

TORIES OUT BUT WHO FIGHTS FOR WORKERS?



PHOTOS: PAUL MATTSSON

Build the socialist election stand

DANIEL FORREST
TEESSIDE SOCIALIST PARTY

Prices, interest rates and rents still rising - the squeeze on working-class people across Britain keeps getting tighter.

People are worse off, and our public services are crumbling. For good reason, people hate the Tories and can't wait to get them out!

Was the Tory budget the last big throw of the dice before a general election? A reduction in national insurance by two pence, higher taxes

on vapes and business class flights too. Will this make any meaningful difference to the lives and living standards of working-class people? Absolutely not.

The 'tax cut' will have no effect on those who don't pay national insurance due to low earnings or being out of work. And with income tax thresholds 'frozen', more people pay more tax than they did when Sunak took over.

Ironically, the other major announcement was the scrapping of the 'non-dom tax status', an idea stolen from the Labour Party - which also shows how little ambition Keir Starmer has for his likely upcoming government.

The money raised won't be used to properly fund the NHS, education or local government, however,

it will be used to fund opportunistic Tory tax cuts for their big-business handlers.

The Tories have never been friends of the working class and do not pretend to be. But we don't have to accept that voting for Sir Keir Starmer's Labour is the only option. After all, neither he or his pro-big business shadow chancellor Rachel Reeves will stand up for the working class.

We need a new mass workers' party to fight for our services, jobs and rights. The upcoming local elections on 2 May give us one way to fight back. By standing candidates as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), Socialist Party members are campaigning with others for an end to cuts, and for elected representatives who will fight on our side against the bosses.

the Socialist formerly Militant

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

London elections - fight for a working-class socialist alternative

HELEN PATTISON SOCIALIST PARTY LONDON REGIONAL SECRETARY

There's a palpable feeling when you talk to ordinary Londoners that this expensive city is falling apart. A recent survey found a majority feel the city is getting worse. From housing to health, it's letting people down.

On 2 May, London goes to the polls in the Greater London Authority (GLA) elections to elect the Mayor and 25 assembly members. It's very likely that Labour's Sadiq Khan will be elected again. He became Mayor in 2016, and in 2021 he won again with only 11% voting for him.

Why aren't people enthused? Well for starters, none of the fire stations that Boris Johnson closed have been reopened. And when campaigners have gone to lobby Greater London Assembly meetings on a number of issues, they have been ignored and thrown out.

Khan hasn't used his powers or considerable budget to stand up for ordinary people. He has failed to stand up to the Tories on Transport for London funding, the network is ageing and falling apart as a consequence.

Housing

On the big issues like housing, he continues to work with property giants and let working-class people down.

It's only because the Tories' record on council house building has been so truly abysmal that Khan has felt able to say that London is entering a new "golden era of council house building". There are over 320,000 people on council house waiting lists in the city. That 32,000 homes over eight years counts as a "golden era" is laughable!

Khan has "funded" free school meals. Although the funding doesn't actually cover the cost of feeding school children.

Khan vs Keir?

Early on in the war on Gaza he called for a ceasefire. Similarly, as an MP previously he opposed the Iraq war. That said, he isn't an opposition figure in the Labour Party. If he wins mayor again in 2024, which is likely, he will use his position to work side-by-side with Keir Starmer.

After a recent meeting, one of Starmer's staff said: "The meeting was really positive and was a great example of how Keir's Labour government will operate - in partnership with our elected mayors." But it won't be working-class people that benefit. Starmer and Khan want the capitalist class to know they will serve their



PHOTOS: PAUL MATTSOON, PUBLIC DOMAIN, LONDON SP

320k people on council house waiting lists in London

32k council homes built over eight years

interests in Westminster and City Hall.

Transport workers in particular have learnt over the last eight years that Khan is no friend to people fighting for decent pay and better working conditions. Bus workers thought that "son of a bus driver" Khan would sort out low pay and other issues facing drivers, he hasn't. Instead it's been left to drivers to organise strike after strike to improve pay against the myriad of private bus firms operating in London.

Most recently it was Underground workers in the RMT union who took on Khan. They had to threaten five days worth of rolling action before he came to the table with an extra £30 million for pay. It will mean that many workers don't suffer the impact of inflation and will be used to increase the pay of some of the lowest-paid staff on the Underground. Still, to put it in perspective, senior managers on the Underground got £12 million in bonuses in the last year.

Already Khan is in election mode, constantly in the London press whipping up fears he will lose to the Tories' Susan Hall, despite the fact he has a clear lead in the polls.

While saying he stands against division, he actually drives it. For example, he denounced anti-Ulez campaigners as 'far-right', when lots of ordinary people worry about how they will afford any form of transport in the city. Khan's own transport strategy document said his travel proposals would have the biggest negative impact on; the poorest, older people, disabled people and families.

Working-class alternative

Without a force putting forward a fighting alternative, millions are likely to simply stay home and not vote.

That's why Socialist Party members, along with other campaigners, are planning to stand as part of TUSC (Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition). We plan to stand in three assembly constituency seats: City and East; Waltham Forest, Hackney and Islington; and Croydon and Sutton, to offer hundreds of thousands a real alternative.

Our campaigns will be about the measures the mayor could actually take to challenge growing poverty and poor housing. How we could stand up to the building companies and kick the profiteers out of transport.

The viciousness of capitalism is exposed in London. The capital of one of the richest economies in the world has huge levels of destitution. That's why we will be explaining the need to bring an end to capitalism, where the world's wealth is hoarded by a tiny minority, and making the case for socialist change.

Socialist Party public meeting series:

Rochdale by-election shows:

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

- Visit socialistparty.org.uk/events



Tory swansong budget that Labour plans to keep WE NEED A WORKERS' GENERAL ELECTION STAND

Socialist Party WHAT WE THINK

The Tories are out of ideas on how to cover up the rottenness of the 'free-market' capitalist system they defend. That was the message of the 2024 budget. And the message, although not new, has been received, loud and clear. With local elections on 2 May, polls leave the Tories with about 20% support, a historic low.

Rather than bring the party together around a bold offering, the budget, like every measure they manage to announce, has deepened the already deep divisions within the party.

In the aftermath, suspended former party chair Lee Anderson has defected to Reform UK. A fight about military spending has also broken out. The party is weak and split, and unable to unite around a way forward. 'Viciousness signalling' is all they can offer.

Polling shows that for the ninth month in a row, most of us believe things are getting worse. That belief is based on experience. This will be the first parliament in modern history that leaves living standards behind where it started.

The housing, cost-of-living and public services crises roll on - and Chancellor Hunt's national insurance cut solves nothing. Despite the inflation rate dropping to its lowest level for three years, food and fuel bills remain higher than they were pre-pandemic. Nearly one-in-three of the poorest fifth of households skipped meals in recent months.

The misery isn't confined to the poorest. As another 1.5 million households remortgage this year, many living in Tory-held seats, they face an average annual housing costs rise of around £1,800. That will be accompanied by rent rises, exacerbating the misery of homelessness and home-precariousness.

Billions of pounds of cuts

It is also anticipated that the budget requires a further £19 billion of cuts to unprotected public services after the next election. That's equivalent to three-quarters the size of those cuts delivered in the early 2010s, which devastated public services.

Those cuts triggered big protests, including a historic three-quarters-of-a-million trade unionists marching on 26 March 2011 against austerity. That autumn, public sector workers went on strike to defend pensions, effectively a public sector general strike. Unfortunately, right-wing trade union leaders failed to build on that and the movement ebbed at that stage.

Today, with anger rising and the prospect of it finding expression in mass action that could go further than 2011, the Tories seek to threaten



Trade unionists protesting outside parliament PAUL MATTSOON

the democratic right to protest and to spread division in order to weaken our opposition.

So-called 'extremism'

As the Socialist goes to press, Tory minister Michael Gove is set to announce a new definition of extremism. Even on this, the Tories cannot agree. Nonetheless, it will have a poisonous impact through promoting anti-Muslim bigotry if there is no bold opposition to it.

Poisonous and racist though it is, the new definition of extremism should also be seen as another piece of political theatre, a desperate hope from some at Tory HQ, that can be pushed aside by a determined mass movement.

It follows a press conference outside 10 Downing Street after the Rochdale by-election, when Prime Minister Rishi Sunak spoke of a "shocking increase in extremist disruption and criminality" in Britain. His previous attempts to clamp down on Gaza protests resulted in him being forced to sack his then Home Secretary Suella Braverman. The movement needs to build on that.

Tory legislation cannot prevent the anger at the slaughter in Gaza and the cost-of-living crisis from finding expression. Another piece of political performance art, the Tory anti-strike Minimum Service Levels (MSL) legislation, was exposed when there was an attempt to use it against striking train drivers.

In January, train operator LNER - one of four now under direct state control - took steps towards using the MSL during the planned rolling strikes by train drivers. The drivers' union Aslef responded by calling five additional days of strikes, instead of the originally planned 24-hour action. LNER backed down. Trade union action defeated the bosses and

[Gove's new definition of extremism] will have a poisonous impact through promoting anti-Muslim bigotry if there is no bold opposition to it

the Tory legislation they sought to use against workers.

The lesson is that Tory attacks on the right to organise and protest, and their attempts to divide us, can be defeated - by being organised. The trade unions need to take this experience to the heart of the anti-war movement. The trade union leaders could make it clear that the Gaza marches are places for trade union members who are inevitably among the growing numbers who support a ceasefire and have sympathy for the Palestinians. That would start to answer the Tory attempts to use racist anti-Muslim rhetoric to divide us.

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is pulling together anti-war, trade unionist, student, and socialist candidates, for the general and local government elections. The TUSC basic programme offers a means to unite on a clear class basis - opposition to warmongers and austerity cutters.

