

INFECTED BLOOD SCANDAL KICK PROFIT OUT OF OUR NHS The profit system is guilty

30,000

people infected and 3,000 dead. Those are the blunt statistics of the Infected Blood Scandal. Behind them the stories of thousands of ordinary people and their families, their lives devastated.

NHS patients were treated using blood bought from profit-seeking pharmaceutical companies, contaminated by HIV, Hepatitis B or C, largely in the 1970s and 80s. Tory and New Labour politicians, and NHS chiefs knew - and the products continued to be used.

The Post Office Horizon Scandal, Grenfell, Hillsborough, Orgreave, thousands left to die in care homes during Covid... In every example, ordinary working-class people suffer the criminal consequences of the profit-before-else system of capitalism, and the capitalist state that exists to defend it.

Rishi Sunak's words on behalf of the capitalist establishment, "I am truly sorry", don't cut it.

Clearly feeling the hatred his own government faces, and anticipating huge public anger at this latest scandal, something like £10 billion has been found for the compensation scheme. Proof that money can be found when they are put under enough pressure.

Keir Starmer's Labour will almost certainly come out on top in the general election. But Labour's shadow health secretary Wes Streeting is arguing for *more* private profit involvement in the NHS, not less.

Anger at 'the system' is growing. Huge numbers have already drawn the conclusion

that the system and all the parties that support it are rotten to the core.

Working-class people need a mass party of our own, one which fights for a fully funded NHS, free from profit-thirsty vultures, and run democratically by NHS workers, patients and our communities. We need a party which fights for the socialist transformation of society, taking the levers of power out of the hands of the capitalist bosses, nationalising big business, including the pharmaceutical industry and the banks, to begin to develop a planned economy which meets people's needs.

If you're fed up with the capitalist profit system which makes working-class people pay and the capitalist bosses ever richer, join the Socialist Party to fight back.

• Read more: 'Infected blood scandal: the profit system is guilty'



the**Socialist**
formerly Militant

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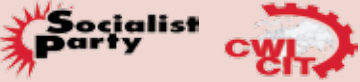
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"The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it."
Karl Marx

Meaningless ‘pledges’ or a workers’ manifesto?

DAVE GORTON

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBER AND NSSN COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER

Keir Starmer’s announcement of six commitments for an incoming Labour government fall woefully short of promising real change after 15 years of Tory misrule. Adding insult to injury, Labour leaders claim it will take two full parliamentary terms to reach this underachievement.

The vagueness of the targets will make success hard to measure and is a deliberate attempt to dampen down enthusiasm for change. What does “delivering economic stability” mean? And how would it be achieved? By continuing Tory spending plans, ie cuts? Local authorities would stay starved of the necessary finance for social care and other essential services. The investment needed to start tackling climate change would be put off at the behest of the markets.

Labour has made it clear that it will attempt to reduce NHS waiting lists by relying on the extension of private healthcare provision, a wholly unpopular stance. The recruitment of 6,500 extra teachers will fail to tackle the problems of a massively ‘academised’ school system, increasingly geared to profiteering not educating. Unless Labour is prepared to increase public sector pay, it is unlikely to get enough teaching applicants

or NHS staff to reduce waiting times anyway.

As infrastructure crumbles and public services suffer, people want real positive change. These pledges barely commit to delivering existing provision in slightly different ways, never mind the root-and-branch overhaul which is needed.

The sorts of things popular with voters are: a £15-an-hour minimum wage; fully funding the NHS and kicking out the profiteers; a mass council house building programme; and nationalising mail, transport, steel, water and energy. However, to deliver these pledges would mean taking on big business rather than cosyng up to them.

Starmer’s Labour has no intention of challenging the capitalist system that allows the super-rich to accumulate private wealth at our expense. Created and supported by the trade unions, community groups and other campaigning organisations, we need our own party. A new mass workers’ party fighting for social change.



RWINDUANO/CC

NSSN conference to help prepare trade union struggle before and after a Starmer-led government

THEO SHARIEFF

This year’s National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) conference will be the last before a general election likely to sweep Keir Starmer’s Labour Party into government.

The Labour Party leadership has backpedalled on previous pledges to strengthen workers’ rights during the course of the next government.

The trade union movement and the working class are going to have to keep the fight on, both before and after a general election, to defend our interests against the bosses’ attacks.

This year’s NSSN conference will provide a forum for trade unionists and shop stewards from across our movement to hammer out a workers’ manifesto for the run-up to the general election.

A workers’ manifesto for the first

100 days of the next government could include:

- Repealing not only the 2016 Tory Trade Union Act, but all the anti-trade union legislation dating back to the Thatcher era and left intact during the Blair years
- Renationalisation of key industries - mail, rail, water, steel and energy, under democratic workers’ control and management - not when franchises end to let the private lenders bleed more profits out of our public services, and for our wages and conditions to deteriorate further, but immediately
- An immediate £15-an-hour minimum wage and inflation-proof pay rises for workers
- Banning ‘fire and rehire’ and zero-hours contracts. And giving workers’ rights from day one of employment



**nationalshop
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NSSN conference 2024

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with the NSSN bulletin
shopstewards.net

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Socialist Party answers Gove’s antisemitic slur and demands debate

SOCIALIST PARTY PRESS RELEASE

On Tuesday 21 May, Tory minister Michael Gove made a speech in which he labelled pro-Palestine university encampments as ‘antisemitism repurposed for the Instagram age’, and referred specifically to the Socialist Party.

The Socialist Party calls on Michael Gove to publicly debate these issues with us so that we have the chance to answer this completely unfounded slur of antisemitism made against us by him.

Our party has participated in and built the anti-war movement, especially campaigning in the trade unions for the potential power of that six million-strong body to be mobilised. Student members of the Socialist Party have been involved in, and are supporting, the student encampments. We offer socialist ideas to build the movement against war – and for a socialist alternative to the capitalist system Gove seeks to defend.

Gove refers to the left supporting calls for ‘intifadas’. Socialist Party placards on the demos call for the building of ‘socialist intifadas’. A recent editorial in our weekly paper the Socialist explained it – and shows why Gove wants to undermine this idea:

“Above all, the Palestinian masses and the working class in the Middle East have the power to decisively change things. The Socialist Party and the Committee for a Workers’ International have been making the case for a socialist intifada – a democratic mass struggle of the Palestinians – to bring an end to the horror in Gaza, and international working-class action to halt the war.

“The development of such a movement would light the touchpaper for working-class struggle across the region, threatening the ruling elites. Israel’s fragile right-wing coalition government would not be insulated from its effects.

“For socialists in Britain, the task is to help strengthen the working-class

movement here and build mass support for socialist ideas – the alternative to capitalist crisis driving war and oppression internationally.”

The Tories – and Keir Starmer’s Labour – offer no alternative to that system, so they seek division in order to cut across the possibility of building a working-class socialist alternative.

Criticising the actions of the right-wing Israeli government – which we also do – is certainly not antisemitic. In fact, the Netanyahu government faced an historic nine-month opposition movement prior to 7 October. The absurdity of Gove’s claim is further shown by the fact that, alone among the left, the Socialist Party attended the London protests that formed part of that movement.

The Socialist Party (formerly Militant) has had longstanding opposition to those who deny the existence of Israel. We have always fought against antisemitism, as well as against fascism and all forms of racism.

In our leaflets on the Gaza demos

we call for “an independent, socialist Palestinian state, alongside a socialist Israel, with guaranteed rights for all minorities, as part of the struggle for a socialist Middle East”. We call for the “building of independent workers’ parties in Palestine and Israel and links between them”.

The big problem that Gove has with us is that our demand for “no trust in the capitalist politicians, internationally or in Britain and a fight to build a mass workers’ party in Britain that fights for socialism and internationalism” is finding ever-greater support and hence his attempt to discredit the protests and the Socialist Party.

On 9 and 10 November, the Socialist Party will be hosting a major weekend of discussion and debate in London. Mr Gove is invited to defend his position there if no sooner date can be found to debate with us.

SOCIALISM 2024

Tickets and more info:
www.socialism.org.uk

Infected blood scandal: the profit system guilty

The infected blood inquiry published its final report on 20 May. It has detailed how thousands of people have died and many more exposed to contaminated blood, a scandal made worse by government cover-ups over decades. Victims and their families will rightly feel vindicated in their fight for justice. We reprint here an article written by **Jon Dale**, Socialist Party member and retired doctor, in 2018, when the inquiry was first launched.

Over 25,000 people have been infected with contaminated blood products the NHS bought from profit-making pharmaceutical companies. Nearly 3,000 have died so far.

That’s the background to the Infected Blood Inquiry, which has only now started after 30 years of hard campaigning by victims and their families.

As recently as April 2017 the Tory public health minister resisted an inquiry. The Tories’ weak position since the general election made them back down.

From the late 1960s people lacking blood-clotting factors (haemophiliacs) could be treated with plasma products made from up to 60,000 blood donations. But if one donor carried a blood virus a whole batch could be contaminated.

Donors need to be healthy, especially if viruses can’t be tested for. The Blood Transfusion Service has always used screened volunteer donors, paid with nothing more than tea and biscuits.

In the US, commercial blood banks used paid donors – except in prisons where donors got five days off their sentence for each pint of blood.

Homeless or undernourished people, alcoholics and drug users are high-risk for carrying blood-borne viruses.



Plasma donation in the US WHOIS/JOHNGALT/CC

Cover-up

Apparently government papers from the time have been ‘lost’. But it has emerged that in 1987 secretary of state John Moore issued a memo to the Tory cabinet on how to get the Thatcher government off the hook.

He proposed a £10 million “once-and-for-all payment” to victims, to be administered by the Haemophilia Society. “(This) is particularly attractive,” he wrote, “as it minimises government intervention; and it would be consistent with the policy of not accepting any direct responsibility for damage caused in this way.”

The Con-Dem coalition government privatised British plasma products capacity in 2013. Bain Capital, a US corporation, bought 80%

for £230 million. It sold it in 2016 to a Chinese investment group for £820 million!

To uncover the full facts, an inquiry of patients, their families, health workers and trade unions is needed with powers to see all government and drug company papers.

