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the Socialist

Issue 1279

13-19 June 2024

formerly **Militant**

PUBLIC SERVICES IN A MESS



LINDSEY MORGAN
BRISTOL SOUTH SOCIALIST PARTY

There are still three weeks to go until the general election and most people have already had enough of interviews with political leaders, wild publicity stunts and meaningless pledges. But many will force themselves to vote just to make sure the Tories are gone. Even Tories seem to want the Tories out by now - including Sunak!

None of the capitalist parties, including the Greens, have put forward proposals that seriously remedy the huge problems we are facing, such as the ongoing cost-of-living crisis and the destruction of the NHS.

Food, gas, water, and all the essentials for life are too expensive. Massive Private Finance Initiative contracts are putting the NHS under huge pressure. Yet Labour's shadow health secretary Wes Streeting wants to introduce even more privatisation to remedy it: like putting more petrol on an already raging fire.

They don't have any answers beyond more 'regulation' for the water contamination crisis which has caused serious illness. This is at the same time as the boss of South West Water got a nifty 58% pay hike in the last financial year, taking her salary up to a whopping £860,000 a year.

Barring a miracle the Tories are out. But Starmer's Labour won't fight for us either. Across the country the Socialist Party is standing candidates under the banner of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC). We have a record of fighting for services: in our workplaces, trade unions and communities.

If you want to say enough is enough then vote for a party that will fight for you. And get ready to struggle under a Starmer-led government. Show the establishment that people are fighting for the socialist transformation of society we desperately need. Join us, campaign with us, build a socialist future at the ballot box and beyond.



PHOTOS: PAUL MATTHESSON AND TOMMY LIVERPOOL

TORIES OUT

Vote Socialist because Starmer's

Labour doesn't stand for us



BACK SOCIALIST AND WORKERS' CANDIDATES - PREPARE FOR BATTLES TO COME >>> p3

A SOCIALIST PROGRAMME FOR CHILDCARE >>> p8-9

PRIDE MONTH: ORGANISE TO FIGHT FOR LGBTQ+ RIGHTS >>> p10-11

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

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

We need workers' MPs on a worker's wage

“We think MPs are paid too much. If you're elected as a trade union rep in an office or a factory, you don't get three times the wages of your workmates or four times their holidays. You live on the same terms and conditions, face the same bills, and try and deal with the same financial pressures and problems as the people around you.

MPs should be the same. When I was an MP in the 1980s, my family and I took only the average wage of a skilled worker in a unionised factory in Coventry. We weren't isolated or insulated from the problems of the people in our city. When I

complained about the cost of living, it was because it hit my family exactly the same way it hit the people I represented. And every Socialist Party member standing as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition in this general election makes the same pledge. If elected, we would be socialist MPs living on a worker's wage. I think that's worth supporting. I hope you do too.

Dave Nellist, Militant-supporting former-MP, and Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition Candidate in Coventry East.



Dave Nellist at the TUSC election launch in 2015. PAUL MATTHEWSON

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition is standing 40 candidates in this election. To see if you can vote for an anti-cuts, anti-war campaigner visit www.tusc.org.uk



"The working-class movement did not have to be in the position that it is now of having no coherent electoral alternative" to the capitalist politicians on 4 July, argues the editorial in the latest edition of the Socialist Party's monthly magazine, Socialism Today.

There are numerous anti-war and anti-austerity independent and smaller party contenders on the ballot but a maximum co-ordination has not been achieved. In some constituencies where TUSC is standing, for example, there are also candidates from the Workers Party of Britain.

The Workers Party has attended the all-Britain TUSC steering committee meetings since March 2022, including discussions preparing for the general election. In November, and again in January, they explained their strategy was to "make a targeted incursion at the next election under our own name" in four or five priority seats, while being "prepared to negotiate if there are clashes" elsewhere. That was consistent with their approach to local elections, only fielding 25 and 11 council candidates in 2021 and 2022 (and none in 2023) compared to over 200 each time for TUSC.

The Workers Party's strategy changed after the Rochdale by-election, to standing as widely as possible with the aim of qualifying for "Short Money" state funding by winning 150,000 votes. With the "snap" character of the election leaving them, they insisted, "really no time to coordinate as we would have liked", they informed the TUSC steering committee

meeting taking final candidate decisions on 3 June that "this will mean a number of clashes between the Workers Party and TUSC in the general election which are regrettable but at this stage unavoidable".

We do not accept, however, that they were all "unavoidable". With their final candidate list announcement on 6 June the Workers Party write of "engaging with independents and other groups" and having "successfully resolved a large number of contested seats". So why not more of the TUSC candidates, like Dave Nellist in Coventry East or proven campaigner Nancy Taafe in Walthamstow?

Nevertheless, as the Socialism Today editorial concludes, "ultimately it is not the Workers Party nor the individuals who have come forward with the best intentions to stand as candidates for them or as independents who are responsible for the current situation" - but the "authoritative workers' leaders and organisations" who had failed to establish a new mass workers' party or at least an organised workers' list ready for the election. That will be one of the key lessons from the election to discuss on 5 July.

SOCIALISM TODAY

Monthly magazine of the Socialist Party
June issue out now
Visit socialismtoday.org to subscribe and get your copy



Why I am going to NSSN conference

Two trade unionists who are standing as candidates for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) in the general election, explain why they are taking time out of their election campaign to attend the conference of the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) on Saturday 22 June.

Nancy Taafe

Waltham Forest trades council assistant secretary; TUSC candidate for Walthamstow

The strike wave that has taken place in Britain over the last two years has seen a new generation of trade unionists who have had enough of austerity cuts and privatisation, and have entered the battle.

These people are the generation that is waking up to the need to struggle to improve their lives. And while it might be expressed in this election as a desire to get the Tories out, these people will be searching for solutions to their problems: the housing crisis, particularly of young renters, and the crisis in pay and falling standards of living.

Putting forward candidates, trade unionists and socialists, is so vital to show that we have to fight on both the industrial and electoral fields. The NSSN conference will bring together the flower of the recent strike wave to prepare a way forward to fight under a Starmer government.



Nancy on a picket line at Whipp's Cross hospital

Alex Moore

Plymouth NEU district secretary (personal capacity); TUSC candidate in Plymouth, Devonport and Sutton

I'm standing for TUSC and attending the NSSN conference to support strikes and fight cuts. There are live strikes in Derriford Hospital of health care assistants and junior doctors. GMB security guards at the Jobcentre are also on strike. RMT members in The Royal Fleet Auxiliary and Aslef train drivers have a programme of strike action. I'm standing to give them support, build solidarity and fight for a political voice. But I have also been delegated by Plymouth NEU, which is affiliated to the NSSN, to attend the conference and am organising a follow-up meeting on 13 July for supporters of the NSSN in Devon and Cornwall. Standing for TUSC and building the NSSN are not separate tasks, especially as we face a new Labour government that will not meet strikers' demands unless they face enormous pressure.

- Devon and Cornwall NSSN meeting: 2pm Saturday 13 July, Stuart Road Social Club, Plymouth PL3 4EB



Alex at the Tolpuddle Martyrs festival



Saturday 22 June
11am-4.30pm
Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, Holborn, London WC1R
Attendance fee - £8.
Email us for more info - info@shopstewards.net

BACK SOCIALIST AND ANTI-WAR CANDIDATES PREPARE FOR THE BATTLES TO COME



WHAT WE THINK

With the general election less than a month away Starmer remains on course for Downing Street. "Things can maybe get a bit better", was how the Economist magazine summed up its very faint hopes in the incoming Labour government. Millions of people who, on 4 July, will grit their teeth and vote Labour feel the same, but for very different reasons to the pro-capitalist, neoliberal Economist.

Desperation to get rid of the Tories is virtually universal. At the same time, however, workers' anger at the almost total absence of Labour pledges to qualitatively improve their lives, has pushed a number of national trade union leaders to break with tradition and make some criticisms of Labour's programme, even in the midst of the general election campaign. Sharon Graham, general secretary of Unite - Labour's biggest affiliate refused to join in the rubber stamping of the party's manifesto because of the weakness of its pledges on workers' rights.

She has not been alone in voicing criticism. Matt Wrack, leader of the Fire Brigades Union, warned that public sector pay had to increase under Labour or strikes would be on the agenda. Mick Lynch, general secretary of the Rail Maritime and Transport (RMT) union, which is not affiliated to Labour, used his Newsnight appearance on 4 June to argue that Labour should "rebuild our infrastructure, our care service, our NHS" and "reskill the country, get good jobs into working-class communities, and re-equip working-class housing."

More broadly, Mick Lynch rightly dared to challenge the universal acceptance in the capitalist media of the "financial constraints" facing the next government. "There is plenty of money in the country, it's just a matter of whether you want to get some of it and distribute it more equitably."

Every bit of pressure to defend workers' interests exerted on Starmer's New Labour by the trade union movement is welcome. But even for those trade union leaders who have criticised Starmer, their fundamental position is still that because Labour is the only currently available alternative government, there is no choice but to campaign for it in this election.

Growing anger

It is patently true that Starmer's Labour is going to win the general election, and there is no way to achieve a workers' government on 4 July. But it does not follow that the trade union movement should back Starmer. It was also true, for example, that a workers' government was not on the

cards when the Labour Party - then the Labour Representation Committee (LRC) - was founded in 1900. At that time, workers were also faced with a choice of two capitalist parties - then it was the Conservatives and the Liberal Party - and the LRC, with just 15 candidates in that year's election, was only a modest start to the process of creating a new party of the working class. Nonetheless, it was vital that the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants (ASRS), predecessor to the RMT, played a key role in that modest beginning.

And today there are many workers and young people who - angered by Starmer's pro-capitalist, pro-war policies - don't accept that there is 'no choice' but to back Labour. The record number of candidates standing in this election, including 461 standing as independents, is one reflection of the growing anger with all the establishment parties, including Starmer's Labour.