There will also be those who argue that the issues of disagreement that exist make a united general election challenge impossible. But that would be a mistake. Part of the building of a new mass workers' party will be the hammering out of a programme between living forces of the movement.

Political voice needed

What the anti-war movement and the trade unions lack is a political voice to oppose these measures and attacks in parliament. Labour does not offer an alternative to the Tory budget, including the cuts that flow from it; it offers no alternative when it comes to opposing Tory warmongering and racism; and it cannot be relied on to defend the right to protest.

The Blair government, Keir Starmer's model, introduced divisive anti-terror legislation with anti-Muslim propaganda that fed a certain growth

of the racist right. Starmer has not challenged attacks on democratic rights. The Starmer-led government will see this year, like Blair's, will seek to defend capitalist class interests, and will therefore be forced to further try to prevent workers and young people from taking action in defence of living standards and in opposition to war.

But the Rochdale by-election showed the potential for a workers' voice to be built. It is now too late to build a new party to challenge for a May general election, but it is not too late for a workers' list of candidates, including left MPs standing outside of Labour.

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Even steps towards a new party will provide a forum for debate, independent of the defenders of capitalism and their racist, divisive rhetoric. Within that, the Socialist Party will be fighting for democratic organisation. And within that, for a socialist programme which will be necessary to take the working class forward in the fight to take power from the capitalists and transform society. We are confident that ever-growing numbers will be won to this, in the battle for ideas that will inevitably be part of the struggles ahead.

Global temperatures increasing – fight for socialism

LEWIS REES
LIVERPOOL SOCIALIST PARTY

In recent months, global temperatures have surged, marking the hottest period in recorded history with an alarming average increase of 1.22°C from pre-industrial levels. Here, this year's February was the hottest, the same for each of the previous nine months!

This concerning trend should surely resonate with those in positions of power, urging them to take the necessary action to stop it. However because of their continued inaction, it is the 'silent' majority, that stands to bear the brunt of the impending climate catastrophe.

We will need a socialist solution to the climate catastrophe and a fight for a planned socialist transition, that prioritises the needs and concerns of the majority over a select few. This would have to be democratically planned by the working class and based on nationalisation of the polluting industries, the banks and big business to prevent climate catastrophe without workers and the poor having to pay for it.

While climate change campaign groups often call for a radical societal transformation and immediate action, there remains a gap in providing the comprehensive socialist programme needed to combat these issues.

Ed Brower, US energy editor of the Financial Times, boldly asserts that "Capitalism won't deliver the energy transition fast enough." Without a distinct and incisive critique of the roots of climate change – seeing it as a product of capitalism's production for profit based on competing nations, parties and groups simply claiming to be 'green' can't offer a clear path forward.

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2024 Tory budget in numbers

2.5% to 1.7% of GDP
drop in public sector investment by 2027 under Hunt's forecasts

2026
the year real wages are set to return to their 2008 level

0.2%
Real wage growth over the course of 14 years of Tory rule (if forecasts are correct)

£8 billion tax cuts this year **vs** **£38 billion** post-election tax rises and planned public spending cuts

£14,000 worse off an average worker than if pay growth had continued at pre-economic crisis levels

£100,000 Donated by Jeremy Hunt to his local Conservative election over the last few years. Is he confident he'll keep his seat?

What we heard

A payday loan of a budget
Robert Shrimpsley in the Financial Times

Nothing Hunt announced changes anything significantly
Institute of Fiscal Studies

A day in the life of a food delivery worker

On Valentine's Day, many gig economy delivery drivers and riders went on strike, demanding better pay and conditions. Here, a Birmingham Uber Eats driver describes a typical day.

Working in the gig economy can be daunting, but rewarding. Data from Rodeo shows that delivery fees decreased in 2022-23 and high levels of inflation impacted total earnings. As an Uber Eats food driver I can average £13.92 an hour over a 15-20 hour week, but this is actual driving time and crucially doesn't include waiting time. Tips are included, but are few and far between.

A typical week begins on a Monday morning, when the weekend can leave people needing essential items such as groceries to make their lunch for work, or buying their breakfast from a sandwich shop or the big food corporations. Logging-in from 7am can provide two to three hours of consistent work. As the work slows down from 10am, I wait for the lunchtime period, which can begin as early as 11.30am. Tuesday and Wednesday are very quiet, and that increases pressure to earn

more on the evening run and the weekend.

With a teenage son at school, it can be a juggling act to be home for him and also attempt deliveries between 4-7pm. Evenings can be productive, with many people ordering from franchises such as McDonald's and KFC. However, this can lead to a glut of drivers waiting for deliveries in-store, leading to chaos.

Second-class citizens
There seems to be a hierarchy of store customers first, drive-thru second and delivery drivers last. Sometimes staff at the big companies, no doubt overworked, can be very rude and it can feel like they treat drivers like second-class citizens. Some store managers make no effort to change this culture. Independent businesses are usually more accommodating and quick, but that is not always the case.

I would expect to make a minimum £200 for a six-day week, but I have earned over £400 on occasions. Uber uses algorithms to suit its business model and therefore a set wage is inconsistent. There are drivers that will boast of consistent £100-plus days, but work-life balance is important for families, as is the cost of fuel, which starts to have a negative impact with long journeys.

As an Uber Eats food driver I can average £13.92 an hour over a 15-20 hour week but this is actual driving time and crucially doesn't include waiting time

Labour funding – from the millionaires not the millions



CHRIS CORNEY
WALTHAM FOREST SOCIALIST PARTY

The Labour Party has proudly announced record private donations totalling £13 million in 2023. But when you lift the lid, this was not because of a huge outpouring of generosity from the general public. Just three millionaires donated £8.5 million.

Two members of the Sainsburys clan donated £3 million and £1 million respectively to Labour, whilst another Sainsbury left £10 million to the Tories in a will. They certainly cover their bases in that family!

Labour's biggest donation of £4.5 million came from South African businessman Gary Lubner, who has business dealings in that country going back into the apartheid era.

There were some people who thought the Labour Party would be in financial difficulty when 200,000 members left after Starmer became leader four years ago. But since then, like Tony Blair before him, he has

established the Labour Party as the B-team for the bosses' class. With the Tories collapsing, there is no shortage of wealthy backers reaching for their wallets to make up the shortfall caused by falling members' subscriptions.

People do not give millions to a political party without wanting something in return.

Well, almost. Trade unions give millions to Labour and it is not at all clear what union members get for their money. Socialist Party members have fought in a number of unions, including one-time biggest backer Unite, for them to be able to support candidates that will fight for their policies, regardless of political party.

So, with the Labour leadership under the influence of its millionaire backers, who will represent the rest of us? Every week brings new reasons why we need a new mass workers' party that will be funded by ordinary people to serve our interests.



Socialist Party general election appeal

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

The Socialist Party is preparing to stand 30 to 40 candidates as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC).

If you agree that we need socialist ideas to be heard in the general election, and for an alternative to Sunak and Starmer – donate to us today.

• Visit socialistparty.org.uk/ge-appeal or call 020 8988 8777



Uni bosses say: 'increase fees' We say: 'Abolish them!'

TED BOYLE
SHEFFIELD SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Behind closed doors, a major university policy change is being discussed and, typically, its not good news! Vivienne Stern, the CEO of employers' organisation, Universities UK, insists that students finance the gap in university budgets yet again, through ever-higher tuition fees. This is off the back of a broad financial report, which outlines the very real mess that university managements have found itself in, where issues such as an exodus of international students, whose higher tuition than domestic students many universities rely on, have been compounded by unprecedented inflation.

Yet there are no illusions about the popularity of such a move: "Political suicide", Stern describes it - very hot in Westminster right now. She urges whoever is in power to implement it that they "act quickly" before an inevitable wave of student outrage. Yes, "before anyone notices" seems to be the strategy they're going for here!

And no doubt such outrage would be fierce: students are already bearing the brunt of major systemic failings. With the confidence built

during the continuing wave of agitation for Palestinian liberation, no doubt we would be on the streets in our thousands, as students did over a decade ago the last time tuition fees were tripled.

But why wait for things to get worse? We students don't need permission to organise and fight to make university life bearable. Stern says raise tuition fees, we say: 'Abolish them!' And secure ample student maintenance grants in turn. Keir Starmer, likely future prime minister, U-turned on Jeremy Corbyn's free education policy. We need a new mass party that will stand up for students and workers.

Act quickly to increase tuition fees and get the inevitable outrage over and done with



Farmers in Wales protest against attacks on subsidies

JOE FATHALLAH
CARDIFF WEST SOCIALIST PARTY

Over 3,000 farmers and agricultural workers descended on Cardiff on 28 February to protest outside the Senedd (parliament) against the Welsh government's proposed changes to the Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS). The plans would mean that, to continue to receive the subsidy, without which small farms could not exist, farmers would have to give up 10% of their land to wildlife habitat, and 10% towards growing trees. According to the National Farmers Union, this would result in the loss of around 5,500 jobs.

The Labour-controlled Welsh government argues that its measures are necessary for environmental reasons, but this is pure hypocrisy. Large swathes of the South Wales valleys have been shorn of trees and wildlife by forestry companies, with lucrative contracts from Natural

Resources Wales (a Welsh government agency). The changes to the SFS must be immediately scrapped and replaced with an increase in the subsidy to fund a transition to environmentally friendly and sustainable farming.

Welsh Tory leader Andrew RT Davies was a speaker at the protest. Rishi Sunak opportunistically posed with farmers protesting outside the Welsh Conservative conference. But the Tories won't fight in the interests of small farmers and agricultural workers – they are on the side of big business.

Farmers' reliance on the subsidy to survive illustrates the exploitation they suffer at the hands of the big landowners and agribusiness dominating the industry, and well as the role of the large supermarkets in pushing down wholesale prices.

