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the Socialist

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12-18 September 2024

formerly **Militant**

Don't let Starmer freeze pensioners

FIGHT ALL CUTS

Build the socialist opposition

BEA GARDNER
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

As the Socialist goes to press, Keir Starmer faced a 'showdown' in parliament as the hated cut to the winter fuel payment for pensioners went to a vote.

It is being dubbed as his 'first political crisis'. 53 Labour MPs didn't vote with the government.

The government has little regard for the crisis facing the 10 million people who will no longer get the £300 fuel payment from this winter.

The real 'difficult decision' being made, is by the millions of older people who were already struggling to pay their bills, now having to calculate which, if any, rooms they can afford to heat.

Starmer is now governing a country with the sixth biggest economy in the world, and 165 billionaires. What does it say about in whose interests Labour is governing, when they decide we can't afford to heat older people's homes?

No one is fooled by the crocodile tears of cabinet members lining up to back Starmer's claim that they 'have

no choice'. Deaths among the elderly fell by 10,000 following the introduction of the Winter Fuel Payment.

When Labour leaders say it is "right to target support to those who need it most", why don't they lift millions of children out of poverty by scrapping the two-child benefit cap?

The vast majority of Labour MPs voted as Starmer instructed them, for a policy not even in the party's manifesto which will throw millions of older people further into financial hardship.

One voted against, risking being suspended like the seven Labour MPs who voted to scrap the two-child benefit cap before the summer recess. Under pressure, the rest either abstained or stayed away.

With Starmer talking to the trade unions about the need for 'compromise' and 'partnership' with the bosses, the fightback to defend our services and to demand full funding needs to be built. The trade unions should play a central role, leading struggles of workers and in our communities.

Those struggles would be strengthened by a workers' voice in parliament - a socialist opposition. Jeremy Corbyn and four other anti-war independents have recently formed the 'Independent Alliance' parliamentary group. There are those suspended by Starmer's Labour as well as four Green MPs too.

The trade unions have correctly opposed the winter fuel payment

cut. They should appeal to the rebel MPs to act as spokespeople for our causes, to champion working-class interests in parliament. These MPs could act as a mouthpiece for the struggles developing outside parliament in our communities and workplaces, opposing Starmer's cuts at every opportunity, campaigning for all the services we need and putting forward fighting, socialist policies. And could be an important step along the road towards the new mass party based on the trade unions that workers need.

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GRENFELL INQUIRY: THE CAPITALIST SYSTEM IS GUILTY >>> p3,4,12

TUC UNION FEDERATION MEETS: PREPARE WORKING-CLASS FIGHTBACK >>> p2,6-7

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

Trades Union Congress

Two trends: Partnership with the bosses, or fight for workers

ROB WILLIAMS
SOCIALIST PARTY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Two months into the new Labour government, the Trades Union Congress (TUC – which brings together 5.5 million workers in trade unions across the public and private sector) held its annual Congress.

At a time when the gap between rich and poor is at its widest, with estimates that some health workers have lost the equivalent of a year's salary while profits are at record levels, Keir Starmer and his backers presented to Congress the mirage of reasonable employers who increasingly recognise "shared interests" and want "fairness" and "workers' rights"!

Partnership or prepare for struggle?

Congress reflected the two major trends in the trade union movement: the trend that has signed up to Starmer's agenda of partnership with the bosses; and the trend, which the Socialist Party is part of, that is ready to face up to the reality of Starmer's pro-capitalist government and to prepare workers for the struggles now and to come.

Important debates took place on the first day of Congress. The motion 'End the Hostile Environment for Workers' included an amendment from civil service union PCS, drafted by its National Executive Committee majority. It demanded that if the New Deal for Workers isn't delivered in the first 100 days of Starmer's government, there should be a special congress of the TUC.

The composite motion was passed and so it is now official TUC policy – it is up to activists to make that a reality.

This shows the importance of an organised left within a trade union. The PCS speech was made by national president Martin Cavanagh, who, alongside the general secretary, is in a struggle to block the fighting strategy of the NEC majority. But because he is under pressure from an organised left, including the Socialist Party, he was forced on this occasion to stand against the partnership trend.

The next motion was from the



Placards at the NSSN lobby of the TUC MARK BEST

Prison Officers Association (POA) on restoring their right to strike. A militant speech by national chair Mark Fairhurst reminded Congress that, while the original ban was made in 1994 by the Tories, the previous New Labour government under Blair and Brown had also removed the right of prison officers to strike. Even though promises had been made to the POA, this commitment to restore their rights was not in Labour's manifesto. Mark warned Congress that this would be a test of whether the new Labour government will deliver for working-class people. Again, this was passed and is now TUC policy.

The tone of these vital debates contrasted sharply with the speech that preceded them by TUC general secretary Paul Nowak. He clearly set out his rationale for undeclared partnership with the government. While saying they won't always agree, not once did he raise the need to take action, instead saying the unions need to be prepared to "roll up our sleeves" and work with the government.

And when Starmer addressed Congress the next morning it couldn't have been clearer.

Blair Starmer

Echoing Tony Blair in 1997, who said 'We won as New Labour and we'll govern as New Labour', Keir Starmer was explicit: "We wouldn't have won the election if we hadn't changed. We won as a changed Labour Party and we'll govern as a changed Labour Party".

That was a repudiation of the left manifesto on which Jeremy Corbyn stood in 2017 – winning three million more votes than Starmer! Corbyn's programme was pro-worker, anti-austerity. Starmer is clear: he accepts the limitations of the sick state of British capitalism, including Tory spending plans, and is trying to neuter the workers' movement by advocating partnership between unions and rabid big-business bosses.

Warning of austerity to come, outlining yet again the so-called "black hole" in public finances, he declared: "I have to make it clear that this government won't risk economic stability

– and with the tough decisions on the horizon, pay will be inevitably shaped by that." There was a heckle in the hall: "tax the rich!"

Arguing for "compromise", he said: "I call for the politics of partnership – business and workers, public and private."

In the preceding debate on 'Building a fairer economy', Unite general secretary Sharon Graham opposed any Labour austerity, saying we need to tax the super-rich. RMT rail union general secretary Mick Lynch warned Labour against limiting themselves to Tory spending plans, saying we need a fairer distribution of wealth.

These criticisms and demands to go further are important. But they need to be backed up with preparations for action to ensure workers don't continue to pay for capitalist crisis, and steps by the trade unions towards an independent working class-based political voice that fights for them.

- Read the report of the NSSN lobby of the TUC on pages 6-7

TUSC discusses 'Collective' network plans for a new party

The September meeting of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) all-Britain steering committee discussed the latest developments regarding 'the Collective' network, planning for the next round of scheduled statutory elections that will take place in May 2025, and two upcoming council by-elections in Coventry and Dundee which TUSC will contest, including the TUSC

chairperson Dave Nellist fighting his old council seat in Coventry's St Michaels ward. For the item on TUSC's discussions with the Collective, a network of 'those on the left who seek to build the foundations for a new political party' including important figures from Jeremy Corbyn's time as Labour leader, the steering committee had before it a briefing document produced by the TUSC national agent, Clive Heemsker. (Search 'TUSC Briefing on the Collective' at tusc.org.uk)

This gave a report of the discussions of the Collective attended by TUSC from before the general election, which have developed further with the production in August of a draft strategy document by the core group, entitled 'Beyond GE24: Rebuilding a Mass Socialist Movement as a Foundation for a New Left Political Party'.

This is still very much an early draft before publication and so only a summary has been given in the TUSC briefing. What degree of support there is for its proposals is still to be determined. That obviously affects how viable or not it is to form a new party to a set timetable in early 2025. Or

whether, as the TUSC representatives argued, a systematic campaign to establish the need for a new party in the trade unions, alongside continuing local community struggles and ongoing social movements, is more likely to achieve our shared goal.

But the steering committee strongly welcomed the fact that the discussion has begun and agreed that TUSC should seek to continue its positive-but-not-uncritical engagement in the Collective network.

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

GRENFELL EXPOSES HOW PROFIT KILLS UNIONS MUST FIGHT FOR NATIONALISATION



WHAT WE THINK

Seven years on from the Grenfell fire tragedy which killed 72 people, and its memory provokes many emotions, including those of indignation and anger, which are amplified further by the disgusting details exposed by the latest report.