Had left trade union leaders, along with Jeremy Corbyn and others, fought to establish a clear mass, democratic workers' party with socialist policies for this election it would have been able to win the support of many workers and young people who instead will vote for independents, Greens, or not vote at all.

Even some of those who will vote for Reform UK could have been won to such a party: just as over a million ex-UKIP voters cast a ballot for Jeremy Corbyn in 2017. Had only the first steps towards such a party been taken - perhaps winning a handful of MPs - it would have done far more to exert pressure on Starmer's Labour than verbal criticism.

While that opportunity has not been taken, there are nonetheless left and workers' candidates standing in this election, including Jeremy Corbyn and other left independents. Forty, including Socialist Party members, are standing under the banner of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition. That is vital preparation for the attacks that working class is going to face under the next government.

Economic crisis

Mick Lynch is quite right to point out that Britain is a rich country. The gap between the few at the top and the working-class majority has grown massively. The average pay of the chief executives of the hundred biggest companies on the London stock market is up from 47 times that of the average worker in 1998 to a gigantic 145 times today.

However, the failure of Starmer's New Labour to propose taking even a sliver of the huge wealth held by the capitalist elite in order to "distribute it more equitably" is not just a reflection of 'excessive caution', or a desire not to 'frighten Middle England'. It reflects that Starmer's New Labour is determined to act in the interests of British capitalism: which expects the working class to pay for its ailing state of health.

The positive policies that Mick Lynch correctly argues for - like mass



Today there are many workers and young people who - angered by Starmer's pro-capitalist, pro-war policies - don't accept that there is 'no choice' but to back Labour.

council house building, for example - were implemented by Labour and even Tory governments in the 1950s and 1960s. That was a very different era, however, when a unique combination of global factors meant that the capitalist class was forced to make significant concessions to the working class over a few decades.

By contrast, over the last nine years we've seen the ruling class react with utter horror to the huge enthusiasm that was engendered among millions when Jeremy Corbyn put forward policies like mass council house building. In order to make Labour once more a reliable representative of the interests of capitalism, every last remnant of Corbynism has been driven from it.

So today the Economist is able to be very clear that the interests of the elites will be better served by Starmer's Labour than by the rapidly disintegrating Tory party. That reflects the predominant view of the capitalist class. As US bankers JP Morgan put it, a Labour victory would be a "net positive" for the finance markets.

The reason the Economist's hopes in a Starmer government are

nonetheless so very faint is because of its despair at the depth of the crisis of British capitalism. It points out, for example, that, if current growth trends continue, by 2031 Britain will be poorer per person than Poland.

That is why there is a 'conspiracy of silence' on what the establishment parties' spending plans actually mean for the future prospects for the working class in Britain. The expected continuation of very low growth in Britain's economy, as the Economist and others have pointed out, makes Labour's claimed plans utterly unrealistic.

Sticking by the Tories' 'fiscal rules', as Starmer has pledged to do, would mean - if growth averages 1.1% per year, as it has since 2008 - a 'black hole' in the public finances of around £60 billion. In other words, Starmer's Labour, acting in the interests of British capitalism, is set to oversee a new era of yet more austerity, including tax rises and attacks on the living conditions of the working-class majority.

Workers' struggle

What conclusions does the workers' movement need to draw? Not that it will be impossible for the working class to wrest concessions from the next government. A Starmer administration would not be the first capitalist government to, for example, increase public sector pay, repeal anti-union laws - more than they currently intend, and to make

concessions to students facing poverty and huge debts. None of this will be achieved by asking nicely, however, but will require mass workers' struggle. And that struggle will be enormously strengthened if it also has a political voice.

All steps towards that - including in this election maximising the vote for candidates defending the principles of trade unionism and socialism - must be pursued.

However, to win what is really needed - to create a society which provides the elements of a decent life for all, such as secure high-quality housing, well-paid work, and a living pension, and to carry out a green transition - will require fundamental socialist change. Capitalism is no longer capable of taking society forward, and as long as the levers of power remain in the hands of the capitalists, steps forward won under mass pressure will be temporary.

That is why the Socialist Party stands for the nationalisation, under democratic workers' control, of the major monopolies and banks that dominate the economy, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need. This is a vital step to breaking the stranglehold of the capitalist class, and laying the basis for the development of a socialist plan of production, where all the science and technique created by capitalism could be harnessed and developed to meet the needs of all.

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Young Socialists

Jobs that actually pay the bills – fighting for young workers



Young teachers on strike in 2023 PAUL MATTSOON

REECE WILSON
PUBLIC SECTOR TRADE UNION REP

As a young worker, my pay packet has had to stretch more and more to cover the essentials – rent, food and travel. After years on youth rates and low-hour contracts as a student, I am now in secure full-time employment that does not have youth rates. But the core issues remain the same.

I'm a trade union rep too. My colleagues are overworked, with sickness rates greatly increasing since the pandemic – largely due to stress. Many can barely afford to travel in. Many are in debt.

Many young workers cannot move out of their parents' home. The promise of a secure job that will allow us to own a house is looking more like an impossible dream.

Other young workers I speak to feel trapped in dead-end, low-paying jobs, with no opportunity of earning a good wage, or progressing towards a career. Young people face a bleak future – unless we fight.

The Socialist Party demands a decent future for young people, but it is clear that none of the main parties standing in this general election do. That's why Socialist Party members across the country are

297,000
young people economically inactive - almost the highest since records began

13%
of young people unemployed

standing under the banner of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC). This is a step towards a new mass workers' party, which would fight for the working class.

Young workers can see that a change is needed. Real wages have been falling for years, but the recent cost-of-living crisis meant a significant number of workers turned to the unions and pressed them into taking strike action for pay rises out of sheer necessity. Many young workers were striking for the first time.

The inflation rate on essential goods like food is often higher than the official headline figures, and even more if you are paid a lower youth rate. To this attack on our living standards, we must demand that the trade unions struggle for an immediate increase to a £15-an-hour minimum wage, without exemptions, and that wages are linked to cost of living.

We are fighting for repeal of the anti-trade union laws, for pay rises, employment rights from day one, and so on. Socialist Party activists are pushing for their unions to back election candidates who back these policies.

The main parties provide no good answer to the problems we face, because they do not break with

capitalism. We point to socialism as the answer.

We can use the massive wealth that exists in society for investment in socially useful jobs, with trade union rates of pay, secure and stable hours, and free training schemes for skilled work. We can share out the work with no loss of pay.

The wealth is there for all of this. Big business has accumulated a record amount of profit. Even a 50% levy on this hoarded wealth would raise billions.

We fight for a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 biggest companies, and the banking system, that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working-class control. This is a step towards a democratic socialist plan for the economy, based on meeting need, not prioritising big business profit.

The Socialist Party says:

- Mass trade union struggle for a £15-an-hour minimum wage now!
- Inflation-proof pay rises for all
- Same pay for the same work!
- Ban unequal youth pay rates
- For the right to stable income and working hours – ban zero-hour contracts

Young workers:

- Vote for workers' candidates
- Get involved in the TUSC campaign in your area
- Get involved in your trade union, and ensure it puts pressure on Labour to meet our demands
- Join the Socialist Party to fight for jobs, homes, and a good life for all.



Adam (second from the right) campaigning to raise the minimum wage

14 years of Tories – war, poverty and austerity

ADAM GILLMAN
READING SOCIALIST PARTY

After 14 years of rotten Tory rule, we have austerity, war, and poverty. Working-class people find it hard to pay their energy bills, and our rivers are polluted – we need to nationalise the energy and water companies.

And then there's the housing crisis. The number of young adults living with their parents is increasing – now 4.9 million.

House prices have skyrocketed, greedy landlords raise rents, and private companies build 'luxury' overpriced low-quality housing.

Local authorities have barely built any new council homes – less than 10,000 in the whole country last year. Over 3,000 families are on the council house waiting list in Reading alone!

Many homes are vacant, while homelessness has never been higher.

Councils need to introduce rent control, and build high-quality affordable council housing, so everyone who needs a home has one. This is what the socialist council in Liverpool did in the 1980s, influenced by the Socialist Party's predecessor Militant.

When Margaret Thatcher's Tory government tried to take the council's funding, we mobilised trade unions and the community in a mass movement, and won.

This is why I'm standing in Reading Central. I'm anti-war, anti-cuts

candidate in the general election, standing for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC).

In Reading, alongside other Socialist Party and trade union activists, I have helped organise protests against the Tories' anti-union minimum service legislation, and against the local Labour council passing on Tory budget cuts.

Devastating cuts and privatisation of public services has enabled Tory central government to steal millions of pounds off councils. We need to fight for this money to be returned, so services are fully funded, and no one goes cold, hungry, or homeless.

With the war on Gaza, both major parties support the absolute atrocities the Israeli state is committing, tens of thousands brutally murdered.

Socialist demands to fight for high-quality, affordable housing:

- A mass council house building programme to end homelessness and provide genuinely affordable homes for all
- Rent control now! Take on dodgy landlords, and end slum HMOs (house of multiple occupancy)

Adam Gillman is the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidate in Reading Central



Labour's GB Energy: a dim prospect for achieving affordable clean energy

SCOTT HUNTER
SWINDON SOCIALIST PARTY AND SWINDON NORTH TUSC CANDIDATE

Nationalisation is a popular policy. A recent YouGov poll found that over two-thirds of people support nationalising the energy companies. And it's no surprise, with sky-high bills, a reliance on polluting fossil fuels and billions of pounds of profit sucked out of the system.

What's Keir Starmer's New Labour's answer? Great British Energy. Although touted as a "state-owned energy company", Labour is desperate to make clear to everyone – especially the capitalist class – that it's not renationalisation. GB Energy will not actually supply anyone with energy. Instead, it will act as a clearing house for investment funds, allocating public money to the private energy industry with the aim of stimulating private investment into green energy.