Almost half of UK farmland is owned by a combination of aristocrats and corporations, according

to a 2023 investigation by Farmers Weekly magazine. Socialists argue for the nationalisation of the large agricultural companies which undercut small farmers. This would be along with the implementation of minimum pricing laws, and the nationalisation of the big supermarkets, food wholesalers and manufacturers under democratic workers' control.

Such a programme, combined with a national plan for agriculture drawn up in consultation with small farmers and agricultural workers, could guarantee jobs in the countryside, and enable a transition to environmentally sustainable agriculture without detriment to farmers or food consumers.

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



UCU election results show members want a fighting, democratic leadership

NEC elections – left wins majority

DUNCAN MOORE
NEWLY ELECTED TO UCU NEC

Last year, post-16 education workers, across universities, colleges and prison education, took historic strike action to defend pay and conditions. University and College Union (UCU) members came out onto the picket lines determined to fight back, and in many cases won significantly more than the employers had offered. But we could have won more. Pay is still falling in real terms, workloads continue to increase, and a crisis in funding is unfolding in all sectors the UCU represents.

Members have proven their determination to fight. We need a leadership which is accountable to members, armed with a serious, fighting strategy that is properly prepared for and built.

Members have elected left candidates from various groupings to lead their National Executive Committee (NEC) and the Higher and Further Education Committees (HEC and FEC).

In the elections I campaigned on a programme which reflected the needs and concerns of UCU members: building a serious campaign of action for above-inflation pay rises; an end to marketisation, casual

contracts and job insecurity; winning binding national agreements on pay and workload in Further Education; and full funding of post-16 education.

To achieve these demands, our union needs a serious political strategy, alongside a fighting industrial one. In the general secretary election campaign, Jo Grady has made clear she is preparing the way for a "partnership" with an incoming Labour government under Keir Starmer, with her manifesto boasting of "incredibly strong political relationships".

But Starmer has shown that he is not on the side of workers, and will only bring more cuts in funding and hardship for post-16 educators. Local council-funded adult education providers, such as my workplace, face redundancies and potential closure, as a result of cuts under Tory- and Labour-led councils.

The UCU currently uses its political fund for lobbying politicians of all the capitalist parties; but nothing in our rulebook prevents members from standing as candidates in elections - we need candidates who will support our members and policies.

I will stand in my local council ward under the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) banner in May, and encourage others to do so.

General secretary election – Jo Grady just clings on

BEA GARDNER
UCU MEMBER



UCU FE strike 2023 (IAN PATTISON)

Incumbent general secretary of the University and Colleges Union (UCU), Jo Grady, has been narrowly re-elected, with half the first-preference votes that she won in 2019.

This result was not the decisive backing for her leadership that she hoped it would be. There were less than 200 votes between her and second-place candidate Ewan McGaughey, and 65% of the first-preference votes went to the three opposition candidates.

In 2019, Grady was seen as the spearhead of the 'no capitulation' pushback against attempts by then general secretary Sally Hunt to prematurely end the 2018 pension strike. In last year's NEC election, coming just after national strike action, Grady's faction made gains.

But this year's results clearly indicate a declined confidence in Grady's leadership. Among the union activists there is widespread frustration with the Higher Education strike 'pause' and other retreats.

It is indicative of Grady's direction

of travel that last year she accepted a 16.3% pay rise, taking her salary to over £125,000, despite having pledged not to accept any offer above that of FE members.

The general secretary results also confirm the Socialist Party's analysis that had the left groupings come together to agree a single candidate on a left programme, they could have stood a serious chance of winning. The combined vote for the two left candidates, Saira Weiner and Vicky Blake, was higher than Grady's vote.

As a paid official, Grady is constrained by the decisions of the now left-leaning NEC and two sectoral sub-committees (the HEC and FEC), which have the mandate to set industrial action and can, if properly organised, use their mandate to direct the activities of the general secretary.

This is why Grady has consistently undermined these committees and her manifesto pledges more of the same, including plans to "modernise" the democratic structures of the union. Grady is already actively organising against the outgoing left-led FEC to override the decision to move to an aggregated ballot in that sector.

This makes more urgent the need for those who want a democratic fighting union to organise democratically at every level of the union. Bringing together the various left groupings could be a part of that process, as well as reaching out to draw together all those members who want to campaign.

Grady has already been pushed further than she wanted due to pressure from the members. UCU should be a member-led union and, if organised, it will be members, including their accountable representatives on the NEC, that determine the extent of action taken in the coming period.

Unison Community conference: We need more than just waiting for Labour

A SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBER AT THE CONFERENCE

Workers from across the not-for-profit and charity sector assembled for the Unison Community Service Group Conference, including housing, social care, advice workers and more.

This is the third-largest and fastest-growing service group in the union, yet it struggles to get even a hundred delegates at its annual conference. Although lack of union recognition, hostile employers and low pay in the sector are all factors in the general lack of engagement from members, the year-on-year failure of the union to lead serious battles and offer a fighting programme on pay, terms and conditions all play a part.

Conference opened the first day with a series of workshops and seminars on a variety of key issues, including how we can get better funding for public sector charities, how Unison is campaigning on the cost-of-living crisis, and the campaign for a national care service. There were sessions on making pensions simple, Unison's 'Year of the LGBT+ worker', tackling violence at work, and digital organising. There was clearly a serious mood amongst delegates, looking for

answers to the situations facing them at work. Running like a thread through most of the sessions was the need for a political response to all these issues. This was not coming from the union leadership, which just constantly promoted Starmer's Labour and encouraged delegates to 'wait for a Labour government'.

The conference was opened with a speech from Angela Rayner, deputy leader of the Labour Party. Although giving her own example as a 'working-class girl made good', she said nothing other than reiterating again and again that only a Labour government can improve our lives. During questions, a number of delegates, including members of the Socialist Party, stood up in silent protest at the Labour Party's position on Gaza, and walked out.

The 21 motions up for debate called for action on many of the issues facing the community sector, but most fell short of demanding a real fightback against cuts and outsourcing, including strikes and demonstrations. We should be demanding of Angela Rayner and Keir Starmer that they commit now to fully fund services and underwrite any debts incurred by councils to stave off cuts.

If the Community Service Group is to really play the role within the union and in the thousands of not-for-profit workplaces across the country that it could and should play, we need to develop a significant broad left in the union within this important sector, and elect a service group leadership with the programme and confidence to lead a real fightback.

The following Socialist Party members are standing for election in the forthcoming Unison service group elections:

Community:
Helen Couchman

Local Government:
Mathew John,
Angie Waller

Health:
Steve Bell,
Adrian O'Malley



Helen Couchman, standing for Community SGE, campaigning for a national care service and national pay bargaining

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PCS Liverpool museums strike: 'We're not selfish – it's what we are entitled to'

PCS members at National Museums Liverpool (NML) are in their fourth week of strike action, as they continue to fight for the £1,500 cost-of-living payment.



PHOTO: SOCIALIST PARTY

PCS REP AT NATIONAL MUSEUMS LIVERPOOL

The strike started on 17 February and will run until 8 April - a full eight weeks. This is the first period of strike action we are participating in since 94% voted 'yes', with an incredible 69% of members taking part.

We fought last year along with 130,000 staff nationally in the civil and public sector, winning a pay rise of 4.5% and the promise of a one-off cost-of-living payment. We were proud to take part in this strike and endeavour to show this Tory government that we can coalesce myriad workers around the country against their programme of continued austerity.

At NML we have suffered a £6 million decrease in Grant Aid funding since 2010, clearly incapacitating the running of the museums and galleries through the inevitable redundancies which followed.

Of the 207 employers constituting the bargaining unit that took action in 2023, NML is the only employer which has not paid the £1,500.

We were surprised that NML had taken this stance, given that it ostensibly supports workers' rights. Ironically, the only museum which NML can keep open during this eight-week dispute is the Museum of Liverpool, which focuses on social justice and the legacy of workers' action - which, for me, is what makes Liverpool great. This exposes the egregious façade of this organisation.

PCS PRESIDENT AND NEC ELECTIONS STOP PRESS:

Socialist Party and BLN member Marion Lloyd is standing for election as PCS president, alongside a full list of activists in the National Executive Committee elections, standing for change in PCS.

As we go to press, the total of nominations has been announced, with Marion Lloyd winning 71 nominations for president, to the Left Unity candidate (and current acting president)'s 70. This shows it's all to play for in the NEC and group elections.

See bln.org.uk

Management stresses workers should be grateful for the rises that it has given us in the past - belying the impact of PCS in securing wage rises over the years.

Members at NML have been treated as if they are selfish, adopting a Tory pretext in order to diminish our rights.

We need all the help we can get to keep up the fight for what's right. It's been nearly a month on strike and the strength is palpable. Me and my colleagues commend the support so far and hope that it continues.

We cannot rely on empty promises and idle platitudes. The workers will pressure these bosses and will win! Solidarity to all workers!

ELLIE, PCS BRANCH CHAIR, SPOKE TO THE SOCIALIST IN A PERSONAL CAPACITY

"We represent staff covering the whole breadth of the workplace, including housekeeping, front-of-house and curation. Our members are lower paid than the sector average, and the living wage does not represent the cultural value of our work.

"Our members need this payment. One of our colleagues is a wheelchair user and has been unable to service her chair due to the cost. We have staff members eating Weetabix three times a day because they can't afford anything else! The bottom line here is that this cost-of-living payment is not a privilege, it's what we are entitled to!"

Vote 'yes' in the PCS strike ballot

KATRINE WILLIAMS
PCS MEMBER

Over the period 18 March to 13 May, the PCS will be holding a statutory strike ballot in support of its 2024-25 pay claim.

Socialist Party members in the union and the PCS Broad Left Network (BLN) call for a 'yes' vote and will work hard to deliver the 50% turnout required by Tory anti-union laws. The ballot is disaggregated, ie broken down by bargaining group.