The profit vultures named are washing their hands of responsibility. An article in the Financial Times warns that increased scrutiny of safety regulations "puts the new Labour government in a political bind between its promises to victims and people living in dangerous homes, and its ambitions to deliver a building boom." Writing from the point of view of capitalist investors, it is a warning that profit margins could be squeezed by the requirement to make buildings safe.

The Grenfell report exposes the murky underworld of the multi-billion pound property development industry. The nasty tendrils of profit and greed penetrate every layer; including councils and the privatised building regulators. The same types of grubby deals, 'nods', 'winks' and 'blind-eyes', go on every day in all corners of the capitalist establishment and industry.

The levels of corruption exposed underline why the profiteering bosses can't be trusted to make buildings safe. Instead, public remedial works should be started without delay and under the democratic control of the working class and trade unions, drawing on the expertise of firefighters and those in the construction industry.

These works should be paid for entirely by the big building companies. Protests of unaffordability, or threats of withholding investment and rising prices, should be met with the demand to open the books to inspection by the trade unions



Port Talbot steelworks threatened with closure SIGMA/CC

and working class, and ultimately by nationalisation.

Tata Steel

At the time of writing, the Labour government is set to make a statement on its talks with Tata Steel aiming to prevent mass redundancies in Port Talbot. Thousands of workers are expected to still face redundancy, thousands more jobs are under threat at British Steel in Scunthorpe too. Royal Mail has also announced further reduction of its services as a billionaire takeover progresses. Both happen under the watch of a Labour government supposedly offering a 'new deal for workers'.

Unfortunately trade union leaders, who met and at the Trades Union Congress (TUC) 8-11 September, did not use the opportunity to demand renationalisation from the new Labour government.

Can't avoid nationalisation

But nationalisation is on the agenda. Thames Water is on the brink of collapse. Creditors giving it 'junk' status in August put it in breach of its license to operate – profiting from our rising bills and polluting our rivers. It also increased the cost of borrowing for other water companies also drowning in debt. 'Special administration', in effect nationalisation by default, is an inevitability.

The alternative – collapse – would mean no water services for London and the south east. The capitalist class accepts nationalisation when it deems the alternative more unpalatable. Likewise, the last Labour government nationalised the banks to prevent total meltdown.

The threat of class struggle features in the capitalists decision making, and in reality is behind all their strategic calculations. It's the reason Labour is calibrating it's public sector pay deals to be the minimum by which it hopes it can avoid strikes, for example. Preparation for struggle and the trade unions mobilising behind demands for nationalisation could force the government to act.

The Labour government could renationalise Tata Steel to save jobs, or the whole water and energy



MARY FINCH

industries, or for that matter passenger rail passenger transport immediately, along with the rest of rail too. There should be no compensation for the fat cat bosses, with compensation only on the basis of proven need.

Nationalisation in whose interests?

When in 2008 the Labour government nationalised Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS), taking a 50% share for £42 billion, it was effectively nationalisation for the rich – taking over the most indebted sections of the banking industry, leaving the rest in the capitalists' hands. As recently as 2021, the government still held a majority of shares. It has been selling them at a loss since. During that whole period, its bosses were raking in monster salaries and bonuses.

The kind of nationalisation that the workers' movement should be demanding is entirely different. Not putting capitalist bosses back in place, but instead running things under the democratic control and management of the working class.

State of the economy

The Labour government faces an economy with record low investment, capitalists refusing to invest their vast sums of wealth, unable to see a stable profitable outlet. One group of capitalists have told the government that Britain needs £100 billion of investment a year for the next



Preparation for struggle and the trade unions mobilising behind demands for nationalisation could force the government to act

ten years to achieve a modest 3% economic growth.

Those numbers put into perspective how limited Labour's sums of planned public investment are. Great British Energy is a government owned company being created with £8.3 billion to be a 'catalyst' for private investment. Similarly, the National Wealth Fund hopes to attract private cash to go with around £7.3 billion of public funds. Both bodies will be led by bosses wedded to big business.

Unite general secretary Sharon Graham typically goes further than most trade union leaders in correctly criticising Labour's plans for further austerity, writing in the Guardian before TUC that "the money is there for all of us to have decent living standards."

However, she falls short of demanding nationalisation. "Unite's research shows we need investment of £6.6 billion in the next five years to build a domestic wind manufacturing industry and create new jobs for North Sea communities. The oil companies are not providing this investment. So the government must take the lead."

But energy companies, for fossil fuels and renewables, have received £140 billion of government subsidies since 2015. Billions is pledged to the privatised steel industry too, while bosses send workers to the scrapheap. Investment to protect working-class communities, jobs and the environment needs democratic planning, and that can only be achieved with nationalisation.

The trade unions should be fighting for every inch of trade union



The nasty tendrils of profit continue to penetrate every aspect of housing, public services, infrastructure and industry – with deadly consequences

influence over bodies such as GB Energy and the National Wealth Fund, demanding that, for example, the National Wealth Fund is used to invest in saving steel jobs in Port Talbot, or that GB Energy investments maintain trade union jobs, pay terms and conditions, of all those employed in the energy sector. And that should go hand in hand with demands put publicly on the Labour government to nationalise, and a strategy to mobilise members to fight for it.

Grenfell was a horrific symbol of the consequences of capitalism, a system that puts profit before all else. The nasty tendrils of profit continue to penetrate every aspect of housing, public services, infrastructure and industry – with deadly consequences and more misery for working class communities. The workers' movement must be demanding it's rooted out, and that all the major levers of the economy are put into workers' hands, so that things can be planned democratically to meet the needs of all and the environment. Part of that means building a new mass workers' party that fights for socialist change.

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Grenfell inquiry report finds corporations, establishment, and capitalism guilty

Over seven years after the fire in Grenfell tower which killed 72 people, the report from the inquiry is damning. Placing blame on corporations putting unsafe cladding on buildings to maximise profits, and the politicians which cut regulations and made us all less safe.

Paul Kershaw, chair of Unite housing workers' branch, reports on the damning evidence that shows the whole capitalist system is guilty.

"The simple truth is that the deaths that occurred were all avoidable" and the failings around Grenfell were down to "incompetence", "dishonesty", and "greed", according to Sir Martin Moore-Bick in the official report on the Grenfell fire.

Seven years after the fire, no one has been prosecuted and thousands continue to live in homes with Grenfell-style fire risks.

Government had been warned of the dangers for at least 25 years. Corporations such as Arconic, the cladding manufacturer, displayed "systematic dishonesty." The BRE (Building Research Establishment), which acted as regulator and advisor to government was privatised and became exposed to "unscrupulous product manufacturers."

During the refit of the tower there was a failure to establish who was responsible for safety standards - resulting in an "unedifying 'merry-go-round of buck-passing'". Even after the report was published, Arconic claimed its product was safe and the buck-passing continues.

When the time came for parliament to hear prime minister Keir Starmer and opposition leader Rishi Sunak express regret on behalf of the British state, MPs on both sides of the house rushed for the exit. In response, Karim Mussilhy, vice chair of Grenfell United - the survivors and bereaved family's group, asked: "How are we supposed to get justice when they just don't care?"

Blair

New Labour former prime minister Tony Blair couldn't even be bothered with even ritual apologies. Dame Carayol, whose cousin and her daughter were killed in the fire, invited Blair to explain his words. "Of course you apologise. It's a simple thing to do. You admit what you've done wrong ... for what his government were involved in that contributed to Grenfell happening, of course you apologise. We're not talking about the neglect and ignoring what needed to be done, ignoring the implementation of recommendations. It's cause and effect."



How are we supposed to get justice when they just don't care?

Karim Mussilhy vice chair of Grenfell United

Other survivors and bereaved relatives expressed similar views. Stephen Mackenzie, a fire security consultant, said: "It's incredibly arrogant from an experienced statesman and politician. The problems with the legislation and guidance stem from his government. Much of the cladding was installed during his government's tenure and Gordon Brown's."

Fire Brigades Union general secretary Matt Wrack spoke for millions when he responded that: "Tony Blair's despicable comments are the remarks of a multi-millionaire who has lost touch with the reality of people's lives. It is no wonder that the public are losing faith in politicians when politicians like Tony Blair make it clear that they have no regard for ordinary people."

David Cameron, the prime minister who championed deregulation with a 'one in, one out' rule where new regulations could only come into force if another was scrapped, later becoming one in, two out and three out, went even further than Blair claiming to be exonerated by the report!