Profit

But private companies will only make investments if they are profitable, so "stimulating investment" in practice means subsidising the profits of the energy companies from the public purse. Haven't they made enough money already? Private energy companies have made record profits – over £420 billion since the energy crisis started – while ordinary people are having to choose between

heating and eating. In some cases, people can do neither.

We all want a future for ourselves and our children, and that means taking serious measures to combat climate change. Labour has allocated just £8.3 billion to the project for the next five years, far short of the £116 billion of investment over the next 11 years needed to meet key environmental targets.

Bosses 'green transition'

If there is a transition away from fossil fuels on a capitalist basis, what will become of the tens of thousands of workers currently employed in the oil and gas industries? They'll be thrown out of work like the miners before them. Why should workers pay the price for the green transition when it's the bosses making all the profits?

This is playing out right now with Tata Steel, a private steel company which has used the excuse of the green transition to decimate jobs. Unite the Union has rejected the false idea that environmental sustainability should come at the cost of jobs and has presented a plan to retain primary steelmaking while moving to greener processes. Unite is also campaigning for "no ban without a plan" for North Sea oil, arguing for additional investment to retain jobs and pay while moving away from polluting industries.

However, Unite falls short of calling

for nationalisation. Just as the bosses at Tata rejected out of hand Unite's proposals, so too will private energy companies, unless there is profit (or lavish government subsidies) in it for them. What we need is for those companies to be under public ownership as part of a democratic, socialist plan to transition away from fossil fuels, ensuring alternative employment or retraining without loss of pay for workers in those industries.

You can't control what you don't own, and as long as our energy infrastructure remains in private hands we will be at the mercy of profit-gouging companies for light and heat. The excuse from Labour and other capitalist parties is that we can't afford to nationalise energy because it would cost too much money. But who says we have to pay another penny to executives and shareholders who have already picked our pockets clean? Any government with the will to do so could nationalise the energy companies, water, public transport, mail and more with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need.

We need a party that fights for us – a new mass workers' party. Armed with a fighting socialist programme, such a party could use the wealth and resources to draw up a democratic plan of production, under workers' control and management, to make sure we can all keep the lights on and our homes warm without destroying the environment.



PHOTO: ANDY DINGLEY/CC

Vaughan Gething loses confidence vote No confidence in Welsh Labour to fight for the working class

GARETH BROMHALL
SWANSEA SOCIALIST PARTY

Welsh Labour leader Vaughan Gething, who took up the position just three months ago, lost a vote of no confidence after two Labour Members of the Senedd (the Welsh Parliament), both critics of his leadership, were absent. At the centre of the controversy is a £200,000 donation to his leadership campaign from a businessman twice prosecuted for environmental offences. Even the Labour Party wouldn't accept the leftovers his campaign leadership bid didn't use.

The vote was a completely symbolic move, with no constitutional consequences, so Gething refuses to stand down. After 25 years of Welsh Labour in power, many working-class people in Wales will be thinking: "We didn't have confidence in you either!"

Our NHS is on its knees. Decades of underfunding and mismanagement have meant that waiting lists are longer, ambulances spend more time parked up at A&Es than on the road getting to patients, and dental provision has completely collapsed. Public services have been cut to

the bone. The Welsh government has handed down without resistance Tory cuts year after year and Labour councils have slashed services. Social care provision, or lack thereof, is a massive contributor to the NHS crisis. Schools are cutting support staff and non-statutory provisions as they struggle to balance budgets.

Save our steel!

Thousands of jobs at Tata Steel in Port Talbot and the downstream plants, and tens of thousands more in the local community, are at risk as the company continue their wrecking programme of redundancies and closures, destroying a key industry and the communities that support it.

Labour has fallen short of calling for what's needed to save the people's livelihoods. Their promised £3 billion and support for the Community Union-backed plan would still see hundreds of jobs lost. And Tata have dismissed these plans outright.

Gething and Starmer should pledge to nationalise the steel industry – taking public ownership of a key strategic industry and preserving good, well-paid, skilled work and maintaining virgin steel manufacturing in the UK.

It's likely that Labour will win in Wales, not due to enthusiasm but because of hatred for the Tories and a desperation for change.

However, there is an alternative – the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition are standing two candidates in Wales – John Williams, a young hospitality worker and union activist in Cardiff East, and myself, an Ambulance Service worker and Trades Council Secretary, in Swansea West.

We are standing to pose the need for a new party of the working class – trade-union backed, with a socialist programme, bringing together anti-war activists, trade unionists and community campaigners with those who see the need for an alternative and want to bring about the socialist transformation of society.

Join the fightback
JOIN THE SOCIALISTS

- Visit socialistparty.org.uk/join
- or text your name and postcode to **07761 818 206**

to find out more today!



A political strategy for the PCS union

The discussion the general secretary and president didn't want to have

At the first meeting of the newly elected National Executive Committee (NEC) of the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS), the president used his powers to block discussion of crucial questions.

In May, members voted for a change of leadership in the NEC elections. The 'Left Unity' grouping lost its majority to a coalition of activists standing for change, which includes Socialist Party members and the Broad Left Network in which they participate.

The union's annual conference quickly followed, where delegates rejected the strategies put forward by the outgoing NEC and instead supported the fighting strategy on pay, jobs cuts and pensions put forward by supporters of the Broad Left Network.

However, the ousted leading group still holds the positions of general secretary and president.

At the first meeting of the NEC, Broad Left Network supporters put forward a political strategy for the union in this general election to back up the industrial strategy agreed at conference.

What the resolution said

This resolution referenced existing union policy, which includes "the ability of branches to apply to

the NEC in order to support candidates for election in particular constituencies".

It argued: "A Labour government is the most likely outcome of the pending general election - but this is not an excuse to demobilise the union's campaign. It is grounds to step up these campaigns. We must put emphatic support behind those parliamentary candidates who support our members and their legitimate demands and needs. The NEC must take steps to mobilise members, to demonstrate clearly our intention to fight, and must place clear demands on the likely incoming Starmer-led Labour government".

The resolution added: "Noting his decades of support for workers' rights, for pay justice and national bargaining in the civil service, for the full funding of public services, for an end to the scourge of privatisation, for the nationalisation of energy, railways and the Post Office, and for his opposition to racism and oppression domestically and internationally, from South Africa to Palestine, the Public and Commercial Services union endorses Jeremy Corbyn as the candidate for parliament in Islington North."

The resolution called on the union to meet with Keir Starmer to present the union's agreed demands on pay and pensions, and for repudiation



PCS members on strike in 2023. DAVE SEMPLE

of the Tory plan to cut 70,000 jobs, instead calling for 100,000 new civil service jobs.

Further, it "reaffirms the right of branches to propose support for candidates in any parliamentary constituency in their geographical footprint to a branch EGM, where those candidates are positively identified as publicly supporting the minimum demands outlined above, where they are not in breach of PCS policy on equality".

"Even whilst we take steps on our political strategy, we must also ready ourselves to renew our industrial campaign should a pro-austerity government, committed to following through planned Tory cuts in the civil service and related areas, be elected."

This is the discussion that the president used his powers to block!

Democratic discussion needed

An important debate could have taken place. The coalition that now has the majority on the NEC is united in its determination to build a fighting, democratic union with a serious industrial strategy on the issues that matter to members. However, not all parts of the coalition agree on a way forward politically. The Alliance for Workers Liberty (AWL), for example, which forms the biggest part of the Independent Left grouping in PCS, takes a different view. The AWL argues for support for Labour candidates across the board, even against Jeremy Corbyn.

Socialist Party members in the union at all levels want these crucial issues debated out democratically.

- See the resolution in full at bln.org.uk

Unison conference a chance to debate the industrial and political fightback necessary

HUGO PIERRE LOCAL GOVERNMENT SGE MEMBER (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

Unison members will be glad to see the back of the Tories in this general election. But many members are also asking: 'Will Starmer's Labour make any difference?'

Our public services, and the jobs our members do, have been viciously attacked over the last 14 years. The NHS has become a brand to be plundered, as it was during the Covid crisis.

Local government is in crisis and chaos. At the start of this year councils were underfunded by nearly £3.5 billion. Many councils face Section 114 notices (see right).

Unison members will be faced with many battles under a Labour government. The cost-of-living crisis has not gone away. For at least two years, Starmer has sent his representatives to our conferences to let us know that a Labour government will only spend what the Tories are spending, so don't get your hopes up.

Starmer-led government

Our general secretary now says: "If you don't vote Labour, you're giving a vote to the Tories". But Starmer has backtracked on all of the 2019 manifesto commitments, and already watered down his agreements with the trade union leaders over the 'New Deal for Working People'. His promise of economic growth will disappear in a puff of smoke and he will turn to attacking our public services, pay and conditions.

Unison's cautious approach to defending public services, relying on lobbying parliamentarians, including the Lords, cannot succeed. In local government, a militant approach of setting lawful needs-based budgets, defying spending restrictions and building mass campaigns around them to demand extra money from an incoming Labour government is the only way forward.

The biggest battle that still could unite us all is over pay. During the cost-of-living strikes only small numbers of Unison members took action - in ambulance branches and selective groups across Scotland and Northern Ireland (where the restrictive Tory strike legislation does not apply). But even this minority forced the Tories to break their pledge to stick with the maximum offered by the pay review bodies.

However, in health, this lack of substantial action resulted in an unsatisfactory improved offer being accepted before more members, who voted to strike, could take action.

NEC must lead

While the general secretary is still from the old right wing, in 2021 members voted for a left-majority National Executive Council (NEC). Members will no longer tolerate a



Unison members on strike in 2023. ROGER THOMAS

leadership that does nothing to organise a mass mobilisation to defend their jobs, pay, terms and conditions. So far, however, many members will not have seen much difference between the left-leaning NEC and the previous right-wing leadership. We have seen, particularly with younger workers, that health workers will look for all avenues to fight, even if it means looking for another union. The left leadership must develop strategies that members believe are capable of winning for them, and not just get bogged down in internal battles with the bureaucracy.