Reps and activists all over the union will be working hard to win the ballot. They are not helped by the union's 'Left Unity' leadership's handling of successive pay campaigns and it's approach to the current ballot.

The national campaign was ended

last summer and in reality there has been no campaigning since. A consultative ballot earlier in the year was launched with no notice or preparation.

While the consultation showed 82% support for strike action, just 66% supported a levy to fund the selective strikes which the executive's previous campaign heavily relied on. A low turnout in the consultation is of greater concern. We warned this was likely to happen, with little time for preparation and no engagement with the union activists.

The statutory ballot has been launched, again with hardly any notice or time for preparation, and over the heads of reps. The claim itself is unclear: it calls for a cost-of-living rise plus pay restoration, but with no indication of what this means.

The ballot doesn't include a mandate for overtime bans or other forms of action, which is a serious omission. Unfortunately, no strategy is spelled out for winning the claim.

Rather than a serious attempt to build a campaign on pay, job cuts and other issues, many activists suspect the timing of this ballot is more to do with the current leadership having an eye on the forthcoming national executive and presidential elections.

Nonetheless, PCS members face low pay, cuts and closures, and with a bold campaign we can win this ballot for action.

Socialist Party and BLN members are committed to doing everything possible to secure a 'yes' vote with the necessary 50% turnouts in all the groups in this ballot.



PHOTO: PAUL MATTISON

Tory stealth tax rises ratchet up pressure on HMRC workers

PCS MEMBER IN HMRC

An extra 4 million people are set to be brought into paying income tax by 2028. 3 million people are set to become higher-rate taxpayers. Income tax thresholds are frozen when inflation and pay are rising. Known as 'fiscal drag', this is a way of raising taxes without raising headline rates of tax.

The Tories are attempting to place the burden of paying for their damaging policies onto working-class people.

Ten years ago, HMRC (HM Revenue and Customs - the government department responsible for taxation) proceeded to cut phoneline staff. Numbers of contacts by phone has continued going up.

Many staff on phone lines are given minimal and generic training before being expected to take calls. They are generally overworked, underpaid and micromanaged. Unsurprisingly the 'churn' in this area is high.

HMRC took the unprecedented step of closing its self-assessment helpline in summer 2023, followed by a

drastic restriction of the helpline in January 2024 - the month when it has the most people calling.

Staff at HMRC know things have been going awry for years. Morale has been low but was boosted by a pay deal worth 13% over three years in 2021. The deal came with various strings attached, and Socialist Party members in HMRC, PCS union members, called for a vote against the package. It involved selling off of terms and conditions, including the abolition of paid lunch breaks. This trade off was downplayed and generally hidden by the current PCS leadership to get the vote through.

Three years later, those staff are back on minimum wage, have to do a late shift each week and have found their ability to work from home highly curtailed.

HMRC staff went from working 42 hours a week with one hour paid lunch to working 37 hours a week. HMRC agreed with pay negotiators that it wouldn't implement that change until April 2024. If 42 hours is retained, the hourly rate of £10.96 will fall under the minimum wage on

1 April 2024 and therefore they will be entitled to a pay rise. But if HMRC implements the cut to 37 hours then that will arbitrarily increase the hourly rate to £12.44 and staff will 'magically' remain above minimum wage without receiving any extra pay.

Such a change would be unprecedented in the civil service. It's likely that many of the lowest-paid staff would choose to transfer to other government departments and receive more money. HMRC knows this and is being cagey about whether it will make the change. That this is even possible is a failing of PCS pay negotiators in 2021.

But for PCS members there is reason for hope. A coalition of HMRC Group Executive Committee members is coming together, to give a fighting opposition to the 'Left Unity' group which until recently had a majority, and which leads the union nationally. Enthusiated branch reps are preparing to stand in the upcoming PCS elections. Socialist Party members are supporting this development and call on PCS members in HMRC to vote for candidates for change.

A CIVIL WAR WITHOUT GUNS

1984-85 MINERS' STRIKE 40 YEARS ON



DAVE GRIFFITHS

SOCIALIST PARTY WEST MIDLANDS
REGIONAL SECRETARY

'Coal not dole' was the cry across Britain as 180,000 members of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) in 180 pits began walking out on strike in March 1984.

It became a long, bitter industrial dispute – a whole year – fought with enormous courage and élan by miners, the biggest workers' struggle for generations. Fought not only against the publicly owned National Coal Board (NCB) but, as miners increasingly realised, the whole British capitalist state that had been mobilised to attack them.

The NCB, pushed by Thatcher's Tory government, had provocatively announced a programme of pit closures. Miners, one of the strongest groups of trade union-organised workers, struck to defend their pits, their industry, their communities and whole way of life.

From the first walkouts in Yorkshire, the strike spread across the coalfields of Britain and posed a major threat to the Tory government. 80% of energy came from coal. As railworkers refused to move coal stocks, the threat arose of 'the lights going out'.

It's laughable to hear Tories today claim 'green' credentials for 'taking Britain off coal'. The truth is, this was a brutal battle by the bosses prepared to smash an industry to subdue the working class so they could let their free market rip across Britain.

'Coal not dole' was the miners' slogan because Thatcher had unleashed mass unemployment as a weapon. The Tories were destroying publicly owned industries, steel, motors etc and much of Britain's industrial base. They hoped to smash the trade unions.

Mass unemployment created fear and desperation. News bulletins reported thousands more job losses daily. Incidentally, the Tories covered the cost of unemployment by 'selling off the family silver' (public industries), a process continued under Blair. Today we are being ripped off by private firms in water, gas, electric, telecoms, post, rail, and so on.

The defeat of workers in this period cleared the way for modern bosses' Britain, where we see the widest gap in wealth and incomes seen by any living person. It was a political watershed.

A decade earlier, the miners had brought down a Tory government. In the 1972 strike – involving the 'Battle of Saltley Gate' where 15,000 mass pickets, including thousands of local engineering workers, closed a

vital coke depot – the miners defeated Heath's government. When Heath, punch drunk from other defeats, called a rematch in 1974, he called an election saying: "It's me or the miners." It wasn't him! A Labour government was returned, the bosses were fuming.

As economic crisis gripped and bosses sought to attack workers' living standards, strengthened trade unions resisted with growing militancy. Labour could only restrain them for a couple of years. Thatcher was elected as the bosses' agent in 1979 and the capitalist class set about a major assault on the working class.

The attack was well prepared. They passed anti-union laws; including enforcing postal rather than workplace voting so the Tory press could interfere in union elections. They didn't attack all industries at once, but one by one picked workers off. They would have noted the failure of the leaders of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) to coordinate any response.

The Tories longed for revenge on the miners and nearly staggered into a major strike in 1981. But, as 'wild-cat' strikes raged across the coalfields, they retreated. They were not yet fully prepared to face this strong group of workers.

Miners worked in a tough environment and were tough men. Their very work brought strong comradeship and discipline (and humour!); many had served in the armed forces.

The government built up coal stocks, arranged more coal and fuel imports for power stations, did deals with right-wing union leaders, beefed up and incentivised the police (many of whom to this day question their role in the strike), organised a force of non-union lorry drivers to move stocks and slashed benefits strikers and their families were entitled to.

Growing tensions

Tensions grew through 1982-83 as government plans began to emerge. Rallies in towns and villages nationwide saw NUM President Arthur Scargill and other leaders begin to rouse miners to the coming challenge. Although the initial NCB announcement targeted 20 pits for closure, it was clear it would be many more.

Late in 1983, the NUM organised an overtime ban to reduce coal stocks by winter 1984. But the Tories moved quicker.

That nearly 200,000 workers, with huge support amongst the working class, would strike for a year seemed unimaginable beforehand. At the time, many on the left argued that miners had been 'bought off' by those new inventions: lager, TV & videos and Ford Cortinas! They'd



never strike. Militant, the Socialist Party's predecessor, resisted these arguments. We were one of the few organisations politically prepared for the strike.

We saw young miners in particular play a magnificent role. As one said: "They threw down the gauntlet, we picked it up." Despite repression and suffering government attempts to starve them back to work, the miners showed great determination and initiative, and raised millions of pounds in solidarity from the public.

Miners and their families were proud people. The idea of 'begging' went against the grain. But realising the dispute wouldn't be short, the younger men and women's support groups rose to the occasion, travelling the length and breadth of Britain and internationally, raising solidarity and financial support at factories and on the streets. They toured railway lines, winning support from train drivers

to stop coal moving, picketed coal stocks, power stations as well as pits.

Huge rallies took place at NUM HQ in Sheffield. At the same time, the Broad Left Organising Committee (BLOC) organised a conference of over 2,000 shop stewards to mobilise rank-and-file support and push for solidarity action across the trade union movement, calling for a 24-hour general strike against the government.

The dispute was clearly central to the future of organised workers nationwide. A miners' victory would be in the interests of all. But from the trade union tops, little beyond words and donations came.

There was also resistance to the strike in some areas, particularly Nottinghamshire. The NUM was a federated union, made up of different areas with different numbers of pits and ease of obtaining coal. This had its negative aspects. A recently introduced productivity scheme

reinforced the potential division between areas, some earned much more from it than others, and some areas were less threatened by closures than others.

Pithead ballots were organised on an area, not national basis. A previous ballot seeking industrial action over pit closures was won in Yorkshire, Scotland, south Wales and Kent, but not in Nottinghamshire or the Midlands, for example.

In itself this was not a shock, the union had never won a ballot over this issue. But, as the threat to the industry became clearer, support for action was growing.

As the Yorkshire walkouts spread, within a week 80% of miners nationwide were on strike. But scenes in Notts were difficult. Large pickets from other areas – along with Notts strikers – sought to picket out working pits. This physical challenge meant some still working dwelt on the idea

that others were trying to force them on strike, rather than facing up to the threat to their industry and union.