Those who put profits first, refused to finance the services needed and tried to cover their tracks must be exposed. The system they defend stands guilty and must compensate those who suffered.

The pharmaceutical industry needs to be nationalised under democratic workers’ control, and to be run as a public service, integrated into the NHS and good public health systems throughout the world.

Maternity services in crisis

For a fully funded, fully public NHS



TED PHILLIPS

ALEX SAMPSON

PLYMOUTH SOCIALIST PARTY

Poor-quality maternity care, often covered up by hospitals, has led to stillbirths, premature births, permanent damage to babies, and death or life-long injury to many women. Many more have been left with deep trauma, impacting every aspect of their lives – from bonding with their babies, to relationships and the inability to return to work. These are some of the findings of a report by the all-party parliamentary group on birth trauma and it makes for uncomfortable reading.

This is not a new problem, however. There have been major inquiries into the failings of maternity services in Morecambe, Shrewsbury and Telford, and East Kent, dating back to 2015. Another inquiry is currently under way in Nottingham. All these reports have pointed to chronic

understaffing and underfunding as major causes of their problems.

But, instead of acting on the recommendations of these reports, maternity services have been allowed to slip even further into chaos. As midwife numbers continue to decline, 88% of midwives are working extra unpaid shifts to keep the service running, equalling 100,000 unpaid hours a week across England. The staff that remain have the highest levels of mental health-related absences anywhere in the NHS. The Royal College of Midwives has warned that maternity workers are “buckling under the sheer weight of demands on them”, and the service is “crumbling before our eyes.”

This worry is certainly supported by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) figures, maternity services have the lowest safety rating of any department they review. In November 2023 they rated two-thirds as not up to required safety standards, up from 55% in 2022. Settling negligence claims due to birth-related errors now costs NHS England £1.1 billion a year, which is a third of the annual budget for maternity and neonatal services.

These issues are not felt equally amongst all women. It has also been found that black ethnic minority women are four times more likely to

die in childbirth, with Asian women and white women from the most deprived areas twice as likely to die as those from the most well-off areas of the country.

This rapid and alarming decline has been ongoing for over a decade due to Tory austerity cuts, but the huge increases in the cost of living over the last two years has accelerated the crisis as more staff leave the NHS. An incoming Labour government also shows no sign of investing more money in NHS services, with Labour’s shadow health secretary Wes Streeting declaring he would “hold the door wide open” to the private sector. Capitalism is determined to bleed our NHS dry as it funnels more public money into private hands, and it is working-class women who are left bereaved, damaged, traumatised and neglected.

We need a fully funded, publicly owned NHS run within a socialist system for the benefit of all before our vital maternity services collapse entirely.

£1.1 billion

NHS England spends every year settling birth-related negligence claims

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Parasite outbreak symptom of a sick privatised water system

Brixham PHOTO: 35MMMAN/CC



LYNN GUNNIGLE

DEVON SOCIALIST PARTY

The outbreak of cryptosporidium in the fishing port of Brixham in Devon is a blow to local families and small family-run businesses still reeling from the pandemic, coming at the beginning of the holiday season. At the time of writing, 46 positive cases have been identified with a further 100 people displaying symptoms. More cases are expected as South West Water (SWW) first denied the water was infected then backtracked, allowing it more time to spread.

17,000 properties were put on a 'boil water notice', that has now been reduced to 2,500. Advice warning of a two-week incubation period with

more cases to come has angered and worried residents who are also concerned that visitors will stay away. This will impact the local economy, and ordinary people may suffer the consequences.

Three free water collection points have been set up by SWW but, bizarrely, only one is in the town itself. Frustrated residents are having to travel to nearby Paignton, causing heavy traffic on the main road in and out of town with long queues at the depots. Petrol costs and time spent travelling are another thing local residents are paying for.

SWW has upped its compensation offer to £215 per customer affected, at first it was only £15! This is a drop in the ocean compared to the £72 billion of dividends paid out to big bosses and shareholders since

water privatisation happened under Thatcher 34 years ago. And the CEO of SWW paid herself over £1 million in bonuses last year.

To add insult to injury, in the middle of this scandal SWW's owner announced £166.3 million of profit last year and dividends for its shareholders.

SWW says it has identified the source and is working to address it, but what's to say it won't happen again in other places as our water infrastructure isn't being invested in?

All in all, it's an utter mess. It puts more strain on our diminished healthcare services. If ever there was an example of why we need our utilities renationalised, run by workers and the local community with the funding it needs, this is it.

Phillip Davies lucrative job – we need workers' MPs on a worker's wage

MILA HUGHES

COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

Tory MP Philip Davies is being paid £500-an-hour working for gambling firm, Merkur. Davies, who was recently knighted, now provides "strategic advice" to a company behind Britain's second-largest network of 'adult gaming centres'.

While working-class people have to fight for decent wages, Davies rakes in £1,000 a month for just two hours of work! His privileged position allows him to profit from the losses of ordinary people, including preying on those who develop a gambling addiction. The company's revenues surge, primarily fuelled by losses, while

Davies enjoys his cushy consultancy gig. And he's not the only MP that's getting paid megabucks, on top of their £91k salary. In 2023 MPs were paid £10 million extra in the previous year.

Merkur Gaming's practices are already under investigation by the Gambling Commission, as reported in the Guardian. A vulnerable customer, Wendy Hughes, battling lung cancer, lost over £2,000 in just 16 hours at one of their venues. Staff allegedly stood by, indifferent to her plight. The company's response? They blamed their own staff!

The capitalist system perpetuates inequality, allowing the wealthy to directly exploit the labour of the working class. The Socialist Party

fighters for members of parliament that would champion the mass of people struggling to make ends meet, not cosy up to gambling conglomerates.

When Socialist Party members stand in elections, they commit to take only a worker's wage to remain connected to the struggles of everyday people, as did MPs Dave Nellist, Pat Wall and Terry Fields, supporters of Militant, the Socialist Party's predecessor.

Instead of cosying up to corporations, they experienced firsthand the challenges faced by the working class. Imagine if Davies earned the average wage of a warehouse worker or a nurse - would he still endorse policies that favour the 1%?

War and disasters cause misery and displacement Capitalism is guilty – fight for socialism

LEWIS MELVILLE

LIVERPOOL SOCIALIST PARTY

Last year, the world saw a record 75.9 million people living in internal displacement due to conflicts, violence, and disasters, up from 71.1 million in 2022. Of these, 68.3 million were displaced by conflict and violence, the highest number on record. Countries like Sudan, Syria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Colombia, and Yemen host nearly half of these displaced individuals. Over the past seven months, the war on Gaza has led to millions more being internally displaced.

Global crises have further intensified over the past five years, with a 49% increase in displacement due to prolonged conflicts in Ethiopia, DRC, Sudan, and Ukraine.

Capitalism's inherent drive for profit and domination fuels these conflicts. Globally, resource wars and capitalist exploitation lead to continuous violence and instability.

Natural disasters also contributed to displacement, with 26.4 million new displacements across 148 countries in 2023. Severe weather events and earthquakes disproportionately affected regions already suffering from conflict, exacerbating

the crisis. The severity and frequency of extreme weather is made worse by climate change, another consequence of the capitalist dash for profit. And, as was the case in Turkey and Syria in 2023, earthquakes and other natural disasters have a greater impact in countries where infrastructure has been cut and building regulations undermined. (See 'Turkey-Syria earthquake – devastation amplified by capitalism's failures' at socialistparty.org.uk)

The Socialist Party fights for a world that puts people over profit. We fight to link up mass movements that can decisively get rid of capitalism, redistributing the wealth out of the hands of the bosses into those of the working class, for a socialist green transition and international working-class solidarity instead of capitalist competition. We can end the cycles of violence and displacement, and build a world where every individual can live in peace and with plenty.

Socialism offers a path to a just and equitable world, free from the violence and instability perpetuated by capitalism. It is time to unite in the fight for socialism to ensure a future of peace and security for all. The best step if you want to join that fight is to join the Socialist Party.



PHOTO: HELEN PATTISON

Join the fightback

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to find out more today!

Slovakia assassination attempt and Georgia upheaval Deepening divides in Europe exacerbated by Ukraine-Russia war

NIALL MULHOLLAND

COMMITTEE FOR A WORKERS' INTERNATIONAL (CWI)

Two recent events - the attempted assassination of Slovakia's prime minister and the mass protests over the 'Russian law' introduced by the Georgian government - have increased political tensions in both countries and are indicative of ever-deepening divides within Europe.

The 27-month long war in Ukraine, which has seen recent Russian military advances, has vastly exacerbated ethnic, national, political, and military tensions within and between European states.

The attempted killing of Prime Minister Robert Fico shocked Slovaks and reverberated across the continent. This happened just weeks before elections to the European parliament, which are expected to see big gains for the populist and nationalist right.

Dmitry Medvedev, the former Russian president, and other commentators referred to the attempt on Fico's life as another 'Franz Ferdinand moment'. The killing of the Austro-Hungarian archduke in Sarajevo in the summer of 1914 is widely regarded as the catalyst that triggered World War One. While this is clearly an exaggeration, it is undoubtedly the case that Europe today is increasingly polarised politically, economically and militarily, with a major war taking place between Russia and Ukraine, supported by rival global powers, costing up to 500,000 lives so far. With the attempt on Fico's life, the New York Times asks: 'How far Europeans are willing to go to wage war against themselves as extreme political polarization stalks their societies.'

The alleged shooter, a former coalmine worker, who tried to assassinate Fico was at first described as a "lone wolf" who has an erratic political history and has in the recent period supported Ukraine in the current war with Russia. The Slovak interior ministry later said that the attacker may not have acted alone. Whatever the motives behind the attack, they are indicative of an extremely polarised society.

Fico began his political life as a Communist Party member before the fall of the Berlin Wall, when Slovakia was part of the former Czechoslovakia. The restoration of capitalism in Czechoslovakia and across the region saw a layer of privileged Stalinist bureaucrats-turned capitalist oligarchs loot the state-owned economy and enormously enrich themselves while the mass of the population saw their living standards dramatically decline.

