

£1 / £2 solidarity price

socialistparty.org.uk



the Socialist

Issue 1267

21-27 March 2024

formerly **Militant**

NO CUTS!

FUND OUR SERVICES

Tories out

Make the super-rich pay

SCOTT HUNTER
SWINDON SOCIALIST PARTY

The appalling state of our public services is compounding the misery of the cost-of-living crisis.

NHS dentists are rarer than gold, you'll be lucky to get a phone consultation with anyone at your local GP surgery, and the NHS waiting list for routine hospital treatment is huge.

Public services have been cut to the bone over 16 years of austerity. Now working-class people increasingly face the choice of spending money they don't have to go private or, more likely, simply going without vital services.

It's not just the NHS. One in five local authorities have warned that they expect to issue Section 114 notices in the next five years - declaring themselves effectively 'bankrupt'. Westminster has already told councils like Birmingham and Nottingham to 'sell the family silver' to pay for budget deficits - those same deficits that are the result of cuts from Tory government!

Austerity hasn't just made our lives worse; it's ended the lives of many. There were 334,327 excess deaths in Britain linked to austerity between 2012-19, the Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health estimates. Not to mention the hundreds of thousands more who died during the Covid-19 pandemic.

A further £19 billion of cuts has been laid out for after the next election by the Tories. Just as well they are on their way out. Except Labour's Keir Starmer has said he's committed to following Tory spending plans!

Labour councillors in their thousands up and down the country continue to vote through Tory cuts at council level rather than fighting to defend their communities.

We can't afford to hope against hope that Starmer will give our services the funding they desperately need now.

Over the last two years, hundreds of thousands of workers across Britain have bravely gone on strike to fight for pay rises and better working conditions. Now, workers need MPs and councillors worthy of that struggle; workers' representatives who will live on a workers' wage and take the battle into Westminster and the council chambers.

The Socialist Party stands in elections as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), which is pulling together anti-war, trade unionist, student, and socialist candidates, for the general and local government elections.

Don't wait, join us to fight for socialist change.



END ISRAELI SIEGE ON GAZA >>> p2

BUILD ANTI-RACIST, SOCIALIST ELECTION STAND >>> p3

UKRAINE WAR >>> p8-9

FIGHTING TO END WOMEN'S OPPRESSION >>> p10-11

DO YOU HAVE NEWS FOR US?

The Socialist is written, read, sold and bought by ordinary workers, trade unionists, young people and Socialist Party members. We want you to write for the Socialist.

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

CONTACT US

editors@socialistparty.org.uk
020 8988 8777 - ask for the editors

DEADLINES

Friday before publication, or Monday morning for urgent news, unless otherwise agreed with the editors.

The Socialist goes to press on a Tuesday night. We publish online on Wednesday and in print on Thursday.

SUBSCRIBE

to the Socialist for weekly working-class news, analysis and fighting strategy socialistparty.org.uk/subscribe

- Paper subscription £4.50 a month, or £6.50 including Socialism Today
- E-subscription £2.50 a month, or £4 including Socialism Today

SOCIALISM TODAY

our monthly Marxist magazine socialismtoday.org

- Paper sub £3 a month, e-sub £2.50

SOCIALISM: THE PODCAST

on all major podcast platforms

FOLLOW US

facebook.com/CWISocialistParty
Instagram @SocialistPartyCWI
YouTube - Socialist Party
Twitter @Socialist_Party

SOCIALIST PARTY

The Socialist is the weekly newspaper of the Socialist Party, the England and Wales section of the Committee for a Workers' International socialistparty.org.uk socialistworld.net



BOOKS AND PAMPHLETS

Socialist Books: our publishing house socialistbooks.co.uk
Left Books: Marxist classics bookshop leftbooks.co.uk

OUR NEWSPAPER TEAM

Editor of the Socialist: Josh Asker socialistparty.org.uk
Editorial staff: Scott Jones, Ian Pattison, Paula Mitchell, Mark Best
Circulation manager: Chris Newby

ISSN 1366-9621
Published by Socialist Publications, PO Box 1398, Enfield EN1 9GT
Registered as a newspaper at the Post Office
Printed by trade union labour at Reach Printing Services

Militant issue 1: October 1964
The Socialist issue 1: 7 February 1997

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

6.7 million adults have missed three or more credit card or bill payments over the last six months.



'Levelling up' damp squib

There aren't "any compelling examples" of projects funded by the Tories' levelling-up agenda, according to the Public Accounts Committee. These projects were due to be finished by the end of this month. Only one tenth of the promised £10.5 billion has been spent by local councils. Instead of levelling up, the funding process, overseen by Michael Gove, is more like 'game over'!



Renationalise water - put people over profits

ALEX CHAPMAN
OXFORD SOCIALIST PARTY

In 1989, the Conservative government under Thatcher privatised our water services. Since then water bills have skyrocketed over 40% above the rate of inflation. Yet this surge in costs has not been matched by improved performance. In 2019, the Environment Agency revealed that only 14% of England's rivers meet their ecological targets. Stories of raw sewage flooding people's streets and homes have become depressingly common.

This disastrous performance can be easily explained: despite increased costs forced upon the public, minimal investment is directed towards enhancing our sewage system. Almost every penny you pay your water company funnels into their profits (£1.7 billion last year), generous shareholder dividends and paying off debts.

To add a bitter twist, English water firms have responded to this self-inflicted crisis by demanding even

more money! Bills are expected to rise at least 40% by the end of the decade in order to deal with the emerging climate disaster. Curiously absent from their proposals is any notion of cutting into profits and dividends.

Nationalisation on its own doesn't solve all the problems the industry has. Indeed, prior to their privatisation, Thatcher's government chronically underfunded the Regional Water Authorities (RWAs). This resulted in predictably poor performance which was used to justify privatisation.

This paints a clear pattern in pro-capitalist politicians' strategy over decades: starve a public service, then 'save' it by handing it over to private interests. This happened to our water; this is happening to our health service. Water needs to be renationalised. This time fully funded and under democratic working-class control and management. As part of a wider socialist planned economy, all our services could be run to meet the needs of people and the planet.

Palestinians face famine as 'lethal aid' to Israel continues

THOMAS ASHER

A quarter of the Gaza population are on the brink of famine, according to the United Nations (UN).

In January, a whole swathe of rich capitalist nations suspended funding for UNRWA - the UN body responsible for distributing aid to Palestinian Refugees. The consequence: a deepening humanitarian catastrophe. Since, a trickle of countries have resumed funding. Britain, and the US continue to withhold it.

Meanwhile, increasingly desperate Gazans are being slaughtered waiting for aid in short supply. On Thursday 13 March, another 21 were killed by Israeli forces who opened fire on a queue of thousands. Earlier the same day, another six were shot queuing for food. In February, 118 were killed by Israeli forces waiting for flour.

UK foreign secretary David Cameron trumpets an extra £10 million of humanitarian aid destined for the 'Palestinian occupied territories'. Compare that to the £1 million-plus spent every time a Royal Navy destroyer stationed in the Red Sea fires a missile at Yemen.

US President Joe Biden says out of one side of his mouth that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu should "pay more attention to the innocent lives being lost". Out of the other side he says "there is no red line" that the Israeli state could cross that would mean cutting off US military aid to Israel.

The US has delivered 100 'foreign military sales' to Israel since the war began: ammunition, bunker busters, arms - with the sinister description 'lethal aid'. The British government

continues to grant arms export licences to Israel too.

Biden, as well as Sunak and others, have not so much as lifted their little fingers to stop the Israeli state's slaughter and starvation.

The thing they fear, above all, is the prospect of the war stirring up a new rising of the masses in the Middle East, like what happened during the Arab Spring in 2011. New mass movements, with the development of independent organisations of the working class adopting a socialist political programme, would put socialist change and an end to conflict on the agenda.

In Britain, fighting to develop and strengthen our own working-class organisations is the most important task, including mass working-class political representation.



Diane Abbott: Hackney protests against racism

BRIAN DEBUS
HACKNEY AND ISLINGTON SOCIALIST PARTY

There was a mass outpouring of support for Diane Abbott at a community rally in Hackney Town Hall Square on Friday 15 March. The protest followed disgusting, racist, misogynistic comments about her made by Tory business donor Frank Hester.

To symbolise the number of times the Speaker of the House of Commons ignored Diane as she tried to speak at Prime Minister's questions, 47 supporters held up "I stand with Diane" placards.

A constant stream of supporters came into the square for well over an hour, swelling the ranks of the hundreds already there to over a thousand.

There were intermittent energetic chants of "I stand with Diane", which became deafening when Diane spoke. She gave a very emotional speech about her mother coming to the UK in the fifties to work in the health service and the racism that pervaded society then.

The massive support from the crowd clearly affected and impressed



Protest in support of Diane Abbott

Diane and she expressed her gratitude for this to the rally organisers and the community of Hackney.

When this story first broke, it took Sunak 24 hours to condemn Hester's comments as racist. This reflects the continued reluctance of the Tories to return any of the £15 million he has donated to them.

The way it has been dealt with is a further indication of the desperate straits that the Tories are in politically and financially.

The actions of Labour leader Keir

Starmer and his coterie leave almost as much to be questioned. Diane was suspended from the Labour Party for 12 months and there are no immediate signs of this being lifted. Meanwhile, her Constituency Labour Party, Hackney North, had three of its elected officers undemocratically removed, replaced by pro-Starmer figures.

Both the Tories and Labour are in hock to the interests of capitalist big business and not those of the working class. We need a new mass workers' party to fight in our interests.

Jeremy Corbyn is likely to stand independently of Labour in the general election, and could be joined by Diane, unless the current suspension is lifted. They could be part of a wider workers' list of anti-cuts and anti-war candidates.

If Diane and Jeremy were to make steps in that direction now it would draw support from tens of thousands, and could be an important step in the direction of a new mass party of the working class.

MP salaries soar above inflation to £91,346

ADAM HARMSWORTH
COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

The Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA), the body that sets pay and expenses for MPs, has awarded a 5.5% increase to MPs' salaries.

That makes MPs' basic pay a staggering £91,346, with tens of thousands of pounds more for those on select committees, for various ministers, plus £75,440 extra for Rishi Sunak and £49,193 for Keir Starmer. That's all before you get to expenses, all paid for by us!

Many of those MPs currently attacking the poorest workers and those on benefits are earning well over £100,000, plus incomes from businesses and property. They live on a completely different planet to workers, and the gap between them and us is getting bigger.

These careerist parliamentarians might say they have no choice but to accept the absurdly high pay put forward by IPSA as it's supposedly an 'independent' pay body. But during the strike wave last year, the Tories ignored the teachers' pay review body without hesitation when its recommendation was higher than they wanted. Pay review bodies don't have any real independence; they are unelected panels that broadly follow the wishes of the government, and are used to try to deceive workers into thinking what is suggested by the body is reasonable.

But very few workers will believe this pay rise is deserved. IPSA chair Richard Lloyd also appeared to be on a

different planet with his comment on the 5.5% rise: "Serving as an MP should not be reserved to those wealthy enough to fund it themselves... We are committed to supporting a Parliament that reflects our society, where people from all walks of life can decide to become MPs".

This Parliament doesn't reflect our society one bit! When workers campaigned for MPs to get a salary at the start of the 1900s, it was so the working class could be represented in Parliament with MPs who would act in their interests. A bloated salary and blank chequebook for expenses only encourages MPs to act in the interests of the wealthy and put their careers first. That doesn't

Help fund an anti-racist, working-class, socialist election stand

ISAI MARIJERLA
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL TREASURER

"They have all lost my vote!" These were the words of the retired NHS worker from the Windrush generation outside Hackney Town Hall on Friday 15 March. He, like the thousands of people at the protest, came to show solidarity with Diane Abbott and to fight against racism.