In contrast, at Littleton Colliery, Cannock, Militant already had members. Seeing events in Notts they decided to organise the Cannock lads to shut their own pit before outside areas arrived. They organised a shift walkout and, as they prepared to picket the next shift, pickets arrived from Wales. They were welcomed as support, but told that the local lads would do the picketing and talking to the incoming shift. Within a couple of days, only three or four were left working.

Had such a left network been encouraged in the NUM, scenes across the Midlands may have been different.

National ballot

The lack of a national ballot was used as an excuse by some, including by some inexcusable trade union leaders, for not organising solidarity action.

In fact, a national ballot would have been won comfortably, removed excuses and strengthened the fight. But already 86% were on strike against the baying of media, bosses and Tory and Labour politicians for a ballot. In many eyes, the strike was already on and dramatically affecting production. They weren't going to be dictated to by the likes of these.

Prominent football figures like Brian Clough and Jackie Charlton came out for the miners. Nottingham Forest fans took abuse as scabs at matches they attended.

Ian MacGregor, Thatcher's American puppet boss of the NCB, declared that he "wanted to hear from the women", hoping they'd push their men back to work. He received a resounding response as miner's wives groups sprang up everywhere declaring "They shall not starve", cadging food for food kitchens and attending picket lines.

Meanwhile, the police – now organised as a national militarised force – increased their aggression, making thousands of arrests to deplete picket lines. Backed by courts, they restricted picketing rights and used roadblocks across the country. They restricted movement even in workers' own towns. One Cannock lad got a week's gaol (and criminal record) for walking to get a pint of milk for the strike centre, deemed to have crossed a quarter-mile restriction by ten yards.

There have rarely been more phone taps! And we saw huge TV and media propaganda. If you believed their daily reports of miners going back to work, 1 million of the 180,000 miners had gone back!

Then TV outdid itself with its distorted coverage of the Orgreave mass pickets – a battle set up by government and police chiefs, with riot police and cavalry charges against workers. Truly, we were seeing a 'civil war without guns'. 55 miners were threatened with life sentences for riot, until police were found to be lying in court.

The strike moved through summer. Thatcher farcically claimed she wouldn't intervene, but we saw police and dark agencies working for government increasingly organising returns to work. As one 'superscab' later admitted: "I knew they had lots of money, political money." They organised the National Working Miners Committee, and later assisted the UDM (Union of Democratic Miners - sic) to undermine the NUM.

She outrageously declared the miners to be "the enemy within", starkly revealing the truth of class society under capitalism, and insulting many men who had served their country.

They launched a legal assault on the NUM. Declaring the strike 'illegal', they sought to 'sequester' (steal) all the union's funds. The TUC had a Congress decision to organise general strike action if any union faced sequestration under Tory laws, but didn't act when the NUM was attacked.

But coal stocks were still falling, and miners anticipated 'General Winter' helping their action take effect. By autumn, the Tories feared losing. Especially when pit deputies' (supervisors without whom no pit could operate) union NACOD voted by over 80% to strike in October. Thatcher's government was hanging by a thread. Electricity bosses estimated "Scargill would...win by Christmas."

But their threatened strike was shadily called off with meaningless promises. The miners entered winter feeling more isolated, especially given the lack of TUC action and the betrayal of Labour leader, Neil Kinnock, who didn't want to see militancy pay. Later rewarded with a peerage, he was to repeat this with Liverpool City Council the following year.

All 'torture' victims have their thresholds; as a miners' mum put it: "Not everybody was strong enough". Despite widening social support for the miners, such as from Pride and others, there was a drift back to work at end of 1984 and early 1985. So, in March 1985, the NUM voted 98-91 for an organised return to work.

Aftermath

The strike had cost the Tories a fortune, but they had inflicted a serious defeat on a strong group of workers. Afterwards, demoralisation was exaggerated – and became an excuse for

inaction by trade union leaders.

Within five years, 18 million people defied the law refusing to pay their Poll Tax and brought Thatcher crashing down. A great win, but not one that compensated for the miners' defeat.

There was devastation in villages as closure programmes rolled on, but miners also rebuilt their strength in pits. At Littleton, where a large majority were back at work by March and the UDM had a base, a walkout when '12 months' were picked on was joined by nearly every miner. The desire to reunite was strong and the NUM quickly became dominant again.

Closures

The Tories denied a mass closure programme. But the reward for those fooled by their lies was to see 90% of pits closed within ten years. The UDM was exposed but had done its damage. But most decisive in the defeat of this historic strike, where workers showed their capacity to struggle to the end, was that this was not matched by Labour and TUC leaders.

For Marxists, it has many lessons for the future and in understanding how the working class 'moves'. It also revealed how reactionary ideas are washed away in struggle.

A couple of young miners in contact

with the National Front were offered money to attack a pre-strike Militant meeting in Cannock. On hearing that a miner was speaking, they refused. Later, one was collecting in London and saw how many black workers were donating. As he told them about the demonisation of miners in the media, they'd smile and say: "We know, we suffer it all the time". The scales came off his eyes and he phoned us excitedly to tell us. He joined Militant and supports us to this day.

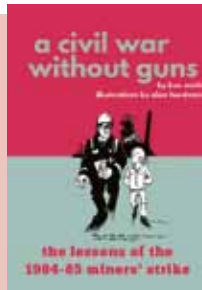
Had the miners won, the whole free-market Tory project would have been challenged. The working class, inspired to take up struggle, would have put the end of the Tories in sight. The push to create 'New Labour' (which Thatcher described as her greatest achievement) would be reversed. British history could have been very different.

Which is why Militant fought with every sinew to help prosecute the dispute, during which 500 miners joined us as the events of the strike revealed the true character of capitalism and failure of the labour movement's leaders.

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A chance encounter with a 'socialist' Labour candidate



SCOTT HUNTER SWINDON SOCIALIST PARTY

While campaigning in Swindon, I've met several Labour councillors and parliamentary candidates. Every time, I get an intense feeling of déjà vu. I was in a coffee shop having a political discussion with some young Socialist Party members when a man sitting at a nearby table introduced himself as Will Stone - current Labour councillor in Swindon and the parliamentary candidate for Swindon North: "I'm a socialist, too. We probably believe a lot of the same things. Why can't we work together?"

I raised nationalisation of the energy companies as a key issue. Stone replied: "Why would we want to nationalise the energy companies when we want to transition to green energy anyway?" How about the hundreds of billions in profits being made by the bosses and shareholders, while workers are struggling to heat and eat? Stone was also unable to account for Labour's recent retreat on its pledge for £28 billion in green investment, nor could he articulate just what form this 'green transition' would take. He gestured towards Starmer's Great British Energy (announced and quickly forgotten in 2022), although admitted that such a company would not actually supply energy to anybody and would just be a clearing house for investment funds! When I again raised the idea of nationalisation under democratic workers' control, Stone could only

Teesside and North Yorks hospital strikes

JOHN MALCOLM TEESSIDE SOCIALIST PARTY

Health Care Assistants (HCAs) across Teesside and North Yorkshire took strike action on Monday 11 March for fair pay. Unison North Tees and South Tees hospital branches have run a successful campaign to resolve Band 2 HCAs carrying out Band 3 duties, which include clinical tasks such as taking blood, recording observations, and catheterisation. This has been a long-running campaign as part of Unison's 'Fair Pay' campaign. There has been a big rise in recruitment to the union as a result of the campaign, and a large majority voted in favour of taking strike action. The employers, North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust and South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, have agreed to the uplift in banding. But Unison members are taking action for four years' of back pay to be paid, in line with trusts in other parts of the country. The picket lines were well-supported and lively, with over 100 members at James Cook Hospital in Middlesbrough. This shows what can be done when members are mobilised and the union puts resources into campaigns.

Obituary: Marika Smith 1965-2024



Socialist Party members in the Northern region were saddened to hear that our comrade and friend Marika Smith has passed away after a long illness. Despite having many hard knocks thrown at her, Marika had a warm personality, and it was always a joy to meet up with her. Marika always stood out in a crowd, with her fabulous (often red) punk hair and bright red lipstick. More importantly, she stood out as a class fighter. Her fighting spirit was highlighted two years ago, when Marika was very unwell, but still absolutely determined to carry on standing as

a TUSC candidate in Chowdene, Gateshead - and what an election team she had! With the help of her lovely family, Marika's leaflets were distributed almost quicker than we could print them! Marika was always courageously at the forefront of battles against racism and fascism. Perhaps the most apt epitaph for Marika is summed up in her own words, when she wrote on social media: "I was born to oppose those who want to spread hate." Our thoughts are with Marika's husband, Chris, her daughter, Corrina, and sons Andre and Nathaniel. ELAINE BRUNSKILL

Building Socialist Students

West Midlands

Young people have taken the lead in the sweeping anti-war movement. With walkouts and occupations taking place across the country, thousands of school and college students are seeing the true colours of the Tories and their blatant support towards this brutal bombardment, and that a future Labour government will offer the same approach. Even before the current anti-war

movements, students were being drawn to socialist ideas as we face further cuts to education, and rip-off housing and bills. After leafleting for a Socialist Students public meeting at Staffordshire University, there was enough appetite to hold an informal meeting to discuss socialist ideas. This is the same in Birmingham, with new people looking for an alternative coming to meetings. Students from the University of Warwick and Coventry University have linked the crucial issues on campus to the need for a mass workers' party, helping with election leafletting for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC). It's clear that the latest Tory budget is just a glimpse of what is to come. That's why Socialist Students support TUSC candidates in the elections, that offer a clear anti-cuts, anti-war programme. MILA HUGHES



UEL PHOTO: FERDY LYONS



London

Going to campuses with the Socialist newspaper is a great opportunity to talk to students. Even when a stall is not in the busiest possible place or when it's not the lunch hour, you can always find people interested in what we're doing. At UEL Stratford Campus we managed to meet two new people interested in joining and we were only there for an hour. Next time, look for us at Docklands campus! The next day, early in the morning at SOAS university, we met more people. Despite the early hour, students were approaching us with questions. What is important in doing stalls at unis is consistency. Every person who stops to talk to us, buys a newspaper or takes away a leaflet matters. That's how ideas spread. ROZA KWIECINSKAS

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SOCIALIST PARTY FIGHTING FUND table with columns: AREA, \$ RECEIVED, \$ TARGET, Q1: JANUARY-MARCH 2024, DEADLINE: 31 MARCH 2024. Rows include South West, West Midlands, London, Northern, Southern & SE, Wales, North West, East Midlands, Yorkshire, Eastern, Other, and TOTAL.