Ed Daffarn, a Grenfell tower resident who raised numerous concerns about fire safety before the fire, said he was "angry but not surprised", and Cameron was "failing to take responsibility".

Tory arrogance

Lord Pickles, former Tory housing secretary, told the inquiry he could not remember the number of deaths and arrogantly demanded that the inquiry was quick in order not to delay his lunch appointment. The report found that his comments "served only to reveal the limits of his understanding".

The report is quite clear that "the government's deregulatory agenda, enthusiastically supported by some junior ministers and [Pickles], dominated the department [for community, housing and local government]'s thinking to such an extent that even matters affecting the safety of life were ignored, delayed or disregarded."

It also points out that the government "determinedly resisted calls from across the fire sector to regulate fire risk assessors and to amend the Fire Safety Order to make it clear that it applied to the exterior walls of buildings containing more than one set of domestic premises."

Ed Daffarn is right that Cameron is failing to take responsibility. The details in the report are shocking but no surprise to anyone following the inquiry. Nor is it shocking that the capitalist establishment continues to duck responsibility.



Front page of the Socialist after the fire



The government's deregulatory agenda was enthusiastically supported to such an extent that even matters affecting the safety of life were ignored, delayed or disregarded.

Former Tory cabinet minister Michael Gove has let slip significant details of the government's failure to pursue the corporations involved and called for prosecutions of cladding firms. Writing in The Times, he has claimed that the Treasury and international diplomacy scotched his efforts to impose consequences on Arconic, Kingspan and Celotex. If it was serious, the government could use primary legislation to block building control approval for any project containing anything made by these three corporations until they put their hands in their pockets to pay for the damage caused.

Of course, the new Labour

government can and should revisit this. To guarantee safety and decent homes for all, the construction industry should be nationalised - but who would hold their breath for the government to follow up even just Gove's more limited ideas?

Grenfell residents' groups have welcomed the details in the report which expose establishment buck-passing, but there are real gaps. The report does highlight cases of racial discrimination, but residents' groups point out that a majority of those who lost their lives were from a Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic background; neither race or class is fully explored.

Residents' warnings ignored

Residents gave explicit safety warnings and were ignored. This is covered in the report, but it ducks recommendations on residents' voice, citing current legislative changes. What is needed is democratic mechanisms of accountability and support for resident organisation. Groups such as SHAC (Social Housing Action Campaign) - the housing association resident and tenant network - report that residents' views continue to be treated with contempt, with landlords even

using legal threats to attempt to silence them. Trade unions have given support to such groups, and this must continue.

Currently, the police are indicating that possible convictions cannot be expected for another three years, many expect it to take longer. This isn't acceptable; prosecutions must be treated with the urgency they deserve.

The story leading up to Grenfell shows the callous contempt of the capitalist establishment. The failure to act since underlines the nature of the establishment and the response to the report is no better.

Any prosecutions of individuals just scratch the surface of a system across the world that puts profit over human lives. We need to put capitalism in the dock too!

Individual politicians such as the former local Labour MP Emma Dent Coad have expressed some of the anger in the community. She stood in the last election as an independent - kicked out of the Labour Party as Starmer shifted it rightwards. We urgently need a party that expresses the anger of millions at the injustices of Grenfell and calls for a socialist way forward. Unions that have voiced the feelings of millions should take steps to form such a party.

Homerton Hospital workers protest governors' meeting



CLARE DOYLE
HACKNEY SOCIALIST PARTY

At Hackney's Homerton Hospital, ancillary workers employed by the notorious private sub-contractors ISS are preparing for battle. The nearly 300 porters, canteen workers, cleaners and security guards, all of whom do vital work to protect staff and patients, have long-standing grievances. These include being denied the £1,655 bonus paid to all other staff in the hospital who worked through the deadly pandemic.

These workers have seen ISS colleagues at neighbouring hospitals win big concessions and get taken 'in house' after determined strike action. Now they are following suit. At their regular Wednesday gathering outside the hospital on 4 September, they made plans to lobby the hospital's council of governors the next evening.

Putting our case

Safety steward Isabella was very pleased with the turn out and the effect they had on the meeting: "Three

of us, including the Unison secretary, Jordan, went inside the meeting itself to put our case. 13 of the 22 governors have said they supported us, but no decision was made at that meeting."

The chairperson who spoke against a decision being made in favour of these low-paid workers was none other than Sir John Gieve - a former deputy governor of the Bank of England and a permanent secretary at the Home Office.

Now is the time for the ISS workers to get organised and prepare a fight to the finish.

Hampshire aerospace workers strike against pay offer



NICK CHAFFEY
SOUTHAMPTON SOCIALIST PARTY

Aerospace workers at Eaton in Fareham, Hampshire took two days of strike action in a campaign to reject the three-year offer tabled by the company.

In the first strike at Eaton for 12 years, there was a large turnout on the picket line on 29 August and determination that the pay cuts suffered in the last three-year deal, during the sharp rise in inflation, would not be repeated. Unite members expressed their anger at the company's attitude. While profits have risen, pay has fallen significantly behind the industry average. If management doesn't respond then further strikes

are planned through September.

This strike shows, like others, that the cost-of-living crisis has not gone away even though inflation has fallen for now. As one striker summed it up: "Prices aren't going down!" Unite reported that, while Eaton management say the money's not there for any further rise, in 2023 Eaton Corporation made €3.5 billion profit and paid their directors close to €60 million.

This sums up the huge inequality that has grown globally in recent decades and the vital role of strong and determined trade unions to fight to reverse that trend.

Delegates from Southampton trades council and the National Shop Stewards Network visited the picket line to give solidarity.

Healthcare assistants win increased pay offer following strike threat

STEVE SCORE
LEICESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

Healthcare assistants in Northamptonshire and Leicester hospitals have suspended their strike action to vote on a new offer from management of the two hospital trusts.

The offer is a big step forward from where they started and is a significant change from a management who were previously claiming that they did not have the money to meet the demands of Unison members.

It is a testament to the determination of union members in both areas. In the Leicester hospitals, they have taken 32 days of strike action so far and had been in the middle of a

planned month-long strike.

First, they won a regrading to take into account the extra clinical duties they had carried out for years. Then they took strike action to demand six years' worth of back pay.

The offer, described by Unison as "not perfect" because it doesn't at this stage include back pay for 'bank staff', is nevertheless a substantial improvement. HCAs on Band 3 will automatically get three years' back pay and can get up to six years if they can show they were doing those duties.

It will be a significant achievement by these low-paid workers, but the struggle to achieve justice for the bank staff should continue.

Campaign to get John Lewis staff unionised

OXFORD SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS

John Lewis workers have been threatened with mass redundancies, changes to working hours, not receiving bonuses, and being forced to work as 'multi-skilled' staff - effectively doing several jobs at once.

These job cuts and worsening of working conditions will take place in stores including Oxford, where a Socialist Party member is one of the workers threatened.

The trade union GMB represents John Lewis workers. However, it has faced difficulties opposing the cuts due to having very few union members at John Lewis, with estimates suggesting only around 250 workers are members of GMB, out of a total

workforce of around 80,000.

In Oxford's store, just two workers are GMB members, including one Socialist Party member.

They have spoken to other workers about joining GMB, although this has been difficult due to a fear of potential reprisals from management. This is a particular concern given that, as stated by the GMB in February, John Lewis discourages workers from joining a union.

Due to the urgent need for John Lewis workers to organise to protect their interests, Oxford Socialist Party members have started a campaign to get staff at our local store to join GMB. Our ultimate goal is to get enough staff to join and support the union to enable it to gain recognition

in the store.

Socialist Party members have stood outside the John Lewis staff entrance as workers were going into work, giving out GMB leaflets with information on how to join. We also had conversations with workers about how joining the union could help them, both with the current situation and in future disputes with the company.

We will continue this campaign to help get workers unionised and plan to regularly be outside John Lewis, encouraging staff to join.

Trade union work is vital to encourage staff to organise so they can defend themselves against unscrupulous bosses who are only interested in profit, not people.



WHAT SHOULD TRADE UNIONS DO NOW THERE'S A LABOUR GOVERNMENT?

Fight to make the rich pay, not workers!

What should the trade unions do now? This was the key question raised by the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) rally and lobby, in which Socialist Party members participated, held as the Trades Union Congress (TUC) gathered for its annual Congress.