The racist Tory business donor has highlighted again the rotten racism that exists in the Tory Party. We all know that the Tories are no friends of the working class of any background. All they care about is money and further profits. This is shown by their refusal to give the £15 million money back.

But for the people who attended the solidarity rally, there was also anger at Sir Keir Starmer and his Labour Party. Diane Abbott has been systematically targeted by Starmer for her support for Jeremy Corbyn and the manifesto he stood for. Starmer is still refusing to restore the whip because she is on the left.

It is becoming crystal clear that the Tories, Labour, or any other party that defends the capitalist profit system, are not going to fight against racism or fight for ordinary people.

We need socialist working-class candidates to challenge the capitalist system that is breeding racism. The Socialist Party has been campaigning to get both Diane Abbott and Jeremy Corbyn to lead the movement for a new mass workers' party. A party that will provide a decent life and livelihood for all and fight against racism and all oppression in society.

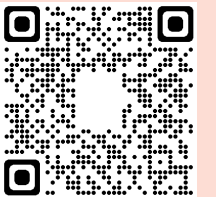
As a step in that direction, the Socialist Party is planning to stand anti-cuts, anti-racist, and anti-war candidates in the general election. But standing in the election costs money. For every candidate, we need a £500 deposit. Please donate to us today to support this campaign.

We can challenge Sunak and Starmer and the racist ideas of capitalism. Help us send a clear message: No more cuts, no more war, end racism!

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



PHILAFRENZY/CC



TERRY OTT/CC

Assisted dying: what would a socialist programme look like?

JON DALE
MANSFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

Assisted dying is in the news again, since broadcaster Esther Rantzen announced she has lung cancer and intended to take control over when and how she would die. Many people would share her wish if faced with an incurable illness that could cause intolerable suffering before death.

However, many could not afford the £10,000 on average to arrange this at Dignitas in Switzerland – more if they wanted family to travel with them.

Should assisted dying now be legalised in Britain? Opinion polls show around three in four support this.

Several countries and US states have already legalised assisted dying. The Isle of Man is preparing to do this and Jersey is due to publish detailed proposals on 22 March. A bill is likely to be debated in the Scottish parliament this year and Keir Starmer has promised a vote in parliament if Labour wins the election.

Socialists support people having full control over every aspect of their lives, including when and how to end it. But in a capitalist society, with inequality in every part of life, real control is impossible for most people. There is inequality in death, too.

Take two people with the same type of cancer at the same stage of illness. One lives in a large warm home, with supportive family who can afford to take time off work and whose care can be supplemented with private nurses and carers.

The other lives in a cramped damp



PHOTO: KOLFORN/CC

flat, sharing a bedroom with a grandchild, where other family members can't afford to take time off work, and where local community health and social care services have been stripped bare.

Hospices offer excellent end-of-life care, so no-one should have to face death in cold uncomfortable circumstances. 300,000 people a year rely on them. But government funding of local hospice services is down £47 million in real terms in the last two years, as funding has not kept up with inflation.

Hospices should be integrated into the NHS and fully funded to meet the needs of their community. Instead they are charities, only partly funded by the government while relying on charity shops, sponsored walks and other fundraising. They compete desperately against many other good causes that should also be fully funded by government and councils.

Good end-of-life care would allow more people to choose to die at home, or in a hospice if they prefer. Fully staffed, fully funded community services are needed, providing trained carers and nurses with time to support the individual and their family. GPs need enough time for home visits and palliative care services need expanding to support them.

NHS care should be available to all, but is severely underfunded. Local authority support is means-tested, so some services may have to be paid for by the individual. Councils have been starved of money for years so services have been cut. Many are privatised, further cutting care as profits are sucked out.

Many people want to pass on a useful sum from a house sale, seeing how little chance their grandchildren have to save for a deposit or get a secure home of their own. A nursing home costs an average of £5,640 a month. Watching life savings drain rapidly away could increase pressure for assisted dying.

Despite legal safeguards, inevitably some frail and ill people would feel they were a burden to their families where community support is not available. Those with long-term disabilities could be especially vulnerable, as local services disappear. Legalising assisted dying in these circumstances could lead to people choosing to end their life, rather than become a financial drain on their families.

As medical knowledge advances, many now survive much longer with illnesses that would have rapidly killed them in the past. Quality of life depends on more than medical progress. To allow everyone to enjoy life to the full before eventually experiencing a dignified death, socialist change is needed to ensure needs are met 'from cradle to grave'.

WHAT'S YOUR VIEW? 
 • editors@socialistparty.org.uk
 or, if you're not online, write to the Socialist Inbox, PO Box 1398, Enfield EN1 9GT

From the frontline of Glasgow's cuts-ravaged services

SHAW ROONEY
YOUNG SOCIALISTS AND GLASGOW ADULT AND YOUTH SOCIAL SERVICE WORKER

'Charity starts at home'. Whoever said that must have been from a very dysfunctional family, because working in the volunteer and third sector leads to more crisis management than managing the real crises facing society today.

A sector built upon the socialist principles of caring for one another and providing a helping hand to those in need, has now been warped into a money-driven machine that has eviscerated the core values that it stood by. Companies and services clamber over each other to beg for the scraps from the government table packaged in the yearly budget.

Who does this affect the most in our society? As always, it's those who are most vulnerable that bear the weight of the cuts.

In Glasgow, the 218 Project, which helps support female offenders to rebuild their lives after drug and

alcohol use, has now been closed down. This has put some of the most vulnerable women in the city out on the street or in shared accommodation that puts their recovery, stability and the lives they have built at risk.

Yet, it is not only the people who use these services that have been damaged by cut after cut after cut. It is also the sector's low-paid workers, now taking on the mental load of those they work with and the ever-present guillotine of redundancy hanging above their heads.

One of the most common sayings you will hear from anyone who has worked in social care and the third and voluntary sector is: "You must love helping people, cause you're definitely not in this job for the money."

Yet even this self-deprecating throwaway comment has been weaponised against the working-class people in these roles. They use people's commitment to helping those who are marginalised in society against them by not providing a work-life balance or adequate training, and by



Services in Glasgow helping vulnerable young women have been shutdown PHOTO: PUBLIC DOMAIN

promoting unhealthy working hours that cause burn out. All because people dare to love their job and give their all to a cause they think is worthwhile.

I, myself, have faced redundancy not once but twice in the space of a year in two different services. In my previous role I did lose my job due to redundancy and have only just managed to escape the same fate in my current role by the skin of my teeth.

While my job is secure, there are other services and safe spaces that are geared towards reducing youth violence and harm reduction that closed their doors during Covid, never to open back up. Austerity and a cost-of-living crisis has left our youth and people in need angry and wanting to lash out, caught in a whirlwind of bitterness and rage at the world and with no safe space to channel that anger in a positive way.

So what does it say about this ailing capitalist society that, at the age of 28, I have stared into the abyss of redundancy twice and those younger than me are forgotten and left to seethe and stew with no place to turn to let it all out?

It shows that greed of those at the top of society holds no bounds, even in the sectors and services we hold dear. We see, day in day out, while holding together the tattered and frayed edges of society, that we are not safe from savage cuts by those who have never had their boots on the ground or their brow hot and sweaty at the coal face.

Shock announcement to close coke ovens at Port Talbot: No trust in Tata!

ALEC THRAVES
SWANSEA SOCIALIST PARTY AND SWANSEA TRADES COUNCIL

Tata's shock announcement, that it will be shutting down all of its Port Talbot coke ovens within a couple of days, will just confirm what most steelworkers already knew, and what the Socialist Party has long warned: there can be no trust in Tata!

As part of the fight to stop the job massacre of over 2,000 redundancies that threatens the future of steelmaking at the plant, the steel unions actually met with Tata management just a couple of days prior to the announcement, when the company said absolutely nothing about these closures and the loss of 200 jobs.

This multinational company has consciously run down the plant over many years. It has not participated

in any serious negotiations around retaining virgin steel production and saving all the jobs during the compulsory 45-day legal consultation period, which is concluding.

This disgraceful and contemptuous move by the bosses is a warning of what could soon come for the other 1,800 steelworkers in Port Talbot!

Unite is midway through a ballot for industrial action but, alongside Community and GMB, the steel unions must now urgently prepare for a united industrial response to any further closures or redundancies.

All forms of militant action need to be discussed, planned and prepared for, including sectional strikes, all-out strikes, plant blockades, and partial or full occupations.

After years of underinvestment, Tata bosses are blaming the state of the coking ovens for their decision. But nationalisation could be the

basis of a massive reinvestment and re-equipment of the steelworks.

Therefore, 'Nationalisation not Devastation' has to be the rallying call to save the steelworks, with the demand for unconditional support placed on Keir Starmer and the newly elected Labour First Minister for Wales, Vaughan Gething. They must give a commitment that no jobs are lost in the meantime.

Tata bosses are politically and economically deaf to any pleas from the steel unions. An incoming Labour government in Westminster and the Labour-led Welsh government must bring the industry back into public ownership, under democratic workers' control and management with compensation, based only on proven need!

There is no other alternative for retaining all jobs and saving the plant. The real fight for Port Talbot begins now!

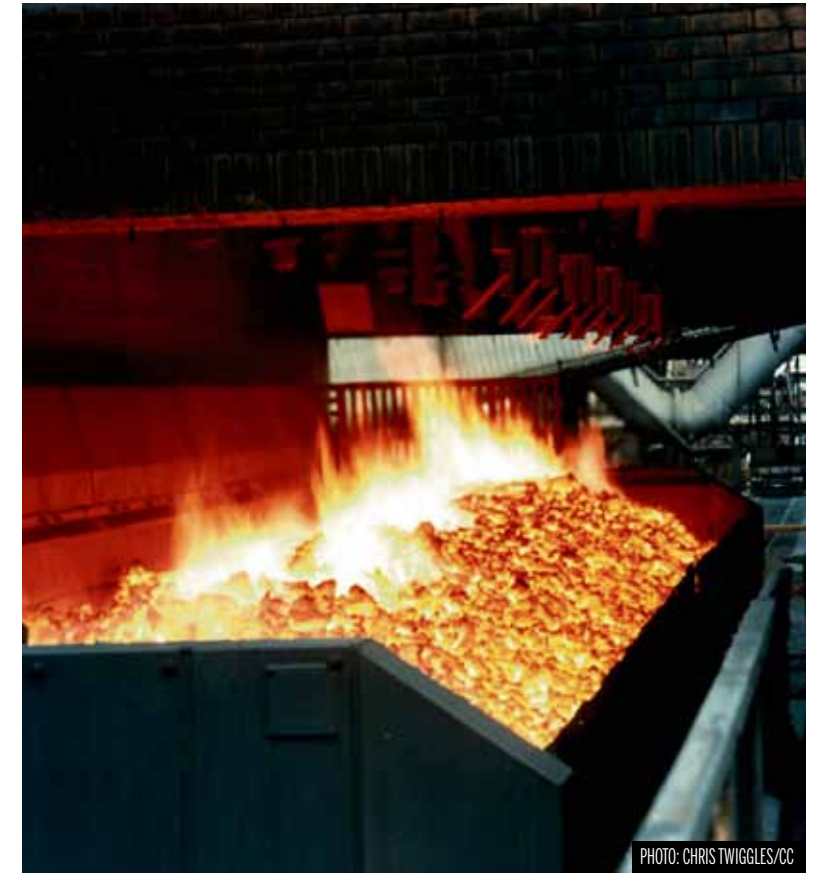


PHOTO: CHRIS TWIGGLES/CC

Childcare big business profits



PHOTO: PUBLIC DOMAIN

TERRI
COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY AND CHILDCARE WORKER

Jeremy Hunt announced an extra £500 million of funding to early childhood education providers (typically referred to as childcare), in the 6 March Spring Budget. This is for the roll-out of 30 hours of free childcare for all under fives by September 2025. As a result of this public funding, private-sector childcare providers are set to make bumper profits.

