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# the Socialist

Issue 1265

7-13 March 2024

formerly **Militant**

## MESSAGE FROM ROCHDALE REBELLION:

# 'We can challenge Sunak and Starmer at the ballot box'



PHOTOS: MARIA UNGER-UK PARLIAMENT/CC, JESSICA TAYLOR/UK PARLIAMENT/CC, LEO LADEY, NICK CLARE

**In Gaza, after five months of bombing and siege, huge swathes of the two-million-strong population face acute hunger. Israeli forces gun down those queuing for limited food. Egypt's president Sisi is building what is effectively a prison camp to hold Gazans in the event they are driven from the Strip into the Sinai desert.**

And yet in Britain, Tories and Labour conspire to prevent a

vote for an immediate ceasefire in parliament. MPs have also never voted on whether or not to drop the millions of pounds worth of explosives in Yemen.

One thing they are prepared to vote on is further cuts. Whatever the details of the Tory budget, to be presented after the Socialist goes to press, our public services will remain underfunded. And for a hint of what a future Labour government will be like, look no further than the council budget votes in places like Birmingham and Nottingham - Labour councils slashing hundreds of millions of pounds. (see page 5)

The Tories are hated, and there is no enthusiasm for Labour too - the result of the Rochdale by-election, won emphatically by George Galloway, proves it. (see page 3)

Working-class people need our own political voice. The RMT rail workers' union has given its support for Jeremy

Corbyn to stand in the general election. Why not other fighters too?

Imagine if there was a list of workers' candidates, backed by the trade unions, fighting in the interests of working-class people against the bosses. Standing firmly for an immediate end to Israeli state terror and in support of the Palestinians' right to national self-determination.

Such a stand would be an important step towards the development of a new mass party of the working class. And to be able to stand consistently on the side of workers in the face of capitalist crisis, to offer a way forward to bring an end to war, poverty, inequality and climate destruction, it will have to fight for socialist change.

That is what the Socialist Party is fighting for. Join us!

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the Socialist

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7-13 March 2024**DO YOU HAVE NEWS FOR US?**

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

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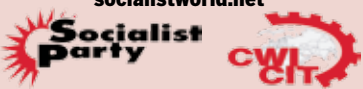
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"The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it."  
**Karl Marx**

**Socialist Party Congress 2024****World in crisis - Preparing for future class battles**

**MARK BEST**  
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

Meeting on the eve of a general election which will usher in a new period of class struggle, delegates from our many Socialist Party branches across England and Wales met in London to discuss, debate and prepare for the coming class battles. As Sarah Sachs-Eldridge from the Socialist Party's Executive Committee said, opening the congress: "Every day there are new developments, revealing the rottenness of capitalism, helping new layers of working-class and young people draw conclusions about the nature of society" and the necessity of fighting for socialist change.

Capitalism means war, poverty and climate change – it is unable to provide a decent future. The Tories are a busted flush, Starmer will act in the interests of the bosses, and we need our own mass party of the working class. The working class is beginning to stamp itself on events. By taking strike action we can win gains, but crucially the working class itself has the power and ability to run society for the good of all.

**The world - war and polarisation**

Developments in Britain flow from the world situation. Hannah Sell, general secretary of the Socialist Party, described how capitalism means "unimaginable riches for those at the top" – the five richest men's wealth has doubled since 2020. Markets have soared based on new speculative bubbles, and a few have got filthy rich – the approximate value of all global assets is an unprecedented 600% of global GDP – the real economy.

And for working-class and poor people? 60% of the world's population has got poorer since 2020. Capitalism means horror without end. Violent conflicts are at their highest level since the second world war, affecting two billion people. Meanwhile, global military spending hit an obscene record of \$2.2 trillion last year.

The wars in Gaza and Ukraine have massive repercussions in every country of the world. Half a million people are dead or injured because of the Ukraine war, and the Israeli state's invasion of the Gaza Strip and constant bombardment has left hundreds of thousands living in "apocalyptic" situations. The hypocrisy of the capitalist classes in the West has been laid bare.

As it has with their inability to tackle the momentous task of climate change. US President Joe Biden billed his Inflation Reduction Act as a 'road to the green transition', but oil and gas production has hit a record high while bosses' profits have tripled during his time in office. In reality, it is about protecting the US economy at the expense of their rivals – particularly China.

Hannah explained: "What a condemnation of capitalism – that an issue that can be only solved on the



Protest against war on Gaza in London  
NICK CLARE

basis of international cooperation is used as a lever for protectionist measures."

The shift from a unipolar world, in which for a brief period the US was able to play a completely dominant role in geopolitics, to an increasingly multipolar world, in which China and other powers begin to jostle for position, adds fuel to the fire of crisis-ridden capitalism. The end of the era of 'cheap money' with low interest rates, the level of indebtedness of the global economy, and feeble growth, stagnation or recessions show new financial shocks, wars or other events could lead to a deep crisis in the global economy.

While a few at the top have got richer, the majority of people in the US have not seen the benefits of growth. The presidential election later this year may well return Trump to the White House – what a condemnation of the representatives of the capitalism.

The sick system of capitalism, with investment in production, science and technique at historic lows, is fuelling rage against the system. Two thirds of young people in Britain consider themselves socialist. In the US it is 44%. We are clear, the need for a socialist transformation of society is well overdue.

Alongside capitalist misery, we are also seeing the working class, the only class capable of replacing capitalism with socialism, begin to stamp itself on events in some countries. In October, 4.5 million days were lost to strike action in the US, the highest



**The Israeli state's invasion of the Gaza Strip and constant bombardment has left hundreds of thousands living in "apocalyptic" situations**

for decades. In Germany, Canada, Northern Ireland and Argentina, just to name a few, the working class has taken action.

Among the contributions during the discussion, the uprisings in Sudan and Sri Lanka were brought up to show that people will move into action, and movements can decisively hold power, but without the right leadership and programme, these opportunities can be lost.

**War on Gaza**

And this was true of the momentous mass movements that spread across North Africa and the Middle East during the Arab Spring of the early 2010s. While the brutal war on Gaza continues, the need for a new Arab Spring, fighting for a socialist programme is clear. Egyptian President Sisi is building new refugee camps in the Sinai desert – new prisons for fleeing Palestinians. The interests of Palestinians won't be fought for by the capitalist leaders of Middle Eastern countries.

A mass movement, fighting to break from capitalism and landlordism, would have a massive impact on Palestine and within Israel itself, with the potential to split society on class lines. Israeli capitalism isn't capable of providing safety, security and prosperity to the Israeli working class. Only on a socialist basis, which respects the rights to self-determination of people across the region, can war and poverty be ended.

As Tony Saunio, secretary of the Committee for a Workers'

Teachers taking part in the 2023 strike wave PAUL MATTISSON



International (CWI), who replied to the discussion said, against a backdrop of capitalist crisis, social disintegration in many countries, with famines caused by climate change, disruptions to supply chains and ultimately profit, broad support for socialist ideas can grow. The importance of the CWI's work now, to build the embryos of new mass parties of the working class prepared to take the steps needed to replace rotten capitalism with international socialism, is clear.

### Britain in turmoil

Many of the worldwide processes discussed are being posed particularly sharply in Britain. Judy Beishon, introducing the discussion on Britain, started by describing the sickness and crisis of British capitalism, compared to other advanced capitalist countries. This has made it harder than ever for the capitalist class to hold back working-class struggle.

The Tories are in complete disarray, a "broken tool for British capitalism" there is no "major issue that has not caused crisis for the Tories." And there are a lot of points of crisis; the longest sustained fall in living standards in 70 years – since records began; 11 million people facing food insecurity. Public services "cut into the bone" – sharply seen in the NHS. And the crisis in local government funding, the meeting heard from delegates involved in fights against the cuts in places including Nottingham and Birmingham, where the Labour-led councils' unwillingness to fight has meant massive budget cuts and council tax hikes being proposed.