Political strategy

With the evolution of the Labour Party under Starmer it's clear that democratising the Labour Link is no longer a viable avenue for political change. The trade unions have even less power in Labour than under Blair over policy, and the conference has very little power over policy or direction of the party. Unison's small voice in the Labour Party rarely represents our members' interests and will have little or no influence on a Starmer-led government.

Because of Starmer's support for

Service Group Elections

In the elections to Unison's service group executives (SGEs), Socialist Party members Adrian O'Malley and Steve Bell were elected to the Health SGE, and Helen Couchman to the Community SGE. These will be important positions from which to argue for a fighting strategy under the new government.

big business, his lack of support for the Palestinians facing genocidal attacks in Gaza by the Israeli state, and his ruthless suppression of any vestiges of a left opposition within the Labour Party, hundreds of anti-war, anti-austerity candidates are standing in this general election.

That this is happening now, before the election, gives a glimpse of the pressure that will come from union members for a new party that represents our interests when a Starmer government doesn't deliver and attacks our public services, pay and conditions.

That half a million joined Enough is Enough during last year's strike wave also showed the potential for building a new workers' party, based on the trade unions, which could rapidly become a significant political force in Britain.

Unfortunately, the trade union leaders who launched Enough is Enough did not organise it into a force that could challenge in elections with a socialist programme.

We need to draw the lessons and support building a political force that can give a real voice to workers and defend our interests.

- See socialistparty.org.uk for our Unison conference bulletin including articles on the NHS and Gaza
- Socialist Party fringe meeting at Unison conference Wednesday 19 June, 5.30pm or end of conference, at the Old Ship Hotel, 32-38 Kings Road, 5 minutes from Brighton conference centre
- Fringe meeting on fighting council cuts called by several Unison branches Monday 17 June 12.30 at the Old Ship Hotel

Section 114 notices: Put all cuts on hold!

JEAN THORPE CHAIR, NOTTINGHAM CITY UNISON (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

Fourteen years after Tory chancellor George Osborne spoke about the "hard road" of austerity leading to a "better future", council funding has been slashed by around 60% and council services lie in tatters.

Last autumn, Birmingham and Nottingham City Councils became the seventh and eighth councils in the last six years to issue 'Section 114' notices. These mean that a council cannot commit to any new spending unless approved by the chief finance officer and must hold a special meeting to plan what to do within 21 days.

In February 2024, the Local Government Lawyer survey reported that 51% of councils were warning that they were likely to issue a Section 114 notice over the next five years, and 9% within the next financial year. This shows the scale of the problem - illustrated by a trail of closures of libraries, care homes, children's centres, swimming pools and countless other council services.

Since 2010, Labour councillors have wrongly claimed they are powerless. When Section 114 notices are introduced or where government commissioners are sent in, councillors say there is nothing they can do as decisions are taken out of their hands.

What these councils should do is draw up legal no-cuts budgets, using reserves and borrowing powers,

Local government pay - demand Starmer improves the offer and prepare to fight

JAMES ROBINSON SECRETARY, KNOWSLEY UNISON (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

The Tory local government pay offer is £1,290 - £700 less than last year - while council and school workers have seen a 30% cut in wages since 2010!

Socialist Party members argued for a fighting strategy from Unison's leadership. This included:

- Move straight to a disaggregated industrial action ballot
- Target resources to those areas that achieved a turnout of more than 40% last year
- Consider selected action by specific groups

and expose the role of commissioners and the government, as part of a campaign to get local people involved in a fight to demand that central government fund the services we need.

At a recent Nottingham City Council library closure consultation meeting, to gasps of incredulity, officers informed us that councillors had received legal advice that they could not attend the consultation during the general election. The local anti-cuts campaign is demanding they therefore immediately pause the cuts until after the election!

Councils should put all cuts on hold, and demand that an incoming Labour government provides immediate financial support.

Unison's national strategy on fighting council cuts has echoed this weak approach by Labour councils. Motion 25 to Unison's national local government conference should be agreed. But three key amendments, by Nottingham City, Hackney, and Surrey branches, have been ruled out of order and not even printed, on the advice of the union's legal officer.

Nottingham City's ruled out amendment says: "Conference believes we need a mass organised campaign of opposition to cuts based on the trade unions and community-based campaigns supported by councillors committed to putting forward lawful 'no-cuts' needs based budgets and not voting for cuts. Such a campaign could force this weak and fractious government to back down. It would also be a bold message to an incoming Labour Government to find the funding for Local Government now and not wait for potential future growth." We are appealing this decision.

Unfortunately, this view was not shared by the majority of Unison's reps on the NJC committee [national negotiating body of unions with local authority employers] and instead we have been asked to consult all local government members throughout June.

In 2023, the only large employer with more than 1,500 members to hit the 50% ballot threshold was the Socialist Party-led branch in Knowsley. The work must be done now to ensure the highest possible turnout in the consultation, to force Unison's leadership into action. A fighting strategy would increase pressure on a Starmer government to come back to the negotiating table with an improved offer, or be met with an industrial action ballot in the autumn.

Do you agree? JOIN THE SOCIALISTS socialistparty.org.uk/join

GMB members debate what's needed from a new Labour government

HOLLY JOHNSTON NURSE AND GMB NEYH REGION (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

GMB union Congress has seen some encouraging motions, including one calling for a joined-up campaign on health and social care. When one fails, the other also fails. Ambulance waiting times have grown exponentially, but waiting for beds won't get better without addressing the issues in social care. We need a coordinated campaign to ensure an equitable healthcare system for all.

Our region brought an emergency motion on NHS pay that I spoke on. We said that the general election implies that NHS workers may not receive any pay rise until after the summer. Our staff, our patients and service cannot wait! Time and time again our pay offer is late. No pay offer is the same as a 0% pay offer!

So we must make this a priority for the incoming government and be ready with our demands and our actions. The motion also highlighted the importance of the need to abolish the 'independent' Pay Review Body and have direct negotiations, and also the need for the health unions to work together and coordinate our actions.

A theme in Congress so far has also been the amount of cuts and the impact it has on our services: from local government and councils, to



GMB ambulance workers on strike in 2023. KEVIN GREENWAY

welfare and childcare. A motion has been passed calling for university grants for all and free education for NHS and emergency students. We should also demand free education for all!

I spoke on a motion on the Tory anti-union 'minimum service levels' legislation, that was passed unanimously. The motion included a strategy to build coalitions of non-compliance, including an industrial response to defend workers' rights to strike and protect any trade union member attacked under this new law. The union should place demands on employers, devolved governments, local governments and other public bodies to refuse to issue work notices, and to initiate and participate in demonstrations. Keir Starmer must be in no doubt we want the MSLs repealed!

However, there was some reluctance from the leadership in the union to push for our members' demands in the first 100 days of a Labour government - saying that the reality is it will take longer than that. Surely it should be that the unions push for change immediately! Regardless of whether they say they cannot deliver, we must hold their feet to the fire rather than kick it down the road.

It is clear that our fights in the trade union movement will be

ongoing under a Labour government. Although there has been some great discussion so far at Congress, the need for a political alternative remains apparent and is vital to bring about the real change the working class needs.

Monaghan Report

Near the start of Congress, general secretary Gary Smith faced a walk-out by delegates from North East, Yorkshire and Humber (NEYH). Allegations have been levelled at the general secretary, national president and senior management team, including that they have failed to tackle the culture of institutional sexism and endemic bullying and harassment identified by the Monaghan report in 2020, accompanied by new allegations of bullying, and suspensions of Central Executive Council (CEC) members. This has led to threatened and subsequently averted strike action by GMB staff in NEYH region. A number of urgent questions are raised around the union's commitment to fully implement the recommendations of the report, and we call on the general secretary and president to provide full transparency and an urgent report to branches, including confirming if CEC members have been suspended, and on what grounds.

A SOCIALIST PROGRAMME FOR CHILDCARE

Childcare will be an issue in the general election. Both the Tories and Labour say they will boost places. But as **Bea Gardner** argues the whole childcare system is broken. What is needed is not sticking plaster but fundamental change.

The childcare system in Britain is in crisis. In the last 18 months, pressure from parents and campaign groups has forced the Tory government to announce their flagship funded hours rollout – a policy Labour has said it will not reverse. But what was promised as “free childcare” has been delivered as a confusing, piecemeal system, under which many parents still face hefty fees. Meanwhile, continuing staff and provider shortages mean there are even fewer places to go round. Since 2014, in 116 of 149 English local authorities, the rate of population growth was greater than the growth of the childcare sector.

Childcare policies are a feature of the general election campaign for both Tories and Labour. According to one think tank, manifesto pledges to lower costs and increase availability of childcare are policies that swing undecided voters. It is an important issue for women because, despite improved social attitudes, a disproportionate amount of childcare and related tasks is carried out by women, including as paid work.

Childcare policies also have wider implications: childcare is a vital social infrastructure enabling parents to work as well as giving children and young people opportunities to learn, play and socialise.

Childcare cost crisis

A quarter of a million mothers with young children have left their jobs because of difficulties with balancing work and childcare, according to the Fawcett Society. ONS figures also indicate that before the recent expansion of funded places, women's participation in the workforce was in decline for the first time in decades, reflecting these pressures. Because of this, various financial concessions have had to be introduced under the current system. In fact, there are six different avenues of state-subsidised childcare, which in combination are projected to cover 80% of childcare costs in Britain, if the full funded roll out is implemented.

This is not because the Tory party is a party that genuinely cares for the wellbeing of children and their families – just look at the 1,000 children centres closed in the last decade. But rather because they have been confronted with the reality that for many parents on low and even middle incomes, it makes little financial sense to work as childcare fees are beyond their salary in many cases.