Childcare used to be provided by local authorities but the sector suffered drastic underfunding under Tory prime ministers Margaret Thatcher and John Major. When New Labour was elected in 1997, it committed to improving the position.

But, in line with their policies in areas like the NHS, New Labour opened the sector to further privatisation under the guise of 'partnership', arguing this would raise standards. 25 years later, we have unfettered profiteering. Some of England's childcare providers have reported an average profit of 22% of their turnover since 2018.

Today's childcare system sees large childcare providers run as businesses with a focus on profits first and as an education setting second. Meanwhile, the workforce are living on minimum wage (sometimes at the apprentice rates of minimum wage) and struggling to keep up with the cost-of-living crisis. As a result, childcare workers are leaving the sector in droves. Childcare providers are struggling with systemic staffing shortages and are regularly turning to temping agencies to cover shortfalls.

Things aren't getting better. A report by the Early Education and Childcare Coalition found that 57% of the workforce are thinking of leaving the sector in the next year due to low wages, high stress and the relaxation of child-adult ratios.

Mike Short, head of local government and education for public sector trade union Unison, said: "There's clearly big bucks to be made in childcare, but this is all so wrong. Large investors have muscled in on the sector, siphoning off the profit, piling on the debt, and forcing smaller nurseries out. This is extremely bad news for infants, parents and childcare workers."

Many childcare practitioners feel undervalued, demoralised and overworked with no extra pay for our efforts.

Marketisation of childcare has failed parents and staff. The only beneficiaries have been the corporate owners that buy up independent businesses, strip them to the bone and run them as soulless money printing machines.

Socialist Party calls for:

- Fully funded, publicly owned childcare, compensation for existing owners only paid on the basis of proven need
- Childcare workers to be covered by collective agreements, negotiated by trade unions, that guarantee living wages for all staff, pension provision, and fair terms and conditions
- Free high-quality childcare for all
- A socialist society to guarantee our children the bright future they all deserve

Gove's extremism attempts to whip up division

SAM
TEACHER AND SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBER

Conservative communities secretary Michael Gove made a statement in parliament on 14 March, outlining the government's new definition of extremism. Gove's announcement was preceded by a report, commissioned by the government, which included socialism and anti-fascism as potential signs of 'radicalisation'.

This move comes off the back of a mass anti-war movement, calling for a ceasefire in the Israel's Gaza offensive over the past five months. The capitalist establishment also faced a humiliating by-election defeat to George Galloway in Rochdale, who ran on an anti-war and anti-austerity platform, and was subsequently denounced by Rishi Sunak outside Number 10.

The government's new definition stipulates that extremism is an attempt to undermine liberal parliamentary democracy, people's human rights, or creating conditions for the advocacy of them.

The announcement sparked criticism even within the Conservative Party, as the former Home Office minister Robert Jenrick commented: "Those people who are simply expressing contrarian views... might find this definition used against them".

But outcry from Tory backbenchers and the Labour Party about civil liberties rings hollow. After all, it was Labour that introduced draconian anti-terror legislation, including the highly controversial Prevent programme.

Prevent was designed as a referral scheme for education and youth workers (among others) to inform on people to the authorities if they were suspected of harbouring extremist views. Muslim communities criticised the scheme as it put them under siege from an increasingly racist and powerful surveillance state.

David Cameron's Tory government then made referrals mandatory under threat of prosecution, and moulded the scheme to its anti-multiculturalism diatribe. The scheme began focusing more on non-violent political and religious values, not just ones related to acts of terror.

Most recently, the government report published by William Shawcross recommended Prevent take a greater focus on Islamic extremism instead of the far-right. It also sought to include socialism, communism, climate activism and anti-fascism as indications of extremism.

Undoubtedly, the government's broadening of the definition of extremism is motivated by racism, to stoke divisions as they try to shore up their small socially conservative membership base. However, the crisis of British capitalism, the subsequent strike wave and impact of protests against the war on Gaza are also drivers of this recent attack on freedom of expression.

Last year, the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act, requiring trade unions in certain sections of the economy to maintain a predetermined level of service during a strike, was another attempt by the Tories to crush the surge in working-class militancy.

Whether it is attacks on trans rights, the right to strike or the anti-war movement's right to demonstrate; an attack on one is an attack on all. Unions, including education unions, should defend any workers penalised using the Prevent strategy. The greatest force for social change mankind has ever seen is that of the organised working class. We encourage all workers to join a trade union and help build a fighting socialist leadership, capable of taking action to win gains for the working class now and for a socialist future without war, oppression and exploitation.

SUBSCRIBE TO THE SOCIALIST

Visit socialistparty.org.uk/subscribe or call 020 8988 8777
 • E-subscription £2.50 a month, or £4 including Socialism Today
 • Paper sub £4.50 a month, or £6.50 including Socialism Today
 Subscribe by direct debit and choose from a range of free books!



PCS: Vote 'yes' in the strike ballot and vote for change in the leadership elections



SHEFFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

MARION LLOYD
BLN CANDIDATE FOR PCS PRESIDENT

Thank you to all the branches that have nominated me for national PCS president. The 71 nominations for me and all Broad Left Network (BLN)-supported candidates show we have everything to play for in the elections for president, National Executive and Group Executive Committee elections. My opponent, acting-president Martin Cavanagh, part of the current ruling 'Left Unity' group in the union, has won 70 nominations. In December 2023, the desire of members for change in our union meant that I came within 800 votes of becoming general secretary, out of 20,000 votes cast. Since the general secretary

election, the BLN has been in discussion with individual PCS activists, groups including the Independent Left, and others, to agree a joint slate of candidates. These candidates come from across the length and breadth of the UK and from across civil service departments, partner bodies and the commercial sector, to challenge the leadership grouping in the union. So let's get to it. Turn out a 'yes' vote in the strike ballot, which opened on 18 March, and turn out the vote for our candidates in the national elections. This is the team who will use any mandate to fight on pay to win. Solidarity!

- NEC and presidential elections open on 18 April. See the full list of candidates here: socialistparty.org.uk/PCScandidates2024

Sanctuary housing workers: Bosses up the ante

UNITE HOUSING WORKERS BRANCH MEMBER

Sanctuary Housing Association London maintenance workers are on strike again, and although there are hopes of a breakthrough due to management agreeing to attend talks at ACAS, workers have been angered by management announcing that they intend to scrap the retention bonus of £500 per year.

This amounts to what many workers describe as 1.5% of their salary, which made previous pay offers more palatable. Having removed this bonus, workers both in London and elsewhere are reacting with fury. This could lead to more workers joining the ballot for strike action. Workers in London are reaching out to other maintenance staff throughout the UK and calling on Unite the

Union nationally to organise a petition demanding that Sanctuary reverse its appalling decision. Sanctuary's announcement was communicated via video. Management stated that this bonus was no longer necessary as recruitment problems had eased post Covid. This completely ignores the effects of the cost-of-living crisis. One Sanctuary rep said: "This is an appalling decision and shows how out of touch with staff Sanctuary is. It demonstrates further why we need a union and for Sanctuary to recognise us."

Another responded to management's decision by saying: "This feels like management sticking two fingers up to workers who held the fort when things were bad during Covid. They then make it worse by pretending that the decision was done with the consent of the staff council, which it was not. "It shows the need for workers to have an independent voice. That voice should be Unite and it further vindicates our decision to take strike action."



UNITE HOUSING WORKERS BRANCH

Bedfordshire Health Care Assistants strike



STEVENAGE SOCIALIST PARTY

BRYAN AND BARBARA CLARE
STEVENAGE SOCIALIST PARTY

Following several months of failed negotiations with Bedfordshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, about 400 Health Care Assistants (HCAs) at two hospitals - Bedford, and Luton and Dunstable - have had no other option but to take two days of industrial action. They are being asked to perform medical tasks above their pay grade, without any extra pay. We spoke to the Unison strikers at Luton and Dunstable who said they

are just asking for what they are due. They explained that HCAs in salary Band 2 of the pay scale should only be providing basic personal care, such as changing and feeding patients. For some time now they have been told to take bloods and blood pressures, ECGs, bladder scans, remove cannulas and catheters, apply simple dressings, and carry out neuro observations. These are Band 3 tasks for which they are not being paid. New staff to the hospital, after two or three months of training, are paid on Band 3, while existing HCAs

who have worked at the hospital for many years remain on Band 2. They were also concerned that they can no longer give their patients the time and care that they need due to these additional duties. Other Trusts have acknowledged the additional responsibility and awarded HCAs accordingly. One Unison member told us that, come April, they will be on the minimum wage. "We have been knowingly abused for years," said one striker. They are asking for this pay to be backdated to 2018. The strikers we spoke to were angry that the University of Bedfordshire nursing department had sent in student nurses to cover the strikers' work - they were given no choice and were not being paid! Another striker told us that during Covid they were the ones who were administering care to Covid patients. Shift work was also an issue: they could have day and night shifts in the same week. The atmosphere on both sites was fantastic. The response from passing cars was amazing. They are determined to fight for a just result, and will strike again if the Trust does not meet their demands.

Coventry Amazon workers fight for recognition



COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

ADAM HARMSWORTH
COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

In the latest strike at Amazon Coventry, GMB union is making a serious renewed push for statutory recognition. On the 19 March picket line, an organiser stressed to the pickets that Amazon will do whatever it can to stop recognition, so they must fight harder to win it. GMB's new leaflets encourage workers to join, but also give the option to just back recognition. Last year saw a three-month gap between strikes, but this year has seen two rounds of strike action already. GMB probably have close to a majority of the site's workforce in the union, but this extra push shows they're taking no chances.

Leeds RMT strikers say reps should stand in elections



LEEDS SOCIALIST PARTY

IAIN DALTON
LEEDS SOCIALIST PARTY

"We need a political revolution!" said one striking Carlisle Support Services (CSS) member of the rail union RMT when discussing whether a Labour victory at the general election would change things for outsourced rail workers like them. "Will they bring workers like us back in-house?" questioned one picket. "Will they scrap zero-hour contracts?" asked another, sceptical whether Starmer would follow through on this pledge. One thing that was clear to these striking RMT members was that if they do nothing then companies like CSS would continue to pay them as little as they could get away with. The CSS workers operate Northern Rail gates on non-mainline stations.

Northern Rail operates mainline stations in-house, with workers on an average salary £12,000 a year higher, as well as other benefits such as free travel, sick pay and being part of the railway pension scheme. CSS workers get none of this. Strike action took place in February with picket lines in the North West, but this latest strike action had picketing for the first time in Yorkshire, aiming to expand union organisation amongst CSS workers. During the discussion about Starmer, one of the pickets pointed to an RMT rep and said: "You should stand!" Pickets offer their best wishes to the candidates standing for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) in the upcoming local elections, which include an RMT rep.

Unison committee rules out conference motion on campaigning against cuts Unison must take up the fight against council cuts

PAUL COUCHMAN
SECRETARY, SURREY COUNTY UNISON (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

This year, public sector union Unison's conference comes as councils are facing a historic situation. The crisis in local authority funding, after over a decade of savage austerity cuts, has led to a series of councils effectively 'bankrupt', issuing 'Section 114' notices, and many more warning they face the same. Breathtaking cuts are posed in Birmingham, Nottingham and elsewhere. Unison is the biggest union in local government and should be leading the way, bringing together all the affected branches in order to mount a national campaign, calling on councils to refuse to make the cuts, and demanding emergency funds from the Tory government. Unison should also demand of Keir Starmer that a Labour government will underwrite any debts incurred by councils acting to prevent cuts, and will fully fund local government services.

Woking

Woking Borough Council is in Surrey and has the highest debts of any council in the country - close to £2 billion (with an annual turnover of around £24 million). The previous Tory council borrowed billions from their friends in government for gambling on real estate ventures which have since gone bust.