All of these issues, as well as the brutal job losses at Tata Steel, will land on the desk of a Starmer-led government on day one. Judy made the point that Starmer will come to power not due to enthusiasm for a Labour government but due to the widespread hatred of the Tories. The next government will take power with an economy that has no prospect for sustained and healthy growth. And as Judy put it: "Starmer won't emerge from a chrysalis as a Robin Hood butterfly when he comes to power." The dropping of the £28 billion green investment target and repeated assurances they will govern with 'fiscal

responsibility' show already the nature of a Starmer-led government.

But Starmer will come to power with the organised working class having flexed its muscles in the strike wave. In a separate discussion on the Socialist Party's work in the unions, Rob Williams, industrial organiser, took stock as the first stage of the strike wave comes to an end. Spurred into action by the cost-of-living crisis, the fight of hundreds of thousands of workers over pay exploded the working class back onto the scene after a period of relatively low struggle. And, when action was taken, better offers from Sunak or the employers were won.

The role of Socialist Party members in a number of unions to push for coordinated action, with strategies to fight and win were discussed. Congress applauded after hearing the result of Sheila Caffrey standing for vice-president of the NEU getting an impressive 5,500 votes in runner-up position (see page 4).

### Starmer-led government

Working-class action will face a Starmer-led government as the hope against hope that 'anything's better than the Tories' comes up against reality. Already some sections of workers and young people are concluding the need to build an alternative. Judy highlighted that the protests in Britain against the war on Gaza have been some of the largest. The effects of these demonstrations have been to remove a home secretary from power and increase the splits in the Tories, and to, amongst a significant section, deepen the unpopularity of Keir Starmer. As one delegate put it, the refusal to call for a ceasefire vote in November was for Starmer like the 'Iraq War moment' was for Blair, but before he's even taken power!

### Rochdale by-election

The congress took place days after George Galloway won the Rochdale by-election, reflecting a rejection of establishment political parties. Tories, the Liberal Democrats, and Labour – whose 'disowned' candidate Azhar Ali still appeared at the top of the ballot paper as Labour, next to the rose emblem – mustered just 26.7% between them. Sunak's impromptu public address the following evening

shows the capitalist class is shaken by the result. But Sunak's attempts to whip up racism and division in response will only make it worse for the bosses.

While the Socialist Party has important disagreements with Galloway over programme and approach, his election has placed the idea that anti-war candidates can stand in opposition to the establishment on the front pages. Clive Heemskerk, editor of *Socialism Today*, in the reply to the discussion, highlighted that the key now was to develop such electoral breakthroughs towards the task of building a new mass workers' party that is capable of uniting the working class, which Galloway's previous election victories have not achieved. But as the editorial of the March edition of *Socialism Today* states: "On the basis of collaboration with others in the trade union and socialist movement, George Galloway and the Workers' Party could contribute to [the process of building a new mass party of the working class]".

### This year's elections

Flowing from the perspectives discussed, the congress dealt with the tasks relating to this year's elections. While the majority of people will vote Labour as the best way they can see to get the Tories out, pointing towards a working-class alternative is vital. The Socialist Party is part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), which brings together socialists, trade unionists and campaigners under a common banner in elections, organised around a core policy platform giving groups the flexibility to produce their own material and demands from this base. It came out of over a decade of work to fight for working-class political representation under a Blair government. As Lenny Shail, Socialist Party campaigns organiser, made clear in his introduction to the discussion, TUSC isn't a new mass workers' party, but can play an important role in the fight to build one, particularly in the fight for trade unions to take steps to stand candidates that will fight in their interests when plainly the Labour Party isn't.

In this year's local elections, Labour councillors have no excuse not

to fight the cuts from the Tory government and send the bill to a future Starmer government. The appeal for all campaigners and trade unionists to stand in these elections, to provide a pole of attraction to anti-cuts and anti-war campaigners was made.

The general election later this year will be an important opportunity to raise socialist ideas and the need for a new mass workers' party in general. The Socialist Party plans to stand candidates under the TUSC umbrella, and hopes to work with others to meet the 100-candidate threshold for fair media coverage. To fund the Socialist Party's campaign in this election a financial appeal was launched to pay for leaflets, posters, public meeting venues and the resources we need to put forward a fighting socialist alternative in opposition to the pro-capitalist establishment. (See page 5).

### Fighting to build the Socialist Party

The leaflets, papers and placards snapped up at protests against the war on Gaza; new reps and members organising and taking strike action for the first time; and the impact a Starmer-led government will have on working-class consciousness, all point to the need and ability to build a party capable of taking a lead and fighting for socialism.

Delegates voted for and agreed documents on perspectives for struggle in Britain – and flowing from that, priorities and tasks for building the Socialist Party to push struggle forward. Documents, which had been discussed in branches across England and Wales, were amended and agreed. And a new National Committee, to guide the Socialist Party in between national congresses, was elected. Socialist Party members pledged £12,922 to help fund the fight for socialism over the next period.

Delegates and visitors came away from an inspiring weekend ready to fight for socialist change. The massive opportunities to win support for the ideas of socialism and Marxism are posed in the next period. If you want to be a part of that fight, join us today.



**Starmer will come to power with the organised working class having flexed its muscles in the strike wave**

Read more from the Socialist Party on the Rochdale by-election result:

'After the 'Rochdale rising': the fight for workers' politics now' at [socialistparty.org.uk](https://socialistparty.org.uk)



A selection of delegates voting on the documents

# NEU vice-president elections

## Strong result for Sheila Caffrey shows need to organise for a fighting union

SEAN MCCAULEY

NEU WORCESTERSHIRE DISTRICT SECRETARY,  
PERSONAL CAPACITY

**A** fantastic 5,471 votes for a fighting, socialist candidate standing for an activist-led union!

Against enormous odds, Socialist Party member Sheila Caffrey secured a strong first runner-up (two candidates are elected) in the recent National Education Union (NEU) national vice-president elections. Her tremendous campaign had at its heart the pledge to provide a bold lead at the top of the union, while at the same time building the activist, rep-led base of the union.

The machine of the NEU Left (the establishment grouping of which Daniel Kebede, general secretary, and the majority of those on the National Executive are a part) was mobilised to garner support for their two preferred candidates, Sarah Kilpatrick and Ed Harlow. They achieved a greater number of nominations than Sheila from NEU Left-led districts, with public endorsements from the two previous general secretaries. They were elected on 8,949 and 7,942 votes.

### Cutting through

It's obvious, though, that Sheila's message was able to cut through the big hitters' rallying cries for Sarah and Ed, to reach the activists, reps and members. Her message resonated with the experiences of members: demands for an above-inflation, fully funded pay rise for all; the reversal of decades of funding cuts, including in SEND (special educational needs and disability) and early years; a new national contract that sets a firm limit on the hours teachers can be expected to work, binding on all employers; an end to supply staff exploitation, with the re-establishment of local authority supply pools; the return of support staff to full-year contracts and winning negotiating rights for support staff.

Sheila and Socialist Party members in local districts, at conference and on the National Executive, have played a vital role, articulating the anger of members. The union has moved from a position in 2021 of the leadership effectively believing that the NEU could never again win a ballot for national action, to one where not only did we beat the undemocratic Tory anti-union ballot thresholds twice last year, but we took eight days of solid strike action to force the government to improve its pay offer.

### Maintain pressure

We need to maintain that pressure on the leadership of the union now more than ever. Unfortunately, the election of Sarah and Ed, sitting alongside the current president and past-president, will only strengthen the core at the top of the union that is not up for a serious fight. They voted to postpone strike action in May and June last year; they voted against the early



NEU strikers strike 2023 PAULA MITCHELL

announcement of dates for our June and July action, which would have allowed reps to get trips and transition days moved so turnout could be maximised. Most importantly, they voted to accept the 6.5%, of which at least 3% was not fully funded, when many in the union felt we could have won more.