Under Fico's leadership, his new party, Direction-Social Democracy (Smer), moved in a right-wing, nationalist direction. During last year's general elections, Fico espoused an

Robert Fico PHOTO: EUROPEAN COUNCIL/CC



Georgia protest PHOTO: JAF0 PHOTOGRAPHY/CC

Georgia

anti-EU, anti-Ukraine, anti-immigration, and anti-LGBTQ+ rights line. Fico faces strong opposition in the Slovakian capital of Bratislava but has support beyond in deindustrialised and poorer rural areas. Fico, like right-wing populist nationalist politicians across the continent, cynically plays on fears that immigrants are 'taking' local jobs and homes and breaking local services and infrastructure. (It is estimated that 5.1 million immigrants entered the EU in 2022, more than double the year before.)

Fico began his fourth term as prime minister last October, with his Smer party leading a three-way coalition. He has criticised EU sanctions against Moscow and advocated a "negotiated settlement" to the war in Ukraine, echoing Putin's call. Like his ally Viktor Orban, the populist nationalist prime minister of Hungary, the Slovak prime minister has taken steps to muzzle the media, legal institutions, and other bodies critical of his rule. Fico has accused the state broadcaster, RTVS, of a "liberal bias" against his government and having a pro-EU agenda.

The attempt on Fico's life has only deepened the country's sharp divisions, with the interior minister warning that "we are on the doorstep of a civil war".

This fear of widespread civil conflict is also present in Georgia where, despite months of mass protests that were met violently by police, the ruling Georgian Dream party adopted a bill - the "foreign agents' law" - which obliges media and 'civil groups' that receive foreign funding to register with the government.

Opponents of the bill have derided it as 'the Russian bill', given its similarities to legislation introduced by Putin's government to crack down on opposition groups and NGOs. It is expected that Georgia's president will refuse to sign off the bill and that it will come back to the government to have a final vote. If so, Brussels has threatened to freeze Georgia's membership bid to the EU.

Georgia, in the south Caucasus, was the first ex-Eastern Bloc country to witness a 'colour' revolution in November 2003. Protests over disputed parliamentary elections led to the resignation of President Eduard Shevardnadze, a former Soviet Union foreign minister. The pro-capitalist, pro-western opposition leaders, however, provided no way forward for the impoverished masses. A US-trained politician, Mikheil Saakashvili, won elections and was

celebrated by the west, increasing tensions within Georgia and with Putin's Russia. Since a short war with Russia over the breakaway South Ossetia area in 2008, Russian troops have occupied about twenty per cent of Georgian territory. As Saakashvili's rule became ever more repressive and corrupt, his support fell. In 2012, an umbrella coalition, Georgian Dream, bankrolled by Bidzina Ivanishvili, who made billions in post-Stalinist Russia, won power.

The Georgian Dream government has tried to balance between developing good relations with Russia while also still publicly maintaining an ambition to join the EU and NATO. Some polls show support for EU membership among Georgians as high as 80% - no doubt as working people are desperate to escape low wages and poverty. At the same time, the Georgian Dream government plays on social conservatism, especially in rural areas, denouncing the EU's 'social values'. As part of its nationalist propaganda, the Georgian Dream government is re-writing history, and even statues celebrating Stalin, who was born in Georgia, have appeared throughout the country.

Last year, the Georgian Dream government backed down to large street protests and Brussels criticisms over the 'foreign agents law' or 'the Russian Bill'. However, the Georgian government seems determined to pass the latest version of the law, especially as it faces elections in October.

The CWI stated at the time of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and other Stalinist states in Eastern Europe that capitalist restoration would not bring peace and prosperity, as the pro-capitalist ideologues promised. Instead, the market economy has led to wars, worsening ethnic and national tensions, impoverishment of the masses, and brutal class exploitation. The various political factions representing competing oligarchs and outside powers' interests have shown repeatedly that they offer no way forward for working people across the region; they are dragging the region towards ever more impoverishment and internecine conflict and wars.

The building of mass workers' organisations, including genuinely independent trade unions, and political parties with socialist policies, is an urgent task in Slovakia, Georgia and across the region. In that way, workers can collaborate across national and ethnic divisions in the struggle for full democratic rights, decent jobs, education, health and public transport, linked to the fight for an end to the disaster of gangster capitalist rule and interference by rival imperialisms. A federation of democratic socialist societies would take the major planks of the economy into democratic public ownership for the benefit of the many, transforming lives, and ending division and conflict.

Committee for a Workers' International
FIGHTING FOR A SOCIALIST WORLD
socialistworld.net

UCU conference: Members debate strategy as crisis in post-16 education grows

DUNCAN MOORE
UCU NEC, PERSONAL CAPACITY

Members of the University and College Union (UCU) meet on 29 May for our annual congress. Delegates will come together in person, feeling our collective strength as a union, to discuss and vote on what needs to be done by our union to defend post-16 education at a time of growing crisis and a looming general election.

Workers in universities and colleges have fought intense battles with bosses for improved pay and conditions in the last two years, winning significant gains but still struggling with low wages, job insecurity and the effects of marketisation in post-16 education.

The Tory government is on its way out, to be replaced by Keir Starmer's Labour - already showing its readiness to commit to Tory spending plans, and water down its commitments on workers' rights.

Funding crisis

Universities and colleges face an imminent funding crisis. Four in five universities could face financial deficits and some university bosses say they could be forced out of business.

As well as higher and further education workers having the experience of mass strike action under their belts, a rebellion is brewing among students. Last year, maintenance loans increased well below inflation and for the first time rents surpassed the maximum loan. Huge numbers of students report studying at home, skipping meals and not buying the resources they need.

Currently, many are staging walk-outs and encampments against the atrocities of the Israeli state in Gaza. The next year could see an explosion of protest by students - already activated by the war on Gaza, and having

witnessed mass strike action by their staff - over the crisis in universities.

Socialist Party members in the UCU are campaigning for our union to adopt a fighting, socialist response. The crisis gripping post-16 education is the result of brutal austerity and privatisation policies. Tory cuts to government funding and the growth of the market model, including a funding system based on ever-increasing student fees, have brought our universities to a state of near paralysis.

We must demand that a Labour government ends the financial crisis in universities and colleges. UCU should call for an end to the market model and for free, high-quality education - publicly owned and democratically run by workers and students. A serious campaign that brings together the education trade unions with students could apply tremendous pressure on Starmer.

Workers' rights

Socialist Party members have proposed an emergency motion on the recent backsliding of Starmer on the so-called 'New Deal for Workers', which provoked outrage among trade unionists when it appeared that Labour was preparing to bin yet more of its pledges, this time on banning zero-hour contracts and introducing sector-wide collective bargaining, in response to heavy lobbying from big business. After meeting with trade union leaders, Labour has now 'reassured' the unions - but what is promised has not been made clear.

The position of UCU general secretary Jo Grady, that we can expect to work in 'partnership' with a Labour government, is not tenable. As well as needing to prepare to fight industrially, this readiness of Starmer to betray the unions shows that we need a new political strategy.



UCU strike rally in London, 2023 PAUL MATTSSON

Our motion notes that we can't rely on Labour to defend workers' rights without pressure, and that UCU members should be encouraged to stand in the election in a personal capacity on a workers' manifesto.

UCU branches at Cambridge University and the Open University have put forward a composite motion on resisting the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act, brought in by the Tories to force union members to cross their own picket lines. We agree that the general secretary should instruct branches not to comply with

work notices issued by employers, in line with the TUC resolution agreed last year, and the NEC should coordinate with other unions. We would go further and say that our union should put itself at the forefront of resisting this law and should call for a national demonstration.

FE national pay bargaining

We also back the calls on the UCU leadership to prepare a campaign for national, aggregated strike action of further education (FE) staff in the 2024-25 pay round, ensuring

maximum participation of branches and the production of material that explains the need to strike for national pay bargaining in FE.

Come to the Socialist Party fringe meeting to discuss a fighting programme that connects the battles of the UCU to the wider political struggles of the working class.

● **Socialist Party fringe meeting: 5.30pm (or end of conference) Wednesday 29 May at the Trouville Hotel, 5-7 Priory Road, BH2 5DH, 5 mins from the BIC**

Birmingham Labour council: Don't blame women workers - fight back together!

BIRMINGHAM SOCIALIST PARTY

Workers in female-dominated roles have been blamed for the financial crisis at Birmingham City Council. But the reality is the Labour council could have avoided this situation if it had worked with the unions to win the funding from central government to pay its workforce properly, rather than pick fights at every opportunity!

Women workers in primary schools organised by the GMB union took a day's strike action on 14 May, and lobbied the council cabinet meeting to make their demand for fair pay. And they definitely made it loud and clear!

This action can be a springboard to involve other council workers and unions alongside the community in a campaign for properly funded services with properly funded staffing.



PHOTO: BIRMINGHAM SOCIALIST PARTY

DWP security guards

ALISTAIR TICE
SHEFFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

On the fourth day of strike action by G4S security guards employed at the Department for Work and Pensions, members of the GMB union at Cavendish Court in Sheffield were heartened by the vote of security guards in PCS: 95% for strike action. None of the six PCS members scheduled to work had come in, and two joined their GMB colleagues on the picket line.

90% are on minimum wage and they have had no pay rise since 2021.



Sheffield



Pickets in Leeds PHOTOS: YORKSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY

One security guard, who has worked for the company for 37 years, told me how his long service had been renumerated:

- 5 years - got a badge
- 10 years - another badge and a candelabra!
- 15 years - another badge and points
- 20 years - nothing
- 25 years - nothing
- 30 years - £300 gift voucher
- 35 years - nothing
- 37 years - minimum wage and ON STRIKE!

PCS union in pivotal moment

As we go to press, the conference is taking place of the Public and Commercial Services union, PCS, which organises in government departments, agencies and contractors. Group conferences have also taken place.

In the last issue of the Socialist, we reported

on a historic step forward in the National Executive Committee (NEC) elections in PCS, in which the misnamed 'Left Unity' led leadership lost its overwhelming majority to a coalition of candidates standing for change. That includes the election of Socialist Party member Dave Semple as

vice president and Marion Lloyd to the NEC. Read more: 'PCS: historic left victory at critical moment' at socialistparty.org.uk.