The new Lib Dem-controlled council is meekly following the unelected commissioners which have been sent in by the Tory government to make unprecedented cuts in local services. Everything from public toilets to children's parks, from community and day centres to accessible local transport, from the arts to sports venues and leisure centres - everything either faces the axe, or being sold to the private sector, or handed over to the community to be run by volunteers on a shoestring.

The four commissioners are being paid over £1,100 per day each to oversee the cuts. The government has told them to remain in Woking for at least five years, working at least 150 days per year. The recent decision to increase local council tax by 10% will only just cover what these bureaucrats are being paid!

Unison's role

Our Unison branch submitted a motion to June's local government conference calling on the union to coordinate the campaigns against cuts. The Unison South East Region Local Government AGM passed the same motion to go to conference. But it has been ruled out by the standing orders committee! Its crime? Calling on the union's Service Group Executive to: "Encourage branches and regions to organise campaigns opposed to cuts in funding, support those councillors that make a positive stance against cuts, and seek to gain support of local councillors for anti-cuts campaigns."

Apparently, having this on the agenda of conference could bring the union into "legal jeopardy"! A general election looms. The bureaucracy and right wing in the union want to keep it safe for a Labour government, and are prepared to sacrifice jobs and services to do it. But the left-led National Executive Council (NEC) of Unison should stand up to this. The Socialist Party has always said that the trade unions should resist the cuts. Supporting councillors and councils to set budgets using reserves and borrowing powers, in the first instance, to stave off cuts, to give time to build a campaign alongside the community to fight for the money back. Labour councils could have pooled reserves and united across the country and defeated Tory austerity. They didn't - instead they made catastrophic cuts and many used up reserves without mounting the necessary fight to get the funding back. Unison could have spearheaded this fightback over the last decade - they could have put demands on Labour councils and organised workers to fight to defend jobs, services and pay. But Unison through most of that time was led by the right wing under general secretary Dave Prentis. Undemocratic measures by the leadership kept the debate about fighting cuts off the table at conferences.

Left-led NEC

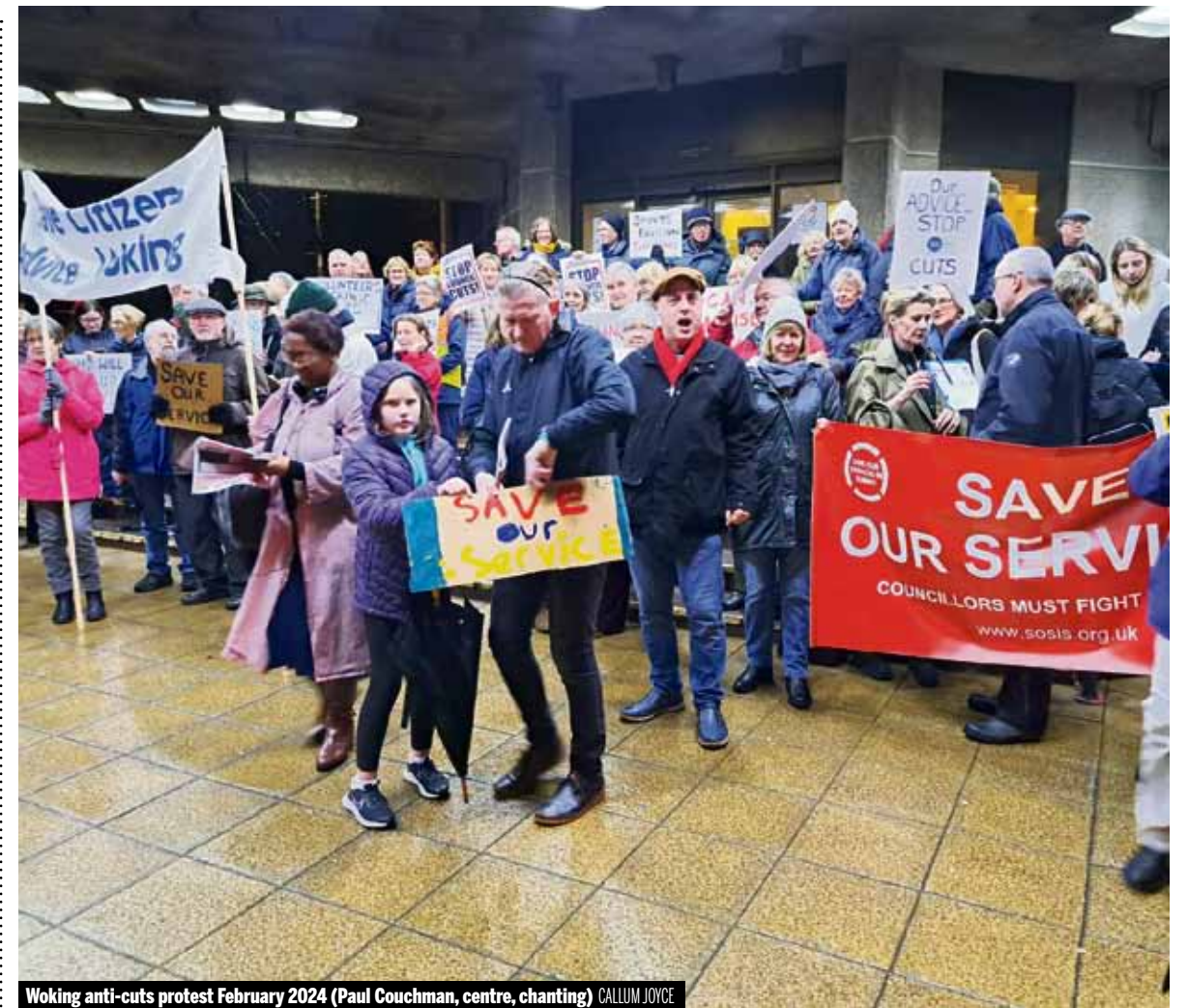
By the 2021 union elections, members had had enough. Although 'continuity candidate' Starmer-supporting Christina McAnea won the general secretary position, members voted for a left-majority NEC, with the 'Time For Real Change' (TFRC) grouping in the lead. The NEC must mount a serious national fight against cuts and on pay, or members won't see any change. My branch is working with several other Unison branches to organise a fringe meeting at the Unison local government conference, to argue the case for this approach - and we will be appealing to conference to challenge the decision to rule out our motion.

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

Local Government:
Mathew John,
Angie Waller

Health:
Steve Bell,
Adrian O'Malley

Community:
Helen Couchman



Woking anti-cuts protest February 2024 (Paul Couchman, centre, chanting) CALLUM JOYCE

Strike ballot planned at Surrey County Council

Thousands of staff in the Unison trade union at Surrey County Council are to be balloted over the next few weeks for strike action in a dispute over pay.

Social workers, teaching assistants, librarians, trading standards officers and many more are among those being asked to vote for industrial action over a pay offer from the council that falls far short of inflation.

53% of members responded in our recent consultation, with 87% rejecting the council's offer. A whopping 91% of those said they would vote for strike action in the event of there being no improvement in the council's offer.

The offer is a 4% increase in the council's overall pay bill. The lowest-paid staff would receive an increase of 9%, but the vast majority would receive less than 5%. This is considerably below the £3,500 increase we claimed as a fair rise for workers, with £15 an hour as minimum pay. The current offer will mean most workers would receive an increase of between £1,300 and £1,500 a year. Local government workers on NJC terms (the National Joint Council - which most councils are part of, but Surrey isn't) received nearly £2,000 each year in the last two years. Most councils local to Surrey awarded £2,000 or more last year, when Surrey workers received an

average of £1,500. Our members are being left further and further behind! After years of below-inflation pay increases and with the soaring cost of

living, staff are struggling. There's still no end in sight to spiralling bills. It's not too late for the council to think again.



Surrey Unison members PAUL COUCHMAN

Get all the latest union news...
nationalshop
stewardsnetwork
with the NSSN bulletin shopstewards.net

UKRAINE WAR DRAGS ON AS PUTIN GAINS UPPER HAND

NIALL MULHOLLAND
COMMITTEE FOR A WORKERS' INTERNATIONAL
(CWI)

It is now over two years since the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the start of the war between the two countries, with Ukraine receiving Nato backing. The battlefield has been in a relative stalemate for months, but Russia's President Vladimir Putin has gained the upper hand. It is estimated that Russia has five times the firepower advantage of the Ukrainian army.

Voices from the 'international community' are raising questions about how long Ukraine can keep fighting. Into the fray, Pope Francis said in an interview that Ukraine should have the "courage" of the "white flag" and negotiate an end to the war with Russia, which received a furious response from Kyiv.

The Ukraine military is carrying out drone and missile attacks against oil refineries deep inside Russia, causing some damage, but the strikes are mainly intended to boost morale at home. Kyiv has also boasted of some military successes against Russia's navy in the Black Sea. Yet the war is not going well for Ukraine in the eastern part of the country, the main arena of the struggle with Moscow. Furthermore, the holding up of a further \$60 billion military aid package from the US Congress to the Ukrainian military is having a significant negative effect on the ability of the Ukraine forces to wage a campaign against Russian forces.

Long gone are the days when the Ukrainian Prime Minister Volodymyr Zelensky could boast that he had Russian forces on the run, after they had been forced to turn back from Kyiv. In a recent speech, Zelensky admitted that up to 30,000 Ukraine soldiers have died in the conflict, with many more tens of thousands injured. Western sources believe this is an underestimation and the real figure of Ukraine troop deaths is probably more than double that given by Zelensky.

In turn, Ukrainian and Western officials say that Russian forces have suffered much greater casualties. This may be the case but Russia currently is making more territorial gains than Ukraine, and has a much larger population from which to draw on for new soldiers. Putin's position appears more secure than a few months ago when the war appeared to be going awry and he faced a short-lived revolt by the Wagner group mercenaries.

Military hardware

The US, France and the UK, in particular, continue to send military hardware to Ukraine, including long-range missiles. But as the war has ground on without any sight of

a clear, overwhelming winner, the US Congress has shown less stomach for funding Zelensky. Republican members of the Congress have held up new financial packages going to Kyiv. With the prospect of a possible Trump victory in the presidential elections, and his publicly stated pledge "not to give a single penny" to Ukraine and to aim to bring the conflict to a swift end, the Republican members of Congress are likely to keep blocking the passage of funds.

This has helped Russia to develop a military dominance on the battlefield. According to the Royal United Services Institute (UK), Russia has increased production of its long-range missiles from about 40 a month in 2022 to about 100 a month by the end of 2023. North Korea has delivered around 1.5m shells to Russia. In effect, Russia has become a 'war economy', with domestic production largely tailored for the needs of the war in eastern Ukraine, while Russia has also been able to find new markets for its raw material exports.

Notwithstanding the significant ratcheting up of arms spending and militarisation by Nato and the EU in light of the 'common' Russian enemy, tensions among the European powers continue over the Ukraine conflict. After months of wrangling with the Hungarian government, a package of new aid was agreed by the EU to send to Kyiv. However it is a long way from what Zelensky claims is urgently needed. The right-wing populist Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has made it clear that he will use his veto regarding future proposed financial and military aid for Kyiv.

Orbán's position is echoed by some other EU states, such as Slovakia. Although Turkey's President Erdogan eventually relinquished his opposition to Sweden joining Nato, the Western allies are far from united. In a sign of frustration with the US Congress, French President Macron called for Nato troops to be put on Ukrainian soil (unofficial and 'non-combatant' Nato forces are reportedly already present in Ukraine). This was quickly rejected by other Nato powers and the EU. They fear that, any openly direct Nato involvement in Ukraine could lead to a widening of the conflict across the region. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz is refusing Ukrainian pleas for stocks of the German-made Taurus missile systems, saying German troops would have to be sent to Ukraine to programme the missiles, dragging Berlin further into conflict with Russia.