Protest greets Twickenham arms fair

NEAL JEFFERY WEST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

The English Rugby Football Union (RFU) has held arms fairs at Twickenham stadium for the last few years and a protest greeted the second such fair this year on 27 February. A sale of combat helicopters and drones to any regime willing to spend money on them took place in the middle of the Six Nations rugby tournament, insulting to local residents and rugby fans alike. There were around a hundred protesters in attendance, mostly local residents and Gaza campaigners. Socialist Party members joined them to show the greedy RFU our anger over the sale of arms to any capitalist regime. Also in attendance was 'Nasty Nick' of East Enders fame. The actor who played him was one of the protest's organisers!



I think the sign outside the stadium saying what is not to be brought onto the premises says it all! (see above)

Leeds uni students occupy Parkinson building over Israel-Palestine war

ANTHONY BRACITI LEEDS SOCIALIST PARTY

Students at the University of Leeds have occupied the iconic Parkinson building in response to university management's unwillingness to distance itself from the Israeli state. On 7 March, students stormed the building, the most recognisable symbol of the university, in anger at the actions of the uni with regards to the genocidal attacks in Gaza. The university is still reeling from the scandal of its chaplain, Zechariah Deutsch, joining the IDF in November, and his propagandising on official and unofficial social media and WhatsApp groups. Deutsch returned to the UK in February and is still officially the Orthodox Jewish Chaplain. The occupiers seek to force the university to deny him access to students; to force the university to commit to the safety of Palestinian students; and for the university to divest its interests in the state of Israel. The marketisation of the university sector inevitably results in the university prioritising its own image. Without friendly media, the university cannot attract lucrative international students and their fees. As a result, uni management had initially locked the occupiers inside the building, with no access to food, in order to starve them out. Despite this, there have been daily demonstrations on campus in solidarity, including significant disruption to a university open day. Hopefully the occupiers can hurt the university in the only place management cares about, its wallet, and so bring about the change they are striving for.

Goldsmiths students protest and occupy against uni ties with Israel state

CHLOE LESLIE GOLDSMITHS STUDENT AND SOUTH EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Students at Goldsmiths University in south London have protested to demand that the university cut its ties with the Israeli regime, and divest from companies that support the Israeli occupation of Palestine. The demonstration was part of a wider campaign by the group 'Goldsmiths for Palestine' which has been occupying the Professor Stuart Hall building, with teach-ins, protests, talks and rallies. Protesters demand that Goldsmiths adopts a clear stance on the unfolding situation. Speakers raised points such as upholding academic freedom and freedom of expression for students and staff who criticise Israel, and explained the role students played in the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. Some demands included divesting from companies, and supporting the rebuilding of Gazan educational infrastructures through partnerships, scholarships, and preservation of archives. The university issued a statement saying that it respects the right of students to express their views peacefully and lawfully, but that it does not endorse or support any political position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. At the time of publication, Goldsmiths management have yet to meet with the organisers of the occupation after "fraught negotiations".

Join the student fightback JOIN socialist students socialiststudents.org.uk/join

Protesters thrown out as Folkestone council refuses to discuss Gaza

ERIC SEGAL KENT SOCIALIST PARTY

Trade unionists and local campaigners turned up to Folkestone and Hythe council's meeting on 1 March demanding that the council takes a vote calling for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. Abena Akuffo-Kelly, Folkestone's mayor, a Labour councillor and chair of the council, said that she had unfortunately mislaid the request for a debate on Gaza! Green councillor Mike Blakemore said: "We do often get asked to make statements or pass motions on national or international issues and, while the position in Gaza is of a different order, I do feel our energies are best devoted to the council and its work on behalf of local people." The joint leader of Folkestone council, Green councillor Jim Martin, announced that he was "minded to write a letter to the Foreign Secretary David Cameron and that he would ask other councillors to sign the letter". In response, people in the public gallery protested saying they wanted the council to debate the

genocide in Gaza and that a letter was not good enough. The chair tried to shout down the protesters while ordering the councillors to leave the council chamber and called the police, demanding that we clear the public gallery. When the police arrived, the director of the council explained that an extraordinary meeting can be held to discuss the call for a ceasefire. We said that we would allow the council to complete the meeting without disruption if the chair would agree to hold an extraordinary meeting to discuss Gaza. The chair refused, saying "bad behaviour should not be rewarded". As if a request to debate the massacre of innocents is "bad behaviour". We were then removed from the public gallery. Folkestone council will be held to account for its refusal to debate the ongoing genocide in Gaza. The call for an extraordinary council meeting will grow so that the voices of Palestinians can be heard in Folkestone council chambers. We need trade unionist, socialist and anti-war candidates to replace unprincipled charlatans in local councils.



Worcester meeting discusses standing against Labour and Tories over Gaza

STUART AND PETE WORCESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

Socialist Party members were invited to what soon became a highly charged meeting in Worcester on 10 March. The meeting was organised by the local Asian community to see the strength of feeling about Gaza, and to explore the possibility of standing independent candidates to challenge Labour and the Conservatives in the local elections. Available chairs soon ran out and over 80 people filled the local community centre to discuss the desperate need to do more about the situation in Gaza. "We need to make a stand" was a commonly repeated theme, another

was: "We can't just sit back and not do something about this". Rejection of the main parties was spoken about by speakers, as was the oppression that Muslims face across the globe. Muslim councillors in Worcester, from both Labour and the Conservatives, had been approached earlier to see if they would step down and stand independently. They had refused and were called "cowards", and the idea of changing the situation from within the Labour Party was discredited. Three people spoke separately giving the reasons why they have decided to make a stand, as independents. One particularly passionate speaker compared the group to a Palestinian youth who throws a stone when faced

by an oncoming armoured vehicle, demanding we still need to resist and how others will follow. A representative of the Socialist Party spoke from the floor about the shared struggle, and highlighted past involvement in the fight against apartheid in South Africa and the war on Iraq, with parallels drawn. Three Socialist Party members stood as TUSC candidates in Worcester in last year's local elections. "We [TUSC and the Socialist Party] do not want to be campaigning against you in the local elections, but want to be fighting with you" resulted in applause from the attendees. After the formal meeting, discussions continued regarding next steps with the organisers.

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

Kirklees winning against cuts, but bigger struggle lies ahead

ROGER BRADLEY
WAKEFIELD AND PONTEFRACT SOCIALIST PARTY

100 people demonstrated yet again against the closure of the leisure centre and swimming pool in Dewsbury by Labour-run Kirklees Council. 'Kirklees against the Cuts', who organised the rally on 2 March, reported that their opposition had already resulted in two dementia care homes and three leisure centres being reprieved from closure – proving resistance can succeed.

The ruling Labour group is in crisis. Four councillors have already resigned, leaving a majority of just one in the council.

The campaigners are considering standing an independent candidate

in the coming council elections. If successful, independent councillors would have the deciding vote.

It is right that the speakers at the protest blamed the Labour council for the cuts. Labour has failed to lead a resistance to Tory cuts from central government.

No mention was made about what independent councillors could do if elected. They should adopt the policy of the local Kirklees Unison branch, and back a 'no-cuts' budget. The demand should be put on an incoming Labour government to provide the funding needed to reverse Tory cuts, and invest in a renewal of local services.

By linking with other campaigns, and other anti-cuts council

candidates, the demands for more council funding will be louder. The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is a banner that can be taken up to facilitate this, Socialist Party members will be standing as TUSC candidates in May.

The campaign to save services in Kirklees would be strengthened further by linking up with the council trade unions also fighting to save jobs and services. Kirklees Unison has been pushing for strike action over the issue, frustrated by the union's regional leadership.

● Read more – 'Protests make Kirklees Council back down on leisure centre closures' at socialistparty.org.uk

Sheffield socialists lead community campaign against park privatisation

LIAM BALL
SHEFFIELD SOUTH EAST SOCIALIST PARTY

Sheffield City Council is privatising the city's parks. But a community group, led by members of the Socialist Party, is having none of it.

'Save Our Parks' is committed to fighting the council's decision to sign away chunks of public land to private sports companies on a 25-year lease. The council is run by a coalition of Labour, Liberal Democrats, and Greens.

In the past two months, Save Our Parks' public consultations have dwarfed the council's. We have called two lively public meetings, with around 25 members of the community in attendance each time, including local press.

We have surveyed attendees of Hillsborough Park Run. They knew nothing of the council's shady plans, and all immediately took positions against it when made aware.

And we have held a demonstration

at Hillsborough Park, demarcating the loss to public land, which was attended by 25. The demonstration was again attended by media, including BBC Look North and the Sheffield Star, who published an interview with Sheffield South East Socialist Party member Leah Byatt.

Save Our Parks agrees that improvements are necessary. But this won't come from the council's undemocratic decision to lease free-to-use land to private profiteers. The public should have an actual democratic say over their desires for local parks, coming up with an alternative plan for Hillsborough Park.