Since then, the results of the group executive elections have been published, and of the national strike ballot on pay that ran at the same time.



Group elections

Candidates for change, including BLN supporters and three Socialist Party members, won 24 of the 31 positions on the HMRC Group Executive Committee (GEC), including every officer position they stood for.

Socialist Party members were also elected to the Home Office and Department for Education groups.

Unfortunately, in the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), while two Socialist Party members were re-elected to the GEC, Left Unity maintained their majority for now.



PCS Liverpool Museums on strike this year LIVERPOOL SOCIALIST PARTY

HMRC group conference: A tone of fightback

JON-PAUL ROSSER
HMRC GEC, PERSONAL CAPACITY

HMRC group conference took place just after the 'Left Unity' group leadership had been ousted in the elections. Activists and reps voted for change against a leadership that squandered the national campaign and blocked the launch of an effective fightback.

Conference began with a Broad Left Network (BLN) motion on office attendance, which proposed a wide-ranging campaign incorporating legal action, strike action and action short of a strike. Another BLN motion set an ambitious policy of jobholders being given the autonomy to decide how frequently they come into the office. These motions were supported and set a tone of fightback in HMRC.

The pay, terms and conditions section was headed by a BLN motion on the delayed publication of the government pay remit. Again conference agreed a raft of tactics to challenge this, as part of the national campaign on pay, pensions and jobs. Unfortunately, a second BLN motion to incorporate action short of a strike was moved by the National President onto the national agenda.

The equality section of the agenda provided a contentious moment when two motions highlighted the lack of people standing for the equality committee posts. Although the issue is real, Left Unity supporters placed the blame on the Group Executive (GEC) equality lead. This is Hector Wesley, who just won the Group President role as a candidate for change. This blatantly sectarian

attack was called out by some delegates, although both motions were given critical support.

The only heated debate was a rule change proposed by the GEC, to increase the size of the GEC to allow for Valuation Office Agency (VOA) members to have reserved seats. This was supported by VOA branches, but the vote was lost. An organising motion was passed for a holistic review of the group structures, allowing all branches to provide input to rule changes that can be supported at conference 2025.

There were motions on many other subjects showing the variety of issues faced by members. The promise of change by the newly elected GEC will be tested very quickly. Socialist Party members and the BLN will be working to deliver for members.

DWP group conference: Again no clear lead from the top

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBER IN DWP

Following the group elections, in which, unfortunately, Left Unity supporters maintained their majority on the executive (GEC), DWP group conference opened to a subdued mood. Only about 30,000 of around 40,000 members were represented by branch delegates.

The focus of conference was on the attacks on DWP staff and claimants, and how we move forward in the national campaign given that DWP turnout in the strike ballot fell short of the 50% required by the anti-trade union laws.

We agree that this should be the focus - our disagreement is on how we move forward. The GEC motion,

which passed, calls for branches to submit their action plans for discussion at the Organising Sub-Committee, and to include the national campaign as a standing agenda item in every branch committee.

A significant reason that we did not get the ballot turnout was the total lack of preparation. After a ten-month 'pause', reps started the ballot with literally days to prepare and with no agitational materials in their hands. Now we go away from DWP conference again with no plan to lay the ground for a rebalot.

Members also pointed out the slowness of the leadership to balot G4S guards to coordinate with GMB action (see facing page), and that health and safety advice wasn't

given to members until the afternoon of the working day before the strikes.

Significant debates took place around control by and support to branches. A censure motion against the GEC for not taking action on last year's conference decisions came very close on a hand vote but lost on a card vote.

The same happened with a call to give reps the material to train more reps, rather than waiting (sometimes months) for GEC-organised training courses.

Reps want a plan to win, and the support and tools to do their jobs - a significant number are realising that this is not the leadership that will deliver that.

PCS strike ballot results

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN PCS WROTE IN THEIR CONFERENCE BULLETIN:

The PCS national pay strike ballot, affecting 171 employers, closed on 13 May, just days before PCS conference. This ballot was launched in March by the outgoing Left Unity-led leadership, without the necessary preparation amongst reps and members, and after ten months of complete inactivity.

Unfortunately, this failed approach, despite the fantastic work done by reps and members, was reflected in the ballot results. Only a small minority of groups and members have a mandate for action.

The results of the vote were not available until 15 May, when dozens of branch meetings to prepare for the conference had already taken place, meaning opportunities for emergency motions were lost.

Socialist Party members across

PCS campaigned hard for a 'yes' vote in the strike ballot. We hoped that across the board the result would have been over the 50% threshold imposed by the 2016 anti-Trade Union Act.

Yet the impact of Left Unity's lack of leadership is clear: the mishandling of the 2022-23 campaign; the ten months of inactivity from June to March; and the utter disorganisation with which the current ballot was launched - including not a single leaflet being ready for the first week of the ballot.

There needs to be a serious debate at conference about the next steps. Given the turnouts of 40-45% in big groups such as DWP and HMRC, there is a case to organise a rebalot of those that missed the threshold. But this must be properly prepared for, with workplace meetings, and tying in the successful groups with a plan of action during this period.

STOP PRESS: PCS conference defeats outgoing leadership, and passes fighting strategy

PCS Annual Delegate Conference opened on 21 May. Solemn faces from the leadership abounded, after their defeat in the national executive (NEC) elections.

In moving the annual report, general secretary Fran Heathcote did not lift the mood or instil a fighting spirit, as delegates assembled after a hard-fought national strike ballot where most areas did not get over the Tory anti-union threshold of 50%. This was due to poor leadership and poorer organisation by the 'Left Unity' leadership of the union.

An early battle overturned a decision by the leadership-dominated Standing Orders Committee, which arranges the conference agenda. Conference threw out the leadership's claim that they won an increase in the 2023 civil service pay award from 2% to 4.5%.

After this, the major set piece debate of the conference began: on pay, jobs, pensions and building a national campaign.

Socialist Party member Craig Worswick, from PCS Home Office group, moved the motion agreed by the Broad Left Network. He called for a serious campaign on the dozens of issues facing civil servants: minimum wage pay, 72,000 job cuts and major pension cuts, workloads, office closures and denial of flexible hybrid-working.

A tense debate followed. Recent left candidate for PCS president and Socialist Party member Marion Lloyd clearly moved the conference hall by contrasting the failed strategy of the defeated NEC with the new approach promised by the newly elected NEC, which takes up post from 23 May. Cheers rang out around the hall.

Conference decisively threw out the PCS Left Unity motion, which had the full weight of the union's outgoing NEC behind it. It then passed the BLN motion. The clear task is now in front of the incoming new leadership to get out and build a serious campaign.

Autism at work: Trade union organisation key to tackle discrimination

MARY FINCH

WALTHAM FOREST SOCIALIST PARTY
AND UNISON MEMBER

Only around 3 in 10 autistic adults are employed, and while many autistic people are unable to work, a huge number are forced into unemployment because of a lack of support in the workplace. The Buckland Review of Autistic Employment, commissioned by the Tory government and headed by Tory MP Robert Buckland, investigates the experiences of autistic people in the workplace and how they can be better supported to get into and stay in work. It does so with no trade union input.

It seems unlikely that this report is an altruistic attempt to change attitudes towards autistic people. The Tories recently floated plans to make it harder for disabled and long-term sick people to claim benefits. Supposedly they are able to work fully remotely, so they should look for a job where they can work from home - and face having their benefits cut if they're unable to find one.

Unsurprisingly, the recommendations for change are woefully inadequate. Many of the recommendations amount to sharing "best practice" and raising awareness among employers. But the report itself mentions a 2020 study by the Institute of Leadership and Management that found 50% of managers were uncomfortable with the idea of hiring disabled people. Their top two concerns were the cost and practicalities of making workplace adjustments.

Ableism

Ableism plays a huge part in the underemployment of autistic people. Many people still see disabled and particularly autistic people as child-like, so they tend to underestimate their abilities.

Understanding of autism and how autistic traits show up in different people, especially women, has also dramatically changed over the past few years. Many autistic people learn to hide our traits, for example relying on scripts or planned conversations to make up for our different understanding of social cues, or deliberately making eye contact even when it feels uncomfortable.

Outdated attitudes and stereotypes of autistic people are still deeply rooted, so people often expect to be able to 'tell' that someone is autistic because of their behaviour. When faced with a person who doesn't 'look autistic', many people will assume that they aren't really disabled and downplay or ignore the things they struggle with.

This obviously has significant implications for autistic people in the workplace. Theoretically, employers have a legal responsibility to make reasonable adjustments for disabled workers. A diagnosed autistic person

should be able to access all the support and adjustments they need. But in reality, employers can and do spin reasonable adjustments as being unreasonable and this can be incredibly difficult to challenge.

This also points to a glaring omission from the report: the incredibly long waiting lists for autistic assessments on the NHS, and the total absence of support available post-diagnosis. Changes to our understanding of autism have led to a huge increase of people seeking assessments - which the underfunded and broken NHS is totally unable to deal with. The NHS is increasingly outsourcing autism assessments to the private sector to cope with demand, but even this is proving insufficient. That leaves millions of undiagnosed autistic adults, waiting years for a formal diagnosis, unable to access support or reasonable adjustments at work.

There is an existing Access to Work scheme which provides grants and practical workplace adjustments, run by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). In 2022-23, only 49,820 received Access to Work provisions. That's compared with around 1 million autistic adults alone in the UK, not including millions of other disabled people.

It's little wonder that so few eligible workers are using the scheme. This is the same DWP which declared terminally ill people fit for work and once claimed a double leg amputee could "climb stairs with his arms". How can disabled people be expected to trust the DWP to accurately assess their needs, and treat them with respect throughout the process?

The DWP also employs work psychologists within Jobcentres who support autistic and other disabled people who have additional needs which affect their job search - but there are only 85 of them. 85 work psychologists to support millions of people!

Many left out

Around one third of autistic people also have a learning disability. Despite the fact that 95% of learning disabled adults are unemployed, they are completely left out of the report.