As delegates arrived, they were met by a lobby of over 100 trade unionists, from seasoned reps to young workers. They called on the TUC to prepare to fight: Make the rich pay, not the workers! The lobby was preceded by a rally at which general secretaries, elected national executive members and reps discussed what the trade unions should be doing in this new situation.

The Tories are defeated – but Starmer's government will try to make workers pay for the crisis

Rob Williams, NSSN chair, opened the debate



We welcome the defeat of the Tories – the smashing of the most successful bosses' party in western Europe is a victory for the working class and the trade union movement.

With the Tories gone, there may be some who will ask: 'So why do we need to lobby the TUC now? Isn't Labour talking to us? Aren't they bringing in policies for us?'

We welcome any policy and concession that benefits workers. It is correct to celebrate the promised repeal of some of the most recent Tory anti-union laws. Although the minimum service levels were rendered inoperable by Aslef train drivers' union, and (Tory prime minister) Sunak was unable to use those laws. But it is essential that unions demand the repeal of all the Tory anti-union legislation, going all the way back to Thatcher.

Some will point to the pay offers to public sector unions, in the range upwards from 5%, as proof that Starmer is listening. While these are above the current rate of inflation, they go nowhere near recovering the vast amount lost during 14 years of savage real-terms pay cuts by the Tories, and pay freezes by New Labour before them. And some are not fully funded and will lead to cuts.

Unions should fight for more,



Rob speaking

and for all pay increases to be fully funded.

Alongside taking strike action to defend jobs and services, unions should call on Labour councils to refuse to implement cuts, and demand that Starmer and his chancellor Rachel Reeves guarantee full funding.

The most fatal error is to have wishful thinking.

In the strike wave, Starmer wasn't in the trenches with us, he was sacking shadow cabinet members who joined picket lines. The cut to pensioners' heating allowance and refusal to lift the two-child benefit cap, and his disgraceful position on Gaza, should caution our movement.

The trailing of Reeves' autumn budget with warnings of public sector cuts, is a blunt warning to those who will argue that we have to give Starmer more time. We have to prepare for Labour austerity.

The role of the union movement is to state clearly what is, not to prettify the situation. Starmer is in the press saying he might have to make 'difficult choices'. There are no difficult choices, there are class choices – you're either with us or against us!

The PCS civil service union has an amendment arguing that if Starmer hasn't delivered on the key workers' rights promised in his New Deal for Workers within the first 100 days, a special TUC congress should be called to discuss next steps.

Because of the strike wave and because of the political vacuum, the unions have become a pole of attraction. That's why its even more necessary that alongside being prepared to take action, the unions also put forward a political programme – a workers' manifesto, the socialist policies that workers need. For jobs, pay and pensions – and link them to the demands needed to defend workers and their communities, including nationalising the oil and gas companies, Royal Mail and BT, and Tata Steel.

That's in contrast to the racists trying to exploit the political vacuum. Imagine if the trade unions had implemented the policy passed at TUC congress in 2018 for a 'Jobs and homes, not racism' programme.

The defeat of the Tories has ushered in a new period for our movement. But it isn't the end of our fight, it's only the beginning.

PHOTOS: MARK BEST, ISA MARJERLA, PAULA MITCHELL



Prepare to fight now – or in the future?

Steve Gillan, general secretary of the Prison Officers Association, was clear, particularly in relation to the anti-trade union laws: "I'm glad we've not got a Tory government, but we've got to fight for whatever we want."

Sarah Woolley, general secretary of the BFAU bakers' union, rightly described this as a critical moment after 14 years of austerity. She outlined the demands in the union's 'Bakers' Dozen' manifesto and said: "Too many people in our movement will want to wait, give them a chance and see what happens. But we've not got time to wait. We demand real change. If that means marching outside parliament because the manifesto commitments have not been upheld, we must march outside parliament". She said: "If the Labour Party doesn't support the working class, we must treat it like any other party that doesn't support the working class."

Ian Lawrence, general secretary of the probation officers union Napo argued that the Labour government could start by going after the unpaid tax of the rich. "We need a rescue package for prisons and probation, and a holistic approach to sentencing. There are too many people in prisons."

Daniel Kebede, general secretary of the National Education Union, pointed out that the Tories left 4.3 million children in poverty and a schools' funding crisis that meant crumbling buildings and a recruitment and retention crisis. He highlighted the campaign for universal free school meals and to increase education funding. He said: "We'll get things, but Starmer's going to need a push. There'll be times in the future we have to fight again."

Train drivers' union Aslef general secretary Mick Whelan celebrated the defeat of the Tory "bastards".

While saying that unions will "never be content" and that "we can campaign, we can protest, we can articulate the voices of the people that we represent", he also said "I'm not too worried about the 'what if' moment, because



Marion Lloyd



Mick Whelan

even if we only got 40% of what's being promised, we're 40% better than we've been in the past."

While arguing for the need to "bang on the doors for all workers everywhere", insisting that you can afford to rebuild public services, Mick said: "I don't expect it overnight, but I do expect it."

He argued that the New Deal for Working People could be "revolutionary", a "building block", from which to "change Labour and its policies". "We've got to build the movement back to where we were in the '70s and '80s. If this is a stepping stone towards doing that, I think we're in the right place."

From the floor, an **RMT member** argued that it is correct to put our demands on a Labour government, but we have to build a force prepared to act. That's not an academic question about what to do in a few years' time: we're facing attacks now.

Marion Lloyd, a member of the NEC majority in the PCS civil service union, spoke in a personal capacity – saying "I hope this time next year it will be in an official capacity".

She argued that this TUC is at a vital stage in taking forward the aspirations of working people. She said "The situation is clear: the austerity we suffered for decades under the Tories isn't going away." Starmer and Rachel 'cutting' Reeves will act in the interests of British capitalism not working people, and so the role of the trade union movement is crucial. The trade unions have a duty to explain what is possible if we unite around a programme that protects jobs and pay.

"There are two strands of opinion at the top of the trade union movement – those who want to wait and see and hope, and those who want to take the opportunity to build the fight now." That is the struggle at the top of PCS. "Don't sow illusions in a government that is intending ruthless austerity".



April Ashley speaking. Sarah Woolley seated

● Taking on the far right

Sarah Woolley, BFAU bakers' union general secretary, argued that, with "people disconnected from politics and not looking to the trade unions", the riots and votes for Reform "should be of more concern to us right now than what Starmer's going to do in the first 100 days."

This point was taken up by **April Ashley, Black members' rep on the Union NEC**, speaking in a personal capacity. April explained that Union had a motion to the TUC arguing for unions to support anti-racist campaigns and mobilise for demos, but she argued that the unions should go further: the trade unions should be central to the fight. The unions can unite all sections of the working class against the bosses, and need to fight urgently against austerity.

The TUC needs to urgently enact the decision agreed in 2018 of a 'Jobs and homes, not racism' campaign – not just leave it as a "nice shiny resolution on the shelf"! Her Union branch had passed a resolution that the TUC should call a national demo. "Too often the trade unions put the role of fighting racism out to other organisations" instead of playing the central role. "We have to link the fight on social conditions to the fight against racism – that's how you undermine the far right and racism."



Link the fight on social conditions to the fight against racism - that's how you undermine the far right and racism

● Trade union rights

While pleased to see the New Deal for Workers, **Steve Gillan, general secretary of the Prison Officers Association**, said: "We need to get rid of the whole raft of 'Thatcher's legislation' – and that includes the ban on prison

officers taking action, brought in 30 years ago.

He called on the whole trade union movement to stand with them, not just to vote for their motion but to mount a concerted campaign.

Illustrating why trade union rights are so important, he said: "Prisons are in a terrible state. If we'd had the right to strike, the prisons wouldn't be in this state". The POA action in 1994 that led to the ban was about overcrowding – fighting for the "health and safety of our members and those in our care". Then the prison population was 40,000; now it's 88,000, with less staff.



Steve Gillan speaking

● How do we organise our political voice?

Hugo Pierre, a member of Unison's local government service group executive, in a personal capacity, raised the vital question of how, in addition to using our industrial muscle, do we use our political muscle? He argued for a strategy that puts councils under pressure not to make cuts, including standing candidates; and he called for unions to put demands on the independent and suspended Labour MPs (who rebelled against the cap on child benefit) to fight for socialist policies.