There is a wide layer of activists asking searching questions of NEU Left supporters in their own districts, at national meetings and at conference. Reps who stepped up during Covid and since have had firsthand experience of organising strike action in their workplaces, and want to know that the union leadership is serious about leading a strong fight

and will not step back at the first opportunity.

### New left needed

This was demonstrated in July last year during the debate over whether to accept or reject the 6.5%. The number of members who signed up to attend the initial online meeting of the Educators Say No group set up by those on the left of NEU Left, including members of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), far exceeded the 1,000 participant capacity.

Yet the opportunity to establish a new activist-led broad left was squandered. Despite breaking with the majority of the NEU Left in that period, the SWP patched up its

differences with the rest of the NEU Left and used the Educators Say No group as a place to push the conservative, establishment candidates as 'pro-strike' fighters.

Sheila's vote reflects that frustration amongst a layer of activists and further demonstrates the potential and desire for the establishment of a new activist-led broad left, to help organise the pressure of members on the leadership.

### Vote 'yes'

The NEU is currently holding an online indicative ballot for teachers over pay and funding and will launch the same for support staff in mid-March. Getting those votes out, winning the ballots, and smashing the thresholds are the main focus for us all at the moment.

National conference is fast approaching. It will be there that any decision to move to a formal postal ballot will be taken. The stated aim of the leadership is to take action in the summer term.

We must, however, ensure that there is no backtracking from this in the face of a general election. Although committed to the plan to strike in the summer, Daniel Kebede has previously expressed a desire not to strike until the autumn. Our pay offer will have been implemented by then.

What's more, there will be substantial pressure exerted on all union leaders by Labour not to 'rock the boat' before what is most likely to be a Labour victory. Likewise, if Starmer is victorious, many union tops will want to hold back action, arguing that Labour will work with the unions. We, and most NEU activists, have little faith that Labour will make a difference.

### Starmer-led government

Starmer has made it clear that it will be business as usual and that public spending will not change. Let's not forget that the week before the Tories caved in last year and offered the 6.5% recommended by the School Teachers Review Body, Rachel Reeves, Labour's shadow chancellor, went on record saying Labour would not honour it if it were in power!

As Socialist Party members, we will continue to build the strongest fightback by developing a strategy to put forward at the National Executive and to campaign for in our districts, whilst simultaneously reaching out to the 5,500 members who voted for a socialist, activist candidate in this election.

This is a strong base to build a new broad left from, to create a fighting union that can win for all of education and all education workers.



**Reps want to know the leadership is serious about leading a strong fight**

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# Only 'Sheriff of Nottingham' opposes taking from the poor

GARY FREEMAN

NOTTINGHAM SOCIALIST PARTY AND NOTTINGHAM SAVE OUR SERVICES STEERING COMMITTEE (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

Two Labour councillors referred to Nottingham as the "rebel city" at this year's budget-setting meeting. Another councillor previously said that the swingeing cuts proposed by the council will destroy the fabric of the city. But they all voted for cuts.

Shugufah Quddos, who holds the ceremonial post of 'Sheriff of Nottingham', was the only councillor to vote against. She presented the Nottingham City Unison petition, with over 1,500 signatures, with 200 protesting outside. She said that when she "became Sheriff, I pledged to amplify the voices of the people of Nottingham".

Three 'Independents' abstained. And over 20% of 50 Labour councillors did not turn up.

But Labour councillor Shugufah was the only one to bravely oppose the budget.

She resisted pressure that was

placed on her inside and outside the council chamber. For example, Labour sought to justify its unjustifiable vote by saying that if the budget was defeated, there would be no services and no wages, and one councillor disparagingly described a vote against as "vanity".

Some Labour councillors talked about protecting services whilst cutting them, and hoping that a future Labour government will fund councils more than the Tories. If that's the case, then refuse to make the cuts and give Starmer the bill.

But the Labour leader of the council admitted the opposite in a recent radio debate with Auvil from Nottingham Save Our Services (SOS). Then council leader David Mellen said that we shouldn't expect anything early from a Labour government.

The council may have voted for the cuts in the council chamber. But the trade union and community fight continues, and Nottingham SOS isn't going away. If they come for our services, we won't let them take them.

# Protest as Birmingham Labour slashes services

JONATHAN OSAKO

BIRMINGHAM NORTH SOCIALIST PARTY

Unite, GMB and Unison unions organised a protest against Birmingham's Labour council's cuts. The flame of anger thawed the numbing cold and rain.

Fiery speeches drew 100 people from all walks of life to the streets, including many children and older people, against the cowardly and extortionate decision of the council. The union-led protest on 2 March was

attended by workers from the council, NHS, education and the fire brigade.

## Workers back strike

87% of GMB members have backed strike action in an indicative vote to resolve equal pay claims that total £867 million. Unite has raised concern over the budget cuts to the city's Labour MPs as well, but have so far been met with a wall of silence.

The Tory government is weak, and a general election is taking place this year. Birmingham council is in a

good position to demand more funding from central government. But, instead, it cut funding for the most vulnerable in the community, while increasing the council tax on struggling people by 21%.

The council has wasted £130 million on its still-not-functioning IT system. An IT expert told me that a programme of this scope should cost a fraction of this.

The decision of the council reflects the attitude of the Tories, but also Keir Starmer's Labour. Rather than taking responsibility for their mistakes, they make working people pay the price.

This shows the need for a new mass party that answers to the workers, and not the wealthy lobbyists, and why the Socialist Party is part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) election stand.



PHOTO: NICK HART

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# Lab-Lib continue South Glos Tory cuts

DAN SMART

SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE UNISON SECRETARY (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

Unison and National Education Union (NEU) members, facing job losses and key services being slashed, lobbied South Gloucestershire Council budget meeting. They were joined by a crowd chanting: "When they say cut back, we say fight back", as councillors voted through millions of cuts to vital public services.

A new Lib-Dem/Labour coalition took over South Glos last May, which was a cause for some optimism among Unison members. But this has

rapidly faded, as the new administration continues the previous Tory administration's four-year cuts budget.

Unison members in mentoring service Breakthrough spoke about the horrendous blow closing their service is going to have on vulnerable people. They movingly pointed out how short-term savings are being made at the expense of people's lives.

Service users will face a much poorer quality of care under a private provider, at much greater expense to the council in the long term.

As well, libraries are set to be slashed by half a million; One Stop Shop hours are being reduced, limiting access to

advice and frontline services; housing services are losing officers, in the midst of a housing crisis, and in a situation where migrants are camping outside the council building, desperate for accommodation.

South Glos Council has been subjected to 14 years of Tories austerity. But now it feels even worse.

We are down to the most vital services being cut. And we are only one year into the four-year budget.

This was the first lobby of South Glos Council in many years – a key step in building a movement which can defeat all cuts.

We are developing reps, officers

and union activists – many are new to these battles – prepared to take on councillors who vote for cuts. Adult social staff and bin workers in South Glos have taken strike action in the last year (see [socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk)).

If councillors continue to sell off and tear down the services that working-class people have fought hard for, our chants will only get louder and louder.

Unison will continue to fight against every cut in South Glos. And the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) will be standing hundreds of candidates around the country this May to make a stand.

# General election finance appeal: Dig deep for a socialist voice

NICK CHAFFEY

SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

Strikes. Demonstrations. The Socialist Party has raised its voice, providing a socialist alternative and a strategy to take the struggle forward.

We can't be certain of tomorrow's events. We live in times of sharp turns and sudden changes. But we do know that a general election is looming. We know council elections will take place on 2 May. So we must prepare.

If we want socialist ideas to be heard in the general election, we are going to need to find the resources to stand. Local elections are free and we must exploit that to the full, by standing council candidates as widely as possible this May. But general elections come at a cost.

The Socialist Party is preparing

to stand 30 to 40 candidates as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC). For every candidate we want to stand we need a £500 deposit and the money to produce leaflets for the Royal Mail freepost we can send to every home in each constituency we stand in, a minimum of £700 for 40,000 A5 leaflets. A minimum target of £50,000 is necessary.