Many learning disabled adults are unable to work, but for those who do want to enter employment, there are very few options. There are several social enterprises opening shops and cafes specifically designed to hire learning disabled adults and support them to find future employment. But with small businesses facing hugely inflated costs and decreased customers, they face an uncertain future and many will be forced to close.

Any government that is serious about supporting autistic adults to enter the workplace must urgently address the funding crisis in the NHS, and provide structured, genuine support for all autistic people searching

for work and entering the workplace.

Labour is almost certain to win the next general election and has made it very clear it won't reverse any of the attacks on public services. In fact, the worst may be yet to come, with Keir Starmer preparing workers for even deeper cuts when he comes to power.

We urgently need a new mass workers' party that will genuinely fight for autistic and disabled people, and all workers. Trade unions taking steps towards the development of new working-class political representation would be decisive.

Trade unions key

The trade unions are also key to fighting for the rights of autistic people within workplaces. Many of the reasonable adjustments which autistic people typically need are changes which would benefit all workers - which may be why some employers are so reluctant to implement them.

Autistic people can have sensory differences which can lead to feeling extremely overwhelmed by bright lights or loud sounds, for example. Everyone would benefit from more comfortable light levels and earplugs for staff working in noisy environments. Autistic people can also find social interactions very draining and may need breaks from this. All staff in public or customer-facing roles would probably be a lot happier at work if they could take regular breaks from dealing with the public.

Many employers and managers want their staff to be happy, and try to create positive work environments. But we can't rely on their goodwill to accommodate autistic people - or for any of our other rights at work. The essential role of management is to maximise productivity, and profit in the private sector. Management often believe that breaks, or greater flexibility in how and when people work, will decrease productivity - regardless of whether it actually does.

The only way to safeguard our rights at work is through the six-million-strong trade unions. Strikes - or even just the threat of strike action - have won pay increases and fought off attacks on conditions in workplace after workplace.

The trade unions can also campaign to change attitudes towards autistic people in the workplace, and fight for sufficient funding for reasonable adjustments. Hiring managers wouldn't be concerned with (and can't hide behind) the difficulty of making adjustments as a reason not to hire autistic people.

The bosses' desire to squeeze maximum productivity and profit out of workers is a driving force behind the discrimination against disabled people - utilising existing prejudices and reactionary ideas developed by their own capitalist system. To end discrimination and oppression means fighting for socialist change.



DAVID MAPLES

BRIGHTON SOCIALIST PARTY

Early in the Covid pandemic, summer 2020, some GPs issued blanket "Do Not Resuscitate" orders on disabled people living in care homes. Around the same time, the National Institute for Clinical Evidence (NICE) issued guidance advising clinicians that, if life-saving treatment had to be rationed, a patient's independence should be taken into account. In the first two waves of the pandemic, nearly two thirds of people who died were disabled.

In March 2023, 1.9 million people were experiencing self-reported long Covid. Two years earlier, the government had opposed setting up an inquiry into the impact of Covid on disabled people.

Ignoring health issues, Tory chancellor Jeremy Hunt's 2023 Autumn Statement included a renewed focus on getting disabled people into work. Rather than tackling the complex issues which prevent many disabled people from working, the government's policy amounted to 'pull yourself together' and if you don't, 'we will sanction you'.

Esther McVey, the 'minister for common sense' said any equality, diversity and inclusion roles in the civil service should be focused exclusively on statutory requirements. This ignores that many statutory requirements are woefully inadequate.

But can we expect better from a Keir Starmer-led government?

45%

of disabled workers who ask for reasonable adjustments failed to get any

To get disabled people into work, the new government will need to rebuild capacity within the NHS. Currently approximately 8 million people are on waiting lists and the NHS has a major staffing problem with 130,000 unfilled posts. The lack of support from Labour for restoring NHS pay to 2010 levels in real terms shows that there is no end in sight to this problem.

The mental health charity Mind has called for the establishment of a commission led by disabled people to redesign benefits assessments rather than sanctions and a system that "doesn't get mental health".

Other campaigners have highlighted the need to support fluctuating health conditions, which standard jobs can't accommodate, and the need to update the social security system to meet new challenges rather than repeating punitive approaches.

All this has been a closed book to



With a Starmer-led government failing to meet working-class people's needs for improved living standards and decent public services, support for the idea of a working-class political alternative will grow

Liz Kendall, Labour's shadow work and pensions secretary, who has been a keen supporter of the benefits cap, including the two-child limit.

The Trades Union Congress is holding its Disabled Workers' Conference in Liverpool on 23-24 May. It has recently produced a useful report on the disability pay gap. Non-disabled workers earn around a sixth more than disabled workers. Starkly, non-disabled men are paid on average 30% more than disabled women.

Not only are disabled workers paid less than non-disabled workers, they are also more likely to be excluded from the job market with 6.7% unemployed compared to 3.3% for non-disabled workers. For Black and minority ethnic (BME) disabled workers, 10.4% are unemployed, compared to 2.6% of white non-disabled workers.

Disabled workers are also more likely to be on zero-hour contracts, disabled women BME workers nearly three times as likely as non-disabled white men (6.0% to 2.2%) to be on these insecure contracts.

Disabled workers need a ban on zero-hour and insecure contracts, with full rights from day one. The trade union movement must demand, as a minimum, that Starmer's Labour reverse its rowing back on workers' rights pledges.

The TUC is calling for mandatory disability pay gap reporting for all employers with more than 50 employees, and for employers to have a duty to produce targeted action plans, in consultation with recognised trade unions, identifying the steps they will take to address any gaps identified, including ensuring disabled workers feel confident in completing workplace equality monitoring.

TUC research has found that the most common issues union reps had to tackle on behalf of members were disability related.

Getting and keeping reasonable adjustments in place is an ongoing issue for disabled workers. Before the pandemic, 45% of disabled workers who

asked for reasonable adjustments failed to get any or only got some of the reasonable adjustments they asked for.

It is clear that the existing legal protections and workplace initiatives used to identify and remove workplace barriers disabled workers face are not effectively addressing the scale and seriousness of the issues we encounter. Despite government rhetoric, the waiting list for Access to Work decisions - a government scheme meant to assist disabled workers to get or stay in work - increased by 8% between June and December last year.

Too often, the current legislative protections are proving to be paper based protection only and not properly protecting disabled workers. This requires well-informed and well-supported militant campaigning workplace reps. Disabled workers can play a central role by organising for trade unions to adopt fighting campaigns.

Within this, the newly elected left leadership in PCS, as the union for workers who administer the benefits system, can play a significant role by campaigning with disabled people's organisations for the punitive benefits system to be replaced by 'living benefits' for all who need them.

After over a decade of Tory attacks on disabled people, there will be huge expectations that things must start to improve once they're out of the door. But Starmer's Labour is promising to stick to Tory spending plans, and fails to oppose the Tories' rhetoric against disabled people.

8 million

people are on NHS waiting lists

With a Starmer-led government failing to meet working-class people's needs for improved living standards and decent public services, support for the idea of a working-class political alternative will grow. The establishment of a new mass party of the working class fighting for socialist ideas - based on meeting people's needs rather than profit - would be a huge step forward for disabled people, and all working-class people, fighting to end discrimination and inequality.

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

Leicester parents demand end to SEND transport cuts

STEVE SCORE
LEICESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

A silent but visual protest in the council chamber on 16 May, and an active lobby outside, marked the latest protest in the campaign to reverse Leicester Labour City Council's cuts to special needs school transport. Like many other councils implementing cuts to virtually all non-statutory services, they decided to attack the most vulnerable.

It is a legal responsibility to get your child under the age of 18 into education. It is a recognised need and a legal duty for councils to provide travel support to children with special needs - apparently that ends at 16!

Beginning with my son's letter to councillors (published in the Socialist issue 1264) and another parent's online petition, the SEND 16+ campaign has grown to a large group of parents.

We have used every weapon we can. We have demonstrated, produced flyers, got a lot of media coverage, put questions to council meetings, lobbied councillors by

writing to them and going to their surgeries. Parents in our group have also started judicial review legal proceedings.

The city council Unison branch has supported us by pointing out how flawed the so-called consultation had been, and issuing its own press statement. In the consultation, more than two years ago, parents of students who will now be impacted were not written to.

Leicester City Council has used the excuse that it is trying to avoid a 'Section 114' notice. But it is cutting so many services that it might as well have issued one! They have stopped funding adventure playgrounds and the remaining children's centres not cut in previous years are now under threat.

One parent put a question to Labour's shadow chancellor on the local radio station: 'Are Labour prepared to put money into councils so that these vital services can be sustained?' The answer was 'no'.

Just as we are fighting to defend attacks on services by a Labour council now, we will have to continue under a Labour government too.

Royal Fleet Auxiliary strike over pay



DUNCAN MOORE
PLYMOUTH SOCIALIST PARTY

RMT union members in the Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA) struck on Sunday 19 May for the first time in their history, in a dispute with the Ministry of Defence (MoD) over pay. The MoD has imposed a 4.5% rise.

The RFA is a civilian service which is critical to the operation of the Royal Navy, working four-month tours at sea, carrying out a wide range of duties, from refuelling and maintenance of vessels, to relief efforts following natural disasters and mine-hunting.

Strikers say pay has been cut by over 36% in real terms over 14 years. Crew numbers have fallen by 28%, while workloads have increased dramatically. RFA pensions and redundancy rights have also been undermined since 2010.

An RFA sailor of 23 years' service told us:

"We're on £20,000 a year less than Royal Navy sailors, although we're taking on more and more of the same duties. We get none of the medical care, housing or other benefits. Ultimately, we're essential to the operations of the Royal Navy, and we deserve to be paid properly."

As we were speaking, an older man walking his dog stopped by and said he'd been in the RFA 50 years back. He was angered to hear about the deterioration of pay and conditions.

RMT members from bus and railway branches joined the picket line in Plymouth, and discussed with Socialist Party members about the prospects under an incoming Labour government. We encouraged them to attend the National Shop Stewards Network conference on 22 June to discuss what workers should demand of that government. Many agreed that unions must create a new political party for workers.

Defend Leeds Little Owls Nurseries!



'ISABELLE GRANT'
LEEDS SOCIALIST PARTY

Around 20 parents and trade unionists marched against the proposed closure of Kentmere Little Owls nursery on 18 May.