Thanking the NSSN for its support for the struggle at Barts Health Trust, **Len Hockey, Unite secretary at Barts**, described their recent victory over Covid bonus payments and called on "health union leaders to replicate that". He said that the 5.5% NHS pay award is "totally inadequate. The fight on pay is a fight for the NHS itself". Endorsing Hugo's points, he said that Starmer's stamping on the 'suspended seven' is "the voice of the ruling class".

● Housing and Grenfell

Suzanne Muna, Executive member of Unite the Union, speaking as a representative of the Social Housing Action Campaign (SHAC) said "Grenfell shows the extent to which landlords are allowed to gamble with people's lives". Rachel Reeves has agreed to let social landlords increase rents by 1% on top of inflation – "It shows who's side this Labour government is on, and it's not ours."

Linda Taaffe, former secretary of the NSSN and long-term housing campaigner, said the Grenfell report is "damning of the whole system – it puts capitalism in the dock". Saying "We cannot let the survivors struggle on their own" she called for the TUC to meet with them and take action.

● See pages 3, 4 and 12

● Nigeria

Deji Olayinka, CWU member, highlighted the appalling repression of trade unionists in Nigeria and urged urgent solidarity.

● See page 9

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Blackwood packed by anti-austerity protest. Build up the pressure!

GERAINT THOMAS

CAERPHILLY SOCIALIST PARTY

"Save our 'stute", chanted the hundreds marching through the town of Blackwood against the eye-watering £45 million cuts proposed by Caerphilly Council. The council plans to scrap the meals on wheels service, and close the miners' institute and local museum. Cheered on by passers-by, the rally took place at the square overlooked by the miners' institute.

Working-class people from across the community were rightly furious at these cuts, and took up our socialist leaflets and papers happily. People understand the callousness of the cuts, and the effect that gutting these services and institutions would have on the community. The council's waste of paying consultants to suggest cuts, as well as the winter fuel payment cuts by Westminster, came

up regularly in our conversations.

This only highlights that the governments (now Labour at every level) do not care about working-class communities' needs. At least, not enough to take on the interests of big business instead.

Although a Plaid Cymru Senedd (Welsh parliament) member and councillor spoke at the rally in support of the campaign, we know that they do not have any fundamental answers to the question of austerity. In practice, they have carried out different cuts instead of no cuts.

It's never been more clear that every gain made, every service ran by councils, has been won by working-class struggle. The anger was palpable, and people were looking for a lead from the trade unions, as we are ready to fight to keep what we have left.

We in particular think that the council workers' unions and

branches across the area should call for the following:

- A consultative ballot for industrial action against all service cuts
- Build for support in the communities across the borough. Produce material for people's homes and shop windows. Call for community groups to organise lobbies of their individual councillors
- A follow up the protest with a lobby of the council
- Demand support from the trade union movement at a regional and national level. Call for serious pressure on the Senedd and Westminster to fork up the cash. If Labour politicians won't support our communities, we should ask why our unions are affiliated to Labour, and why we don't stand candidates of our own instead, who are prepared to fight all the cuts



The protest marches through Blackwood High Street PHOTO: DAVE REID

Pensioners organise against Labour winter fuel payment cut

CLARE WILKINS

SECRETARY EAST MIDLANDS NATIONAL PENSIONERS' CONVENTION (NPC) (PERSONAL CAPACITY) AND NOTTINGHAM SOCIALIST PARTY

The axeing of the winter fuel payment for pensioners by the new Labour government, except for those in receipt of Pension Credit, looms large. We have to fight against this cut. It will be the first of many.

63% of pensioners eligible for Pension Credit currently claim it. You have to be in receipt of or eligible for it on 14 September to get it this year. £2.3 billion set aside for Pension Credit went unclaimed last year. The government says it will save £1.3 billion by cutting the Winter Fuel Payment.

The government has responded to the huge backlash by saying they will extend the Warm Home Discount. But only people on Pension Credit can get this and not all energy providers are in the scheme. They are also urging people to claim Pension Credit and for family and friends to help them claim. There are over one million pensioners who are just above the threshold for Pension Credit and other poorer pensions

will also be hard hit.

At a recent reception for Labour MPs, Keir Starmer said that they must "toughen up" because there will be more "tough choices" and not to rebel, despite the complaints they are getting from constituents. A three-line whip against attempts to stop the cut mean any Labour MP that stands up for pensioners will be disciplined. Instead of going after privatised energy companies making huge profits at the expense of us all, Starmer's cuts will mean old people will be cold.

More than 200 people took part in the NPC annual convention in Blackpool on 3 and 4 September. The convention discussed the anger at this cruel cut, and the need for a decent, liveable pension so that pensioners can have security and dignity in older age.

Jan Shortt, NPC general secretary announced that NPC and Unite the union have organised a lobby of parliament against the cut in the Winter Fuel Payment on Monday 7 October from 2-4pm in Room 14 in Westminster. A rally will take place at the George IV statue in Parliament Square beforehand.

Twelve killed in Channel boat disaster

Fight for jobs homes and services for all



PHOTO: CSDP EEAS/CC

BERKAY KARTAV

SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE AND MEMBER OF UNITE MIGRANT WORKERS BRANCH

Twelve people, including six children and a pregnant woman, tragically lost their lives after the boat carrying them sank in the English Channel on 3 September. Dozens more people had to be rescued by fishers and coastguards.

Over 40 people have lost their lives this year, desperately attempting to cross the English Channel in search for a better future. Exploiting the plight of people fleeing war, repression and devastation in their home countries, human smugglers cramming people in small boats to make a profit.

Despite scrapping the Tory Rwanda scheme, Keir Starmer and home secretary Yvette Cooper have talked about increasing deportations of asylum seekers, putting lives at risk.

We say, no to racist immigrant laws! We demand democratic

working-class control over borders by elected representatives from trade unions and migrant organisations to review asylum cases and grant asylum, and the resources to do so safely and quickly.

The new Labour government has not put forward any new safe and legal routes for asylum seekers. Tory policies and cuts to public services fuel desperation that pushes people towards dangerous journeys across the Channel.

Pro-capitalist politicians try to pit workers against each other, scapegoating migrants for lack of jobs, homes and services. Meanwhile they enable their rich backers to get richer.

The richest 100 individuals in the UK increased their wealth by £40 billion in the last year alone. Just a fraction of that wealth can be used to lift millions of people out of poverty.

The reason for the lack of decent jobs with decent pay, the lack of secure homes or collapsing services is

not because of asylum seekers and refugees. The responsibility lies with the bosses who only care about their profits, both in Britain and internationally, and their rotten system.

A united, mass working-class struggle for a fully-funded NHS, a mass programme of council house building and decent jobs for all can cut across divisions and win resources for all. The consequences of decades of cuts and capitalist divide-and-rule was seen in the far-right attacks mere weeks ago.

To cut across the rise of racist ideas and to end the horror seen in the channel, the working-class movement needs a political arm too. A new workers' party, based on the trade unions and armed with a socialist programme, could fight for the money and resources our communities need. A fight for jobs, homes and services for all would be a pole of attraction for working-class people who are looking for a socialist alternative.

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Nigeria state repression: Release all prisoners, drop the charges!



Lagos protest DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST MOVEMENT

● Add your name to the statement



● Pass the motion in your union



DEJI OLAYINKA

SOUTH WEST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Activists from the Socialist Party, alongside Nigeria Solidarity UK, quickly organised a protest at the Nigerian High Commission in London on Monday 9 September in response to the attacks on the workers' and anti-austerity movements. The protest supported the #EndBadGovernance protesters and the Youth Rights Campaign (YRC) by submitting a petition demanding the release of Nigerian Labour Congress President Joe Ajaero, as well as Adaramoye Michael Lenin, Mosiu Sodiq, Daniel Akande, and all those incarcerated in connection with the recent #EndBadGovernance protests.

Joe Ajaero, who was arrested early on the Monday, was released later that day without his passport, after 15 hours of questioning by the secret police over alleged terrorism financing.

Micheal Lenin, who was arrested on Sunday 5 August, now falsely charged alongside others with treason, is the National Coordinator of the YRC. If found guilty, they could face a death sentence, the maximum penalty in Nigeria for treason. The YRC group played crucial roles in the #EndSARs protest four years ago and also in the ten days of protests that rocked Nigeria last month over increasing hunger and hardship.

