:

● **End the siege – for the permanent withdrawal of the Israeli military from the occupied territories**

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

● **For the building of independent workers' parties in Palestine and Israel and links between them**

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

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

Protesting outside while parliament descended into chaos



PHOTO: MARTIN REYNOLDS

Thousands of people gathered outside parliament once again on 21 February, demanding the end to the Israeli state's brutal offensive on Gaza. Inside, Members of Parliament were debating a motion from the Scottish National Party calling for a ceasefire.

Socialist Party members were, as always, with others outside; selling the Socialist newspaper and talking to people. It was easy to approach protesters for discussion because of the huge queue outside Parliament!

We were focusing mainly on the topic of this year's general election. Neither the Tories nor the Labour Party are standing up for the Palestinians. People know this and explained how that they don't really see any option of who to vote for. That's why we need an alternative.

Socialist Party members are preparing to stand as part of TUSC (Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition), calling for an end to Israeli state terror and to fight for working-class people's interests.

Asking people questions is important. Sometimes they don't even know that the opinion they are making is basically what the Socialist Party and TUSC are saying! And it concerns everything - Gaza, the lack of working-class representation in government, the frustration about cuts and austerity.

I had a long conversation with one protester, I spent most of it thinking: "I agree completely. I should be saying this to you, because that's why I'm here!"

ROSE KWIECINSKA
EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Southampton students organising in solidarity with Palestine

Southampton Socialist Students helped organise events that made up the Southampton portion of a national student day of action in solidarity with Palestine.

We started with a campaign stall on campus, which got a lot of interest and a positive reception.

The meeting in the evening included; two speakers who spoke from their own families' experience, as well as outlining the historical background to what is unfolding in Gaza; a lecturer whose family is from Palestine; and at the end I spoke about the university's involvement with the Israeli state, as well as the need for a political alternative.

At least 50 people attended, students and from the local community. It was a great event to build confidence in the movement. Those who stayed on watched a documentary called "5 Broken Cameras", which was created by a Palestinian documenting his life in the 2000s.

NICK DAVIES

Bradford Gaza protest

Leeds and West Yorkshire Socialist Party members took part in a march from Thornbury roundabout to Bradford City Hall.

The march was massive, over 2,000 strong, with plenty of supporting honks from cars. There was clearly an anti-government and anti-Labour sentiment, with chants against both Starmer and Sunak.

Interestingly, there was another smaller protest outside the Gurdwara, in solidarity with the ongoing farmers' protests in Punjab. Both protests were very friendly towards each other, showing the international nature of this great city.

TOM GIBSON



Protest on budget day – Wednesday 6 March No to Tory attacks on young peoples’ future

ADAM POWELL-DAVIES
SOCIALIST STUDENTS NATIONAL ORGANISER

The Tories are set to announce their latest spending plans on 6 March, budget day. It will be yet another budget for the super-rich, enacted in the interests of big business and the banks.

Of course, the Tories will do nothing to solve the crises facing students and young people – a broken housing market, the sky-high cost of living, decaying public services, climate breakdown – the list seems endless. So it’s no wonder the Tories are so hated. Plagued by infighting and scandals, they are headed for disaster in the next general election, which has to be called this year.

But who else can we vote for?

Many will look to Keir Starmer’s Labour Party as the best tool to get the Tories out, albeit as the ‘lesser of two evils’. Starmer has made clear that his Labour Party will rule in the same capitalist interests as the Tories, repeating his catchphrase of ‘fiscal discipline’ – a not-so-subtle codeword for more cuts and privatisation. Starmer has transformed the Labour Party into a ‘safe pair of hands’ for big business, which puts capitalist profit-making before the lives of ordinary people, and young people’s futures. How can we trust a Labour leader, who has backed the slaughter of Palestinians, to defend young people and workers in Britain?