Leah Byatt is standing in Hillsborough ward for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) in the 2 May council elections to offer an alternative. I am standing in Graves Park, with 28 TUSC candidates across Sheffield – so far one in every multimember ward.

Can you stand too?



Hillsborough Park PHOTO: GREGORY DERVICKÉRE/CC

TRADE UNIONIST AND SOCIALIST COALITION

TUSC AGAINST CUTS

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

● Find out more visit: tusc.org.uk

Barking: Fury as heating bills are six times higher than last year

PETE MASON
BARKING REACH RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION CHAIR AND SOCIALIST PARTY

Facing bills of £2,400 for a two-bedroom flat, 61 furious residents from two hard-hit blocks of flats have signed an email, assisted by the Barking Reach Residents Association, demanding the bills be struck off. The

Bradford 'bailed out' by debt and asset fire sale



Bradford TUSC PHOTO: BRADFORD SP

IAIN DALTON
WEST YORKSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY

The Tory government has responded to Bradford council's special appeal for £80 million. The 'bailout' offered is not new money from central government, but borrowing at 1% above standard interest rates for councils, to be funded from the council's own resources, including by selling off assets.

As part of the deal, an 'independent improvement board' is to be established to oversee cuts. 18 other councils have been granted similar powers.

After 14 years of funding cuts from Westminster, with the huge weight of financial pressure on councils, the Tories have been forced to acknowledge the scale of the crisis and change the 'rules'.

However, Bradford council is still pressing on with £40 million of cuts this year. The Labour council should

be saying 'no cuts', and refusing to sell off community assets – libraries, leisure centres, and so on.

Why not set a budget that defends all jobs and services, using all available means, mobilising the local community to back the stance? The demand should be put on an incoming Starmer-led government to fund it.

Socialist Party members have supported anti-cuts campaigns throughout West Yorkshire, which will clearly need to be stepped up in opposition to these cuts, and the further cuts to come. As part of resisting these cuts, we believe it is vital that councillors who refuse to fight are challenged at the ballot box by candidates who will.

We appeal to all anti-cuts campaigners, trade unionists and community activists to join us standing as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), to ensure the widest-possible challenge.

landlord is also threatening to send another £1,000 bill for the previous year's gas usage.

Over the last ten years, since the construction of these homes, the landlord has: failed to install working meters; failed to bill residents for their actual use of heat and hot water; and failed to properly maintain the heating equipment.

Only last month, a two-year period of constant flooding in the basement carpark was finally fixed. But an overflow pipe still runs directly there. If there is another fault, it will dump overflow water again. Residents have been wading through water to get to the block entrance.

One resident moved out last August, hoping to sell, yet has been served these estimated bills, based

on habitable rooms, rather than on actual heating and hot water usage.

The heating service for residents has been appalling since the building was first occupied ten years ago. The heating failed for an extended period, as highlighted in the Socialist at the time (see 'Heating scandal on east London estate' at socialistparty.org.uk).

Residents demand that the bills are suspended, and that billing returns to the £400 per year previously levied to residents, until work is completed to bill residents according to usage.

British Gas has announced profits that rose almost tenfold in a year – from £72 million to £751 million – with a £144 million payout to shareholders. 'This profiteering from residents' huge energy bills has led to a revolt. We await a response from the landlord.

Southampton Venny victory

NADIA DITTA
SOUTHAMPTON EAST SOCIALIST PARTY AND TUSC CANDIDATE IN BEVOIS WARD

During our first meeting in Bevois ward (see 'Ready to support one of their own as TUSC candidate' at socialistparty.org.uk), community member Sarah Imran spoke up. She advised us that the Labour council, as well as the three local Labour councillors, had a consultation on the council website.

We were being threatened with the closure of the Venny playground in Weston (see 'Don't be mean, save our green' at socialistparty.org.uk). The excuse was antisocial behaviour.

The Venny had not been invested in for over ten years. In 2014, the council closed the purpose-built building, which was used by the community, with support and youth workers.

Socialist Party member Sue Atkins said: "This was replaced with an attractive purpose-built facility that the community was delighted with.

However, this lasted for less than a year. Eventually, it was handed over.

"It is great that there is a pre-school for SEND children. But it's shocking that this is run by a charity when it should be part of the state education system. Also, this should be an extra facility, instead of robbing the local community of its own much-needed and valued building."

With Sarah and the rest of the community, we decided to run a campaign, and held our first protest outside the Venny on 10 January. This attracted a lot of people, and also landed us on the front page of the local Daily Echo newspaper, as well as two local radio shows.

The following week we held a meeting with the community, who wanted to protest. We encouraged everyone to fill in the consultation form, demanding no closure.

We continued to campaign, spoke to the local community, and gave out leaflets. The planned closure and lack of investment was already

having an effect, as the children and youth have no alternative.

At the council's budget meeting, I put forward a deputation, and spoke about the importance of having our only green space stay open. I said that we needed investment, that our council needed to show it cares, and that it was not investing in the future of our children and youth.

Our victory is just half the battle won. We demand a fully functioning youth centre, with qualified youth workers. We want the Venny back to its former glory to serve the community like it previously did.

We say no to cuts. We demand a safe space, and a place for our children and youth.

That's why we're standing for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) in May. Sue Atkins is preparing to stand in Woolston, the ward the Venny is in.

We already have 13 candidates across Southampton. Will you stand with us?



Save Venny playground campaign PHOTO: SOUTHAMPTON SP

Hackney Labour council closes children's centres

BRIAN DEBUS
HACKNEY UNISON CHAIR

Chants of "Save our children's centres" rang round as over 100 parents and their children, plus supporters, lobbied Hackney Council. They were protesting council proposals to close two centres, and change the usage of two others.

Campaign organiser Natalie Aguilera stated:

"It is between the ages of nought to three where you can make the most impact in a child's life. That is where you will close the gap between disadvantaged children and their peers.

"Children's centres have an invaluable role to play in doing that. And that's why we're going to fight tooth and nail to keep these centres open for now and for future generations."

"People are struggling, and these changes and closures will particularly impact the most vulnerable, the poorest, and single-parent families." Suspended local Labour MP Diane

Abbott accused Labour councillors of listening more to council officers than voters. She gave her full support to stop any cuts to children's centres.

I spoke from Hackney Unison, saying that, with reserves of over £150 million, the council did not need to make these cuts. With the likely election of a Starmer-led Labour government, this cuts policy should not be carried out.

Despite all this opposition, the council ploughed on, and voted through cuts to the budget and a 4.99% increase in council tax – the maximum legally allowed without a referendum. The fight goes on. This will expose Labour as little more than 'pale Tories' to more people.

There's no council elections in London this year. Socialist Party member Nancy Taaffe is preparing to stand for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) for the London Assembly North East seat, covering Hackney, to challenge pro-cuts politicians.



PHOTO: HACKNEY SP

Waltham Forest Labour's jargon can't hide brutal cuts



ROY WILLS
WALTHAM FOREST SOCIALIST PARTY

Nowadays, Waltham Forest Labour calls its council cuts "tactical management actions". When Labour councillors voted for £18 million worth of cuts, Waltham Forest trades council called a protest and, naturally, our local Socialist Party branch was there.

Those areas suffering include: care and support for the elderly; services for the disabled; and temporary housing for homeless families.

The council will also sell off public properties, or as it puts it: "Asset-led service transformation".

The typical Labour councillor claims that there is simply no alternative, and that the fault lies with the tight-fisted Tory government. But another option exists, with the well-documented historic efforts of Liverpool's socialist council of the 1980s that beat Thatcher's cuts (see

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

Our members engaged the councillors as they arrived for the budget meeting. Many responded with a resigned shrug of the shoulders, referring to "unprecedented levels of demand". But why are they implementing Tory cuts in what is highly likely to be the last few months of their administration?

The council is also reviewing its library service. Local volunteers arrived to plead their case.

They have seen the service deteriorate from its original incarnation to a woefully underfunded option, run only through the goodwill of concerned locals.

The clear message emerging from local government is: what you had last year, you will probably not get next year. At this rate, local councils will provide the statutory

requirements, and nothing else.

Local towns will be just shops and unaffordable housing. The pleasant provisions for the community that were once fixtures will be regarded as optional extras. If it doesn't make a profit, then why would it need to exist?

It sounds like an awful caricature, but decisions like the ones being taken by councils all around the country make it seem like a reality. Only a socialist programme can ensure a proper provision for local people.

There is money in this country, it just needs to be redistributed properly.

Local resident and Socialist Party member, Nancy Taaffe, assistant secretary of the trades council, helped organise this protest. She's planning to stand for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) in the North East London Assembly seat. She's standing to put this fighting programme on the ballot.



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 sick pay, parental and holiday rights from day one of employment. End bosses using bogus 'self-employment' as a means to avoid giving workers rights.

- No to austerity through inflation. For all wage rates to be automatically increased at least in line with price rises.

- Open the books of all companies cutting jobs or claiming they can't afford to pay a real living wage. State subsidies, where genuinely needed, for socially-useful small businesses.

- For trade unions independent of the capitalist state, with members having democratic control over their own policies, constitutions and democratic procedures. For all trade union officials to be regularly elected, subject to recall by their members and paid a worker's wage.

- Reduce the state retirement and pension age to 55. For decent living pensions.

- Replace universal credit and the punitive benefit system with living benefits for all who need them.

PUBLIC SERVICES

- A massive expansion of public services including the NHS and council services. Reverse all the cuts, kick out the privateers. Bring private social care and childcare facilities into public

ownership under democratic control, in order to provide free, high-quality services for all who need them. Expand services for all women suffering violence.

- For local councillors who are committed to opposing austerity and all cuts to local services, jobs, pay and conditions.

- For a socialist NHS to provide for everyone's health needs, including dental and eye care – free at the point of use and under democratic control. Kick out the private companies! Nationalise the pharmaceutical industry under democratic workers' control and management.