Putin responded to Macron's calls with his own threats, once again stating that Russia would be prepared to use 'strategic nuclear weapons' if Russian national sovereignty was imperilled. Putin cites the encroachment of Nato

countries on the borders of Russia and the possible Ukraine membership of the military alliance as a major reason for his 2022 invasion. Although Putin's nuclear threats are largely sabre-rattling rhetoric, it does indicate how the conflict could begin to spiral further out of control, with the deployment of ever more devastating conventional weapons.

Initially, following the Russian invasion, there was widespread sympathy and support for the plight of Ukrainians, especially in the western countries. However in parts of Asia, Africa and Latin America there was often sympathy for Russia due to the legacy of the former Stalinist USSR, prior to the restoration of oligarchical capitalism, and the perception that Russia was fighting western imperialism and Nato.

Today the mood of working people across the world is increasingly sceptical and cynical about the motivations of the Western powers and the Zelensky regime. This is especially the case since the cruel bombardment of Gaza by the Israeli state, which has led to the deaths of over 30,000 people, mass starvation, and the destruction of most of the buildings and infrastructure of the Strip. Many people ask, why is it that the human rights of Ukrainians, who faced Russian invasion, must be respected but not the human rights of the occupied Palestinians?

These sentiments have been exploited by the Putin regime, which has sought to widen its authority and influence in the so-called 'Global South'. As part of its new alignment with China, which is now tacitly supporting



the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Moscow and Beijing falsely project themselves as being on the side of the oppressed everywhere, including the Palestinians.

Russian elections

As he predictably wins a fifth term as president, Putin's position appears more secure than for several years. The war is largely going in Putin's favour - Russian forces recently captured the town of Avdiivka (albeit reportedly at a huge cost in casualties). Any oppositional voices at home are quickly branded as traitorous. The protests following the death in prison of the anti-Kremlin figure, Alexi Navalny, were smaller in comparison to previous opposition movements. With the commencement of the war, many opposition figures have been imprisoned or fled Russia. The anti-war movement remains relatively small and suppressed (it is estimated that almost 20,000 people have been detained for protesting against the war). The Russian economy has managed to emerge from the Western-imposed sanctions marking some growth and with new trading arrangements with China and Gulf states, and other parts of the world.

Yet below the surface, opposition to Putin's regime is developing. The response to opposition figures' calls last weekend for voters to show up and cast their ballots, at the same time, as a show of rejection of Putin's foregone re-election, reportedly involved some thousands. How and when a serious, sustained struggle against Putin's rule develops and becomes a more powerful social revolt, is unclear, at this stage. Working class leadership and socialist policies will be key to the success of such a movement.

However, as the war drags on at a

huge human and material cost, demands for peace can grow in Russia and result in divisions within the regime. Currently Putin is attempting to press his advantage on the battlefield to capture more territory, and is unlikely to engage any time soon in serious negotiations with Kyiv. Should the situation on the battlefield begin to turn against Russian forces or is bogged down still further, the mood in Russia can begin to change significantly, and Putin can be forced to cease the Russian military campaign. At a certain stage, Putin can face the prospect of being removed or overthrown. The character of the regime that would replace Putin is also uncertain and depends on how the war and events unfold.

Zelensky under pressure

Zelensky can also come under increasing pressure domestically to try and reach an agreement with Moscow. The Ukraine government is planning to put a new 'mobilisation law' to parliament in expectation of drafting an extra 500,000 to the armed forces (currently around 330,000 troops are estimated to be deployed on the battlefields). Rather desperately, Kyiv has also raised the prospect of using convicts as fighting fodder. As it is, Ukrainian troops are serving for long spells at the front with little rotation and respite. Morale is suffering. "A large proportion of the men of fighting age are unwilling to be deployed to the front", according to the Financial Times.

The Kyiv government has talked about lowering the age of conscription from 27 years to two years. Exemptions will be put in place for so-called 'critical workers'. They will have to contribute to the war effort financially, either by funneling part of their pay or through a monthly levy. But for many working-class and poor Ukrainians this is interpreted as meaning the middle class and better off can avoid conscription, as those who cannot afford the fee can be drafted.

Polls show that the majority of people are opposed to the new conscription targets. In February a survey by Info Sapiens, a Ukrainian organisation, found 48% of men were "not prepared to fight while 34% were". Half of the 90% of respondents said they "now think the west is tired and will push Kyiv into a compromise with Russia".

Working class of the region

As we enter the third year of mass slaughter in Ukraine, it is clear more than ever that the working classes of Ukraine and Russia and the region need their own independent voice. Zelensky and Putin both lead right-wing nationalist regimes dominated by oligarchs. Neither acts in the interests of working-class people, yet the labouring masses are expected to be

the endless cannon fodder for the war.

From the start, the CWI has called for the immediate withdrawal of Russian military forces. We have also called for the Ukrainian working class to organise itself to remove the corrupt, pro-Western-imperialist Zelensky regime. In Russia, the working class also needs its own independent organisations and socialist programme, to successfully oppose the Putin regime and its rich backers.

While the Ukrainian masses have the right to live free from any foreign occupation it is also the case that ethnic minorities inside Ukraine have the right to be free of Ukrainian chauvinist oppression. Marxists support the right of self-determination for the Ukraine masses, but also support the right of the people of the region of Donbass and Crimea to determine their own future. It is not clear what the mood and sentiments of the people of these areas are at the present time given the war situation and Russian military occupation. But over a decade of hostility from pro-Western governments in Kyiv towards the majority Russian speaking Donbass, which included years of military assaults by Ukrainian military and far-right forces before the outbreak of the 2022 war with Russia, will have hardened opinions.

Dramatic changes on the ground have to be taken into account by Marxists when proposing a programme on the national question. The Azerbaijan regime's ruthless removal of nearly all the ethnic Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh last year, and the Israeli state's erasure of Palestinians from at least half of Gaza, have created new 'facts on the ground' in those parts of the world. So too, ten years of conflict and discrimination and annexations have undoubtedly affected the outlook of the people in Crimea and Donbass and have to be taken into account.

A Marxist programme on the national question and minority rights has to take such events into consideration when elaborating its position on the right of self-determination for oppressed nations and how this is to be achieved. Marxists oppose the majority ethnic Russian population in Donbass and Crimea being coerced against their will into a Ukraine state, or forcibly merged into a 'greater Russia'. They must have the right to decide their own future, in a genuinely free and democratic manner.

This aspect of the CWI programme is inextricably linked to the need for the building of an independent mass socialist alternative in Ukraine, Russia and the region, uniting working-class people across all national and ethnic lines against war, poverty, exploitation and capitalism.

FIGHTING TO END WOMEN'S OPPRESSION

International Women's Day public meetings

Socialist Party branches up and down the country have been organising public meetings to mark International Women's Day 2024, discussing the role working-class women have to play in fighting against oppression and for socialist change. Three areas report on their successful meetings.

East London:

'Insightful and inspiring'

MIHAELA IVANOVA
TOWER HAMLETS SOCIALIST PARTY

People came together for the East London Socialist Party district public meeting on 'How we fight the backlash against women's rights, put an end to sexism, misogyny and oppression.'

It was inspiring to have the discussion with over 50 attendees, the big majority women. Around 20 people were new to the Socialist Party and found out about the meeting through the hard work our members put in to promote it. To engage as many people as we did, we spoke to contacts, trade unionists on picket lines, people on campaign stalls, paper sales, young members spread the word to university friends, and we put posters up in the surrounding area. It was a successful turnout and a productive discussion.

Women shared personal experiences of the struggles they have faced in lieu of desperately needed funding. People described cuts in domestic violence services, street lighting, council housing, childcare and maternity services, and community facilities such as the recent attack on the Boundary Estate Community Laundrette by Tower Hamlets council.

It was insightful to hear firsthand from so many young women about their experiences. For example, two Queen Mary students spoke about the past and present failings of the university and its lack of sexual harassment reporting procedures. A new Socialist Party member also spoke about her positive experiences as a woman in the party, why being a feminist is concurrent with being a socialist, and what steps we can take to build a better and equal world.

Working-class women

It was made clear that, as women have been brought into every sphere of public life, the private work of working-class women, such as housework and childcare, is expected at the same standard while being active members of the workforce and, more often than not, affected by the gender pay gap and other unique

forms of systemic oppression and inequality.

We discussed the absolute necessity of reclaiming International Women's Day as a day of protest and of continuing the struggle against the backlash on women's rights.

As the war on Gaza escalates, women are suffering unimaginable horrors, little-to-no medical care during childbirth, and a 300% increase in miscarriages. We must build as part of the anti-war movement, the struggle to end the system that profits and feeds off of the exploitation and oppression of working-class women and people alike.

The same is needed to end other forms of oppression. For example, LGBTQ+ people have seen Pride protests watered down, as rights that have been won are challenged by the Tories' fearmongering about Trans people, and the lack of an alternative from Keir Starmer.

Socialist programme

Capitalism thrives on this division, and women's oppression is just one part of the system of exploitation. Gender oppression can only be eliminated by transforming the way society is structured, organised and run. That's why the Socialist Party puts forward a socialist programme based on the working class taking the wealth and power out of the hands of the capitalists.

The discussion concluded that we cannot rely on Starmer's pro-capitalist Labour Party to defend women's rights. For humanity to liberate itself from oppression, poverty and exploitation we must take the power into our control. We must build a political voice for all those struggling against oppression under a mass workers' party which works in the interests of the many, not the few.

After the meeting, we spoke to contacts who were impressed with how young and determined our party is. We also had attendees interested in our material such as our monthly magazine *Socialism Today*, and some new attendees eager to get involved in organising with our local branches and learning more about what we have to say!



A small section of the public meeting in East London JAMES IVENS

Sheffield

LEAH BYATT
SHEFFIELD SOUTH AND EAST SOCIALIST PARTY

42 attended a city-wide Sheffield Socialist Party public meeting called to mark International Women's Day on Wednesday 13 March, including 13 non-members.

Discussions centred on women's resistance and class struggle, throughout history and today. The meeting also included arts and crafts activities, raising money for the fighting fund.

Four members led discussions: Siobhan McMillan led a discussion on Chilean Arpilleras and women's resistance against the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile; Sue Statter led a discussion on Women Against Pit Closures and women's organising in trade unions; Isabelle France led a discussion on the Save Our Parks campaign, Socialist Party members are driving in Sheffield; and Maddie Rooney led a discussion on election campaigning as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC).

The evening raised £265.30 from book sales, badge sales, and art sales (all art pieces were donated by talented caucus members). The event generated enthusiasm from all in attendance and everyone got stuck in.

We want to build on the success, drive participation in our campaigning activity and appeal to new layers of socialist women to get involved in the fight back.

Liverpool

ISIS SMYTH
LIVERPOOL SOCIALIST PARTY

International Working Women's Day, represents a day for us to prioritise, memorialise and commemorate women, and to discuss what feminism means for us. On 12 March, Liverpool Socialist Party did just this – calling a public meeting.

Women members prepared short speeches on various topics such as paid work, housework, sex work, and education. Sally Griffiths, from Manchester Socialist Party, introduced the discussion.

Capitalism undermines the confidence and position of women. In our party meetings, we make continual efforts to combat this. Some, including me, made their first contributions during this meeting.

As male members contributed alongside the women of our branch, an insightful inclusive conversation flourished. Guests mentioned how impressed they were, one describing it as feeling like 'home', which perfectly echoes how I felt at my first Socialist Party meeting – a credit to the brilliant women of the Socialist Party!

Come to a Socialist Party meeting near you

• To find the details of your nearest branch go to socialistparty.org.uk/events

• Or to find out more about joining the Socialist Party visit www.socialistparty.org.uk/join



Follow, comment, like
Instagram
@socialistpartycwi

SOCIALISM TODAY

Monthly magazine of the Socialist Party

March issue includes...