Leeds City Council will decide in June the fate of council-run Little Owls nurseries across the city. Three face closure, a further 12 face privatisation.

Kentmere Little Owls is a small nursery in the heart of its community, next to the local community centre and small shopping area. We marched down to the Green, a short walk from the Seacroft Little Owls.

Children at Kentmere have been guaranteed places at Seacroft. However, there has been no real consideration of the impact on working parents, especially those who don't

drive. Our march between the two took over half an hour - too long for any of the children to have walked.

Local Labour MP Richard Burgon's office lies between the two nurseries. Several parents have written to him since the start of the campaign but we are still awaiting a response. Parents who have previously voted and campaigned for him to be elected feel abandoned.

Most welcome was the support of the Unison local government branch, which has backed the campaign and sent a speaker to the march.

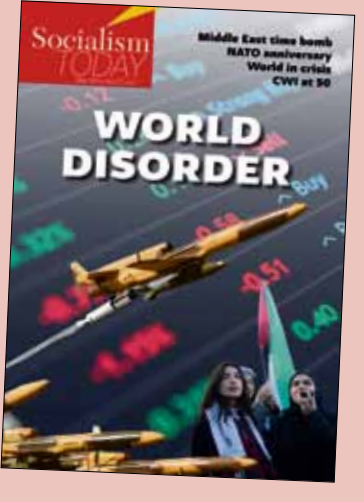
We urge both Richard Burgon MP and local councillors to work with parents and trade unions in the campaign to defend a vital resource that is at the heart of the local community, and fight to demand from central government the funding needed to keep them open.

SOCIALISM TODAY

Monthly magazine of the Socialist Party

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Tens of thousands march in London against slaughter

CALLUM RHYS GRIFFITHS
WALTHAM FOREST SOCIALIST PARTY

We took to the streets on 18 May. Although this was the 14th national march for this cause through the heart of the capital, support and passion are not waning. The mood was defiant and determined.

This is of course a reaction to the continued mass slaughter in Gaza, and the recent Israeli state offensive into Rafah. The response by our government, the US, and opposition parties has been challenged on the streets.

The Socialist Party was there. We spoke to protesters, and people bought our placards, and the Socialist paper.

The march did meet with a

counter-protest, and far-right racists. But our march dwarfed theirs.

Chants of "free free Palestine" and "end the occupation now" could be heard throughout. Some brought drums and speakers to loudly declare their support for the cause, and ensure they are heard.

Some chants, however, spoke to the deep-rooted frustration in the political leaders we have in the UK. Chants derided not just Rishi Sunak, but Keir Starmer too. He and his Labour Party have enabled this ongoing slaughter, claiming that Israel has "that right". As the chants say, they will "never be forgiven".

We need a real alternative, a socialist alternative, not a choice between two capitalist parties. Only a socialist alternative could bring an end to ongoing wars and turmoil caused by capitalism and greed.



Student encampments are growing

Leicester walkout

Socialist Students is helping lay the groundwork for a student walkout and march at De Montfort University (DMU) in Leicester on 24 May. We have been doing campaign stalls and meetings on campus to get as many people as possible aware of our plans. We have been in contact with the student union too.

The reception at DMU has been overwhelmingly positive. Many students state how they were looking for such protest activity about Gaza, as there has not been much on campus compared to the other university in Leicester, which has an encampment.

We have captured the mood at DMU. We have also received a positive reception from university staff, with UCU union members coming to our meetings, and on-site security expressing their solidarity with us.

We will continue to build for our student walkout on 24 May, with activity planned for the whole week leading up to it.

SAADA MOHAMED

LEICESTER SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Socialist Students says:

- Disclose all finances - universities should open their books to democratic inquiry by students and staff
- End marketisation - for fully funded, free education
- Broaden the protests - we would be strengthened if more students, and workers, joined the action
- The encampments should be spaces for everyone to discuss how to transform this movement into the mass action needed to fight for Palestinian liberation
- For fighting, democratic student unions that represent our interests
- We need a political voice - for a new workers' party with socialist policies to end war, oppression and capitalism



Oxford students push silent uni

Oxford Action for Palestine has had a busy week. On 16 May, the campaign held a rally/press conference, partially motivated by a statement released by Oxford University's vice chancellor. That statement committed to nothing except "constructive dialogues", yet they even failed in this, as they have not replied to any of the camp's attempts at direct communication.

I had attended an anti-war rally a month earlier in the same place. But this crowd was considerably larger, its atmosphere far more charged.

Oxford Action for Palestine has received support from 14 trade union branches.

On Saturday 18 May, Oxford Action for Palestine organised a die-in outside the Sheldonian theatre and Bodleian library, blocking all exits but one during the lead-up to the

graduation ceremony. The camp has become noticeably more organised, and had some stewards present at this protest, albeit with very basic training.

Concerningly, university security staff assaulted two protesters at this action. It is shameful that the university chooses to send security staff to deal with the student protesters, physically endangering their own students, instead of having constructive dialogue that they claim is so important.

And Oxford Action for Palestine has set up another camp at the Radcliffe Camera. Security is an ongoing concern, between police circling camp one and a worry that non-student supporters will likely get removed by staff at camp two.

But pressure is rapidly mounting on the university to negotiate, while Oxford Action for Palestine doesn't seem about to back down any time soon.

ALEX CHAPMAN

OXFORD SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Liverpool – how can we win?

The protest marches have seen newer generations come together to denounce the Israeli government attacks on Gaza, as well as their own governments for their complicity in continuing to provide arms and technology that are being used on the front lines. But it is not only the Tories and Labour who are complicit.

UK universities have research contracts and financial ties to the Israeli state. This has prompted students to take those protests directly onto the campuses, with demands to the university chancellors to divest and halt ties.

The University of Liverpool encampment in solidarity with the brutal crackdowns of US students, and to demand that the university halt complicity, including diverting funding away from companies that create weapons that have been used by the Israeli government to commit atrocities in Gaza.

Students from universities across Liverpool have joined together to take over Abercromby Square, or Alameer Square as we've renamed it, after a Palestinian poet killed by an Israeli airstrike. We're putting demands in plain view of students and staff.

The encampment has grown, with almost all of the square taken up. Multiple events, rallies, and other activities have been called by the encampment - notably a rally outside the town hall on Nakba Day.

The encampment has support from the community, with food, tents, and other necessities. The students are well organised, with officers appointed for safeguarding, security and other measures.

Socialist Students members have been discussing with the wider public about the encampment, its aims, and what they can do to support - helping to broaden its reach. We need to push the university to breaking point, so that the fees that students pay are not used to fund the slaughter in Gaza.

Socialist Students says: broaden this movement to involve the wider public, ensure democratic discussion of the movement's demands at its heart and centre, and fight for a socialist alternative to end capitalist war and exploitation. All issues at the heart of stopping the war on Gaza.

LEWIS REES AND NIVEN DAY
LIVERPOOL SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Lack of transparency at 'business-run' Manchester

The camp is bigger and better equipped, with different tents signposted for visitors. I crossed paths with a Daily Mail journalist there, who had just been refused an interview.

I asked the camp about broadening the movement, including about the marketisation of education. They said: "As a camp, we obviously acknowledge that this is a symptom of a wider issue of capitalism, of imperialism, of colonialism, and within the university spaces of the marketisation of education."

I also proposed our Socialist Students' demand on the universities to open their financial books to inspection by our movement. They said: "There's a huge lack of transparency at the university. It does operate as a business, it is a business, and I think that leads to a huge lack of transparency between the management, the workers, and the students. There's no transparency there."

Socialist Students held a campaign stall near the student union, where it was evident the effect that the protest camp was having on students' political consciousness.

One student was hesitant to sign our petition, as she was worried how it might affect her visa. This is a worrying reflection of the Tory government's attitude towards pro-Palestinian sentiment, and growing uncertainty around international student visas.

SAM HEY

MANCHESTER SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Basildon tractor plant strikes in response to broken pay deal



CHRIS HUGGINS
BASILDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Unite the Union members at Basildon CNH tractor plant started nine days of strike action on Tuesday 14 May. The company has broken a 2022 pay agreement to increase pay in 2024 by the average rate of inflation for the year, which would have been 7.4%. Instead, CNH has offered 4%, based on the fact that the official inflation rate has recently dropped.

Compare this with a multimillion-pound package to the CEO, who

took away 310 times the pay of the average worker at CNH Group in 2022!

Strikers say years of below-inflation increases, and general mistreatment and lack of respect for the workforce, have also played a part in this action. The picket is well attended and morale is high, helped by a BBQ and sound system.

Talks involving ACAS have not resolved anything yet, so action will continue on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays until 30 May, with discussion about possible escalation.

Why I joined the Socialist Party

From climate change to housing – everywhere capitalist crisis

CIARÁN O'DONOGHUE
NEWHAM AND EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

I joined the Socialist Party in October, after the Israeli state's brutal onslaught against the people of Gaza started. I have considered myself to be a socialist since I was a kid, due to other family members' influence.

I joined the Labour Party when Jeremy Corbyn was elected leader. Seeing a socialist elected as leader of the Labour Party, only for him to be smeared and his ideas attacked constantly by the media, and demonised by many right-wing neoliberal politicians within his own party, naturally left me disillusioned with Labour.

I studied Politics and International Relations at university, and started reading more Socialist thinkers. I already had a grasp of some Marxist concepts, but have begun expanding my knowledge since joining the party. Articles in the Socialist paper and Socialism Today magazine are incredibly useful tools for broadening understanding.

Since leaving university, I have become acutely aware of issues within the industry I work in. There is a lack of union representation.

Consequently, I have heard many stories from colleagues of workplace abuses that workers were unable to fight. To me this highlights why collective organising is vital to prevent such abuses, and demanding justice for workers.

The need for socialism is evident. We are seeing growing economic and social inequality, as well as wars breaking out around the globe. Everywhere you look, capitalism is in crisis.

For my generation, the ability to get a house is becoming increasingly difficult. Across the country, waiting lists for council houses are colossal, as well as the costs of buying a house and rent.