This demo is part of international solidarity actions planned by the YRC and the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) to rally activists, trade unionists, youth groups and socialists across the world to raise awareness about the repression and budding dictatorship in Nigeria. Its aim is to build sustained pressure on the Nigerian government as Adaramoye Michael Lenin and nine others appear at the Federal High Court in

Abuja on Wednesday 11 September, for a ruling on their bail application. Similar activities are planned in Nigeria on the day of the court sitting.

Speaking during the demo, I said: "Socialists, working people and youth across the world are inspired by the #EndBadGovernance protests in Nigeria. We extend our solidarity to the working class and youth in Nigeria in their struggle against fuel price hikes, anti-poor economic policies and attacks on democratic rights. We call on President Tinubu to halt the repression and release all those imprisoned now. Only a socialist Nigeria can end the economic crisis facing the country."

The Socialist Party will continue to raise the issues of the repression in Nigeria within the trade unions, students unions and socialist movement with a view to build more support for the struggle against the horrendous impact on most Nigerians of the government's neo-liberal policies in Nigeria.

We Say:

- Drop 'treason' and 'terrorism' charges against protest organisers
- Defend the right to protest, and free the hundreds detained for protesting
- Fight to defend Nigerians from economic and social collapse

Committee for a Workers' International



FIGHTING FOR A SOCIALIST WORLD
socialistworld.net

Save Leicester adventure playgrounds



PHOTO: STEVE SCORE

STEVE SCORE

LEICESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

Hundreds of people of all ages protested outside Leicester Town Hall on 5 September against the Labour council's ending of support for adventure playgrounds. The deafening noise must have penetrated the council chamber as they debated the 9,000-signature petition being presented. Just to be sure, the protest repeatedly marched around the Town Hall while the meeting took place!

There is huge anger at the council's plan to ending funding for the nine playgrounds situated in some of the most deprived areas of a city where more than 40% of children live in poverty. As explained in previous

issues of the Socialist, some of these playgrounds have existed for more than 50 years and have a long tradition of giving children safe places to play, learn and socialise.

This is part of the council's cuts, which they describe as necessary to avoid a Section 114 notice, so-called 'effective bankruptcy'. But to supposedly avoid having to make drastic cuts, the council is making those same cuts now! These include the ending of 16+ Special Educational Needs school transport. Although, in that case, the campaign managed to force the council to re-run its flawed consultation and at least delay the cut, giving more time to build the campaign try to reverse it.

The council has told playgrounds

that they must find funding elsewhere, but in precipitously stopping the funding they are making even that difficult. So is the fact that they hadn't clarified their intentions on whether they would extend the leases on the land and premises.

We understand that verbal assurances were given at the council meeting on extending the leases, but final decisions would be made by the city mayor's 'executive'.

Leicester Socialist Party believes that these devastating cuts are not necessary, that the council could continue the funding and build a mass campaign, including the playground supporters, to force the Labour government to put the in money needed to support local services.

How can you help us raise £7,837?

Every quarter the Socialist Party sets itself the target to raise £25,000 through our public campaigning. The money is vital to fund all our work, including things like the posters and leaflets we take out with us when we are campaigning. With the deadline for this quarter fast approaching at the end of September, we have £7,837 to raise.

What can your Socialist Party branch do to meet its target, and to help your region meet its target too? Lots of branches will be organising a big campaigning day on Saturday 21 September, speaking

to as many people as possible about how to build the socialist opposition to Starmer's cuts. Use it as an opportunity to ask those who support our campaigning to donate to the fighting fund. Let's make sure we meet the target and strengthen the socialist fightback!

Fund the fightback
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SOCIALIST PARTY FIGHTING FUND

AREA	£ RECEIVED	£ TARGET	Q3: JULY-SEPTEMBER 2024	DEADLINE: 30 SEPTEMBER 2024
South West	1,879	2,100		89%
North West	874	1,200		73%
Northern	540	800		68%
Southern & SE	1,454	2,400		61%
London	2,993	5,000		60%
Wales	1,091	2,400		45%
East Midlands	671	2,050		33%
Yorkshire	837	2,650		32%
Eastern	356	1,300		27%
West Midlands	728	2,700		27%
Other	5,740	2,400		239%
TOTAL	17,163	25,000		69%



WHAT WE STAND FOR

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

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



Sri Lanka presidential election: Support Siritunga Jayasuriya standing for socialist change

TU SENAN
COMMITTEE FOR A WORKERS' INTERNATIONAL,
INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT

The presidential election in Sri Lanka on 21 September is the first significant election since the 'Aragalaya' – the mass movement that ousted former President Gotabaya Rajapaksa. Since then, the presidency has been held by Ranil Wickremesinghe, a veteran capitalist politician who has been prime minister on several occasions. He has delayed calling this election for as long as possible to give time to rebuild the reputation and support of the entire capitalist establishment, which was shattered by the movement.

The restructuring of debt and further borrowing from the IMF and various countries (China, the United States, and India) have temporarily helped avert the looming economic catastrophe. However, none of the factors that led to the country's bankruptcy have been adequately addressed or resolved.

Following the default on repayments in May 2022, domestic debt has continued to rise. There is no real solution in sight. The 'restructuring' talks effectively amount to implementing further austerity. Deprivation is on the rise, with over 30% of the population - more than 7 million people - now plunged into dire poverty.

Nearly half the population has reduced what they eat to provide for their children and save money for energy needs. More than half of the population have no savings due to the soaring cost of living, and 6% of households have ceased sending their children to school. This is particularly alarming in a country where children's education used to be highly valued and considered a priority.

Even welfare programmes intended to support the poorest have failed to reach those in need. While vast sections of the population plunge further into desperate conditions, lenders continue their collaboration

with the capitalists, prioritising the protection of their investments and profits over the wellbeing of the majority.

Fearing a potential resurgence of mass movements, the government has intensified its repression against protests and strikes, which persist across the country. Most demonstrations led by students or activists are met with police hostility and, at times, violent dispersal.

Political fragmentation

The discredited mainstream parties have lost significant support, and their weakness has led to a record 39 presidential candidates!

Sajith Premadasa, the candidate from the main opposition party, the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB - 'United People's Power'), positions himself as a reliable representative of the capitalist class, while also claiming to support the Aragalaya movement. The once-governing Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) finds itself torn between supporting Premadasa, Namal Rajapaksa (son of former president Mahinda), or Ranil. Amid these divisions, Premadasa is also negotiating with Tamil parties to secure their support. Given the considerable unpopularity of both Ranil and the Rajapaksa family, the SJB candidate is seen as a likely contender for victory.

The Tamil vote could significantly influence the election outcome this time. [Tamils are an oppressed nationality in Sri Lanka and a brutal 25-year-long civil war took place along national lines, ending in 2009 with mass reprisals and persecution of Tamils.] Through the election campaign, right-wing Tamil political representatives have fragmented, with sentiments for boycotting the election or fielding a Tamil candidate have developed. Some factions have come together for the first time to put forward a common Tamil candidate. An unspoken battle for Tamil votes is now unfolding in the south, yet none of the right-wing parties have stepped forward to address key demands of the Tamil community, let

alone offer a viable solution to the national question.

NPP faux-'Marxists'

The National Peoples' Power (NPP), a coalition led by the JVP (People's Liberation Front), has emerged as an alternative, despite not playing a leading role in the mass struggle. Its candidate, Anura Kumara Disanayake, was ahead in opinion polls prior to June.

However, a shift away from the NPP began as the SJB intensified its campaign as a "reliable force", committed to continuing capitalist policies while also announcing populist measures in its manifesto.

2022 mass movement protesting in front of the Presidential Secretariat in Colombo on 13 April
PHOTO: ANTANO/CC



This includes acceptance of the longstanding 1,000 Sri Lanka Rupees wage demand of hill country workers, fully implementing the 13th amendment to the constitution to appeal to Tamils, and restricting the executive powers of the president.

Although the NPP brands itself as 'Marxist', its policies hardly differ in substance and effect from those of the right-wing SJB. The NPP has capitalised on past struggles and anger. The anti-corruption sentiment, in particular, has increased its support, as it presents itself as 'clean'. However, its programme offers little beyond 'clean capitalism', lacking concrete solutions for improving the



Siritunga Jayasuriya

PHOTO: CWI SRI LANKA

economy. It is now prepared to protect the interests of Indian billionnaires and the IMF in Sri Lanka.