- Women in the revolution
- Defending women's rights today
- The fight for workers' politics
- Women fighters of the Paris Commune



socialismtoday.org/subscribe

Are social attitudes regressing?

What is needed to end sexism and misogyny?

AMY SAGE
BRISTOL NORTH SOCIALIST PARTY

A recent Daily Mail article proclaims “teenage boys are turning into homophobic sexists who abuse their own mothers”. The article then goes on to explain how the ‘king of toxic masculinity’ Andrew Tate is brainwashing teenage boys into adopting homophobic and misogynistic ideas.

It is undeniable that Tate, who is under investigation over allegations of rape and human trafficking and is due to be extradited to the UK, has had some impact on attitudes towards women, but he cannot be said to be the root cause of sexist and misogynistic ideas. Whilst recent studies do show that there is a growing gender divide in attitudes towards feminism and equality among younger generations, is it true to say that young men are becoming more misogynistic?

Researchers at King’s College London surveyed 3,716 adults aged 16 or older across the United Kingdom in August 2023, to gather opinions on feminism and divisive figures such as misogynist social media ‘influencer’ Tate.

43% of respondents thought ‘feminism’ had done more good than harm to society, with little overall difference between the genders. However, the gender division for respondents aged 16-29 was quite stark - one in six men stated that feminism has done more harm than good, compared with one in 11 women.

21% of male respondents aged 16-29, who said they have heard of Andrew Tate, had a favourable opinion of him. This was true for 7% of young female respondents.

In a different study, conducted by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), 3,000 participants were surveyed on their attitudes towards and understanding of rape and sexual assault. The CPS found that backward attitudes and rape myths were more pronounced among young people.

For instance, overall, 74% of respondents understood that it can still be rape if a victim doesn’t resist or fight back. However, this number fell to just 53% of 18-24-year-olds.

Where does sexism come from?

While it’s understandable that these statistics can appear as alarming, it’s important to keep them in perspective. Overall, societal attitudes towards women have transformed over time and those holding sexist and misogynistic attitudes still represent only a small proportion of those surveyed. That doesn’t mean that these statistics should be ignored or written off. Instead, it’s important to understand why this gender divide exists and what can be done about it.

There are capitalist commentators who have tried to blame social media itself for sexism and misogyny. However, while social media creates a platform for these ideas, and 24/7



PHOTOS: PAUL MATTSSON, SOCIALIST PARTY AND JAMES ENGLISH/CC

access and algorithms that prioritise misogynist content amplify the voices of those who hold and promote sexist and misogynistic ideas, it cannot be said to be the cause. Rather, these attitudes are a hangover of ideas that go back thousands of years, to when class societies and private property first arose, and women and their bodies became the property of men within the family, under their authority and control. These ideas, at the root of discrimination, sexism and abuse, are perpetuated by the capitalist system that is itself based on inequalities of power and wealth.

Women class fighters

The position of women in society has undoubtedly improved in the last few decades. Now, women make up a significant and important part of the workforce, they also make up over half of trade union membership in the UK, and have been some of the fiercest class fighters for improvements in the lives and working conditions of both men and women. However, as these studies have revealed, there is still a layer within society that holds problematic attitudes and beliefs towards women, which can also be rooted in material conditions.

There is a section of men who can be particularly susceptible to the divisive and misogynistic ideas promoted by figures like Tate. The King’s College study also revealed that 30% of men aged between 16 and 29 think that it will be harder to be a man than a woman in 20 years’ time. Young men falling behind in both education engagement and outcomes - who see

only a bleak future of dead-end, low-paid jobs, without the hope of renting, let alone buying, their own place - could be led to believe that women and feminism are the root cause of their problems, rather than a capitalist system based upon exploitation and inequality.

Fighting against division

As long as the capitalist system remains in place, the material and ideological basis for divisive ideas, discrimination, sexism and abuse will continue. That is not to say, however, that struggles cannot be waged in the here and now to challenge sexist and misogynistic ideas. In schools for example, relationship and sex education in schools, dispelling harmful stereotypes about gender and promoting relationships based on equality and consent, can play a role; although this needs to be adequately funded and under the democratic control of teachers and students.

Terms such as ‘male privilege’ or ‘toxic masculinity’, for example, are not helpful, as 41% of respondents in the King’s College survey felt. They can themselves be divisive, tarring all men as ‘toxic’ and fuelling the very misogynistic and anti-feminist attitudes that they are meant to confront. However, that is not to say that the attitudes and behaviour towards women that the term ‘toxic masculinity’ normally describes do not need to be addressed. All sexist and abusive behaviour must be challenged, all incidents should be properly investigated and appropriate action taken against those found guilty.

The trade unions have a role to play in fighting for changes in attitudes, in the law, and in organising and campaigning against sexual harassment and abusive behaviour in workplaces, including schools, colleges and universities. This means ensuring that adequate procedures are in place for dealing with harassment, and that they are actually implemented in practice, with proper training available for all trade union representatives and staff.

But the basis for ending discrimination, sexism and abuse lays in bringing an end to class society. That means fighting for socialist change, and a society with values based on equality, cooperation and solidarity, in which the major companies are publicly owned, including the media and social media, and society can be democratically planned in the interests of the majority.

The trade unions are also central to building a party that can unite the working class with a programme that can fight for such fundamental socialist change. This would enable the provision of high-quality public services, decent and affordable housing, a living minimum wage - reforms that would eliminate the material basis for gender inequality, provide a future free from poverty, hopelessness and despair for all, and lay the basis for an end to sexism, gender violence and abuse.



The basis for ending discrimination, sexism and abuse lays in bringing an end to class society

Like what you've read?
SUBSCRIBE TO THE SOCIALIST
socialistparty.org.uk/subscribe





WHAT WE STAND FOR

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

The Socialist Party organises working-class people to fight against the attacks from this rotten system on our lives and livelihoods, and for a socialist alternative: a society which takes the wealth out of the hands of the super-rich and is democratically run by working-class people to meet the needs of all not the profits of a few.

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

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

WORK, PENSIONS AND BENEFITS

- A £15-an-hour minimum wage for all, without exemptions. For the minimum wage to automatically increase linked to average earnings or inflation, whichever is higher.
- Share out the work. A maximum 32-hour working week with no loss of pay or worsening of conditions. The right to flexible working, under the control of workers not employers. An end to insecure working, for the right to full-time work for all who want it; ban zero-hour contracts.
- All workers to have trade union rates of pay, employment protection, and sickness, parental and holiday rights from day one of employment. End bosses using bogus 'self-employment' as a means to avoid giving workers rights.
- No to austerity through inflation. For all wage rates to be automatically increased at least in line with price rises.
- Open the books of all companies cutting jobs or claiming they can't afford to pay a real living wage. State subsidies, where genuinely needed, for socially-useful small businesses.
- For trade unions independent of the capitalist state, with members having democratic control over their own policies, constitutions and democratic procedures. For all trade union officials to be regularly elected, subject to recall by their members and paid a worker's wage.
- Reduce the state retirement and pension age to 55. For decent living pensions.
- Replace universal credit and the punitive benefit system with living benefits for all who need them.

PUBLIC SERVICES

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

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

- For local councillors who are committed to opposing austerity and all cuts to local services, jobs, pay and conditions.
- For a socialist NHS to provide for everyone's health needs, including dental and eye care – free at the point of use and under democratic control. Kick out the private companies! Nationalise the pharmaceutical industry under democratic workers' control and management.
- Renationalise privatised utilities – including rail, mail, water, telecoms and power – under democratic workers' control and management.
- Free, publicly funded and democratically run, good-quality education, available to all at any age. Abolish university tuition fees and write off student debt, end marketisation, and introduce a living grant. No to academisation. For all schools to be under the genuine democratic control of local education authorities, school staff, parents and student organisations.
- The right to a safe secure home for all. For the mass building of genuinely affordable, high-quality, carbon-neutral council housing. For rent controls that cap the level of rent. Fair rent decisions should be made by elected bodies of tenants, housing workers and representatives of trade unions. For cheap low-interest mortgages for home buyers. Nationalise the privately owned large building companies, land banks and estates.

ENVIRONMENT

- Prioritising major research and investment into replacing fossil fuels and nuclear power with renewable energy, and ending the problems of early obsolescence – where products are designed to 'wear out' and be replaced – and unrecycled waste.
- Nationalisation of the energy companies, under democratic workers' control and management, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need, in order to carry out a major switch to clean, green energy, without any loss of jobs, pay or conditions.
- A democratically planned, massively expanded, free to use, publicly owned transport system, as part of an overall plan against environmental pollution.
- For a major, publicly funded, insulation and energy transition plan for existing housing stock.
- Agribusiness to be taken into democratic public ownership. For a food processing and retail industry under workers' control to ensure that standards are set by consumers, small farmers, and

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

DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

- For united working-class struggle to end discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, disability, sexuality, age, and all other forms of prejudice and oppression.
- Repeal the anti-trade union laws and all others that trample over civil liberties. For the right to protest and to strike! End police harassment. For the police to be accountable to local committees, made up of democratically elected representatives of trade unions, local community organisations and local authorities.
- For the right to choose when and whether to have children – for the right to access abortion, contraception and fertility treatment for all who need it.
- For the right to asylum – with democratic community control and oversight of emergency funding resources. No to racist immigration laws.
- Expand democracy. For the abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords. For all MPs to be subject to the right of recall by their constituents at any time, and to only receive a worker's wage. For proportional representation and the right to vote at 16.
- For the right of nations to self-determination. For an independent socialist Scotland and for a socialist Wales, both part of a voluntary socialist confederation of Wales, England, Scotland and Ireland.
- Oppose the dictatorship of the billionaire owners of the media. For the nationalisation of newspaper printing facilities, radio, TV and social media platforms. Access to these facilities should be under democratic control, with political parties' coverage being allocated in proportion to the popular vote at elections.
- For a new mass workers' party, based on the trade unions, and drawing together workers, young people and activists from workplaces, and community, environmental, anti-racist and anti-cuts campaigns, to provide a fighting, socialist political alternative to the pro-big business parties.

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

- No to imperialist wars and occupations!
- Take the wealth off the super-rich! For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and the banking system that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working-class control and management. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need, not to the fat cats.
- A democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, and in a way that safeguards the environment.
- No to the EU bosses' club. Organise a campaign with European socialists and workers' organisations to use the talks on post-Brexit relations to tear up the EU pro-capitalist rules. For a real collaboration of the peoples of Europe on a socialist basis as a step towards a socialist world.

Do you agree? Join the fightback!

JOIN THE SOCIALISTS

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

Help fund the fightback!

DONATE TODAY

socialistparty.org.uk/donate



240 TUSC candidates agreed for May's local elections

and there's still time for more!

Two hundred and forty candidates have been approved to stand on behalf of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) in May's local elections after the latest meeting of the TUSC all-Britain steering committee on 13 March.

The candidates will be contesting four constituency seats for the Greater London Authority, the directly-elected Salford city mayor, and council wards in 44 first or second-tier local authorities – just over 40% of the 105 local councils with elections this year.

And there's still time for more trade unionists, anti-cuts community campaigners, stop the war on

Gaza protesters, and socialists from different parties or none, to join what will be the biggest working class left-of-Labour challenge to Sir Keir Starmer's Tory-lite New Labour Party in May.

The final steering committee meeting to approve candidate applications will take place just before Easter, with completed application forms needing to be received by the TUSC National Election Agent - Clive Heemskerck, at cliveheemskerck@socialistparty.org.uk - by Saturday 23 March in order to be placed on the agenda.