That is a large sum for a small organisation of workers and young people squeezed by the cost-of-living crisis. But we have to rise to the challenge and dig deep to have a socialist voice that can reach thousands of voters, strikers, anti-war protesters, workers and young people.

The Socialist Party has a history of working-class struggle, of past victories that should inspire us for the tasks ahead. We have a clear fighting

socialist programme that can point a way out for humanity in this era of war and economic crisis. We have confidence in the working class and the roots we have built up in the trade unions and communities that can fight back and win in the period ahead.

In the 1980s we turned bold socialist ideas into the election victories of Terry Fields, Pat Wall and Dave Nellist, workers' MPs on a worker's wage who gave a voice to the epic battles against Thatcher.

Workers and youth today are looking for answers and a way to fight back. There is no mass party representing the interests of the working class. The political vacuum is enormous and we can only partially fill it.

Based on the huge events that are coming, thrown up out of capitalist

crisis, the organised working class in the trade unions will be compelled to fight in the electoral field.

These steps, towards the development of a new mass workers' party will raise the sights of the working class as a conscious force to fight for socialist change.

It would be a mistake not to take seriously the role we can and must play. We need to grasp every opportunity in the general election to build support for socialist ideas – raising the necessary finances for that fight is the challenge we must rise to.

How much can you give? Pledges to be made by 2 May, and paid by the end of June. Pledges can be sent now to [isai@socialistparty.org.uk](mailto:isai@socialistparty.org.uk) and donations can be paid at [socialistparty.org.uk/donate](http://socialistparty.org.uk/donate) with "GE appeal" in the comments.



PHOTO: TOMMY LIVERPOOL

# International Women's Day 2024

## 'DOWN WITH WAR, FORWARD WITH SOCIALISM!'

BEA GARDNER  
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

International Women's Day 2024, 8 March, takes place in a world in turmoil. Since January, the conflict in the Middle East and horrifying onslaught on Gaza have intensified. The war in Ukraine is also showing no end in sight. The misery and brutality of war is set against a backdrop of global economic instability and crisis, with the working class hit hard by the rising cost of living globally.

Yet despair and desperation is only one half of the story. In the past 18 months, we have seen a new generation of working-class fighters, many of whom are women, playing a leading role in strike action across a number of countries. In Britain, nurses have been on strike for a decent pay rise and safe staffing, the first nationwide strike in the Royal College of Nursing's history.

We have also seen the emergence of a mass anti-war movement, with women at the forefront, coming out week after week along with hundreds of thousands of ordinary people across the UK – and internationally – to stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people and calling for an end to the slaughter in Gaza.

International Women's Day was

founded with this spirit of internationalist workers' solidarity, promoting from its origins the shared interests of workers of all countries, not the capitalist exploiters and warmongers.

It was launched by socialists and first held in 1911 as a day to both remember and build for the struggles of women workers. Historically, women workers celebrated 'their day' by participating in mass demonstrations, protests and strikes – a far cry from the corporate sponsored 'official' International Women's Day of recent years. Officially, "Inspire inclusion" is the vague slogan this year.

International Women's Day founders recognised – as the Socialist Party does today – that the liberation of women is fundamentally linked to the need to get rid of capitalism, which not only perpetuates women's oppression, but is also a system of war and conflict.

The founders also understood that, even though women at that time made up a minority of the workforce, overthrowing capitalism and building a new socialist society, based on the democratic control by the majority, would require a united struggle of workers of all genders. This required a conscious approach to organise and build socialist ideas among women.

Historically, a rallying point for International Women's Day

demonstrations has been resistance to war, occupation and national oppression, including within Palestine.

### First Intifada

During what is known as the first Intifada (or 'uprising') beginning in 1987, Palestinian women played an active role organising marches, boycotts, and directly confronting Israeli soldiers. They also set up day centres to look after children, which stayed open late so women could participate in the demonstrations.

Their experience of the uprising demonstrated the potential power that a united movement would have in bringing about both national and gender-based liberation. At the 1988 International Women's Day march, Palestinian women called for an independent state as a means of achieving their liberation.

However, women's role was subsequently thrown back, with women later excluded from participation in demonstrations.

International Women's Day has not been a focal point for struggle against national oppression and war because of some kind of so-called 'natural' tendency towards pacifism, but because of the impact that war and national oppression has on women.

A spotlight is shone on existing



Women march in Russia on International Women's Day 1917

inequalities and oppression in periods of crisis.

Tragically, we see this disproportionate impact unfolding in Gaza now. Israel's offensive within the densely populated Strip has resulted in women and children making up 70% of casualties.



**Workers have nothing to gain from this war, but they stand to lose everything that is dear to them**

- Clara Zetkin after the outbreak of WWI

Women are relied upon by the capitalist system to provide 'free' care for the very young and elderly. In wartime, this adds additional strains and risk. In Gaza, some women have been unable to flee areas because of their caring responsibilities for sick, disabled and elderly family members.

Sexual violence is recognised as a tactic of war.

### War and hunger

There is also the threat of starvation. Though this is particularly acute in Gaza due to the Israeli siege, as one of the founders of International Women's Day, German Marxist Clara Zetkin, wrote in her manifesto against World War One: "The twin-sister of war is hunger".

As the bombing devastates infrastructure and destroys food stores, women face the sharp end of being unable to provide enough food for their families, ultimately going without.

In the face of such devastation and brutality, it can be challenging to see a way out.

Yet even when confronted by the horrors of war, Clara Zetkin urged socialists, and in particular socialist women, to "fight for life".

She argued then – as we do today – that socialism is the only path to peace. In a pamphlet that she was later imprisoned for, she wrote: "In the interests of their profits, they have fanned the hatred among the people, thus contributing to the outbreak of the war... Workers have nothing to gain from this war, but they stand to lose everything that is dear to them".

Along with Rosa Luxemburg and



## WHAT WE STAND FOR

Capitalism is an ailing, crisis-ridden system based on the exploitation of the majority of the world's population by a small, super-rich elite who own most of the wealth and the means of producing it. This way of organising society, in which the pursuit of profit comes before everything else, causes poverty, inequality, environmental destruction, wars and oppression across the globe.

The Socialist Party organises working-class people to fight against the attacks from this rotten system on our lives and livelihoods, and for a socialist alternative: a society which takes the

wealth out of the hands of the super-rich and is democratically run by working-class people to meet the needs of all not the profits of a few.

Building fighting democratic trade unions in the workplaces and a new mass workers' party is a vital part of the struggle to change society along socialist lines.

Because capitalism is a world system, the struggle for socialism must also be international. The Socialist Party is part of the Committee for a Workers' International which organises

across the world. Our demands include:

### WORK, PENSIONS AND BENEFITS

- A £15-an-hour minimum wage for all, without exemptions. For the minimum wage to automatically increase linked to average earnings or inflation, whichever is higher.
- Share out the work. A maximum 32-hour working week with no loss of pay or worsening of conditions. The right to flexible working, under the control of workers not employers. An end to insecure working, for the right to full-time work for all who want it; ban zero-hour contracts.
- All workers to have trade union rates of pay, employment protection, and sickness, parental and holiday rights from day one of employment. End bosses using bogus 'self-employment' as a means to avoid giving workers rights.
- No to austerity through inflation. For all wage rates to be automatically increased at least in line with price rises.
- Open the books of all companies cutting jobs or claiming they can't afford to pay a real living wage. State subsidies,

where genuinely needed, for socially-useful small businesses.

- For trade unions independent of the capitalist state, with members having democratic control over their own policies, constitutions and democratic procedures. For all trade union officials to be regularly elected, subject to recall by their members and paid a worker's wage.
- Reduce the state retirement and pension age to 55. For decent living pensions.
- Replace universal credit and the punitive benefit system with living benefits for all who need them.