We also have to deal with the looming threat of climate change, and its many disastrous effects. These are just a few of the far-reaching disastrous effects of capitalism.

With this Tory government on its way out, and with a right-wing Labour government set to replace it, workers need a voice. That is why I joined the Socialist Party.



Gareth (left) and other young Socialist Party on campaigning on our stall at the end of Swansea Pride GARETH BROMHALL

Swansea community says: 'Pride is political'

GARETH BROMHALL
SWANSEA SOCIALIST PARTY

This year's event was sponsored by Unite the Union, and the local Labour council. Controversially, the event was also sponsored by Great Western Railway. The local secretary of train drivers' union Aslef made it known to the trade union bloc that his branch and union were nearing 30 months in dispute with this employer.

Tory hostility

The Tories whipping up culture wars around trans rights, drag queens and other LGBT issues has had an effect, with hostility both online and

in person on the day more overt and visible. Nonetheless, thousands marched, and thousands more lined the entire route in support.

Socialist Party members are part of Swansea Trades Union Council, and we coordinated with others to build a trade union bloc, including members from Unite, GMB, PCS, Unison, Usdaw and Aslef.

Swansea Socialist Students initiated a radical bloc, which included socialist and anarchist groups, anti-fascists, and pro-Palestinian marchers, under the banner "pride is political" and "queers for Palestine".

The Socialist Party had a stall inside the festival at the end of the march, with members taking turns to run it.

This was a great opportunity for three of the new members who have joined us this month to get stuck in, taking part in their first campaign activity with the Socialist Party.

Youth

Our socialist material on LGBT+ issues was well received, particularly by young attendees looking for an alternative. The front page of the Socialist paper, "Mass workers' struggle can end slaughter in Gaza", prompted several discussions.

And our 'Tories out' leaflet, with more demands reflecting the current situation, also went down well, with several people indicating their desire to discuss with us more.

Northampton protest condemns violence against women by Tory politician

KATIE SIMPSON
NORTHAMPTON SOCIALIST PARTY

Jonathan Nunn has been forced out of his position as West Northamptonshire Tory council leader, following more allegations of horrific domestic violence, a crime he was convicted of in 2004.

Five women have now come forward with harrowing allegations of further abuse by Nunn. A protest on 16 May had many angry residents demanding Nunn be stripped of his council position.

'Personal matter'

Shockingly, in March, the council's chief executive officer, Anna Earnshaw, stated: "The claims about domestic violence were a personal matter, and not for the council to investigate". A number of placards at the demonstration made it clear that domestic violence is never a private matter. This is especially the case when an elected councillor used his position to shield himself from criticism.

Sexist and misogynistic ideas are built into the divisive and exploitative capitalist system that Tory politicians like Jonathan Nunn defend. Nunn cynically launched a council

campaign to tackle violence against women in 2022. For the survivors of domestic abuse, these revelations about Nunn only deepen distrust that these kind of institutions can keep them safe. It is even harder for women fleeing abuse to find somewhere safe to go, as the council tightens the priority housing criteria.

Cuts

Refuges have been depleted in the region. Offices where women could go to report abuse have been closed.

Critically important services, like the Sunflower Centre, which support victims of domestic abuse, risk becoming overwhelmed due to limited funds. Drug and alcohol workers, like myself, find we're becoming advocates for those coming into our service, including those experiencing domestic violence in the home.

The Labour Party nationally is reaping the benefits of the hatred for the Tory party. Yet, Labour councillors haven't made any attempt to reopen lost services, or secure the future of those few still standing.

The Socialist Party and Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) campaigners led the call for the council to adopt a needs-based, no-cuts budget. This budget was

discussed and agreed by members of the community, and drawn up by our council candidates.

The budget included reopening and fully funding services that were previously closed in Northampton, which would include refuges. It also included a safety system for all pubs and clubs to provide either a safe room for people who have become at risk on a night out, or a mandatory call to a community support officer to ensure people who need help are able to return to a place of safety.

Tories lose seats

The Tories face losing some of their safest seats in Northamptonshire in the general election. But there's no guarantee that those experiencing domestic abuse are going to be safer under a Labour government already promising "fiscal responsibility" over adequate funding of vital public services. We are going to have to get organised to fight for the services we need.

People made it very clear on this protest that they see domestic abuse as a council matter, and as a political matter. Ending sexism, misogyny, and violence means ending the capitalist system that those ideas are built into, and fighting for socialism.



Anti-cuts campaigners before their deputation to Southampton council

Holding Southampton Labour to account for decade of austerity

SUE ATKINS
SOUTHAMPTON EAST SOCIALIST PARTY

When the newly elected Labour council met, we sent a deputation to hold them to account over statements made in pre-election leaflets.

The local elections in Southampton saw the best-ever results for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) in Bevois ward, with Socialist Party member Nadia Ditta receiving 848 votes, narrowly losing out to the incumbent Labour councillor.

This was on the back of the devastating war on Gaza, which residents linked to the devastation within their own community caused by a decade of austerity cuts carried out by the Labour council.

We are not going away. This is the beginning of our campaign, not the end.

● Paying to cut our services

Community wins victories

The local community, through our campaigns, had achieved two notable successes – reversing council decisions to close St Mary's Leisure Centre and the Venny adventure playground. But Labour ward councillors tried to claim credit for these successes themselves!

The council is supposedly investing £2 million in the leisure centre. But they've found this money by making another £40 million cuts, and selling off another £120 million of capital assets.

At the council deputation, led by Nadia, we demanded that any investment in St Mary's Leisure Centre must be decided through consultation with the local community. As taxpayers' money is being spent, then the facility must stay in council hands, and not be handed over to a private provider, which is the Labour council's declared intention.

Likewise with the Venny, Bevois councillors should call a meeting to discuss how our council tax is spent. We fought to save it, and now we need investment to make it the heart of our community.

Nadia further made the point that, with the prospect of a Labour government within months, there should be

no excuse that there is no money. The government must be put under pressure to restore the £500 million stolen from Southampton over the last decade. Replicated throughout the country, this would immediately transform people's lives, as council homes could be built and services restored.

Even though Nadia explained how things could be different, the response from the councillors was warm words, but no commitments. Our campaigning must therefore continue.

We have produced a leaflet, going door to door, to thank everyone who voted TUSC for Nadia, and to reach out to all who want to get involved to fight for the community.

Tony Twine, TUSC candidate in the 2024 local elections for Portswood ward in Southampton, explains the deputation he made to the council.

I sketched out the sinister function of the council's new Improvement and Assurance Board, a mechanism for forcing through £40 million cuts to essential public services. I demanded the council place in the public domain the "who, why, when and where" of this unrepresentative, secretive, undemocratic, inaccessible and unaccountable vehicle for public asset-stripping.

The Labour council has set up a body, basically self-imposed Section 114, chaired by one of the main commissioners sent in to make cuts in Liverpool and Northamptonshire councils. The council is paying these people colossal amounts of money to cut our services.

● Tony says his reasons for supporting TUSC are quite simple: "They consistently campaign within the working class on jobs, pay and conditions, both locally and nationally. They have a public profile, and hold regular inclusive meetings. I will help with any united fightback campaign that TUSC takes up."

● Our socialist paper contains answers to rotten capitalism

As the Socialist paper organiser for West London Socialist Party, one of the jobs I hate is disposing of unsold papers at the end of the week. Every time I do it, I think: We have a paper which contains the answers to the issues of the rotten capitalist society we live in, copies that remain unsold are helping to prop up that system.

We don't have any magic formula, so I'm pleased members of West London Socialist Party sold a record 65 Socialist papers in the last week.

We have our paper at our weekly branch meeting. And everyone there takes some to sell during the week. We plan when we'll campaign to sell the Socialist, what locations, and confirm who will be present.

Our main sales are at rail and

Underground stations. Each evening, thousands of commuters pour from Hammersmith tube, or Ealing Broadway station.

So many people these days wear earphones, or are looking at their phone. How do we get their attention?

Noise is good – make sure the loudest voice among you has a range of simple slogans ready to shout. Be seen. Approach people directly. Be proud of our paper.

A paper sale is not just a social gathering. Our focus when we're campaigning is engaging with the public. But we also plan a half an hour in a café after the sale, to exchange thoughts, ideas and views.

BILL REED
WEST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY



● Donate now to fund our Socialist message

Socialist Party members are out busy campaigning on a whole number of issues. You might find our members calling for a socialist intifada - democratic mass struggle - on the many demonstrations and protests in support of the people of Gaza, including the student encampments and protests.

Or you might find us demanding the nationalisation of Tata Steel, our campaigning in Wales to stop the closure of the steelworks.

What stands out as unique in all our campaigning is our clear socialist message.

You are showing your support for these demands by collectively donating thousands of pounds for our campaigns.

The money that you donate helps us make sure that we smash through

SOCIALIST PARTY FIGHTING FUND									
AREA	£ RECEIVED	£ TARGET	Q2: APRIL-JUNE 2024				DEADLINE: 30 JUNE 2024		
South West	1,819	2,100							
Northern	412	800					52%		
Southern & SE	1,212	2,400					50%		
London	2,100	5,000							
North West	461	1,200					38%		
Wales	896	2,400					37%		
East Midlands	712	2,050					35%		
Yorkshire	662	2,650					25%		
Eastern	314	1,300					24%		
West Midlands	253	2,700					11%		
Other	262	2,400					9%		
TOTAL	9,104	25,000					36%		

our vital, quarterly fighting fund target. This is essential for us to be able to continue to put our socialist message across with posters, placards and leaflets and the Socialist newspaper.

Can you match the Palestinian student in Leicester who donated £5?

You don't have to wait until you

meet our members on our campaign stalls, you can donate online!





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



Kanaky-New Caledonia: Macron provokes protests and disorder

- **Macron sets Kanaky on fire!**
- **Enough of France's colonialist and repressive policies**
- **For the full and complete right to self-determination of the Kanaks**

New Caledonia, a French overseas territory in the Pacific, has erupted in protest following a vote in the French National Assembly that allows French residents who have lived in the territory for ten years to vote in provincial elections - a move which has angered the indigenous Kanak population who fear having less independence than currently. **Gauche Révolutionnaire** (CWI in France) looks at the situation.