- Visit tusc.org.uk for more information



I'm standing to represent the working class as an RMT union rep. The main political parties do not represent the population of this country, only the privileged few. Big business has corrupted politics in this country, the people need to take it back and elect people who are not driven or corrupted by profit interests. The whole stance on Palestine, by Tories and Labour, has reflected this - turning a blind eye to genocide

Darren Lumber, Stanley and Outwood East ward, Wakefield



I'm standing as a TUSC candidate because, with over 300,000 'unnecessary' deaths due to Tory austerity since 2012, and with no real opposition in sight, we are in desperate need of green, anti-cuts and anti-austerity policies for the survival of our communities

Laura Fretwell, Eccleshill ward, Bradford



PAUL MATTSSON

TRADE UNIONIST AND SOCIALIST COALITION



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

- Find out more visit: tusc.org.uk

Council housing neglect – I'm standing for TUSC to fight back

AARON SMITH
ENFIELD AND LEA VALLEY SOCIALIST PARTY

My mum and I live in a council flat in Cheshunt, Hertfordshire – owned by Enfield Council. With a hole in the roof and awful damp, mould is out of control. The flat above ours, and lots of others on the estate have been sold as part of the right-to-buy scheme.

I keep looking at the building from the garden and thinking about how absurd it is that some of the building is publicly owned and some is private, you really can't tell from the outside at all. They should never have sold any flats off at all; it has been a major barrier in fixing the leaks and basically stretched out this whole ordeal. The delays this has caused mean much more maintenance is now required to bring it back to the standards required for it to be a healthy and safe place to live in. We are lucky the building hasn't partially collapsed!

It really adds to the problem that housing is so unaffordable and inaccessible for people on modest incomes or benefits. If the flats became structurally unsafe they would have nowhere to put us temporarily!

My Mum's flat is a symptom of far

bigger problems, and of Enfield Labour council's failure to fight back against Tory austerity since 2010. Every time someone from the council comes here, they say how stretched the council is with money and staff, and that they struggle to even keep their staff. It is not sustainable for it to go on like this. They said the same at a recent meeting held for tenants, attended by around 50 people.

I think the call for councils to set needs-based budgets is spot on. Only then can the housing crisis begin to be fixed with maintenance of existing stock brought back to a decent condition, and a mass programme of new council homes to reduce waiting lists.

The country generally is in a knackered state; roads are broken, public services don't work effectively and health is generally poor, poverty and homelessness are rife.

I think everything we see around us is connected back to the Tories' austerity and downright robbery of our country's wealth.

A lot of the problems we see can't be fixed unless councils are funded properly. That means having councillors prepared to fight for what's needed. That's why I'm standing as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition on 2 May, standing in the Flamsted End ward of Broxbourne Borough Council.



PHOTO: INFOGIMATION/CC

Fund the fightback DONATE TODAY

- Visit socialistparty.org.uk/donate or call 020 8988 8777
- or make cheques payable to Socialist Party,
PO Box 1398, Enfield EN1 9GT



SOCIALIST PARTY FIGHTING FUND

AREA	£ RECEIVED	£ TARGET	Q1: JANUARY-MARCH 2024	DEADLINE: 31 MARCH 2024	%
South West	3,339	2,100			159%
Northern	1,088	800			136%
West Midlands	3,589	2,700			133%
London	6,322	5,000			126%
Southern & SE	2,828	2,400			118%
North West	1,402	1,200			117%
Wales	2,667	2,400			111%
Yorkshire	2,299	2,650			87%
East Midlands	1,723	2,050			84%
Eastern	956	1,300			74%
Other	4,164	2,400			173%
TOTAL	30,375	25,000			121%

Leeds Uni Gaza occupation



Protest on 18 March PHOTO: IAIN DALTON

Socialist Students members joined a rally marking just over a week since students occupied the Parkinson building at Leeds University, in protest at university policies in relation to the ongoing war on Gaza.

Socialist Party Yorkshire regional secretary Iain Dalton was involved in the hundreds-strong occupation at

Leeds Uni in 2010. He spoke to point out some lessons of that struggle for today's occupiers, pointing out that linking up with workers on campus and the wider trade union movement is key to ensure the struggle on this issue and others is taken up more widely.

Socialist Students member Anthony Bracuti brought solidarity. He pointed out that the university was

following in the footsteps of Sunak and Starmer, and with the local elections coming up, the political apologists for the catastrophe in Gaza should face a challenge. Anthony and other Socialist Students members will be doing so by standing as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition in the local elections on 2 May.

LEEDS SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Nottingham marches to oppose cuts

IAN HUNTER AND CHARLIE TAYLOR
NOTTINGHAM AND DERBY SOCIALIST PARTY

Chants of "stop the council cuts" and "Tories out" rang out across the Old Square in Nottingham on 9 March.

Around 200 people expressed their anger at the vicious programme of cuts to vital services and jobs.

Nottingham's overwhelmingly Labour-run council had approved the cuts programme a few days earlier, when only one Labour councillor Shuguftah Quddous (ironically the Sheriff of Nottingham) spoke out and voted against. As a result, Shuguftah was suspended from the Labour Party the following day.

The cuts involve 554 full-time equivalent jobs and closing or disposing of the city's two remaining care homes. Adult social care services will face further cuts, grants to the cultural sector will be ended.

In addition, the programme will

include sales of citywide assets such as 40 residential properties the council owns but rents out at market rents. No-fault eviction notices have been served on the tenants.

Government-appointed commissioners have been in place since the end of February to oversee the implementation of the cuts.

Nottingham Save Our Services, a campaign comprising a wide range of groups in the city (trades council, trade union branches, community activists, and Socialist Party members) has vowed to continue, and to broaden and strengthen the fight against the cuts and their inevitably devastating effects on the city and its people.

Socialist Party day school: 1984-85 Miners' strike - lessons for today

PAUL TOOLEY-OKONKWO
MANSFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

A full-to-capacity meeting room, with 50 people in attendance, a mix of ex-miners, trade unionists, long-standing Socialist Party members, new members and socialist students, remembered the history and the consequences of the miner's strike of 1984-85. A cross-regional Socialist Party meeting on Saturday 16 March in Chesterfield, organised by Chesterfield and Mansfield members.

Dave Griffiths, Dave Gorton and Steve Score gave great accounts of the 'offensive' miners' strikes in the 1970's (wanting better wages) and, in 1980's Thatcher's Britain, the 'defensive' miners' strike, not only to save jobs and pits but a whole industry and a way of life in coal-mining areas. An observation of post-strike colliery areas was as: "A nice place to walk your dog or cycle around, but it doesn't feed your kids."

The miners' strike of 1984-85 posed a great threat to the Tory government at the time. Thatcher sold off the 'family silver' to cover the cost

of unemployment and passed anti-union laws to try to break the unions. Even though the striking miners were defeated in 1985, Thatcher and her Tory government didn't break trade unionism.

The dedicated role of women in the strike, who organised to feed, picket, raise money, and demonstrate for striking miners' families was remembered. In the year-long strike, with nothing coming in, if it wasn't for the women organising, the strike wouldn't have lasted as long as it did. One contributor on gender barriers said: "The miners' strike shows when workers move into struggle, attitudes and consciousness can change very rapidly."

Everyone in attendance benefited from the political analysis of the strike and its place in working-class history.

The strike wave in the last couple of years shows that it will take more than strong trade unions to fight for what we need. Class issues are political issues, that's why we need to fight for a new mass workers' party and socialist change.

A fantastic day school, I will be definitely attending the next one!

MAY DAY GREETINGS IN the Socialist



Back the paper that backs the working class

- Send greetings, see prices and make payments: socialistparty.org.uk/mayday
- Resources and enquiries: scottjones@socialistparty.org.uk
- 20% off before 2 April

China: Growing class anger as multiple crises face CCP rulers



'White paper' protesters at Southwest Jiaotong University PHOTO: DATE20221227/CC

LENCE LAW

FIRST PUBLISHED BY SOCIALIST PARTY SCOTLAND (CWI)

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP)-dominated state is facing a narrowing of support in society. For decades, the leadership of CCP has relied on economic growth to maintain its legitimacy. However, this model is not as powerful as before. Social problems have been increasingly revealed and the cycle of capitalist crisis has been significantly accelerated.

Starting from the 'reform and open' policy in 1978, and completed in Jiang Zemin's reforms in the late 1990s, the ruling class of the state, that had seen capitalism and landlordism abolished in the years following the 1949 Chinese revolution, has become a special form of capitalism controlled by CCP bureaucrats, which is not the same as western capitalist states, but there is no difference in the exploitation of the working class.

They hide behind a socialist-like narrative and use economic growth to cover the expanding gap between rich and poor. However, with the growing size and power of the Chinese working class, as a result of the rapid urbanisation of the past 30

years, social conflicts and a growing questioning of the Chinese ruling class's character, make this recent social crisis more remarkable for the working class.

The beginning of 2024 sees the Chinese economy still in crisis, and the living quality of workers and young people is not getting better as the government promised. After the Chinese government cancelled its lockdown policy, under the pressure from the 'white paper revolution' protests, there was a short-term bounce back in the economy.

However, this wave of recovery was much shorter and smaller compared to the recovery in 2020. At that time, people were expecting to get back to 'normal life' and hoped that higher incomes in the future would cover their loans and bring them a better life. Yet two years later, both urban and rural areas face crisis and rising poverty.

Many young couples in China have given up having children as a result. Chinese society now faces the first population decrease since 1962. For the same reasons, under the impact of a worsening quality of life, young people are cutting back on spending, leading to a decrease in economic consumption.

The Chinese government has tried to stimulate the market, but people

are less willing to spend their money. The economy is even facing a crisis of deflation, which leads to inefficient exports and investment.

Another crisis facing the Chinese economy is in the real estate industry. This was already happening before the pandemic, and has been accelerated with most of the population of China losing the ability to pay off debt.

During the past 30 years, the real estate industry has been bound to the growth of the economy and rapid urbanisation, and has been seen by the ruling class as a way to make financial investments rather than a place to live.

Under the illusion of rapid growth, the Chinese working class and youth have to clear out 'six wallets', which are two wallets of a couple and four wallets from each of their parents, to purchase a house and carry debt for 30 years. This industry has now reached its limit. Heavy debt has brought a negative impact to living quality, increased the gap between the rich and poor, and accelerated the decrease in internal consumption.

The extremely long working hours of Chinese workers is making things even worse. In 2023, the average number of working hours reached 48.7 hours a week. The economic crisis brings heavier pressure on the working class, which is the reason for low wages, long working hours and unemployment.

As of June 2023, youth unemployment was already over 20%, and overall unemployment also increased to 5.5%. Suppression of the workers makes people have no time and money on consumption.

The budgets of provincial governments within China are also facing a crisis. Local governments were relying on 'land finance', extremely dependent on the real estate and construction industries. Indebtedness of local and provincial governments has rocketed. Pressure on financial income makes local governments seeking a way to make cuts such as reducing expenses on medical care, decreasing the salary of civil servants and more.

Averting crisis

Against this backdrop, the CCP-led state is increasingly intervening to try and avert financial, economic and social crisis. Before the pandemic, the Chinese government, facing the overheated bubble of house prices, responded by pushing down house prices, represented by the slogan: 'Housing for living, not for speculation.'

This reform includes policies such as introducing a property tax and restrictions on how many properties could be owned. The CCP hoped this reform could ease social conflict, and bring more investment to high-tech industry rather than the real estate industry, which already is in danger.

Under these social, economic and financial dilemmas, the bureaucratic capitalists and the state machine are losing the confidence of society. According to the Chinese Labor Bulletin, the incidents of workers' struggle in 2023 numbered 1,779, compared to 831 in 2022. In 2018, before the pandemic, the

incident count was 1,883. There has not yet been a qualitative change in the number of workers' struggles.

On the other side, this still weak but growing working-class force has made the ruling class take action in the media and propaganda. The CCP not only uses nationalism and the narrative of 'The Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation', but also tries to pander to growing left-wing public opinion.

The attitude of being 'anti-capitalist', the increasing reference to Marxist theory on official announcements, and, only on a few occasions, supporting workers during strike actions, has shown a recent shift by the ruling class.