### PUBLIC SERVICES

- A massive expansion of public services including the NHS and council services. Reverse all the cuts, kick out the privateers. Bring private social care and childcare facilities into public ownership under democratic control, in order to provide free, high-quality services for all who need them. Expand services for all women suffering violence.
- For local councillors who are committed to opposing austerity and

all cuts to local services, jobs, pay and conditions.

- For a socialist NHS to provide for everyone's health needs, including dental and eye care – free at the point of use and under democratic control. Kick out the private companies! Nationalise the pharmaceutical industry under democratic workers' control and management.
- Renationalise privatised utilities – including rail, mail, water, telecoms and power – under democratic workers' control and management.
- Free, publicly funded and democratically run, good-quality education, available to all at any age. Abolish university tuition fees and write off student debt, end marketisation, and introduce a living grant. No to academisation. For all schools to be under the genuine democratic control of local education authorities, school staff, parents and student organisations.
- The right to a safe secure home for all. For the mass building of genuinely affordable, high-quality, carbon-neutral council housing. For rent controls that cap





Devastation in Gaza PHOTO: NAAMAN OMAR APAINAGES/CC

others, she continued to fight for international socialism, appealing for international workers' solidarity. They used International Women's Day demonstrations as a rallying point for this message, even when large sections of both the women's and socialist movement fell behind 'their' nations' flags and supported the imperialist war.

### February 1917

In 1917, a huge step toward peace was made when the women textile workers of Petrograd, Russia, downed tools on International Women Day and marched towards the Tsar's palace, demanding bread and peace. The 'February Revolution' had begun.

Over two million Russian soldiers had died in the war and there were huge food shortages. Though these women faced armed troops, they

persuaded them not to fire on the demonstrators but to join them.

In his writings on the Russian Revolution, Leon Trotsky comments on the bold role played by women, describing how women went "up to the cordons more boldly than men" and would take hold of soldier's rifles, commanding them to "put down your bayonets; join us!"

They also called on male workers to join them. Within days, the Tsar was gone. Eight months later, the working class had taken power in the 'October Revolution,' led by the Bolshevik Party.

Leading Bolshevik Alexandra Kollontai commented: "The 1917 Working Women's Day has become memorable in history. On this day, the Russian women raised the torch of proletarian revolution and set the world on fire."

Though it was women, because of the urgency of their situation, who "lit the fire," it was the Bolshevik Party under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky that played the crucial role in translating the huge anger against capitalism and its warmongering leaders, into a strategy for taking power.

Trotsky put it, explaining the crucial role of a revolutionary party: "Without a guiding organisation, the energy of the masses would dissipate like steam not enclosed in a piston

box. But nevertheless, what moves things is not the piston or the box, but the steam".

The social, political and material position of women was dramatically transformed after the revolution. Women gained freedoms their counterparts in capitalist countries like Britain were years away from achieving, including the right to vote, equal pay for equal work, divorce, as well as the introduction of free nurseries and communal laundries. (See 'Lessons of Russia 1917 for women's struggle today' at [socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk))

In the West, women's mobilisation in the workplace during the first and second world wars led to dramatic changes in how women saw their role in society. The struggle for women's rights has since won important reforms, and in many ways improved social attitudes. In the period that followed World War Two, significant concessions were granted to workers in Britain, including the establishment of the NHS, expansion of council house building and so on.

### Capitalism

However, under capitalism, positive social changes and gains are ultimately constrained. Not least because capitalism is in crisis, unable to offer such gains on a permanent basis, but also because inequality and division

are ingrained in the capitalist system. Capitalism is based on the exploitation of the majority by a minority.

To end sexism, misogyny and oppression we first need to end capitalism. Capitalism incorporated pre-existing gender inequality into its fabric to suit its economic and political interests and it continues to reproduce such division.

Bringing an end to the capitalist system requires a united class struggle of all workers – of all genders. It is even clearer today than it was 100 years ago, that it is impossible to transform society without the participation of women. Women now make up a large proportion of the global working class, including making up the majority of trade union members in the UK.

The working class is central to changing society because of the role it plays in the production and delivery of all the goods and services we need; because of that it can be unified by its common interests to exercise its strength against those of the capitalist exploiters.

By taking the big companies and banks into democratic public ownership, a plan of production can be developed to meet the needs of all. By taking all the levers of power out of the hands of the capitalist class and establishing working-class democratic control of society, the basis can be laid for the

socialist transformation of society – and with it the start of the process of unpicking the historic foundations of women's oppression. The genuine collaboration of socialist states internationally can bring an end to war for good.

This International Women's Day, join us in the fight for a future, in Britain and internationally, that is free from war, inequality, poverty, exploitation and oppression. As Zetkin declared in her manifesto, "down with war, forward with socialism".

## SOCIALISM TODAY

### Monthly magazine of the Socialist Party

March issue includes...

- Women in the revolution
- Defending women's rights today
- The fight for workers' politics
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### It doesn't have to be like this

Women and the struggle for socialism  
Available at [leftbooks.co.uk/](http://leftbooks.co.uk/)



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

### DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

- For united working-class struggle to end discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, disability, sexuality, age, and all other forms of prejudice and oppression.
- Repeal the anti-trade union laws and all others that trample over civil liberties. For the right to protest and to strike! End police harassment. For the police to be accountable to local committees, made up of democratically elected representatives of trade unions, local community organisations and local authorities.
- For the right to choose when and whether to have children – for the right to access abortion, contraception and fertility treatment for all who need it.

- For the right to asylum – with democratic community control and oversight of emergency funding resources. No to racist immigration laws.
- Expand democracy. For the abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords. For all MPs to be subject to the right of recall by their constituents at any time, and to only receive a worker's wage. For proportional representation and the right to vote at 16.
- For the right of nations to self-determination. For an independent socialist Scotland and for a socialist Wales, both part of a voluntary socialist confederation of Wales, England, Scotland and Ireland.
- Oppose the dictatorship of the billionaire owners of the media. For the nationalisation of newspaper printing facilities, radio, TV and social media platforms. Access to these facilities should be under democratic control, with political parties' coverage being allocated in proportion to the popular vote at elections.
- For a new mass workers' party, based on the trade unions, and drawing together workers, young people

and activists from workplaces, and community, environmental, anti-racist and anti-cuts campaigns, to provide a fighting, socialist political alternative to the pro-big business parties.

### SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

- No to imperialist wars and occupations!
- Take the wealth off the super-rich! For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and the banking system that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working-class control and

management. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need, not to the fat cats.

- A democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, and in a way that safeguards the environment.
- No to the EU bosses' club. Organise a campaign with European socialists and workers' organisations to use the talks on post-Brexit relations to tear up the EU pro-capitalist rules. For a real collaboration of the peoples of Europe on a socialist basis as a step towards a socialist world.

Do you agree? Join the fightback!

## JOIN THE SOCIALISTS

- Visit [socialistparty.org.uk/join](http://socialistparty.org.uk/join)
- or call 020 8988 8777
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# Sanctuary housing workers' strike: Through the eyes of a new rep



UNITE HOUSING WORKERS BRANCH

**CHARLES CHRISTODOULOU**  
UNITE REP, SANCTUARY HOUSING

*The London housing maintenance team in Sanctuary Housing is taking strike action on pay and conditions and for union recognition.*

It was raining hard as I approached the picket line at 7.10am. Originally I thought: 'There's no one here.' I could see our Unite branch chair, Paul, standing, waiting... and then they started to flock in. Until we were at 27!

I thought to myself: 'We are ready now.' About half an hour in, our senior management came towards us with a shocked face. They didn't expect so many, raising our morale.

We were here to fight for recognition of our union, and also our pay rise. We received a pay cut last year

– RPI inflation was at 11.4%, we received 4%. We now know we have been given 4% again, a further pay cut. And now we are also seeking parity with the office staff for our holidays and sickness benefits.