Socialist Students supports any election candidates prepared to make an anti-war, pro-working-class stand against the Tories, Starmer’s

Labour, and all the other establishment parties. We also want to help stand student candidates in the general election, who put forward socialist demands to give young people a future – including free education, rent control, and a real living wage for all.

SOCIALIST STUDENTS SAYS:

- Tories out! But Starmer’s Labour doesn’t fight for us
- We need election candidates who stand against poverty, war and oppression
- Build a new workers’ party with socialist policies
- Prepare to build a new student movement against a future Starmer government
- Fight for the socialist transformation of society in Britain, and across the world

Could you stand in the local elections in May?

Tories, Labour and all the other major parties have been making cuts in the council chambers for years. We need councillors who will actually fight for what we need, like decent student homes, and who are prepared to fight a future Starmer government for the funding our local communities need.

Socialist Students members will be standing in local elections around the country, as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC).

• Email socialiststudents@gmail.com

BRIAN DEBUS
HACKNEY UNISON CHAIR AND SOCIALIST PARTY

Parents and trade unions shredded the council’s proposals to privatise or close two children’s centres, and change the usage at two others, at Hackney Council’s scrutiny meeting on 19 February. This was a case of déjà vu – the council tried to close two of these centres two years ago.

If these proposals go ahead, 200 subsidised nursery places would go, and up to 50 jobs could be cut. This is what happens when a Labour council gets locked into a philosophy of implementing cuts, instead of fighting them.

Parent Natalie Aguilera, with a child at Fernbank nursery, told the scrutiny commission: “What has changed significantly since the last time, however, is the childcare environment, with a government proposal that would hugely increase demand for childcare just around the corner. This should have prompted a reassessment of the council’s approach.”

Yet, Donna Thomas – head of early years, for Hackney Council – said, with central government’s free childcare offer about to expand, it is a good time to reshape children’s services. Talk about getting the wrong end of the stick!

‘Once they’re gone, they’re gone’

Beatrice Hackett, another parent, stated: “Once these centres are gone, they are gone.” She also said after having to “plough through” documents and data: “I’m still confused”, and it was still not clear how these proposals could be justified.

Another parent presenter Yuliya Keselman criticised the briefings presented to the cabinet, including unclear graphs and population projections. “How can the cabinet make decisions on the basis of

Hackney council’s children’s centre cuts consultation shredded at scrutiny stage



SAVE OUR SEBRICH

a graph they can’t even see?” she said.

This campaign has gained tremendous momentum in the last three weeks, and will be holding a very large and lively protest lobby of the full council meeting on the 28 February.

- Read what’s happened so far – ‘Campaign to save Hackney children’s centres kicks off with protest’ and about ‘Childcare premise meaningless without funding the full costs’ at socialistparty.org.uk

Sanctuary housing workers strike: ‘Bosses have said ‘No’ for too long’

PAUL KERSHAW
CHAIR, UNITE HOUSING WORKERS BRANCH

Hundreds of repair jobs have been cancelled in advance of the first-ever strike in Sanctuary Housing, a large nationwide housing association. The London repairs team want proper recognition and negotiating rights for their trade union, Unite.

They are also calling for a pay increase to compensate for cuts in real-terms pay. Last year, the CEO Craig Moule got a 9% increase in his basic pay, bringing the total to £380,213.

Tenants back them

Local Sanctuary tenants actively support the workers in their battle. They complain about the use of contractors instead of directly employed staff, and Sanctuary’s failure to listen to tenants. Last year, the Housing Ombudsman found Sanctuary guilty of gross maladministration when Sanctuary was found to have let damp ‘fester’ in a tenant’s home.

Sanctuary Housing revenues for last year stood at £943 million, with its surplus increasing by 73% to £101.3 million. There is no doubt about its ability to pay.

Pay cut

Unite general secretary Sharon Graham said: “Sanctuary Housing imposed a significant pay cut on its workers during the worst cost-of-living crisis in a generation, despite its extremely healthy financial position. It is also refusing to recognise the collective bargaining rights of its unionised workers. Our Sanctuary members have their union’s unwavering and total support.”