This strategy is not only to try to ease the class conflict, but also to maintain its legitimacy, to claim itself as a 'revolutionary party'. Until now, it still works. Many people seeking social reform are willing to believe the CCP can make society better. But on the other side, this action of trying to strengthen their legitimacy is a sign of weakness that will eventually undermine them.

Marxism

The bureaucratic capitalists' claims to defend Marxism and revolution are ironic. It is the ideas of genuine Marxism which will eventually end their domination. The similar contradictions can be found all around modern Chinese society. One of the examples is at the end of 2023, more than 10,000 people rallied in Shaoshan, Hunan, calling for another revolution.

Similar events happened across the whole country, and over one million people took part online. These revolutionary left-wing protests are mainly influenced by Maoist ideas, but support for the idea of a new revolution for the Chinese working class is widespread.

The CCP could not ban the protests as they took place on the commemoration day of Mao Zedong's birth, 26 December. The event in 2023 was the largest rally ever, and the proportion of young people has significantly increased.

Going forward, the Chinese working class and youth are fighting for independent worker-controlled unions, and the right of assembly. This will increasingly bring them into collision with the CCP and its 'Marxist' rhetoric.

With this growing awareness, support for collective ownership, democracy in the workplace, and genuine revolutionary Marxist ideas will eventually become the largest force among the working class. It is a long-term fight. The road is tortuous, and the future is bright.



Fighting the Nigeria cost-of-living crisis

DEJI OLAYINKA

Since Nigerian president Bola Tinubu came to power last May, he has launched relentless attacks on the masses in Nigeria through neoliberal capitalist 'shock therapy' policies, encouraged by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and international capitalists.

This started with the immediate removal of fuel subsidies, sharply increasing the cost of transport and energy generation. He then floated the Nigerian currency, more than doubling the price of imports as the naira lost 70% of its value. The resultant inflation has escalated the crisis of underfunding in government services; for example in healthcare antibiotics prices increased by 1,100%.

Inflation has worsened hunger; the ministry of agriculture predicts that 31.5 million Nigerians will face acute hunger this year and many are now turning to eating reject rice grains previously used for fish feed. Domestic food growth has also been hindered by kidnapping and attacks by terrorists and violent gangs. Insecurity has only worsened since the inflation with more desperate acts like the recent looting of a warehouse and a stampede over rice killing seven people. With 46 academics in the capital dying due to hardship, it's clear even traditionally secure professions aren't immune to the suffering.

To fight back, there have been spontaneous protests, but organised workers should lead the movement. The Nigerian Labour Congress called two days of protests but cancelled the second day, despite getting no concessions from the government. The Democratic Socialist Movement of



PHOTO: DSM

Nigeria (DSM) - the Socialist Party's sister party - called for national strike action from the unions. If organised, this could force a reversal of policy, as was seen in the 2011 general strike in Nigeria.

But regardless of the trade union leadership's inaction, the DSM, as part of the Joint Action Force, has vowed to continue action, despite the constant threat of violent repression by the Nigerian state.

And so solidarity action must also be taken by the Nigerian diaspora. Here, the Socialist Party, as part of Nigeria Solidarity UK, quickly organised a demonstration outside the Nigerian High Commission in London on 9 March, as a step towards building a solidarity movement of Nigerians and other workers.

The campaign echoes the calls of the DSM for an immediate end to Tinubu's anti-poor policies. It calls for the return of the fuel subsidy to lower prices back to pre-29 May levels, for an increase in the national minimum wage to match the rate of inflation, and for a reversal of all anti-poor neoliberal policies. Nigeria has huge resources, yet they are used for the greed of a few. Join us as we campaign for them to be used for the benefit of the majority.

We are also campaigning on the issues affecting Nigerians here in Britain. The rapid devaluation of the naira left many students threatened with unenrolment as they were unable to pay their university fees which basically doubled overnight. Over the coming weeks we will be organising protests and meetings on campuses demanding that universities write off the increased burden of uni fees and accommodation costs caused by the devaluation of the naira.

- Nigeria Solidarity UK Zoom meeting: Speakers include Pelola Adewale Democratic Socialist Movement Nigeria
- 7pm 25 March 2024
- Meeting ID: 815 4306 7850
- Passcode: 521693. All welcome

The rights of Polish women once again under attack

ROSE KWIECINSKA

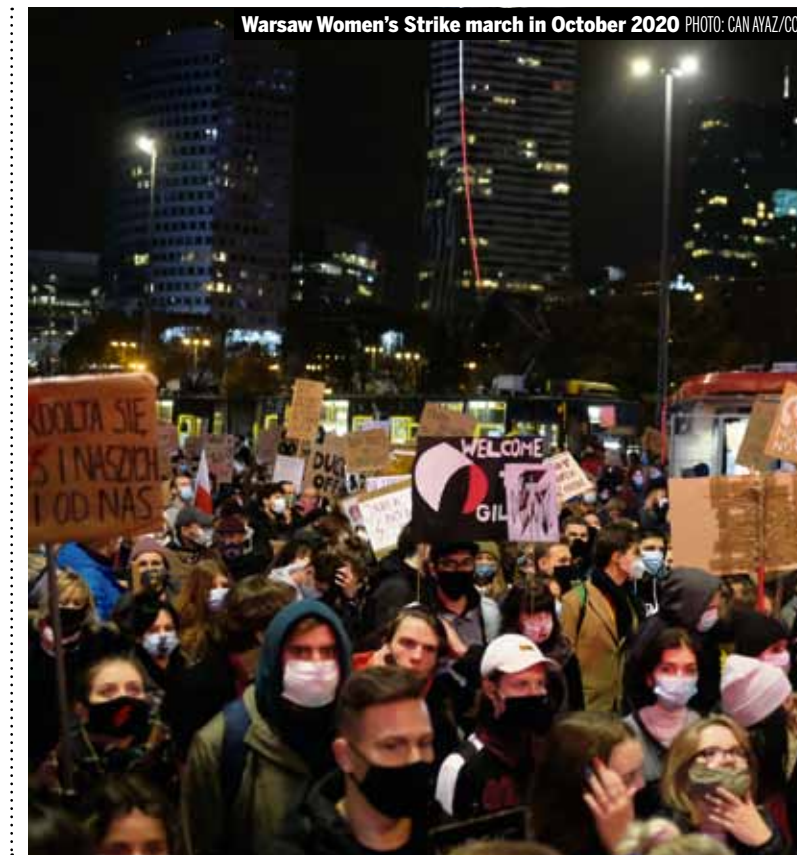
NEWHAM AND EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

The anti-abortion regulations existing in Poland since 1993, commonly referred to as the 'abortion compromise', have been modified twice following Constitutional Tribunal rulings.

The first change took place in 1996 when the 'Constitutional Tribunal' ruled the provision allowing abortion when "a pregnant woman is in difficult life conditions or a difficult personal situation" unconstitutional.

The second amendment took place after the Tribunal's decision on 22 October 2020, declaring the rule allowing abortion in cases of severe and irreversible fetal damage and incurable disease threatening its life unconstitutional. Since then, legal abortion is only possible when "pregnancy poses a threat to the life or health of the pregnant woman" or when there is a "reasonable suspicion that the pregnancy resulted from a prohibited act".

This decision sparked a wave of women's protests and strikes throughout Poland, marking one of the largest anti-government movements in many years.



Warsaw Women's Strike march in October 2020 PHOTO: CAN ANAZ/CC

Three years later, the right-wing party PiS (Law and Justice), after eight years in power, has lost the elections, partially because of this movement.

On 15 October 2023, after winning the elections, the new government's coalition agreement ordered that the Constitutional Tribunal's 2020 decision be reversed.

Right now, there are four projects in the Sejm (Polish Parliament) regarding the liberalisation of abortion waiting to be voted on, including two projects of a social-democratic party Lewica (The Left) about the decriminalisation of abortion and the right of women to make their own decisions about their bodies until the twelfth week of pregnancy.

They were supposed to be voted on from 6-8 March but, on 5 March, the Marshal of the Sejm, Szymon Holownia, suddenly changed his mind and moved the debate to 11 April.

Holownia justified the decision claiming the votes should not take place during local election campaigning that will take place on 7 April.

The 'All-Poland Women's Strike' (Polish feminist social movement) announced a demonstration on 8

March. And once again, women have been protesting.

The party of Holownia, Trzecia Droga (the Third Way), wants a referendum concerning the matter of abortion. It was the participation of women in the elections that gave them the opportunity to be in the government. 68% of the Third Way electorate supports legalising abortion.

But a referendum is simply extending the road to legalisation of abortion and avoiding responsibility. In Polish law, nothing blocks the legalisation of abortion by means of a law.

Human rights shouldn't be voted on - they simply belong to us. Under strong criticism, Holownia backed down.

At the same time, when asked if he considers the possibility of liberalising abortion law, President Andrzej Duda (from Law and Justice) stated: "Abortion is the deprivation of human life, and if someone demands abortion, they are demanding the right to kill."

In Poland 83% of people support the liberalisation of the current anti-abortion regulations. A significant 57% believe that abortion should be possible up to the twelfth week.

We have had to put up with a complete abortion ban for 30 years, because the 'abortion compromise' was essentially a ban. We should have to wait no longer for these basic rights.

£1 / £2 solidarity price

socialistparty.org.uk



the Socialist

Issue 1267

21-27 March 2024

formerly **Militant**

COUNCIL HOMES AND RENT CONTROLS

Fight for a socialist solution to the housing crisis



ROB THOMAS
HACKNEY SOCIALIST PARTY

Unaffordable rents, sky-high house prices and rising cost of living after multiple crises - it's no wonder that young people experience the worst of the housing crisis. The rate of youth homelessness in London rose by 20% (in 2022) and is increasing, according to Centrepoint, a youth homelessness charity.

14 years of austerity has cut Britain's public services to the bone, and over a decade of wage restraint has left the average worker £14,000 worse off than

they were in 2010.

On top of less money in our pockets when finally starting a career, many young workers today also have to pass through extortionate university education. Enormous tuition fees and maintenance loans saddle us with lifelong debt. Students are left to fend for themselves in London's private housing market or choose cramped and often poor-quality halls.

A change of government looks almost certain this year. But would the situation facing working-class people under Starmer's Labour be any better? Starmer and Reeves are keen to stress Labour's 'iron-clad fiscal rules' at every opportunity,

ensuring that the bosses know that they will be a safe pair of hands. This means no more money for Britain's cash-strapped councils which are already stretched beyond limit dealing with the housing crisis. No help with soaring rents - it is not uncommon for 50% of Londoners' pay to be spent on rent. Starmer's ditching of Corbyn's 2019 manifesto proposal to build 500,000 council houses means the dire situation will certainly continue.

The need to build an alternative to this rotten system has never been clearer. Against the backdrop of a huge increase in wealth inequality since 2019,

working-class people are beginning to fight back, demanding fair pay and working conditions and an end to endless war and violence. Corbyn's programme reached a number of people, showing an alternative was possible and 67% young people today consider themselves 'socialist'. We need a socialist solution to the housing crisis.

The Socialist Party says:

- Slash rents and introduce democratically decided rent controls now
- Introduce compulsory licensing of all landlords to ensure decent housing standards

• Carry out a mass programme of council home building. Councils should fight the cuts, by setting no-cuts, needs-based budgets as part of building a mass campaign for the funding they need

- Take over empty properties
- Nationalise the large building companies, land and banks, under democratic workers' control and public ownership, to ensure enough good-quality council housing and cheap mortgages
- Build a new mass workers' party
- Fight for socialist change in Britain and internationally

PHOTO: TED EYTAN/CC

WHAT WE STAND FOR: THE SOCIALIST PARTY'S MAIN DEMANDS >>> see column on page 12



9 771366 962103

ISSN 1366-9621