The Parisian media pretends to discover the situation in Kanaky/New Caledonia by reporting 'riots'. It ignores the fact that it is French President Emmanuel Macron who is leading a particularly disastrous policy. Both the local right-wing and Macronist deputies, as well as the French

government (with the full support of the National Front, RN and the Republicans, LR), have confronted the independence movement, particularly since 2021.

The goal is to prevent, at all costs, the possibility of independence, but also the possibility of a lasting majority around the Kanak separatists in the Caledonian territorial government. The latest step is therefore the forced passage of the "law on the electoral thaw" (a law drawn up at the request of the elected LR and Renaissance parties in New Caledonia and Darmanin, the Minister of the Interior). The right to vote in provincial elections has been 'frozen' to those resident in Kanaky/New Caledonia before 1998, preventing the Kanaks from becoming an electoral minority in their own land.

The electoral 'thaw', expanding the right to vote to recent migrants, mainly from France, will have the effect of dispossessing the Caledonians. It was this ultimate provocation which ignited the powder, despite the warnings of nationalist, independence

and autonomist organisations: the Party of Kanak Liberation (PALIKA), the Trade Union of Kanak Workers and the Exploited (USTKE), and the Kanak and Socialist National Liberation Front (FLNKS) etc.

The Macron government therefore decided to reform the electoral process through constitutional change. More recently settled Europeans, often going there to do business, and encouraged to settle in New Caledonia to 'populate' in the face of the natural demographic increase in the Kanak and Oceanian population, could vote on the status of the territory in local elections, in the same way as the indigenous inhabitants.

Despite the ongoing peaceful protests, the vote in the National Assembly remained scheduled, with the Macron government receiving the support of the RN and LR. This decision is full of colonial contempt, and could only add fuel to the fire in Kanaky and strengthen the protests and riots taking place. On the night of 14-15 May, after the vote of the National Assembly, which followed in the footsteps of the Senate validating the constitutional revision of the electoral body, the riots continued. At the time of writing, there have been four deaths and hundreds of arrests. The GIGN, the RAID, the CRS 8 (specialists in urban repression) and the mobile gendarmes have been dispatched. The colonial state once again favours repression. Macron has declared a state of emergency.

Where does this anger come from?

Since 1988, an institutional process has been deployed so that residents

can vote on the future of Kanaky and can decide, through three successive referendums, on their relationship with France and their autonomy or independence.

This process, to determine Kanaky's relationship with France, was decided following a decade of mobilisations and mass struggles in Kanaky for independence and against French domination.

French government repression had been fierce. But the political, union and associated forces of the nationalist and independence movement have never given in to fear. But, in order to stop the violence and deaths, the Matignon agreements in 1988, then those of Nouméa in 1998, were signed between the parties, unions and associations of the nationalist and independence movement, the anti-independence forces, and the French state. The electoral body was decided in 1998, fixing who could vote and, in particular, who among the Europeans could vote: the Caldoches (families descended from settlers in Kanaky who had been there for a long time) and the Europeans who had arrived and settled for more than twenty years.

Divide and rule

However, since 2018, Macron and his governments have been doing everything to slow down and limit the political weight of the Kanaks. People have faced difficulties in registering on the electoral lists even though they have always been there! Three referendums took place.

The first was organised on 4 November 2018. It saw a 'No' victory of 56%. But the independence vote was strong. In the second referendum, on 4 October 2020, the pro-independence vote increased to 46%. The third took place on 12 December 2021. This referendum was particularly marked by abstention (56%), the separatists having called for a boycott following a disagreement on its date because it took place in the middle of the Covid crisis there, lockdowns having prevented any public meetings and activism.

This referendum is still contested because it did not meet the 'rebalance' conditions provided for in the Nouméa agreements. But Macron and his government chose to force its way to support the right and the Macronists of New Caledonia, who see that their domination is eroding. This truncated referendum was organised after the provincial elections, in which the anti-independence parties became a minority. The territorial government, elected in February 2021, was formed with six members from the independence and nationalist coalitions, four from the right and the Macronists, and one independent.

As luck would have it, two months after the announcement that a law on the 'electoral thaw' would be submitted to parliament if the New Caledonian parties did not find a agreement on the electoral process, the pro-colonial right exited the government and refused to sit. When Macron says that the law adopted by the National Assembly in France would not be applied if a local agreement was found in New Caledonia, we can clearly see the scam, since the anti-independence people refuse any agreement!

Since 2021, the same logic has continued, both in the Macron government and in the parties of settler descendants. The majority of the archipelago's economy is still in the hands of the Caldoches or Europeans who arrived to do business, while the Kanak population has mainly been kept in a state of underdevelopment. It was not until 1999 that a real university existed in New Caledonia, for example.

Preventing independence

Macronist deputy Nicolas Metzdorf appealed to the government to pass this 'thaw' of the electorate as quickly as possible to try to maintain dominance for a while longer. Metzdorf speaks of a "totalitarian drift of the separatists", but also reveals the underlying reason for the manoeuvre orchestrated from Paris: the European population meeting the 1998 criteria for voting is decreasing (New Caledonia is losing inhabitants generally) while the Kanak population continues to grow.

Integrating newly arrived Europeans into the electorate would allow Metzdorf and his friends to maintain their colonial domination for some time to come.

But such a policy will mean increased repression against Kanak demands.

Moreover, it is clear that Macron is rigging the cards to preserve the important economic interests in this area of South East Asia-Pacific: important geopolitically for China, the United States, Britain and Australia - French allies in the region. France does not want to lose its territory and its zone of influence in disregard of the rights of the peoples of the Pacific.

Solidarity with Kanaky!

Macron's policy, reinforced by a vote in the Senate and the Assembly in France, is causing enormous anger. The sending of troops by Macron and his threat to maintain the congress in June 2024 to ratify the revision of the Constitution, even without local agreement between separatists and loyalists, says a lot.

Macron is playing with fire. His objective is not only to keep the Kanaks in an electoral minority in their own territory for a while longer. He seems to be pushing for a settlement which already exists somewhat in New Caledonia/Kanaky, by redistributing the powers of the regions and those of the Nouméa government: the North traditionally under the control of the independence parties, and the South to the Europeans. This is already problematic and circumvents the question of the inhabitants' right to self-determination for all of Kanaky.

But it is also very dangerous from a political point of view. A large part of the settlers are ideologically opposed to sharing power with the separatists. Macron is also not far from risking a partition of the territory, a potential source of future civil wars.

It is not for nothing that the most violent events are taking place in Nouméa and in the South province: this is where social inequalities, the dominance of the descendants of settlers, and racism, are strongest. A layer of exasperated young people have had enough of the colonial contempt and the manoeuvres of the right and the Macronists, just as they want revenge for the repression suffered on all peaceful actions since January, where numerous activists have been arrested.

The main organisations, organised in the Field Action Coordination Cell (CCAT), announced an escalation of protest action in response to the government's provocations. The CCAT has never called for looting and destruction, they say, but they have called for a strike (affecting many sectors, which the media do not talk about) and for blockades and pickets almost everywhere on the island. It is along this path that we must continue, and the entire workers' movement must provide solidarity.

We also need a real debate within the movement on the democratic organisation of society in New Caledonia so that independence or autonomy is not taken over by the capitalist predators of the Pacific (China, Australia, USA) but by building a socialist society, freed from capitalism and its rule of profit, where the economy is in public ownership in the hands of the workers and the population of the entire archipelago, to allow the socialist, democratic, and ecological development of the region for the benefit of the inhabitants.



£1/£2 solidarity price

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ESCALATE STUDENT GAZA CAMPS:

■ SPREAD ACTION ■ FIGHT FOR SOCIALIST IDEAS

JAMES IVENS

LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Student fury against the Israeli state onslaught in Gaza is crying out from encampments at dozens of unis.

Socialist Students and the Socialist Party members are there in support - camping in some occupations, organising solidarity actions for others, and discussing among students and workers how this movement can win.

It's not good enough that vice-chancellors - earning six figures - won't let the movement see the university's accounts. While they take home ten times the average wages of staff, they're dead quiet on

warmongers paying institutions.

We say: disclose! Open the books to democratic inspection by elected representatives of the student body and campus trade unions. Contracts wrapped up in slaughter and occupation must be ended - with no cuts to courses and jobs.

It's not good enough to cut back conditions for students, and thrust staff into poverty or unemployment. Fees, profit, competition - it's just not working. Even the Financial Times says the "funding model for UK universities that has been allowed to evolve is at breaking point!"

We say: end marketisation! Cancel tuition fees and debts - replace them with living grants and public funding, for free education as

a public service. Then there's no 'excuse' to prop up war for cash, or make workers and students pay with cuts.

It's not good enough that none of the main parties are saying what so obviously is needed. They back the war and marketisation because big business uses them to make profits off the rest of us.

We need a political voice

We say: students and workers need a voice in politics! We can't leave it to the rich and their politicians to fight for our interests. Camps can lobby local MPs to explain their positions. But the bulk of MPs back the war. So we need a list of candidates in the general election, answerable

to students, trade unionists, and the working class, stubbornly arguing to end war, cuts and privatisation. That'd be a step in the direction of a big new party that we can all make our own, to fight the warmonger bosses!

Right now, none of what we're offered is good enough. The occupations show readiness to fight for something better. So did the student rent strikes starting 2021, and the waves of trade union strikes starting 2022, and hundreds of thousands marching for Gaza. There's power in numbers.

We say: build the movement! Leafleting and campaign stalls on campus, and marches to other schools, colleges and unis, can

draw more students and workers in. Campus trade unions can defend encampments - pass motions in support, demanding no punitive or discriminatory measures against those taking part. Student unions can build too - by calling open meetings of students and staff to discuss demands and how to build.

And if you're sick of "it's not good enough" - if you want to help build something lasting to challenge war, oppression and capitalism - join Socialist Students. Join the Socialist Party.

Do you agree?

**JOIN THE
SOCIALISTS**

socialistparty.org.uk/join



WHAT WE STAND FOR: THE SOCIALIST PARTY'S MAIN DEMANDS ►►► see column on page 14



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