The Sanctuary lead Unite rep commented: “Since we started the union two years ago, we have come a long way. The result of this ballot shows how angry members are. 100% of members voting for strike action should be a wake-up call for management.”

Another worker said: “Repair

staff and tenants have long been asking for better working and living conditions, but the workers have been left with no other choice but to call a strike, with the support of tenants. We hoped it would not have to come to this, but with no willingness from Sanctuary to enter any discussions, this is the only course of action at the moment. Sanctuary has spent too long telling their workers and tenants ‘No’. It’s now time we say ‘No’ to their treatment of us.”

New trade unionists

New members have been signing up to the union since the strike was announced. While the current action is confined to the London maintenance team, the organisation owns and manages over 120,000 homes across England, Wales and Scotland, and employs over 14,000 people.

The initial strike action is on 28 and 29 February and 1 March.

Leicester Labour cuts disabled children’s transport ‘How will we get to school?’

The cuts by Leicester’s Labour council hit the most vulnerable hardest. One example is its plan to remove school transport, currently available to special educational needs and disability (SEND) children, aged 16 and above. Their excuse for cutting this is that this service is “non-statutory”.

Ben Score is 15, and attends a SEND school. He wrote to councillors, and the local MP, to protest. The following is an extract from his letter.

The council’s SEND director cruelly replied to Ben’s letter, saying that although the council might make some exceptions to these cuts, “the council will not consider exceptions on the grounds that parents/carers are working, cannot afford the cost, or have other children to take to school.”

Being a special needs student myself, I strongly disagree with this decision. The removal of transport means that some parents will struggle to get their child to school.

A lot of parents with children attending my school chose the Home to School Transport as taxi services are becoming extremely expensive. Parents may also be too busy to transport their children themselves



A previous protest against cuts made by Leicester’s Labour council STEVE SCORE

due to their jobs, transporting their other children, etc.

One of the supposed benefits is that the change could help build independence in young people. I do not agree with this, as most students in my school aged 16 and over are simply not capable of getting to school by themselves.

Parents only discovered this change in a letter. I have spoken to teachers in my school, and none were aware of the consultation before the letter was sent out. This means that parents now have little time to find alternative transportation, which may be impossible.

The letter states that parents

should contact them in exceptional circumstances, implying that some could keep their place if necessary. However, what is considered an “exceptional circumstance” is not clearly specified. I do not believe that all students that require the transport will keep their place.

Would you be willing to contest

Why I’m standing for TUSC - nothing more fulfilling than standing up

May will soon be coming around again, and I cannot wait! Not because my birthday is in May, but because it will give me the chance to stand as a Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidate again in the local council elections on an anti-austerity programme.

I am standing in Fulwood ward in Sheffield again. Last year, I was fortunate to attend a hustings with the other candidates.

Well, that was the plan. The sitting Liberal Democrat candidate did not attend, and neither did the Conservative. I like to think it was the thought of facing a TUSC candidate, but probably down to how they view the electorate.

Sheffield council is run by a coalition between Labour, Greens, and the Liberal Democrats.

The Green candidate said that, through collaborative working, they had managed to agree a budget well before the deadline. I reminded them that there was nothing to celebrate about a budget that cut millions from the social services!

The Labour candidate’s main attack on me was that what I was proposing in fighting the cuts was illegal – which it is not. But this gave me the opportunity to state that it should be illegal for politicians to

allow people to be cold, hungry and homeless!

In Sheffield, we are standing a candidate in every ward in the city, and plan to stand at least one candidate in the general election too. So if you are considering standing, but are not sure, take it from me – there is nothing more fulfilling than to be able to stand up, showing that there is an alternative to cuts and austerity. Be part of the fightback against this rotten political system.