We were contacted by workers in Canterbury asking to join the union. Our colleagues in Essex were asked by management to cover some of our jobs, and they asked: 'Why do we have to cover London jobs?' When they were told it was because we are striking they refused to cross our picket line, and this lifted all our spirits.

We have now given notice for further action which will start on 20 March, a further week split over two weeks, and I see this as an opportunity to engage with the areas that have approached us. We can join them up to the union. This year's campaign

for pay will be with our brothers and sisters in Ely, Canterbury, Essex, Rochford and Oxfordshire. I hope with the support of Unite!

*Steve O'Donnell, London and Eastern Regional Secretary of Unite, joined the picket and pledged support for the strike. Members of the Unite housing workers branch distributed leaflets on some Sanctuary estates before the strike explaining the issues. Tenants came out of their homes to tell leafleters how much they supported the workers. On the picket line tenants brought money and some home-baked cakes.*

● Contact the branch to offer support, or if you are a housing worker wanting to get organised: [info@housingworkers.org.uk](mailto:info@housingworkers.org.uk)

## Reinstate Tom Watkins! End bullying and anti-union attacks at Cardiff Labour council



SOCIALIST PARTY

**JONATHAN GOLDING**  
CARDIFF EAST SOCIALIST PARTY

On 29 February, members of Cardiff Socialist Party and Trades Council joined workers from the waste management department and members of Unite the Union to lobby the council cabinet for the reinstatement of Tom Watkins, a Unite rep of 15 years. Tom had served for 33 years at Cardiff Council in the street cleansing department, but was fired last July.

His 'offence' is trivial, warranting a verbal warning at most. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that he was sacked because he is a

good union rep. Cardiff bin workers have been taking bold strike action against the Labour council over pay and cuts.

Tom has always taken his job seriously and had an unblemished record. He had twice reported a damaged bin, but when nothing was done, used his own tool to repair the bin. Furthermore, he was accused of insubordination for not following an order from a supervisor, even though the supervisor admitted that Tom might not have heard him. And that's it!

Tom was sacked by a management who, we are told, have themselves committed greater breaches, and have

not been subject to any disciplinary action. Tom's 'mistake' was in having a conscientious approach to his job. The union can only conclude that he has been victimised as a good rep. His sacking is yet another example of anti-union actions by Cardiff Council.

The campaign demands that councillors intervene with management to secure Tom's reinstatement and, in so doing, demonstrate their support for the principles of natural justice and trade union rights. To do nothing would be to accept the right of the managers to act in a callous, anti-trade union manner against their workers.

Tom's sacking has echoes of the Post Office scandal, when Post Office managers thought that they could destroy people's lives with impunity. The campaign will continue with a lobby of the next full council meeting in March.

Get all the latest union news  
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stewardsnetwork](http://nationalshop.stewardsnetwork.org.uk)  
NSSF bulletin: [shopstewards.net](http://shopstewards.net)

## Stop press: UCU elections Duncan Moore elected

Socialist Party member Duncan Moore has been elected to the National Executive Committee of the University and College Union (UCU) representing members in Further Education. See next week's Socialist for analysis of UCU's general secretary and NEC elections.

## Reading ISS workers strike over failure to pay Covid lump sum



ISS strikers SOCIALIST PARTY

**STEVE BELL**  
UNISON HEALTH SGE, PERSONAL CAPACITY

Over 40 ISS-employed health support staff at Prospect Park Hospital in Reading picketed their workplace on 29 February. Their strike is over the employer's failure to pay the £1,600 lump sum that has been awarded to most staff nationally on NHS terms and conditions.

Pat Kenny, a Unison regional organiser, told supporters that ISS had received the payment for the lump sum from the NHS, but were refusing to give it to the workforce!

He also reported that ISS management was trying to get staff from other sites to cover the strike, but struggled to find them, resulting in management having to undertake the work normally done by the striking staff.

The workers were striking initially for three days and then plan for another two day strike. But they fear that the intransigence of ISS management may mean they have to take further action. However, they are a

determined and solid union group, having seen their membership grow from a minority of the workforce into a majority because of how they have been treated.

I addressed the rally and gave solidarity greetings, and pledged to raise the profile of the strike not only in the region, as the Unison branch secretary for a neighbouring county NHS branch, but also at Unison's national Health Service Group Executive. I pointed out that this multinational company makes millions out of the NHS from predominantly the lowest-paid staff, and yet won't pay staff what they are owed. That is a reason why we should bring all the contracted firms like ISS back into the NHS, so that all NHS staff receive the pay recognition they deserve.

● Unite members at Barts NHS Trust and in Dudley are fighting over the same issue. Workers in East Kent just scored a victory on this issue when their Trust agreed to pay the lump sum

## Join the fightback JOIN THE SOCIALISTS

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# Pro-cuts, anti-democracy Newham Labour exposed

## Pressure pushes alternative budgets that challenge cuts

## Outrageous arrest of local activists

JAMES IVENS  
EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

A 50/50 split in the Labour Group, two alternative budgets backing local campaign demands – and the midnight arrest of anti-cuts activists. The pro-austerity Labour administration in Newham is in turmoil, and lashing out under pressure from union, community and anti-war campaigns.

Political developments in the east London borough and wider society have ramped up this pressure. The 'Newham Independents' group of councillors now has three seats, expressing local anger at crumbling council services and Labour's defence of the war on Gaza.

Newham Trades Union Council, the coordinating body for local unions, put forward a detailed anti-austerity 'people's budget'. The leader of the Independents, Mehmood Mirza, is an officer of the trades council. The trades council called on the Independents, and all councillors opposed to cuts, to support that budget, as part of campaigning to win the needed funds from Westminster.

### Sweating

Sweating in the face of a growing challenge, the local authority's ruling Labour Group was split down the middle in advance of the meeting. Mayor Rokhsana Fiaz's initial budget proposal was defeated on the casting vote of the chair. The budget finally moved, however, kept the headline attack of £22 million cuts, including to SEND education.

The Independents joined the trades council's lively protest outside the budget-setting meeting on 29 February. Councillor Mirza announced an alternative budget, including no redundancies of ordinary council workers, municipal takeover of Stratford's suddenly closed indoor market, and a rent freeze for stallholders at Queen's Market. All are demands of local union and community campaigns.

Under pressure from the council's finance officer, the Independent budget also included concessions such as a council tax hike of 3.99% – one point less than Labour's. Lois Austin of Newham and East London Socialist Party spoke to oppose any rise in austerity taxes, but support the challenges to other Labour attacks.

A second alternative budget from the two Green councillors also mixed demands from local campaigns with concessions to the austerity



framework. Nonetheless, the rising counter-pressure of working-class anger is evident.

Mayor Fiaz opened the council meeting with a tirade against anti-war protests "crossing the fine line" into "bullying and intimidation" of warmongering politicians, citing a meeting she had held with Tory prime minister Rishi Sunak. She then drew parallels with those opposing Labour budget cuts.

### Not allowed to speak

In the debate over the budget, the Labour chair cut off Councillor Mirza just as he reached the no-redundancies point. The mayor had been allowed to speak over time. The public gallery loudly demanded "let him speak!" – forcing the chair to do so.

All Labour councillors were roundly heckled for their flimsy attempts to defend austerity. The chair used this as a pretext to clear the gallery and continue the budget debate without that pressure. With the public expelled, Labour alleged that the gallery's heckling amounted to an antisemitic attack on Councillor Josh Garfield, who had got up to defend the austerity budget.

Following these allegations, two members of Newham Socialist Labour – Jeremy Corbyn supporters forced out of Labour by the party's right wing – were arrested in their homes at five to midnight on 1 March, and a third at 8am.

They were kept in custody for over 24 hours on suspicion of "antisemitic hissing" from the gallery, which all three deny. In reality, this is a political attack.

### Labour fears movement

Newham Labour feels it has scores to settle – and more importantly, fears the growing political boldness of the anti-austerity movement. It is following Rishi Sunak's lead in trying to clamp down on democratic protest and political alternatives to austerity, war and racism.