The Socialist Party fights for

- Free, public, high-quality and flexible childcare accessible to all, from birth
- Flexible provision, including availability in the evenings and at weekends
- Expand provision, including funding the building of new, high-quality facilities
- Extend public childcare provision

to include activities for older children and young people, such as youth services as well as sport and leisure facilities which need to be fully staffed and properly resourced

- Reopen Surestart centres and expand provision of children's centres to offer parenting support including for feeding. Bring privatised services such as health visitors back in-house

Privatisation failure

Many of the few remaining council-owned nurseries are being closed, not due to lack of need, but because cash-stripped councils are selling off ‘assets’ (buildings) and cutting so-called ‘non-essential’ services, instead of fighting for the funding and services people need. The majority of early years providers are privately owned, with private nurseries and self-employed childminders providing the majority of care for under-5s. Most operate on weekdays only, with food costs on top of fees.

Private ownership means following so-called market ‘logic’, which in reality means charging the most possible and taking in the highest numbers of children at the same time as reducing costs, through low staff pay and not investing in training or equipment. Figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) show that private providers have higher staff-to-child ratios than voluntary and community nurseries and 87% increased their fees in the last 12 months.

A privatised childcare system also fuels competition between providers. The best-performing nurseries, in areas with high-earning families can charge the most fees, which exacerbates inequalities. It also contributes to provider shortages, with fewer private nurseries and childminders in the most deprived areas.

- Bring nurseries and other childcare facilities back into public ownership
- Expand free school meals to all children in all education and childcare settings

A real living wage and improved conditions for childcare workers

Privatised childcare has resulted in early years educators and childcare workers being some of the lowest paid. The average wage of an early years practitioner is well below the national minimum wage due to the reliance on extremely low-paid apprentices – one in eight are paid under £5 an hour. They also work some of the longest hours relative to comparable jobs. One in six leave the job within a year.

- We campaign for union recognition for every childcare worker and for fighting, democratic trade unions that implement collective agreements which guarantee living wages for all staff, pension provision and fair terms and conditions



PHOTO: FIRST MINISTER OF SCOTLAND/CC

Democratic control and genuine choice

Even though huge sums of public money goes into childcare, under the current system we have little control. ‘Childcare Choices’ is the name of the Tories’ childcare scheme. But parents’ genuine choice over their child’s early education and care is constrained. Only 6% of councils have sufficient spaces for children with disabilities. There is limited provision on evenings or at weekends, which is particularly challenging for shift workers.

All childcare services should be run democratically by representatives of the workforce, parents and wider community, including input from children and young people. Early years education shouldn’t only be for those in work or during work time. All parents should have the availability of quality childcare, to allow for participating in social life. All children should have the opportunity to attend an early years setting that meets their needs. That means flexible childcare, not just based on the most-profitable hours of 8am-6pm, but with evening and weekend provision as well as provision during the holidays.

- For parents’, students’ and workers’ democratic control of childcare and education provision and curriculum

For a genuine work-life balance

Long working hours, rising costs of living and housing shortages place huge strains on parents. One in five households living in London do not have access to a garden or balcony. Parents face lengthy and expensive commutes between home, work and childcare, especially those without access to a car. There is also the domestic burden – cooking, cleaning and washing – which two-parent households spend an average of four hours a day on, the burden typically falling disproportionately on women. All of these pressures ultimately impact on the amount of quality time for families.

- For the real right to flexible working from day one – on workers’ terms, with no loss of pay
- £15-an-hour minimum wage for all with no exemptions
- For decent benefits that reflect the cost of raising children, rising with the cost of living
- Full maternity and paternity pay throughout parental leave at a rate of 100% of weekly earnings or 32 hours at national living wage levels, whichever is higher
- An extension in maternity and paternity leave up to a year
- End overcrowding and unsafe housing. For mass building of council

homes with gardens. Introduce rent controls, end landlords’ discrimination against families with children and for those on housing benefit

A movement of the working class

Childcare is a workplace and trade union issue and should be central in a fighting programme of the whole trade union movement. Not least because women make up 60% of essential workers and a majority of trade union members. The working class needs a political voice – a new mass workers’ party to fight in its interests – and the trade unions could play a central role in bringing such a party into being.

We are standing candidates in the general election, pointing in the direction of the mass working-class based alternative that is needed. We have a track record of campaigning for the local services working-class families need, including fighting against nursery closures. The election is also an opportunity to raise what could be possible if the profits of the few were democratically controlled by the majority.

- For fighting democratic trade unions, union recognition in the workplace, and an end to the anti-trade union laws
- For a new mass workers’ party, based on the trade unions and fighting for socialist change

A socialist society

Britain’s childcare crisis is a symptom of its economic decline and fragility. Even during periods of sustained economic growth, such as the period in the aftermath of World War Two, capitalism has been unable to provide this. Concessions have been won previously by workers and campaigners, such as the increased number of council-run nurseries opened during and after the second world war. Unlike today, these were typically open seven days a week and were not only free to access but also provided a free quality cooked meal and clothing for every child that attended.

Under capitalism in crisis gains are ultimately constrained. Any gains made have to be defended, or risk being clawed back. But it doesn’t have to be like this.

If the big companies and banks were taken into democratic public ownership a plan of production could be developed to meet the needs of all. What is currently siphoned off as profits into the bank accounts of the super-rich minority could instead be directed to benefit the majority. That includes investment in education and services for children, young people and families.

Why I’m standing for TUSC

Fighting for parents like me, and children like my son



Socialist Party members including Corinthia (right) on the ‘March of the Mummies’ PHOTO: BIRMINGHAM SOCIALIST PARTY

CORINTHIA WARD
BIRMINGHAM NORTH SOCIALIST PARTY AND
ERDINGTON TUSC CANDIDATE

Since becoming a parent in 2021 I’ve experienced first-hand the strained services and the limited future this system offers to my child. Starting with the overstretched and under-funded maternity services in the NHS (resulting in my birth requiring a caesarean) and my son having minimal health visitor checks.

With childcare costs being one of the most expensive in the world it was more cost effective to drop my working hours in half than to send my son to nursery. While this made economic sense for our household, coupled with the rise in the cost of living, it meant we had more mouths to feed but on limited finances.

My partner and I have even held off having another child with our concerns of not being able to afford it. Other families I’ve met are doing the same.

The child benefit cap is one weapon used against families. The Royal Family doesn’t stop receiving taxpayers’ money when they have more than two children, but working-class families are no longer allowed to access the small benefit which previous generations had fought for!

Keir Starmer has said a Labour government will keep this policy despite

children’s charities raising the link of this policy to rising child poverty.

The disadvantages for working-class children don’t stop there. The Institute for Fiscal Studies reported that school funding per pupil, in real terms, is at 2010 levels, through funding squeezes carried out by the Conservative government.

My son and his generation face many hurdles. Capitalism only offers them student debt, increased privatisation and cuts in public services, unaffordable rent, work instability, climate crisis, and war.

Erdington covers some of the most deprived areas in Birmingham, and many families such as mine have to overcome more economic challenges than our parents or grandparents. This is one of the reasons I’m standing as a candidate in the general election.

Only socialist policies can provide children with the right track for their early year’s development and provide families with the support they need:

- For a fully funded NHS – kick out all the privateers. Free training and bursaries to increase the number of midwives and health visitors.
- Scrap the child benefit cap and increase in line with inflation.
- For a free education system – from the cradle to the grave. Fully fund schools – give school staff a pay rise and invest in new school buildings

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 about joining us today!



Organise to fight for LGBTQ+ rights

Tories Out! But how can we trust Starmer?

This is the text of a leaflet Socialist Party members will be distributing at Pride events happening before the general election. If you agree and would like to help spread a socialist alternative to LGBTQ+phobia then get in touch: visit www.socialistparty.org.uk/join

The Tories will be kicked out before Pride season 2024 is over! And for LGBTQ+ workers and young people this is a huge cause for celebration.

The Tories pledged that they would fight the election on "culture wars and trans issues". That won't save Sunak and Co from a kicking at the ballot box.

Their vile lies won't distract anyone from the fact the Tories have no solutions to the huge needs in society - from ending poverty, to stopping war, to consigning LGBTQ+phobia and all discrimination to the dustbin of history, or providing a future for all young people.

But whipping up bigotry and division can still impact our lives. Getting rid of the Tories won't end the need to fight for LGBTQ+ rights.

That's also because, unfortunately, a Starmer 'New Labour' government is not going to act in the interests of the working-class majority and cannot be relied on to deliver the rights and services we need.

At this year's Prides the Socialist Party is offering ideas for the discussion in our community about how we organise to fight for LGBTQ+ rights after 4 July.

Many will understandably be hoping that anything has got to be better than the Tories. Hate crimes based



PHOTO: SCOTT HUNTER

on sexual orientation were up by 112% in the five years to 2023, with a 186% rise when it comes to hate crimes against trans people.

We also cannot forget the impact of all the Tories' other disastrous policies, felt not just by the LGBTQ+ community but the whole working class; anti-union laws, anti-protest laws, more than a decade of austerity leading (sometimes literally) to crumbling services, homelessness, and millions relying on food banks.

But Starmer's Labour cannot be trusted to transform this situation. Starmer has been anything but firm on trans rights. And the untrustworthiness of Starmer's Labour goes beyond U-turns on support.

For example, the Tory reign has left our NHS without the staffing and resources to meet all our needs. But rather than commit a Labour government to public funding of a massively increased and improved health service, including gender affirming services, shadow health minister Wes Streeting has committed to continuing the role of private profiteers in the NHS - a huge factor in its current disastrous state.

The biggest enthusiasm for Starmer's New Labour comes from big business bosses - the capitalist elite. For example, the party's 'business conference' was sponsored by HSBC, and was packed with bankers and city executives. This reflects how the majority of the capitalist class want a Starmer-led government, because they are confident it will act in their interests not the working class's.

Attacks on our living standards

When faced with so many attacks on our living standards and rights and no mainstream party fighting for us, it can be easy to think things are hopeless but everything we have won has come from fighting for it!

The film Pride has immortalised the potential for solidarity between LGBTQ+ and workers' struggle, and showed how trade unionism was a factor in changing social attitudes towards LGBTQ+ people. Marriage equality, support services and the healthcare we have weren't gifted to us by benevolent politicians but came from struggle and campaigning.