JOHN BUNN
SHEFFIELD SOUTH EAST SOCIALIST PARTY

TRADE UNIONIST AND SOCIALIST COALITION

TUSC AGAINST CUTS

• Find out more visit tusc.org.uk

Coventry Labour removes rape victim support

Coventry Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre (Crasac) has been forced to

close its waiting list to anyone over the age of 13. It is the only specialist service of its kind in Coventry. It has made this decision because the council has slashed its funding.

100 protesters gathered outside the council’s budget meeting, urging them not to carry out cuts. The Labour council has imposed cuts and charges on Coventry residents to cover a £20 million budget gap.

Victims of sexual violence bluntly said at the protest that if Crasac hadn’t supported them, they may not be alive. The cuts come with a 4.99% rise in council tax, alongside cuts in council tax payment support, in a city of mass poverty, where many still rely on foodbanks.

The protest had the banners of trade unions Unite, Unison, NEU and UCU. Socialist Party member Jane Nellist spoke on behalf of Coventry Trades Union Council.

Labour isn’t listening to Coventry’s workers, so we need our own candidates in the election. We sent a petition round the protest – ‘Help us stand anti-austerity and anti-war candidates’ – taking 15 sign-ups, including from Crasac volunteers.

Coventry Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is hoping to challenge all 18 seats in the council elections. 13 are already in place.

TUSC is seeking candidates and other support from socialists, trade unionists, and anti-cuts campaigners. If you’re in Coventry, or nearby, and want to help our campaign, get in touch.

ADAM HARMSWORTH
COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

Birmingham protesters march against youth cuts

Socialist Party members supported a protest march of 100 people opposing cuts soon to be levied against youth services by Birmingham City Council. Speakers highlighted the importance of youth centres and services as lifelines for disenfranchised young people.

This follows the council’s Section 114 notice – effectively declaring ‘bankruptcy’, and committing to only fund the bare legal minimum of services. The bill for Tory central government cuts and the Labour council’s incompetence has predictably been footed by the city’s workers. This is expected from an authority that has repeatedly foregone its obligations to its constituents, in favour

SOCIALIST PARTY FIGHTING FUND

| AREA | \$ RECEIVED | \$ TARGET | Q1: JANUARY-MARCH 2024 | DEADLINE: 31 MARCH 2024 |
|---------------|---------------|---------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| South West | 2,552 | 2,100 | | 122% |
| West Midlands | 2,556 | 2,700 | | 95% |
| Southern & SE | 2,106 | 2,400 | | 88% |
| Northern | 594 | 800 | | 74% |
| Wales | 1,582 | 2,400 | | 66% |
| North West | 772 | 1,200 | | 64% |
| London | 3,146 | 5,000 | | 63% |
| East Midlands | 792 | 2,050 | | 39% |
| Eastern | 428 | 1,300 | | 33% |
| Yorkshire | 868 | 2,650 | | 33% |
| Other | 2,854 | 2,400 | | 119% |
| TOTAL | 18,251 | 25,000 | | 73% |

these cuts? Special needs students should not lose out on opportunities because of a lack of funding.

Playgrounds saved – council caves to protesters

Hundreds of parents and students – who use the adventure playgrounds outside the council’s budget-setting meeting on 21 February, over fears they were for the chop.

Although they have now been given assurances that there are no cuts this year, it is clear that it will be cut in future. The council is promising massive cuts to all non-statutory services – libraries, leisure centres, museums etc and more – be decided on over the next year.

The Greens put an amendment to secure the playground funding for four years. But that was voted down.

But even in moving it, according to the Leicester Mercury, Green councillor Patrick Kitterick “accepted cuts would ‘unavoidably’ have to be made across various areas of council spending, but said he felt the playgrounds were something the council could save”. In other words, the Greens are already playing the divide-and-rule game on which cuts to make.

STEVE SCORE
LEICESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

of placating the demands of the Tory government.