- Renationalise privatised utilities – including rail, mail, water, telecoms and power – under democratic workers' control and management.

- Free, publicly funded and democratically run, good-quality education, available to all at any age. Abolish university tuition fees and write off student debt, end marketisation, and introduce a living grant. No to academisation. For all schools to be under the genuine democratic control of local education authorities, school staff, parents and student organisations.

- The right to a safe secure home for all. For the mass building of genuinely affordable, high-quality, carbon-neutral council housing. For rent controls that cap the level of rent. Fair rent decisions should be made by elected bodies of tenants, housing workers and representatives of trade unions. For cheap low-interest mortgages for home buyers. Nationalise the privately owned large building companies, land banks and estates.

- 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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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.

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Protesters gather outside Ghana High Commission to fight anti-LGBTQ+ bill



JOE GARWOOD
CAMDEN AND HARINGEY SOCIALIST PARTY

On 6 March, a crowd of LGBTQ+ activists and allies assembled outside the doors of the Ghana High Commission in London in defiance of the anti-LGBTQ+ bill passed on 28 February.

Dubbed the 'Promotion of Proper Human Sexual Rights and Ghanaian Family Values Bill', it was first introduced into Parliament in 2021 and makes it illegal to identify as LGBTQ+ or outside of the gender binaries of male and female, massively increasing criminal penalties for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer Ghanaians.

Currently in Ghana, same-sex conduct between men is illegal and punishable by a maximum of three years in prison, but the new bill means any queer person, regardless of gender or assigned sex, as well as any allies who publicly advocate for the rights of queer people, could face having to pay up to 5,000 penalty units (approx. 60,000 in Ghanaian cedi, or £4,700), as well as anywhere between six months and three years in prison.

Chants such as "kill the bill" and "queer Ghanaian lives matter" echoed through Belgrave Square as speakers made passionate pleas to the Ghanaian High Commissioner to the UK and Ireland, Papa Owusu-Ankomah, to come out of hiding and face the reality of the vast amounts of people who will be demonised by this bill simply for just existing.

Socialist Party members handed out flyers outlining the links between authoritarian capitalism and anti-LGBTQ+ oppression, and this was also felt in many speakers' calls for international solidarity, and a recognition of the links between all forms of oppression under capitalism. One speaker spoke out against the war in Gaza, and said how we need to stand united across the world against all draconian regimes that continue to rule through systems of alienation and violence.

We stand in solidarity with LGBTQ+ Ghanaians facing this extreme discrimination and persecution, and continue to put forward our socialist ideas as a way towards ending various forms of oppression globally, standing behind and alongside working-class people across Ghana and Africa, with a focus on speaking out against this horrendous form of targeted discrimination.

Nigeria solidarity protest



Socialist Party members protested outside the Nigeria High Commission on 9 March in solidarity with cost-of-living protests in Nigeria

Renewed workers' actions offer hope for change in Egypt



Mahalla al-Kubra textile plant PHOTO: PARIS KNIGHT/CC

DAVID JOHNSON

As well as coming under pressure from the masses over the Egyptian regime's cowardly response to the Israeli state's merciless attacks on Gaza, 'strongman' President Sisi faces rising workers' anger. Sharply rising food prices have severely hit Egypt's low-paid workers, but there are signs of a fightback.

Around 14,000 textile workers at Egypt's largest factory, Misr Spinning and Weaving Company, at Mahalla al-Kubra in the Nile Delta region, started a week's strike on 22 February. Workers at one of real estate company Talaat Moustafa Group's biggest subsidiaries, Alexandria Construction, in Cairo, held a protest on 28 February.

It was women workers in Mahalla's clothing factory who started chanting slogans, which quickly spread from one building to another. Security staff locked exits to stop these workers, as well as those at the onsite power station, gathering in the central square. However, on the third day, 7,000 strikers rallied there. Dozens were arrested. As usual, the official state-run trade union committee denounced the strike, but workers drove them out of the rally.

This echoed the historic 2006 strike, when Mahalla women began the strike that was a key step towards the 2011 uprising bringing President Hosni Mubarak's 31-year rule to an end. In 2008, the city saw an uprising that was to be repeated on a national scale, three years later.

The new strike's trigger was the public sector minimum wage increase from 4,000 Egyptian pounds (LE) to LE6,000 per month. Although Mahalla is state-owned, pay is covered by the National Wages Council, which last October raised the private sector minimum wage to just LE3,500. A Mahalla worker with 25 years' service taking home LE4,000 per month gets around US\$130 at the official exchange rate, or US\$80 at the parallel market rate (at the time of writing).

Workers also demanded their daily meal allowance be increased to LE30, chanting this barely covers "the price of a litre of milk." They also chanted: "Where is Sisi's decision?" pointing to an increasing willingness to challenge the president. In January, he arrogantly remarked: "Don't we eat? We eat. Won't we drink? We drink, and everything is functioning. Things are expensive and some things are not available? So what?"

The strike ended after a week,

following the Minister of Public Business Sector's intervention. Management agreed to pay LE6,000 per month minimum and most arrested workers were released. An earlier offer that included overtime payments, profit share and health insurance in the LE6,000 was not accepted.

Construction workers' protest

Hundreds of Talaat Moustafa workers protested outside company headquarters. The company has been laying off workers on permanent contracts and replacing them with temporary workers on worse terms and conditions. Workers demanded overdue payments, a cost-of-living bonus, better health insurance and safety gear available and insufficient healthcare coverage. Many permanent workers laid off have been injured at work or suffer chronic illnesses.

Workers told reporters criteria for bonus rates and rises are obscure, but are consistently paid out to people related to or connected with managers. Managers and their assistants receive lavish benefits, while workers' pay stays low.

Unusually, the police did not attempt to shut down the protest,

although they have stopped smaller protests in the past. However, on 4 March an office workers' protest was prevented when security forces locked gates.

But then hundreds of the company's own security guards refused to start their shift! They demanded higher wages, better benefits, working hours and holidays. "Our salaries are very weak at LE3,000. We work for over 14 hours a day, unlike the rest of the employees. We receive the quarterly bonus at a lower percentage than them," one guard explained.

Within 30 minutes, a senior manager met them, promising to pay a rise within two months, after which the protest finished.

Mubarak's regime remains

Talaat Moustafa Group has had huge contracts constructing the new capital city President Sisi has overseen. It tripled its real estate and hospitality business in the past year, despite Egypt's economic crisis. In the past few months its share price shot up, making millions for its multimillionaire major shareholder, Talaat Moustafa. One of Africa's richest men, he was close to Hosni Mubarak's son, Gamal, who was hated by workers for pushing through widespread privatisation when his father was president.

In 2008, Talaat Moustafa was found guilty of paying a former policeman \$2 million to murder Lebanese singer Suzanne Tamim. The other major shareholders of Talaat Moustafa Group are the Bin Laden family of Saudi Arabia.

In February, the company entered a partnership agreement with United Arab Emirates investment company ADQ to build a vast new tourist city at Ras el-Hikma on the Mediterranean coast, west of Alexandria. The \$35 billion deal, including sale of land by the army, will greatly help Sisi's government pay \$42 billion debt and interest charges it owes this year. Many questions are raised, including the viability of the project, its environmental cost, the true value of the land, how its army ownership came about, what local residents' views are (they haven't been consulted) and what controls there will be over future profits in a 'free economic zone'.

The Sisi government's desperate need for foreign exchange has forced it to sell off state-owned assets. Ras el-Hikma adds to the growing list of Egyptian companies and land now under Gulf ownership and control.

The gross inequality, corruption and brutal repression of opposition of former President Hosni Mubarak's regime has continued, and even increased, under Sisi. Recent strikes and workers' protests could mark the beginning of a new wave of working-class action, as developed in Mubarak's final years.

The reawakening of the Egyptian working class could be a powerful factor in ending the crisis in Gaza, opening the Rafah crossing for humanitarian aid and encouraging workers and the poor across the Middle East and North Africa to oust their mega-rich rulers across the region.

Building independent trade unions and workers' parties with socialist, democratic and internationalist programmes will be needed to end ongoing capitalist poverty, war and environmental destruction.

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the Socialist

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STOP THE SLAUGHTER IN GAZA

» Take on Sunak and Starmer

» Build the socialist election stand

IAIN DALTON
YORKSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY SECRETARY

More than 30,000 have died in Gaza since October, with more unable to be counted under the rubble. The Israeli state's brutal onslaught continues.

As the Muslim holy month of Ramadan begins, hunger is so widespread that people are unable to fast. 23 people, including several children, have died of dehydration and malnutrition since the beginning of March.

US President Joe Biden hypocritically described the situation in Gaza as "heartbreaking" and is under pressure to increase aid. But

he won't take decisive action, as Israeli capitalism's biggest backer, to cut off the weapons and finance necessary to sustain the brutal war.

The strategic interests of US capitalism, and the profits of its big businesses weigh far more under this system than the lives of the 2.3 million displaced in Gaza.

Similarly, politicians from the major capitalist parties in Britain continue to oppose an immediate ceasefire and the permanent withdrawal of Israeli troops from the occupied territories.

On this and many other issues, the lives and living standards of ordinary working-class people, in Britain and abroad, are small

change to their interests. That's why, as well as strengthening the opposition to the brutal war on Gaza on the streets, we should challenge Sunak, Starmer and the rest at the ballot box too.

Socialist Party members and other trade unionists and campaigners will be coming together under the banner of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition in the local and general election, to offer an alternative to the horrors of war, famine and poverty - fighting for socialist change.

Taking a stand for socialism in the elections is a step to building the mass force capable of ensuring an end to the horror we are seeing in Gaza.

Join the fightback

JOIN THE SOCIALISTS

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



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



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