A fighting trade union movement is going to be essential under the next government. So is building the LGBTQ+ rights movement. But it is also vital that the working class starts to create its own political voice.

This election does represent an opportunity to take steps towards the kind of party we will need under a Starmer government. It is positive that Jeremy Corbyn has declared he will stand as an independent.

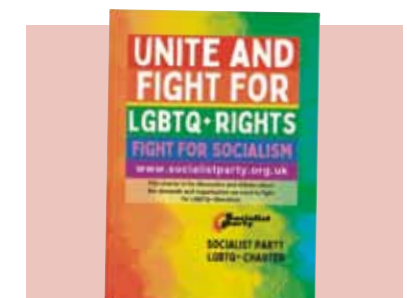
The potential exists for a bloc of workers' MPs being elected, who could, from 5 July, articulate the demands of the working class in parliament, including on LGBTQ+ rights.

Fighting for workers' interests

If Jeremy Corbyn and others are elected, it will immediately pose the need for the trade union movement to start discussing how to build a party that fights in workers' interests. The Socialist Party is fighting for every possible step towards this.

This includes standing candidates as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, an electoral coalition which aims to enable trade unionists, community campaigners and socialists who are fighting for a new mass workers' party to stand candidates against pro-austerity establishment politicians under a clear banner.

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



● See the Socialist Party's LGBTQ+ charter at socialistparty.org.uk/LGBTQcharter2023

Tories' prison record placed public and prisoners at risk

Next government faces overcrowding and underfunding



PHOTO: THE WUB/CC

PROBATION OFFICER IN THE WEST MIDLANDS

Shortly before the election was called, in a desperate attempt to manage the endemic crisis in prisons and the whole criminal justice system, the Tories announced a further extension to their End of Custody Supervised Licence (ECSL) scheme. The scheme releases some prisoners earlier than their automatic release date to try and cope with dangerous overcrowding in UK jails. Originally announced back in October, it has increased from 18 days initially, to 70 days earlier now - such is the scale of the crisis in prisons.

Criminal justice unions, and campaign groups for prisoners and victims alike, warned of the potentially dangerous consequences of these measures. Reducing the prison population is desperately needed, however this scheme has been a misguided disaster.

Forced through with no consultation or planning with staff or victims' groups, it has meant that prison and probation staff who are tasked with

supporting and supervising prison leavers have had no time to accurately assess their risk or ensure the required support is in place to promote a stable path to rehabilitation, such as accommodation, employment, and mental health and substance misuse treatment. This has undoubtedly placed prison leavers and the public at risk.

ECSL only kicks the can down the road, from an overcrowded prison service to an understaffed and overcapacity probation service. 87,691 people were in prison in England and Wales in May. However, the number of people that can be held in "safe and decent accommodation" - the "uncrowded capacity", is considered by the MOJ to be 79,507. Likewise, probation officer case-loads in the community often exceed 130%, with some officers reaching 200% workload.

Unbelievably, the chief inspector of prisons highlighted a problem with prisoners being released under ECSL with no home to go to, only to be recalled to prison days later for breaching the terms of their licences.

Prison leavers, who often present with complex risks and needs, are frequently left to fend for themselves without appropriate support.

Prisoners are also often released without accurate risk assessments, placing the public at direct risk because of the government's chronic underfunding of criminal justice services. This has unfortunately been a common theme in recent high-profile 'Serious Further Offences', including the tragic murder of Zara Aleena in 2022 and the 'Killamarsh murders' in 2021, where these structural failings had devastating consequences. When Sunak has been challenged in parliament over his mismanagement of prisons, he has claimed that "no-one who is a threat to our country" will be released. However, the scheme has included prisoners assessed as 'high risk', a 'risk to children' and prisoners involved in domestic abuse cases.

The Tories' record in dealing with the crisis in criminal justice has only served to make the problem worse. But they're likely not going to be in

power much longer. It's no surprise that the prison crisis is one of the items on Keir Starmer's 'shit list' - massive issues the next government will have to deal with imminently.

'Justice on the cheap' by replacing genuine intensive and holistic support with more tagging, curfews and scheme's like ECSL, won't solve the crisis. Funding is desperately needed for staff and services that actually help people move away from crime including homelessness, substance misuse, mental health and youth services. Sticking to 'fiscal discipline', will a Starmer-led government provide those services without being pushed?

The poverty and alienation caused by capitalism are by far the biggest drivers of crime. By taking the wealth and resources out of the hands of the bosses, workers could democratically plan society on a socialist basis. Only in a socialist society, where services don't face relentless attacks by capitalist governments, and are provided on the basis of need and not profit, can the public be properly protected.



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.

- Agrusiness 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.
- Repeat 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!



Horrific arrest and escalation by South Wales police against Gaza protesters

Between 3 and 4 June, 19 protesters were arrested in Cardiff and Swansea in a brutal escalation of police response to the Palestine movement. A video shows eight police officers surrounding a disabled activist, and forcing his head down, before escorting him away.

An emergency demonstration was called in response outside Cardiff Bay police station - 15 people partaking in a non-violent sit-in inside were arrested. They were released 19 hours later. The disabled activist was released after 26 hours.

South Wales police also arrested a 12-year-old and their Palestinian mother the next day during a protest in Swansea for alleged assault. There is outrage at this claim. The 12-year-old was placed in a cell, and



One of the many Gaza protests in Cardiff. JOE FATHALLAH

London marching in anger at war and British politicians' complicity

Eight months of war in Gaza, Rafah subjected to prolonged siege, and the Israeli army has inflicted at least 36,580 deaths onto the people of Palestine.

The closure of Gaza's Rafah border has reduced aid to Palestine by two thirds. Millions of inhabitants remain under threat of famine.

On 8 June, tens of thousands again took to the streets of central London, demanding the cessation of UK government support for the Israeli state's war.

In spite of overwhelming support for the Palestinian people from people in Britain, neither the Conservatives nor Labour is willing to acknowledge war in Palestine as a major issue. When there is a vacuum of choice, it is our duty as socialists to show that there is another way.

It is our duty to scream from the hills that it is capitalism - which breeds war, poverty, and racism - that has worsened this tragedy. It is

our duty to stand firm as socialists against capitalism, as Palestinians stand firm against tyranny.

EWIN WILLIAMS
CAMDEN AND HARINGEY SOCIALIST PARTY

Trade union delegation to Cardiff protest camp

Cardiff Trades Union Council made a solidarity visit to the Cardiff University Gaza protest camp, led by members of the Socialist Party. It included local representatives from the

NEU, UCU, PCS, Unison, and Unite trade unions.

It was an educational experience for everyone, in which the students' experience of protesting in support of Palestinian rights could be seen in the wider context of working-class struggles to end all forms of oppression. The role of trade unions in that struggle was explored, with many people participating in the discussion, particularly how properly organised trade union action and workers' sanctions could help bring an end to the slaughter in Gaza.

Another topic covered was the marketisation of education - the running of universities like businesses,

instead of as an educational service. Students, especially those from overseas, have to take on massive loans to fund their education, which discourages poorer and working-class students from even considering higher education.

The pressing need to form links between student protests and the organised working class in trade unions was also highlighted. For example, by students being invited to speak at union branches and at trades union council meetings, as well as by visits like ours!

JONATHAN GOLDING
UNITE COMMUNITY AND CARDIFF TRADES UNION COUNCIL DELEGATE, PERSONAL CAPACITY

a supporter of the couple was later arrested.

This was a targeted attack on the anti-war movement, and an escalation of police tactics. The scenes at the police station were brutal and unnecessarily violent.

Ruling class

The ruling class use the police to stamp down in times of unrest. During the miners' strike 1984-85, over 11,300 miners and their supporters were arrested. Over 5,600 stood trial, and over 100 jailed.

Supporters were intimidated or victimised into losing their jobs. For about £500,000 a day, Margaret Thatcher, then Tory prime minister, strategically used the police to try and intimidate the miners into submission (see page 14).

We need democratic control of the police, where the community decides staffing and operations. There would be no room for racism and hate.

Capitalism creates war and division, we fight to spread the ideas of socialism as a path to justice.

ELE JANE
CARDIFF EAST SOCIALIST PARTY

Health and job struggles led me to the Socialist Party

KIRSTY DENMAN
MANSFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

I moved back to Mansfield after finishing my degree, and struggled to find employment opportunities. I was having difficulties with social interactions, which negatively affected my performance in interviews.

So, I decided to seek a diagnosis for autism, to help get support for my social difficulties. But the NHS waiting list in Nottinghamshire was two years! I could have had an assessment in weeks, if I could afford to 'go private'.

I went back to uni to get a master's degree. My engineering management studies were enlightening.

I learned about all the different ways that businesses can exploit their suppliers, customers, employees, and the environment. And I learned that it is all done in the name of profit.

It upset me when my dissertation concluded that: while yes, blockchain technology could have profound impact in letting consumers know their food's exact origins, and all of the emissions associated with transportation and production, no company would ever invest in this

kind of technology, because the financial cost would massively outweigh any potential increase in sales. At uni, 'right-wing' and 'liberal' friends were all from wealthy backgrounds. They would get annoyed when I pointed out inconsistencies in their beliefs, and the implications for poor people. Typically, working-class friends disliked 'talking politics', but had 'left-leaning' views.

I joined the Socialist Party shortly before finishing my masters. Since becoming a member: I have spoken at Socialist Party meetings, sold the Socialist newspapers at rallies, and represented my local branch at the Socialist Party national congress.

I ran for district councillor, under the banner of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), in the local elections. And I attended the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) summer event in Berlin.

I will continue to put all of my efforts into understanding and banishing the capitalist machine.