Now more than ever, we need a mass workers’ campaign to fight back against cuts, low pay, and all other ruling-class attacks and incompetence. This is why the Socialist Party will stand in the upcoming election, as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), to provide an alternative to capitalist parties, to support workers’ campaigns on the ground.

U’SEMU MAKAYA
BIRMINGHAM CENTRAL SOCIALIST PARTY

• Read more about the fightback in Birmingham – ‘We won’t accept our city’s services being destroyed’ – on page 5

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PROTEST ON BUDGET DAY

WED 6 MARCH

TORIES OUT! BUT STARMER’S LABOUR DOESN’T FIGHT FOR US

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socialist students

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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.

- 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!

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

DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

- For united working-class struggle to end discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, disability, sexuality, age, and all other forms of prejudice and oppression.

- Repeal the anti-trade union laws and all others that trample over civil liberties. For the right to protest and to strike! End police harassment. For the police to be accountable to local committees, made up of democratically elected representatives of trade unions, local community organisations and local authorities.

- For the right to choose when and whether to have children – for the right to access abortion, contraception and fertility treatment for all who need it.

- For the right to asylum – with democratic community control and oversight of emergency funding resources. No to racist immigration laws.
- Expand democracy. For the abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords. For all MPs to be subject to the right of recall by their constituents at any time, and to only receive a worker's wage.

- For proportional representation and the right to vote at 16.

- For the right of nations to self-determination. For an independent socialist Scotland and for a socialist Wales, both part of a voluntary socialist confederation of Wales, England, Scotland and Ireland.

- Oppose the dictatorship of the billionaire owners of the media. For the nationalisation of newspaper printing facilities, radio, TV and social media platforms. Access to these facilities should be under democratic control, with political parties' coverage being allocated in proportion to the popular vote at elections.

- For a new mass workers' party, based on the trade unions, and drawing together workers, young people and activists from workplaces, and community, environmental, anti-racist and anti-cuts campaigns, to provide a fighting, socialist political alternative to the pro-big business parties.

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SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

- No to imperialist wars and occupations!

- Take the wealth off the super-rich! For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and the banking system that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working-class control and management. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need, not to the fat cats.

- A democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, and in a way that safeguards the environment.

- No to the EU bosses' club. Organise a campaign with European socialists and workers' organisations to use the talks on post-Brexit relations to tear up the EU pro-capitalist rules. For a real collaboration of the peoples of Europe on a socialist basis as a step towards a socialist world.

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Protests sweep Nigeria as general strike threat issued



Protesters in Nigeria during a previous struggle PHOTO: OLUDELEADEWALEPHOTOGRAPHY/CC

Nigeria is in turmoil. A combination of economic crisis, a massive currency devaluation, insecurity, various insurgencies and most recently, neoliberal policies rushed through by the new president, have plunged the country into a grave social and economic crisis, which threatens to worsen. Living standards are rapidly falling, parts of the economy are coming to a halt and the International Monetary Fund is warning that inflation could rise to 44%. Street protests against rocketing food prices, beginning in northern Nigeria, are spreading.

An editorial in the Vanguard, a major Nigerian newspaper, wrote that "the federal and all state governments [have] to sit up and do something given the desperate situation Nigerians find themselves in, or the situation could get out of hand very quickly. Hunger and biting poverty have taken over the land. Even people who used to cater for the less-privileged are no longer able to foot their basic bills due to the harsh economic conditions. The protests in Niger, Kano and other places in the north are just warning shots."

The two trade union federations, the NLC and TUC, issued on 8 February another ultimatum to the government, demanding action by 23 February, and the NLC have called two days of protest for 27-28 February. The NLC stated that if its demands are not met then it will issue "a seven-day notice that will expire on 2 March to the federal government, after which an indefinite nationwide strike will commence".

The Democratic Socialist Movement (CWI Nigeria) issued the statement opposite on 19 February.