The NPP fails to address nationalisation or the protection of nationalised health and education. There is no mention of reversing recent legislation that undermines workers' and democratic rights. The NPP is woolly on the national question.

A victory for its candidate might even further erode democratic rights. The NPP attracts the Sinhala nationalist base of the Rajapaksa family due to discontent with corruption and economic conditions. Distrust in capitalist institutions and politicians is widespread, and there is suspicion towards the lenders. Some youth and militant workers are drawn to socialist alternatives, which are not unpopular. A victory for the NPP would be unlikely to bolster socialist consciousness, as capitalists will probably exploit its shortcomings to propagate anti-left sentiment.

Marxists must concentrate on rejecting all alternatives protecting capitalism and focus on strengthening the independent power of the working class, through a socialist programme. The working class taking a leading role in struggles could transform the current situation.

The Frontline Socialist Party (FSP), formed by a split from the JVP, has created a small coalition called the People's Struggle Alliance which is standing in the elections. Its critique of the JVP as a Sinhala nationalist force and its efforts to advocate for socialist ideas are positive developments. Although its manifesto includes details of what it envisions as socialist policies, such as establishing a constituent assembly, enacting the right to recall representatives, and reversing draconian laws, it falls short on two major issues: economic policy and the national question.

Don't pay the debt

While it agrees that IMF-led policies should be resisted, the manifesto stops short of advocating for the complete non-payment or abolition of all debts. Instead, it proposes negotiating with lenders and delaying debt repayment until the economy improves, with part of the income eventually allocated to debt repayment, which is similar to that of other capitalists and the NPP, differing only slightly in nuance and intention.

Marxists understand that radical policies advancing workers' interests will face resistance from international capitalism and its local allies. Therefore, a clear strategy on implementing these policies is crucial. Marxists advocate an alternative strategy, including debt non-payment or full cancellation, capital controls to prevent capital outflow, worker-controlled mechanisms for price control and essential goods distribution, and the nationalisation of key economic sectors. Education, health, energy, transport, and other sectors should be managed by worker-controlled bodies, with increased subsidies for industry and agriculture development. This vision can only be realised by a workers' government and through solidarity among international working-class movements.

Tamil self-determination

The People's Struggle Alliance also presents a muddled position on the national question. Since the FSP split from the JVP, it has not clearly

articulated its stance on this issue. It equates Tamil and Sinhala nationalism as mirror images, without acknowledging the specific context of Tamil demands in relation to state repression.

National aspirations span all classes due to shared repression. Even if pro-capitalist or petty bourgeois sections lead the movement, Marxists must understand its roots and promote workers' unity against all forms of oppression, including national oppression. Recognising demands such as Tamils' right to self-determination is crucial. Marxists should support building an independent working-class movement among oppressed nationalities and unite to dismantle oppressive capitalist systems. Supporting the demands of oppressed nations to self-determination will both weaken the capitalists they are fighting against and bring the working and poor masses of all nationalities closer together. Instead, the People's Struggle Alliance proposes a vague 'autonomy' (wrongly read as self-government in Tamil) which fails to adequately address national oppression.

United Socialist Party

The United Socialist Party (USP), affiliated to the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), takes a class-based position to the problems facing working people of all nationalities. This may explain why the People's Struggle Alliance has not invited the USP to join its coalition. The USP maintains a friendly relationship with the FSP, collaborating in various struggles and forums against ongoing repression. The USP has consistently advocated greater collaboration among leftist groups and the establishment of a principled alliance based on a Marxist programme and strategy. The USP has put forward the slogan of debt non-payment from the outset and continues to



Mass protests against Macron in France



Tens of thousands of young people and workers demonstrated against Macron and his government in France and their austerity agenda. Gauche Révolutionnaire (CWI France) mobilised in support of the protests on 7 September. Read more at socialistworld.net

GRENFELL PUT THE CAPITALIST SYSTEM IN THE DOCK! FIGHT FOR SOCIALIST CHANGE

LINDA TAAFFE

WALTHAM FOREST SOCIALIST PARTY

In the words of the chair of the Grenfell inquiry into the west London tower block fire that killed 72 in 2017, tenants were 'failed' by governments of both kinds, by building companies of all kinds and by other authorities connected with the refurbishment of the tower block, including the local council.

Those tenants are our brothers and sisters. They are workers doing all kinds of jobs, and from different backgrounds, but all struggling to make ends meet, aspiring to make a better life, and many having tried bravely to get their voices heard in the run-up to that terrible fire.

The chair added that those to emerge from this tragedy with the greatest credit were indeed members of the local community, to their great honour. Those with reputations in tatters make up a list of private companies, like cladding manufacturer Arconic, which arrogantly refused to even attend the inquiry.

'Justice now!'

"Now is the time for justice", demands Grenfell United – a group made up of families of victims and survivors. Not in three, five, or even ten years, as is being trailed by a former chief prosecutor. After the recent riots and far-right attacks, Keir Starmer made sure those involved were arrested and charged swiftly. Courts were cleared to get convicts in jail double quick.

Will this be the attitude adopted for the Grenfell companies? Three of the big companies – Arconic, Kingspan and Celotex – have already denied any wrongdoing. Property companies exert tremendous pressure on governments and landlordism is widespread. When Boris Johnson's Tory government promised it would get rid of Section 21 'no-fault' eviction notices, it was inundated with landlord lobbies, threatening that if this became law, they would clog the courts even more with injunctions and lawsuits. Unsurprisingly, the proposed legislation was kicked into the long grass.

There needs to be a massive, loud and determined campaign organised to ramp up the pressure for justice for Grenfell. The heroic campaigning by survivors must be backed up by trade unions, with their membership of millions, and all campaigning workers and organisations.

There have been too many scandals. The private profit-driven system is rotten to the core. The alternative is to build for need not profit, and to invest in public services. We need to bring into existence a real independent mass socialist workers' party, to shine as a beacon for all oppressed workers and to carry out real socialist change.

The evidence for Grenfell prosecutions is all there in the 1,700-page report. Already 58 people and 19 companies and organisations have been interviewed by police. Corporate manslaughter has been raised. Michael Mansfield KC, who represented residents, has explained that the police investigation should have come first!

The setting up of the inquiry by Theresa May was a known tactic of delaying justice and softening guilt, allowing the perpetrators to fade away out of sight. In other words, letting the guilty bosses off the hook.

Whilst individuals responsible must be punished, the whole emphasis has been on complete systemic failure. The capitalist system should be put in the dock, questioned about it's right to continue and to pose socialist change.

Since the 1990s especially, the rich and their representatives in parliament have been shrinking the state through all kinds of austerity measures; and boosting greed and individual private profit.

Tony Blair's Labour chose the Private Finance Initiative for buildings for hospitals and schools as the only show in town. The Conservative-Lib Dem coalition encouraged a 'bonfire of red tape' to allow juggernaut companies to exploit the market for greed. Local authority services like building control were hollowed out through decades of underfunding and redundancies.

Grenfell was a perfect storm – refurbished 'cheap and cheerful' so as not to be out of place with its posh Kensington neighbours – where 72 tragically had their lives taken.

It's time for justice, but above all it's time for socialist change. It's time for working-class people ourselves to join in building an organisation to fight for it. It's time for working-class people to take the lead in making plans for need not profit, in housing and in all services.

Grenfell United referred to the companies involved as "no better than crooks and killers". Let's clear them all out and set about building a socialist world.



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BUILD THE SOCIALIST OPPOSITION TO STARMER AND CAPITALISM

What future does capitalism offer young people? The chasm of wealth inequality grows by the day, as the wealth of the billionaires soars, while wars and climate change inflict misery and threaten the futures of billions of working-class and young people across the globe. We're worried about how to make ends meet, and the state of our public services. Travel fares are sky high, while public transport routes have been cut, meaning many of us have to walk for hours to get home from work and college. Our NHS has been cut to the bone, making it harder than ever to simply get an appointment. The housing crisis makes it impossible for us to live fully independent lives. No wonder 1 in 4 students now face mental health issues. Our schools, colleges and universities have gone massively underfunded for years. Students used to get grants, not high-interest loans. Now we have our services and courses cut, while greedy bosses make hundreds of thousands of pounds off our education. Why is this happening? It's because the system we live under – capitalism – is organised around creating profit for a tiny handful at the top of society over improving the lives of ordinary people. It's time to get organised and fight back. Read on to find out more.