Come to a meeting

• socialistparty.org.uk/events



Kirsty (third right) campaigning with the Socialist Party

Why I'm standing Before Tory and Labour austerity, Basildon was a great place to live

DAVE MURRAY
ESSEX SOCIALIST PARTY

Plentiful, good quality, social housing, available for genuinely affordable rents. Lots of green space and access to the countryside. Plenty of jobs in manufacturing. Local schools, and a hospital, all this made Basildon a great place for working-class families - until Thatcher and her successors declared the experiment a failure.

The partial deindustrialisation of Britain, the great council housing sell-off, plus decades of privatisation and cuts means that, like the rest of the country, life here is a lot harder for working-class people than it needs to be, or used to be.

Many of the sold-off council houses now belong to landlords,

who often charge three times what a council tenant would pay for an identical property. It's particularly galling that the private landlords are squeezing their tenants, using housing that was built with public money on public land.

Big name manufacturers have shut up shop. Public investment has also dried up.

The 'new town' no longer feels new. You can see signs of neglect and decay everywhere.

What is most remarkable, though, is that in recent times the local Labour Party has gleefully and publicly shat on its own legacy. Like the Tories, they have worked hand-in-glove with landlords and property developers to pass public assets over to the private sector, and build on green spaces.

They have enabled the 'build to rent' buccaneers to have a free hand in redeveloping our town into a future ghetto - building monstrous high rises, full of low-grade flats, built with no regard for the political life of the tenants, or the sustainability of heating and transport.

Basildon people are very capable of fighting back though. One of the first people jailed for non-payment of the unfair poll tax was a fiery grandmother from Basildon.

Production workers at the tractor plant are currently on strike over pay. I'm standing to give a political expression to that fighting spirit.

• **Dave Murray is the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidate in Basildon & Billericay**

Why I'm standing - 'Our candidates challenge Tory austerity, silent Labour, and racist right'

NANCY TAAFFE
WALTHAM FOREST SOCIALIST PARTY

This election is characterised by a groundswell to remove the Tories. People are absolute in what they don't want, and they don't want the Tories.

And within this need to get rid of the Tories, there are also voices and candidates who are articulating the unspoken rage of the fightback.

Young people, who are victims of housing greed. Workers from the recent strike wave, struggling for decent pay. Others are being scapegoated by the establishment politicians, and blamed for crises caused by austerity and capitalism.

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is fielding candidates to give an electoral expression to this mood. I'm standing in Walthamstow as a socialist, because the time to boldly raise socialist policies is not just ripe, it's rotten ripe!

Rotten

And rotten is an apt word to describe the decrepit Tories, and their cousin opportunists in Reform. Keir Starmer has warned us, from his silence on the bombing of innocent people in Gaza, to the chaos in privatised utilities and his failure to call for renationalisation, that he's not going to stand up for working-class people and challenge the greed of the bosses. We don't want our class being disorientated by the racist right, we must stand.

In Walthamstow, the supporters of



Nancy (left) and the Waltham Forest socialist campaigners

our TUSC election stand are the people who have campaigned against the Labour council closing libraries, cutting youth clubs, and privatising services.

We've spent eight years trying to stop a monster block from being built, which will do nothing to alleviate the housing crisis. We have been the ones trying to prevent victims of social cleansing being evicted, and shunted hundreds of miles away. We are the ones who have been on picket lines, supporting striking workers.

We need big changes to solve society's problems, particularly for young people. Rent control and building council homes would raise the living standards of millions.

Only those with a record of fighting back, and not bending the knee to austerity will be seen as credible, as time passes. Socialist Party members standing for TUSC have that record.

• **Nancy Taaffe is standing for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) in Walthamstow**

Your donations make the socialist stand possible

£90,000

£80,136

£67,978

Thank you for your donations. We have reached the minimum needed to stand 30-40 Socialist Party candidates. And we can produce leaflets, posters, and more outlining the programme needed for working-class people.

Whatever we raise on top enables us to present the biggest and boldest possible socialist alternative to the establishment parties. In addition to the £67,978 donations received, we have an extra £12,158 in pledges. The fantastic response to our election appeal demonstrates the enthusiasm for our stand.

Keir Starmer's Labour proves time and again that they represent big business, not the working class. We need our voice in this election.

Socialist Party members are out campaigning, building support for socialist ideas. We have public meetings across the country, we're participating in anti-war demonstrations, anti-cuts campaigns, and strikes - join us and donate.

• **Donate - socialistparty.org.uk/donation**
• **Pledges to be made by the end of June, and paid by the end of July**

Community backing for socialist Momtaz in Kent

ERIC SEGAL
KENT SOCIALIST PARTY

Momtaz Khanom is standing against the slaughter in Gaza, and as the voice of the marginalised people in our society - young and old, the poor and the sick, the low-paid and the homeless. 40 people attended her launch meeting as Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) parliamentary candidate in Folkestone and Hythe.

A courageous young woman, who had been racially abused at Folkestone railway station in November 2023, after returning from a demonstration against the war on Gaza, also spoke. She urged the community to stand in solidarity with Momtaz.

Momtaz told the audience to beware of false claims by the Labour Party that they oppose the war in Gaza. She is sending a clear message to the elite: "We will not be silenced".

Mike Sargent, a retired railway worker who, as a member of the executive of transport union RMT,

attended the formation of TUSC in 2010, opened the meeting. He explained how the RMT, together with other trade unions and the Socialist Party, set up TUSC, as a step towards building a mass workers' party. Mike said that capitalism has failed, and that we need to build a socialist society for the benefit of all.

A courageous young woman, who had been racially abused at Folkestone railway station in November 2023, after returning from a demonstration against the war on Gaza, also spoke. She urged the community to stand in solidarity with Momtaz.

Momtaz told the audience to beware of false claims by the Labour Party that they oppose the war in Gaza. She is sending a clear message to the elite: "We will not be silenced".

• **Momtaz Khanom is the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidate in Folkestone and Hythe**



Miners' strike: The Battle of Orgreave – the 'police riot' 40 years on

ALISTAIR TICE
SHEFFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

40 years ago on 18 June there was a massive 'police riot' on the outskirts of Sheffield. Now, a re-named and privately owned housing estate stands on the site of the infamous 'Battle of Orgreave'.

In 1984, 180,000 miners, members of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), began a year-long strike to try to save their jobs, communities and futures against the mass pit closure programme of the National Coal Board and Margaret Thatcher's Tory government.

Three months into the strike, miners began to picket the coking works at Orgreave to try to stop haulage lorries from transporting coke (coal-based fuel) to Scunthorpe steelworks 40 miles away. There'd been a few days of skirmishes with the police, but then on 18 June, a mass picket of miners was ambushed and brutalised by a state-directed paramilitary police force (see right).

95 miners were arrested and charged with either riot (with the potential of a life sentence) or unlawful assembly. When the cases went to court, all the miners were acquitted when it became clear the police had falsified evidence. But no one in the police or government has ever been held to account for the violence and lies, including the BBC reversing film

footage to falsely portray miners attacking the police first.

In 2016, the then Tory home secretary, Amber Rudd announced there would be no Orgreave inquiry, citing among other spurious reasons, that nobody had actually died! The Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign (OTJC) was set up over a decade ago to campaign for a such an inquiry to get justice for those miners, and expose the role of the police and complicity of the Thatcher government in what has been described as Britain's 'civil war without guns'!

Join us on Saturday 15 June at 1pm when the Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign is holding a 40th Anniversary march and rally outside the City Hall, Barkers Pool, Sheffield.

A CIVIL WAR WITHOUT GUNS LESSONS OF THE 1984-85 MINERS' STRIKE
By Ken Smith, £5

From Left Books - the bookshop of the Socialist Party

- Visit leftbooks.co.uk
- PO Box 1398, Enfield EN1 9GT



PHOTO: WM POLICE/CC

Eyewitness: 'The police were like rabid dogs'

40 years ago I was about to experience something that would change my whole life. In a place called Orgreave I was to experience, like many others, just whose side the police were on.

By the time of the first mass picket at Orgreave I was an experienced picketer. My tactics in dodging police to get to the pits, especially in Nottingham to picket, were second-to-none. That first picket at Orgreave felt wrong. As we walked down to Orgreave there was no harassment from coppers, lads were shopping at the local Asda - it was like a carnival day.

Dressed in our shorts, t-shirts and trainers, we met up with the 'thin blue line' of coppers as far as the eye could see. Suddenly we saw the lorries carrying coke coming towards the Orgreave entrance. We surged forwards to stop them, roaring 'here we go', but once the lorries were inside Orgreave the coppers moved into us in an arrow-shaped formation. They charged and opened us up and the cavalry raced forward with huge wooden truncheons. It was like a game of polo to them as they smashed their truncheons down.

They were like rabid dogs let loose. My trust in the police ended that day forever.

We made a mistake not being prepared for them. Never make that mistake again.

REBEL WITH A CAUSE, ROTHERHAM

Book review: From a Rock to a Hard Place - the 1984-85 Miners' Strike

JANE NELLIST
COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

On the night before the official announcement of the miners' strike in March 1984, I was in the home of Ethel Hood, along with National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) leaders of the Keresley pit in Coventry and my partner Dave Nellist, Coventry Labour MP at the time, when they got the news that the strike was on.

Little did we know at the time the momentous year that lay ahead and the impact it would have on communities across the country.

Reading 'From a Rock to a Hard Place - the 1984-85 Miners' Strike', which has been updated for this year's 40th anniversary of the miners' strike, brought back so many memories of that year of struggle. The book is an important contribution to working-class history.

Beverley, who was a librarian from a Nottinghamshire mining area, and whose father was a miner, has drawn together first-hand testimonies, photos and documents from those working-class men and women whose voices are rarely heard, and who lived through that year-long struggle.

Her book weaves the recollections of others with her own experiences

PHOTO: AMGUEDDRA C/MARD/CC



living in a pit village at war with a vicious Tory government.

She captures the reality of the brutal actions of Thatcher's government which used every tool the state had to try and break the miners' resolve area, and whose father was a miner, has drawn together first-hand testimonies, photos and documents from those working-class men and women whose voices are rarely heard, and who lived through that year-long struggle.