- More on the political crisis in Nigeria can be read at socialistworld.net: 'Nigerian masses face extreme hardship due to President Bola Tinubu's policies'

DSM welcomes NLC's declaration of two-day nationwide protest over cost-of-living crisis

- Demands must include total reversal of the fuel price hike and deregulation, as well as immediate actions to halt the meteoric rise in food prices and other basic needs
- Knowing labour leaders' penchant for last-minute suspension and compromise, we urge pro-labour civil society and activists to begin to mobilise independently for a national shutdown and mass protests

The Democratic Socialist Movement (DSM) welcomes the declaration by the leadership of trade union federation, the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), for a two-day nationwide protest on 27-28 February 2024 over the debilitating cost-of-living crisis. This declaration, coming on the heels of a 14-day notice for a general strike previously issued to the federal government on 8 February 2024, shows that the leadership of the trade union movement, which had initially and publicly scorned the idea of providing leadership for the mass anger of the Nigerian people, has found itself in a situation where it can no more ignore the rising tide of spontaneous mass protest breaking across the country over the past few weeks, in response to the deteriorating economic situation. Maintaining its previous stance and attitude could mean mass anger turning against it.

By declaring a two-day nationwide mass action, the NLC can help to deploy the organisational and political might of the organised working class to strengthen and give concrete expression to this mass anger, thereby ensuring that it wins. But this can only happen if the NLC leadership is serious this time around and not simply repeating what it has always

done in previous struggles, which is to declare actions only to suspend them at the last minute without any gains being secured, creating confusion and demoralisation in the movement. In fact, if the NLC had not suspended its planned general strike over subsidy removal on 6 June last year, there is a possibility that the Tinubu regime would not have had the confidence to carry through the subsequent neoliberal policies of currency devaluation, which have further worsened the situation for the mass of the people.

Therefore, should the NLC leadership repeat this tragic approach in the current circumstance, then they could invite unto themselves the justified anger of the angry masses and youth who already view the leadership of the trade union movement with suspicion. It should not be forgotten that the #EndSARS revolt broke out on 7 October 2020 following disappointment and anger over the last-minute suspension of a general strike by the Ayuba Wabba-led NLC on 28 September 2020. During the protest, many young people were hostile towards the idea of leadership and towards the labour movement in general, because of anger over the betrayals of the labour leadership during previous struggles.

To be forewarned, however, is to be forearmed. The DSM believes that workers and activists should not continue to tolerate, but instead organise to challenge, this penchant of the trade union leadership to act against the interests of the movement. Therefore, we propose that pro-labour groups like JAF, ASCAB, CORE, TIB, TPAPM, activists and socialists, in addition to the need for their own independent actions and initiatives for mass actions, should urgently begin to constitute democratic action committees at workplaces, campuses and the communities, to ensure the nationwide protest goes on regardless. Such a network of action committees set up across the country and acting on behalf of the Nigerian masses can quickly step in to declare for the planned action to go through. Through such action committees, further steps to take the struggle forward beyond 27-28 February can also be discussed and agreed.

At the time of writing, it seems only the NLC is behind the declared nationwide protest. The Trade Union Congress (TUC) which has often

united with the NLC, is yet to issue any statement in this regard. For us in the DSM, we believe that the unity of the working class is crucial at this hour. To this extent, we call on the leadership of the TUC, as well as activists within the movement to argue for the need for the TUC to key into the date of 27-28 February.

We also urge the NLC and TUC not to limit the demands of the struggle to palliatives alone. We urge them to also demand the reversal of the fuel price hike and all neo-liberal policies which are the immediate causes of the present crisis.