How can students and workers fight Labour cuts? >>> p2

What is Socialist Students? >>> p2

Opposing the far right: fighting back against racism >>> p3

If Starmer attacks students, we will fight back

TOM PORTER-BROWN

BIRMINGHAM CITY SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Universities suffered cuts, debt, and staff redundancies for the last 14 years under Tory austerity. Will Keir Starmer's new Labour government change this dire situation?

Universities face a funding crisis. Will Labour let universities go bankrupt, or will it intervene?

Funding must be enough to sustain universities long-term, and avoid cuts to courses, firing staff, and selling off assets. The alternative being pushed by some Labour politicians and vice-chancellors is a blatant attack – increasing tuition fees.

Working-class students are already under such financial strain though, extortionate prices for accommodation, increasing costs of basic necessities such as food, massive debts after graduating. Students shouldn't have to pay another penny.

The capitalist parties leave working-class and young people without a political voice. But what can students do about it?

In order to oppose the attacks on our education, students need to be organised, and prepared to speak out – and act against both university management and capitalist politicians. And we've seen it's possible, just this last year.

Northampton Socialist Students won rent refunds by organising demonstrations and putting pressure on university management. Surrey Socialist Students helped win tuition fee refunds for Nigerian students facing deportation.

This proves that students and the working class can win. Fights like this are still ongoing, up down the country.

Thousands of students took part in encampments to protest against

their universities' complicity in the seemingly endless slaughter in Gaza. And there is more to be done.

Starmer and the uni bosses must get the message – 'if you attack us, we will fight back'. By organising on campus as well as mobilising for national demos, if and when that is needed.

Socialist Students meetings are a good chance to discuss socialist ideas with fellow students, learn lessons from revolutions and other mass movements, and plan for action now.

Students and workers need to link their struggles, and support each other. If university staff take strike action and form picket lines, students should join them, and discuss how we can fight back together.

And it's not limited to universities. We don't live in isolation.

Students depend on healthcare, public transport, delivery services. If any trade union declares strike action, students should attend these picket lines to build connections with working-class struggle.

Many working-class students have part-time jobs. We can discuss these ideas with co-workers, and build the movement from the ground up.

Socialist Students is here to show that victories can be won for students and workers, and that socialism is worth fighting for.



Will Labour let universities go bankrupt, or will it intervene?

Socialist Students



Black Lives Matter movement



MIHAELA IVANOVA

QUEEN MARY SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Violent riots and protests, instigated by far-right groups, broke out across the country in the summer.

But, a few days later, on 7 August, tens of thousands of people took part in anti-racist counter-protests in response. In North Finchley, we chanted: "Whose streets? Our streets!"

'Hate marches'

Under the pressure of public opinion, the capitalist newspapers and police tried to heap praise on our anti-racist protests. Yet, for almost a year, they have continuously labelled our peaceful mass protests against the war on Gaza as 'hate marches'.

The main lesson from the riots is not that we should rely on the police, but on our potential power with united mass action. Bolstering the repressive state apparatus will not negate the daily experience of Black, Asian, and other ethnic minority workers and youth of racist policing.

The fight against racism needs to be stepped up. Imagine if the 7 August protests had been followed up by a massive trade union-led, anti-racism demonstration around the slogan – 'jobs and homes for all, not racism'. It could have mobilised hundreds of

thousands of young people and students, angry about racism and discrimination, and wanting to fight for a decent future.

While this wave of riots and attacks has passed, it is a warning sign of what could happen. The far right has fed off the anger from poverty and the crisis in housing and services, after 14 years of Tory austerity.

The Tories used a war on 'small boats' and the inhumane 'Rwanda scheme' to try to polarise the working class against the real enemy – the capitalist bosses. Keir Starmer's continuation of austerity and anti-immigration propaganda will only deepen discontent with capitalist politics.



Workers of all backgrounds have more in common than with their capitalist bosses

But the far right is still weak. They were predominantly outnumbered by anti-racist counter-protesters.

The fightback against the far right is not out of sight. Working-class and

Fighting back against racism and far right

Jobs, homes, and services for all

What is Socialist Students?

We think capitalism is a system that offers no future to the vast majority of people. But if you're a young person attending school, college, or university this year, chances are we don't need to convince you of that.

All young people have known growing up in a capitalist system in crisis. It has brought climate disaster, unending war, public services and infrastructure that doesn't work, soaring cost of living, and more.

Young people have no time to lose in fighting for an alternative to

capitalism – for a socialist system that puts the needs of people and the planet before the profits of a tiny few.

That's what Socialist Students is for. We want to help students get organised in the fight for socialism.

Socialist Students groups hold regular meetings, where students can debate and discuss what ideas are needed to change the world. Our members take those ideas out onto campus, by raising socialist solutions to all the issues facing students, as part of campaigns and protests.

SOCIALIST STUDENTS FIGHTS FOR:

- Free education – Scrap tuition fees and end student debt. Replace loans with living grants that rise with inflation
- End low pay – Pay rises for all that rise with inflation, scrap zero-hour contracts. A £15-an-hour minimum wage, with no exemptions for age. Support striking workers
- End the housing crisis – Mass building of high-quality affordable council housing. With rent control
- Councils should restore public services – Needs-based no-cuts people's budgets. Restore youth services, open libraries, reverse cuts, and reemploy sacked workers

- Renationalise energy companies and other private utilities – Socialist plan for climate change, including expanded renationalised cheap or free public transport
- End to all wars and occupations – The right to self-determination, on a socialist basis. For international workers' unity
- Take the wealth off the super-rich – Nationalise the banks and top 150 companies, under democratic workers' control and management
- Tories have been smashed – Now build the socialist opposition. Build a new mass workers' party on a socialist programme

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STUDENTS BUILD A MOVEMENT TO STOP THE SLAUGHTER IN GAZA



SAADA MOHAMMED
LEICESTER SOCIALIST STUDENTS

We have witnessed eleven months of brutal slaughter of Palestinians in Gaza, and increasingly in the West Bank too. It has exposed to the world how capitalist politicians do not value human life, despite what they say about wanting an end to the conflict.

Many people here in the UK have felt anger at the situation in Gaza and taken to the streets to protest. Many students have also taken things into their own hands, protesting against their university bosses, calling for divestment from arms companies and companies that invest in Israel. School and college students have organised walkouts and protests in solidarity with the Palestinians.

Towards the end of last term, student encampments were staged up and down the country, exposing universities' links to arms companies and banks. Socialist Students members were involved with many of these. We take part in the movement raising the need for a mass struggle of workers and young people here and abroad - putting pressure on governments and politicians, and pointing to the fact that it is the working class that has the real power in society. We also explain the important role of the trade unions in Britain, together organising nearly

7 million workers, and the need bring an end to the capitalist system which breeds conflict and war.

Last term, Socialist Students worked towards linking up protests at different universities. In Leicester, where I was a student, we organised a march from De Montfort University to the University of Leicester, expressing our discontent about the way our universities are being run.

We call for an end to the marketisation of higher education and an end of the tuition-fee funding model. Universities are becoming ever more reliant on money from big business, including from arms companies such as BAE Systems and Lockheed Martin, due to cuts in funding from government. University education should be free for all, and fully funded by making the super-rich pay.

The huge determined protests against the slaughter in Gaza have defied attempts by politicians and police to intimidate them. That defiance led to the hated Suella Braverman being sacked as home secretary.

Pro-Palestinian campaigners standing in the general election had a huge effect in a whole number of constituencies. Jeremy Corbyn was reelected, in addition to another four anti-war independent MPs. Student protests this term can have a big effect too.

If you want to be part of the fightback, get involved!

What you can do

- Organise a protest or walkout at your uni, school or college
- Lobby your local politician or university management
- Get your students' union to arrange transport to the next Gaza demo
- Join Socialist Students, help bring an end to capitalism, war and oppression

Uni arms funding: Open the books!

How much money does your university get from arms companies profiting from the slaughter of tens of thousands of Palestinians, or other people killed in wars and conflicts around the world?

We say to the uni bosses: open the books! Let us see the details of all your grubby deals, who is giving you dirty money and where our tuition fees money is going.

Give students and university workers a democratic say over how our universities are run. Fight for a fully funded education system!