The 1984-85 miners' strike in Britain wasn't just a fight for the men down the pits. Miners' wives and

families played a crucial, and often undocumented role.

Beverley writes: "Women began to realise that they could become active in other areas. For one thing they had to raise funds and collect money to buy supplies".

They formed groups like the Women Against Pit Closures. These women organised fundraising events, collected money, and spoke at rallies. It changed their lives and developed real fighters for their communities and class. The book highlights how their confidence and

ability to organise grew.

Donations for striking miners and their families came from across the world. Food, clothes and toiletries and, most importantly, money! Women went on international speaking tours to raise the issues and the need for funds. Coventry miners' wives even travelled to Afghanistan.

Holidays in other countries were organised for children hosted by international trade unions.

They ran 'soup' kitchens (most of them served two-course meals) and distributed food parcels, keeping families fed during a harsh year. Their activism wasn't just about supporting their husbands; it was a fight for their families and communities.

I helped out on my day off at the kitchen in Keresley where a full meal was served to families including children, because families couldn't afford packed lunches or school meals (children were not entitled to free school meals). Using very limited kitchen space it was incredible to see the quality of the meals produced.

Big vats of curry from the Asian community were delivered, which went down really well. I saw how working-class solidarity broke down any prejudices that may have been held.

Beverley also makes a really important point about how the confidence of working-class women developed: "They had come to realise there was a big world out there, full of possibilities. Many took on training courses and embarked on university degrees."

She also includes stories from

journalists and photographers, such as a 26-year-old John Harris who captured the iconic photograph of Lesley Boulton, herself a photographer, as she was about to be hit by a mounted policeman at Orgreave in June 1985.

He writes: "I saw Lesley Boulton trying to help an injured guy on the ground. The cop on the horseback was coming toward her, baton raised. He shouted: 'I'm having you next bitch!' I quickly click-clicked. That was it! The cop was never named and no disciplinary action was taken."

John is still taking photographs and was recently on the National Education Union picket line taking photos of striking teachers!

While local Labour Party members raised thousands of pounds for the striking miners and many MPs, especially those in coalmining areas, spoke up in parliament, the Labour Party and TUC leadership were woefully lacking in their support for the miners' strike. The Labour Party is even worse now than it was then under Neil Kinnock!

Beverley's book tells the real story of the hardship, humour and solidarity of a community of working people. More importantly, it gives a voice to those who fought so hard against the power of the state that was being used in an attempt to crush them as they fought to save their jobs and their industry.

It has lessons for us today in that we need to build the power of the unions to defend working people and also build a new political party to fight for a socialist society.

Landslide win for Morena party in Mexican elections

TONY SAUNOIS
CWI SECRETARY

The crucial Mexican presidential election has resulted in a landslide victory for Claudia Sheinbaum, standing for the populist Morena party. Morena was founded in 2014 by the outgoing president Andrés Manuel López Obrador, popularly known as AMLO. Sheinbaum won with 59.5% of the vote and will become the first female president in the 200-year history of the country.

Her nearest rival, also a woman, Xóchitl Gálvez, won only 27.6%. Gálvez was tarnished by endorsement from all the other main pro-capitalist parties. She was seen as the candidate of the rich and powerful elite.

The election of the first female to the presidency is extremely significant in Mexico, a country riddled with violence and big elements of social disintegration. Over 1,000 women were murdered by their partners in 2021 (the country began to record 'femicides' in 2014). Swaths of Mexico remain locked in war zones between drug cartels, paramilitaries and the army or police. Every year for the last five years over 30,000 people have been killed as a result of the war between various drug paramilitary organisations or the forces of the state - almost the total killed in Gaza!

Although the election of the first female president of Mexico is a historic event that will be widely welcomed, it is not the first time that a female candidate has won elections to the top public offices in Latin American countries, having already been elected in Brazil and Chile. For socialists, the key issue is what are Sheinbaum and Morena's policies and programme and do they benefit the working class and poor?

Apart from the presidency, 98 million eligible voters were confronted with 70,000 candidates to fill the 20,000 posts that were up for election. Morena is set to win a two-thirds majority in one or both houses of Congress. Having won the state of Yucatán, Morena now controls 24 of Mexico's federal districts.

The social polarisation and elements of collapse were reflected during the election campaign. This was the most violent election in the modern history of the country. 25 candidates were killed and another 25 election organisers or workers were also assassinated - the highest number killed were from Morena.

Sheinbaum was regarded as the 'continuity' candidate following AMLO's presidential terms. Morena and Sheinbaum are regarded by millions of voters as being in opposition to the corrupt, oligarchical capitalism that is linked to an array of political parties. She promised to continue his social welfare programmes.

Yet neither AMLO nor Morena have a programme to challenge capitalism and replace it. AMLO ruled over a mixture of substantially increasing the presence of the military in a series of infrastructure projects and in other sectors of the economy. At the same time, he introduced austerity measures and continued participation in the USMCA (US-Mexico-Canada



PHOTO: PROTOPLASMANID/CC

afterwards, leading to rising tensions between both governments.

The fragile growth of the Mexican economy has largely been fuelled by geopolitical factors. Arising from the pandemic, the legacy of Trump's trade war with China, the war in Ukraine, supply chain problems and other factors, some US companies have opted for more 'near-shoring'. For the first time, in 2023, the US was buying more goods from Mexico than China, and Mexico became the US's top trading partner. By 2023, 13% of total US exports were to Mexico and 43% of exports from Mexico went to the US.

With a two-thirds majority, Morena could move to change the constitution, in particular allowing for the popular election of the Supreme Court, which has blocked a series of proposals AMLO attempted to introduce.

Despite the sweeping victory of Morena, the new government will now confront all of the massive social, economic and political issues that exist. The attempts at reforming the system will not resolve any of these issues, such is the depth of the crisis.

Social and class struggles are certain to erupt, posing the need for the Mexican mass and working class to build a new political party that represents its interests with a revolutionary socialist programme to break with capitalism and mobilise the masses to confront the drug cartels.

A struggle is needed for such a party, with an appeal to join with the massive Latino working class and the working class in general in Mexico, and in the US, to jointly struggle to break with capitalism and imperialism and build a voluntary democratic socialist confederation of the Americas.



On the website

South Africa: Working-class rage brings ANC's long majority to a humiliating end

In a shattering rejection, the ANC, elected in an atmosphere of heady euphoria with an overwhelming 62.7% majority in 1994 to mark the end of white minority rule and apartheid in South Africa, has been brought to its knees with a humiliating 40.2%. The ANC may have emerged from these elections with the largest share of the vote, but it has suffered a decisive historical defeat thirty years after its triumphant elevation into office. 29 May, 2024, represents the end of an era for Africa's oldest liberation movement. It is also a political turning point for the country. The ANC's sense of entitlement as the presumptive party of government is decisively over. Read more by Marxist Workers Party (CWI South Africa) reporters at socialistworld.net

European elections

The fallout from the European Union elections that took place between 6-9 June in EU members states continues with the far right making gains and Macron calling an election in France. For updates and analysis see socialistworld.net

Agreement), the successor to the hated free trade NAFTA agreement, which benefited US imperialism. ALMO deployed the army in the fight against the drug paramilitaries but the military has been involved in drug trafficking and is riddled with corruption.

Mexico has enjoyed a small period of economic growth but with continuing rising levels of inequality and poverty. This has given rise to the formation of powerful drug cartels which, in effect, rule in some areas of the country.

Migration

All of these social issues will confront the Sheinbaum government, along with the crucial issue of migration. Millions pass through Mexico from central and southern America, as they attempt to enter the US. This issue will be crucial in the election in the US later this year and



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the Socialist

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formerly **Militant**

END GAZA SLAUGHTER

VOTE FOR SOCIALIST AND ANTI-WAR CANDIDATES



STEVE SCORE

LEICESTER SOCIALIST PARTY AND
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After at least 37,000 deaths in Gaza, hundreds of thousands of injuries, starvation, the lack of basics such as medicines and clean water, and the repeated displacement of millions of people, the US government has proposed a 'peace plan'.

Yet governments such as the US and the Tories here in Britain have throughout continued to back the Israeli government's genocidal assault on Gaza, including supplying them with the weapons that cause

such devastation. That says it all about whether they care for the lives of innocent people.

The United Nations Security Council-backed proposal for a "full and complete ceasefire" is very far from being agreed by all sides, especially given the instability and splits in the Israeli government. But the motivation of the US government and other big powers is not so much humanitarian, but fear that wider instability in the Middle East could threaten their imperialist interests.

It hasn't just been Rishi Sunak and the Tories that have backed the Israeli government's actions. Labour leader Keir Starmer has followed

the Tories' lead on Gaza. Early on he opposed a ceasefire and even supported cutting off water and energy supplies to Gaza.

No wonder many people have turned away from Labour as a result. Starmer has desperately tried to cover his tracks. Labour could now recognise a Palestinian state.

Of course the Palestinian people should have their own right to a state, one that is not militarily and economically dominated, and can provide the basics of life that everyone needs. However, capitalist governments have been unable to do that before, and have no programme that could now.

It requires a mass movement of working-class people across the Middle East and internationally, and a socialist programme that can use the wealth and resources of the region to allow a genuine solution.

This is why I am standing in this general election, alongside the other Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidates - to provide an anti-war, socialist alternative to the main parties.

The Socialist Party fights for:

- End the siege - for the permanent withdrawal of the Israeli military from the occupied territories

- For a mass struggle of the Palestinians, under their own democratic control, to fight for liberation
- For the building of independent workers' parties in Palestine and Israel and links between them
- For an independent, socialist Palestinian state, alongside a socialist Israel, with guaranteed rights for all minorities, as part of the struggle for a socialist Middle East
- No trust in the capitalist politicians, internationally or in Britain. Fight to build a workers' party in Britain that fights for socialism and internationalism

WHAT WE STAND FOR: THE SOCIALIST PARTY'S MAIN DEMANDS >>> see column on pages 10-11