However, while we embrace every concession, no matter how minor, that can be won for the working people, without the working class ending capitalism and taking over the running of society under a socialist programme, there is no way any concession, however won, can bring any lasting relief for the long-suffering working people and youth. By and large, we urge labour and working people to fight for the following set of demands:

- Reversal in the fuel price hike to pre-29 May 2023 levels
- Reversal of all neoliberal policies
- Reversal of recent hikes in school fees at tertiary institutions and for adequate funding and democratic management of public education at all levels
- Immediate fixing of public refineries, and their democratic ownership and management by the working people
- A price-cap on all petroleum products from the Dangote refinery in order to ensure affordability
- For trade union-led actions to ensure price control and prevent price gouging and hoarding of food and other essentials
- For an increase in the national minimum wage to meet the rate of inflation
- Immediate cut in the salaries and allowances of political office holders
- Public ownership of the banks, financial institutions, industries and oil refineries, under democratic workers' control and management, in order to ensure Nigeria's economy works for the needs of all and not the greed of a few
- For the building of a genuine mass workers' party with a socialist programme

NIGERIA SOLIDARITY UK

SOLIDARITY WITH COST-OF-LIVING PROTESTS IN NIGERIA

- Nigerians in UK must pledge full solidarity with the Nigerian working masses protesting economic hardship
- Mobilise for a day of action at the Nigeria High Commission to express solidarity
- Down with Tinubu's anti-poor policies of fuel subsidy removal and floatation of the naira
- Transform Nigeria so that our huge resources are used for the benefit of the vast majority, not the greed of a few

Come to our Zoom public meeting to plan solidarity action

Thursday 7 March 7pm
Zoom Meeting ID: 822 5317 1420
Passcode: 622544

Join the protest at the High Commission
Saturday 9 March 12 noon

Join the solidarity campaign



£1/£2 solidarity price

socialistparty.org.uk



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END ISRAELI STATE TERROR



FIGHT BACK AGAINST ROTTEN CAPITALIST SYSTEM

SÉAMUS SMYTH
NORTHAMPTON SOCIALIST PARTY

It is over 150 days since the start of the most recent assault on Gaza, with over 30,000 Palestinians killed and over 70,000 injured. Northern Gaza has been transformed into a barren waste ground from continuous bombardment by the Israeli state.

Across the Gaza Strip there is a catastrophic humanitarian crisis unfolding, with food, drinking water and medical aid at an all-time low. Southern Gaza is now facing the murderous onslaught, with towns such as Rafah - once deemed a "safe zone" - being prepared for a ground offensive with missile strikes and more deaths.

This shows the reality of the capitalist system - war, famine and destruction which will cost countless lives. And capitalist politicians both here in Britain and internationally will continue to support the cruel actions of the Israeli state. While some politicians speak soothing words in opposition they ultimately continue to support the carnage that is taking place.

Regardless, it is the same politicians who try to defend and preserve the failing system of capitalism - a system of continuous crisis. Time and again, the same politicians who argue in favour of war and approve huge amounts of financial backing to continue it, carry on implementing brutal cuts and privatisations to our much-needed public services.

Yet, we have seen hundreds of thousands across the country and millions internationally take to the streets to voice their anger and to expose the double standards of their pro-capitalist governments. In schools, colleges and universities, students have organised walk-outs, demanding an end to Israeli state aggression in Gaza. The pressure from the anti-war movement forced the hated former Home Secretary Suella Braverman to resign last year and pushed Keir Starmer and the Labour leadership to call for a 'humanitarian ceasefire', in reality more empty words.

But the anti-war movement can go further if it is linked to the workers' movement and trade unions. Unions could mobilise their workers in greater numbers onto the

demonstrations, defend their members against victimisation and organise a dialogue between workers in the arms and logistics industries and anti-war campaigners to call for action against the war.

And, crucially, to put forward the steps needed for genuine worker's political representation, to back candidates who are against the barbaric war on Gaza and the relentless cuts and exploitation here in Britain.

Bringing an end to war and national oppression, in Palestine and internationally, means fighting for socialist change. It is the working-class and poor masses internationally who have the power to bring that change about. Join the Socialist Party to fight for it.

PHOTO: LUC LACEY

WHAT WE STAND FOR: THE SOCIALIST PARTY'S MAIN DEMANDS ▶▶▶ see column on p14



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