Newham and East London Socialist Party opposes Newham Labour's austerity budget, and these arrests of anti-cuts protesters. The right to protest, and the struggle against war and austerity, would be greatly strengthened by a united stand, in Newham and nationally, in the general election, as a step towards a new mass party of the working class.

# Robust response needed to Queen Mary uni attack on the right to protest

BEA GARDNER  
UCU MEMBER

The University and College Union (UCU) offices at Queen Mary University (QM) were recently broken into by security who forcibly removed UCU posters displaying solidarity with Palestine (see 'Gaza – Queen Mary uni management orders break-in of union office' at socialistparty.org.uk).

The raid is a blatant attack on the right of trade unions to independently organise. It is censorship of the UCU's democratic decision to protest the onslaught in Gaza.

### Hostile management

QM management has a hostile approach toward the unions, and was one of those imposing a 100% dock in UCU members' pay for participating in last summer's marking boycott.

As well as attempting to attack workers' rights with 'minimum service levels' anti-strike laws, and the right to protest over Gaza, the Tories have made freedom of speech on campuses a flashpoint with the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act.

In reality, they mean freedom of speech for the bosses, warmongers and their defenders. They are attempting to assert authority within universities, particularly over

left-wing students who are increasingly critical of big business influence in education. That now includes anger at the cosy relationship many universities have with the arms industry and their investment links with Israel.

UCU's 'Exposed' campaign is directed at this divisive interference. However, to date the campaign has been limited primarily to an online webpage. Attacks such as on QM UCU demonstrate the need to actively mobilise to defend members' rights, and to campaign for unity between staff and students. While the UCU general secretary has made some critical comments on X/Twitter, to date there has been no official statement condemning this incident.

### National demo

Socialist Party members call on the leadership of UCU, as well as the self-described 'democratic socialist' Aspire-led Tower Hamlets council where QM is located, to condemn the actions of QM management. UCU and the wider union movement must make a robust response. We demand the leadership calls a national demonstration in defence of QM UCU and against the ongoing attacks to trade union organising rights and freedom of speech. See socialistparty.org.uk for a model motion for union branches and trades councils.

# Assaulted by Tory councillor for raising a question about Gaza

JENNY HURLEY  
LANCASHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY

Campaigners in Chorley, Lancashire attended a public council meeting on 27 February to ask why, despite it being the policy of the Labour majority on the council, no public statement calling for a ceasefire in Gaza was being debated. In response, I was assaulted by a Tory councillor and pushed towards the door, captured on video.

Chorley residents feel strongly that, after our constituency MP and speaker of the commons Lindsay Hoyle abused parliamentary procedure for the recent Gaza ceasefire vote, our elected representatives should take a clear stand.

After submitting public questions in advance, campaigners used our supplementary questions to ask about the lack of any public statement on Gaza.

It was during these questions that CEO Chris Sinnott shut down the meeting and campaigners held up signs saying "Chorley Borough Council: Silent on Genocide."

Councillor Craig Southern, a Tory

representative for Euxton South, Mawdesley and Croston, rushed at me shouting, grabbed my clothes and started trying to push me out of the room until an usher and member of the public stopped him.

We have already had our voice taken away by our MP, Lindsay Hoyle. Where is our voice now? Is Chorley now the most undemocratic place in Britain? We heard a lot about MPs being threatened, but who is going to protect the public from our elected representatives?

### We won't stop

Chorley for Palestine, which organised the protest, will continue campaigning. And we will continue to fight for a political voice for the anti-war movement and working-class people. As part of that, I am preparing to stand in the 2 May local elections as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, for the fourth time – this time against the Labour leader of the council. We are putting the call out to all others wanting to make a socialist, anti-war challenge to Tories and Labour at the ballot box, to stand alongside us too!

# Suspension of Nigeria Labour Congress nationwide protest: another missed opportunity!

## For a 48-hour general strike as the next step

PELUOLA ADEWALE  
DSM NATIONAL ORGANISING SECRETARY

The Democratic Socialist Movement (DSM) considers the decision of the leadership of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) to suspend the two-day nationwide protest of 27-28 February, after only one day of protest, counterproductive. It was a missed opportunity by the labour movement to roll back the avalanche of neoliberal onslaught of the past nine months and win real concessions that can bring some relief to the mass of suffering workers and poor.

Given the enthusiasm with which the mass of workers trooped out to join the protest on the first day, as well as the huge support the action elicited from commuters and members of the public, the least the NLC should have done was to allow the nationwide protest to run its full course. Then, immediately afterwards, to prepare for a general strike which it had said was the next step. This is the only way to fight and win against a viciously anti-poor capitalist regime where determination to force through its neoliberal poison is in no doubt.

According to a communique released on the evening of 27 February, the NLC NEC-in-session resolved: "To suspend street action for the second day of the protest having achieved overwhelming success thus attained the key objectives of the two-day protest on the first day".

To start with, we are shocked at the claim that the struggle has achieved the "key objectives of the two-day protest on the first day". Which objectives do the NLC NEC mean? As far as we can tell, the crisis of fuel price hikes, naira devaluation, hunger and inflation that is devastating lives, incomes and jobs, for which the two nationwide protests were called, is still very much there. Workers, traders, artisans, students and young people are still struggling to afford three square meals for themselves and their families due to soaring food prices. The prices of cement and other commodities are still high while the naira is still in free fall compared to its value nine months ago. In fact, so desperate is the situation that some people were killed and many injured after they were trampled

during a stampede at a customs facility in Lagos, where they had gone to queue for free bags of rice. How many more Nigerians have to die from hunger and other crises associated with the cost of living before the labour leadership understands that this is a struggle that needs to be waged with all the seriousness it deserves?

Of course, the claim that the protest achieved its objective on the first day is only a figment of the labour leadership's imagination. As the International Monetary Fund (IMF) which, together with the World Bank is behind the current neoliberal offensive in Nigeria, has pointed out, inflation will likely soar up to 44% by the end of the year. This shows how much more devastating the situation can still be unless we continue the mass resistance now.

If anything was achieved on the first day, it is that sections of the working masses used the opportunity to demonstrate their readiness to fight. A momentum was starting to build.

### Workers let down by leaders

In fact, so enthusiastic were layers of the working masses about the struggle that a few activists and working-class elements who did not participate in the protest in Lagos on 27 February turned up on the second day, not knowing that further streets protests had been suspended the night before! The protests would most likely have been even bigger and more successful on the second day than what we saw on the first day! The NLC leadership acted as a brake and made an emergency stop.

Now, suddenly, another excuse has emerged from the NLC leadership. At a press conference organised by the NLC on 28 February, Congress president Joe Ajaero said the government intimidated and harassed the union to suspend the action.

Both from a strategic and tactical point of view, the appropriate response to intimidation and threat of harassment or violence by the state is exactly what the NLC said before the 27-28 February nationwide protest, when it warned the police that, if the state went ahead to attack the protest, then the NLC would embark on an immediate general strike!

Why publicise the government



intimidation only after the action was called off and not use these threats as a further reason to continue to mobilise? It is clear that President Tinubu's base of support is weak. Less than nine million Nigerians voted for him last year, a small minority of the country's roughly 220 million population. Many public sector workers are low paid and often paid in arrears. And even if some public sectors are regularly paid, they suffer from the raging inflation and see how their families and friends are also suffering. So, a serious push by labour could get mass support across the country.

But the truth is that the leadership of the labour movement has a penchant for making bold statements without any plan to actually put words into action. This is the only way to understand the shameful retreat. If the second day protest had gone ahead, there is no doubt that, a solid momentum for a general strike would have been consolidated.

### Retreat

By retreating, not only has the NLC leadership created further doubts in the minds of the working people in its sincerity to lead a consistent struggle, it has also given the capitalist elite a period of grace to further consolidate their neoliberal assault. To be clear, without mass struggles, very little progress will be achieved on any of the issues between now and 13 March when the new ultimatum expires.

By and large, the overall conduct of the NLC so far shows that trade union leaders are yet to learn anything from the past, especially our immediate experiences since the Tinubu regime came to power nine months ago. Between 29 May and now, the NLC and TUC individually and collectively must have called nothing less than four actions (strikes and protests) against the neoliberal policies of fuel subsidy removal with its attendant cost-of-living crisis. Each of these actions were either suspended because the labour leadership wanted to explore further talks with the government or, where the actions were executed, the labour leadership had often expressed hope that the

success of the action would compel the government to reconsider its disastrous policies, only for this not to happen.

What we need at this point is a fighting labour leadership and coherent programme of struggle that involves both fighting over anti-poor policies and the day-to-day issues, with a view to winning real concessions. Also needed is to make the necessary political and organisational preparations for the working people to seize political power from the capitalists in order to establish a workers' and poor people's government that can run the country in the interest of all.

Our experience over the past two decades of civil rule shows that no section of the capitalist elite can be trusted to run the country in the interests of the working people and poor. We need a sharp break from capitalism to pave the way for a socialist transformation of the country.

The first step is for worker activists everywhere to begin to campaign within their unions for immediate preparations for a 48-hour general strike as soon as the 14-day ultimatum expires on 13 March. This can take the form of organising workers' meetings on the shop floor and communities to collect signatures mandating each industrial union to vote for a general strike as the next step.

### Determined struggle

Workers must insist that the trade union leadership leads a determined struggle. Those unwilling to fight because they are compromised with the ruling party and the state should step aside. There should also be a continuation of independent actions by the working masses, youth and pro-masses' organisations, something that actually contributed to the pressure that forced the NLC to call the nationwide protest on 26-27 February in the first place.

We also need to call for either the rebuilding of the Labour Party as a democratic, non-monetised party, or the formation of an entirely new mass workers' party, in either case with a socialist programme. After all is said and done, without the working class taking political power in its own hands, no lasting, significant real change can be achieved. With a workers' and poor people's government on a socialist programme, it will be possible to begin to use Nigeria's wealth to meet the needs of all and not the greed of a few by nationalising the key sectors of the economy under democratic workers' control and management.

This must be our ultimate aim!

# 'Carer's referendum' exposes rot in Republic of Ireland's capitalist constitution

MILITANT LEFT (CWI IRELAND)

On 8 March, voters in the Republic of Ireland face two referenda to change the constitution. The 'Family Amendment' vote proposes to extend constitutional recognition to all families, not just those based on marriage. As such, it represents some further element of progress in Irish society.

As with the Marriage Equality vote in 2015, most working-class people will see this as a step in the right direction and it will likely be voted through. This has not stopped various right-wing politicians and commentators seeking to stir up nonsense arguments against the amendment. It is telling that many of these arguments are rooted in the potential impact on inheritance. As always, the Irish political elite are concerned to protect their property, regardless of the damage they do to wider society.

Far more problematic is the so-called 'Carer's Amendment'. This seeks to remove from the constitution the archaic language of a 'woman's place in the home'. This will be replaced by a constitutional recognition that the family remains the primary caregiver, and that the state will "strive" to provide support to this care.

Since its foundation in 1922, the Irish capitalist state has consistently off-loaded caring responsibilities to religious orders and charities. No matter what party was in government, the policy remained the same: care is to be provided in the home, supplemented by a mind-boggling array of poorly funded charities and religious orders. Over the past 100 years, the state has provided woefully inadequate funding for these charities, with shortfalls often made up at the expense of poor pay and conditions for care staff.

An inevitable consequence of this situation is the unending series of court cases brought by families desperately seeking state support for dependents whose often complex care needs are not being met. The state, fights these cases with a grim determination. It has no hesitation in imposing years, and sometimes decades, of additional suffering upon these families, while these cases make their way through the court system.

This attitude is rooted in the extreme fiscal conservatism of the Irish establishment, which sees the provision of basic social services as fundamentally a waste of taxpayers' money. Contrast this with the same establishment repeatedly bailing out big-business interests when they run into difficulty. The most recent example was when the banking sector crashed in 2008, the state guaranteed the liabilities of all Irish banks overnight, over €450 billion, based on a 'back-of-an-envelope' calculation. The consequence of this was the

€64 billion bank bailout and years of crushing austerity, which had a devastating impact on disabled people and carers.

There is a growing backlash against the 'Carer's Amendment' as disabled people and their families see that it will make no material difference to their lives. If the Carer's Amendment passes, they will be left with an empty promise that the state will 'strive' to provide care. This, in effect, means the endless court cases will continue as the state seeks to define 'strive' in the meanest, most penny-pinching, way possible. One inevitable consequence of this will be a further curtailment of disabled people's right to live independently with the necessary support.

The socialist slogan 'from each according to their ability, to each according to their need' is a powerful orientating point in the debate on the Carer's Amendment. A socialist

society is not based on the accumulation of vast wealth and profits by a tiny elite. Instead, the wealth generated by our collective labour would be used to address human need, in all its complexity.

People would have a right to access support and funding to meet their needs. Instead of pretending to 'strive' to supporting the provision of care, a socialist society would ensure that resources were available to those who need them. As there would be no billionaires or millionaires in a socialist society, the resources that these currently hoard would be put to better use.

The Carer's Amendment referendum exposes the need for a universal public health system which includes a public care system. Funded by general taxation, this system would ensure that care needs were met and that stressful, time-consuming litigation would no longer be necessary.

Regardless of how the vote on this amendment goes on 8 March, it is likely that there will be little improvement in the lot of those affected by it. A constitution under capitalism has as its primary focus the protection of the profit-system and the interests of those who benefit from this system.

This particular referendum has drawn out into public view one of the fundamental, of many, dysfunctions of the Irish capitalist state - its abdication of any responsibility for care. It is a shameful legacy and highlights, yet again, that the Irish 'Republic' is anything but for many of its citizens.



## 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



## INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

# WOMEN FIGHTING BACK TO PROTECT OUR RIGHTS!

### SOCIALIST STUDENTS MEMBERS

Attacks on women and women's rights are being met with protest and mass resistance.

The dismantling of Roe v Wade in the US, which saw the removal of abortion rights from millions of women, was met with protests. A mass movement led by young women followed the murder of Mahsa Amini by the 'morality police' in Iran. Mass movements in Latin America have forced governments to legalise or relax restrictions on abortion.

Women and girls face sexism, sexual harassment and violence. In all zones of war and conflict, there is escalating violence against women and girls. Working-class people are struggling under the cost-of-living crisis, from low pay and growing debt, and women are more likely to have childcare responsibilities and be in low-paid or precarious work.

Tory policies have put a decent education out of reach. We are crammed into overcrowded campuses, our staff are run ragged, and there is little extra support.

The capitalist establishment wants to divide working-class people against each other to divert the anger against them and their brutal, failing system.

But they also fear a new generation of women fighting for our rights!

A general election is coming. But Keir

Starmer's Labour government will offer no route to genuinely challenge sexism or falling living standards. He says his government will halve violence against women and girls - but this is an empty promise from a party siding with big business.

Starmer's 'tough choices' won't allow for investment in street lighting, free public transport, childcare facilities and support services - unless we organise to fight for what we need!

We need to organise on campus, to oppose sexual harassment and sexism and fight to improve our conditions. University managements can't be trusted - students and university workers need democratic oversight over all policies relating to sexism and violence, and provision of support.

Young people need to link up with trade unions, which have led a massive strike wave over the last 18 months. The Socialist Party campaigns for a new mass workers' party that would fight to protect the rights of women and the whole working class. We want workers and young people to stand as candidates - maybe that could include you!

To liberate us all from oppression and exploitation, we have to fight for socialist change: to take the wealth and power out of the hands of the capitalists so society can be democratically organised for the good of us all.



PHOTO: PAUL MATSSON