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the Socialist

Issue 1299

21-27 November 2024

formerly **Militant**

We all need a pay rise!

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NOW

NO AGE EXEMPTIONS

Unions must lead the fight

ADAM HARMSWORTH

VICE CHAIR NAPO, PROBATION AND FAMILY COURTS WORKERS' UNION (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

How cold is too cold before putting the heating on? What level of overdraft is manageable? Could I save a bit of money by holding out until this evening before having a bite to eat? The bills just keep rising: food, fuel, transport, and other essentials. But our pay doesn't.

Those aren't questions the profit-seeking bosses ever have to ask themselves! Last year, the average pay of FTSE 100 CEOs was over £4 million each. Unite the Union has reported company profit margins have soared 30% compared with pre-pandemic. And it's the willingness of trade unionists to fight back that has led to some workers being shielded from the worst effects of runaway inflation, by winning improved pay deals.

But we shouldn't have to fight over and over to ensure we have enough to live on. The trade union movement fought and won the establishment of the minimum wage. But now we have to fight to make it enough to live on.

The minimum wage from April next year will be just £12.21 an hour for over 21s, £10 for 18 to 20-year-olds, and a paltry £7.55 for under-18s. In 2021, the Trades Union Congress adopted the policy for a £15-an-hour minimum wage to be implemented, as quickly as possible. So if this Labour government is supposed to be delivering a 'new deal for workers', why isn't it making it £15 an hour now?!

In October, the young members' network in my trade union Napo moved a motion at the union's AGM demanding an immediate £15-an-hour minimum wage, for all ages and rising with inflation. It passed almost unanimously. The unions have to fight to demand Labour makes the increase now.

The trade unions are crucial to fighting for and winning a decent living standard for workers. They have to counter the pressure of the capitalist bosses, who want Labour to keep wages low and help them maintain their gargantuan profits.

Trade unions must build serious pressure on the Labour government for action now, for £15 an hour, to scrap Tory anti-union laws, including the undemocratic 50% strike vote threshold, an end to council cuts, and other measures to reduce the enormous costs on workers.

We need our energy bills cut, our transport costs cut, rents capped, and our public services fully public and fully funded. And we need a party to fight for it. That's why the Socialist Party calls for a new mass working-class party, fighting for socialist change.

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

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

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

'Put that in bigger letters next time!' A socialist alternative to Labour in Sheffield, Woodside by-election

ALISTAIR TICE
SHEFFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

"You should put that in bigger letters next time!" says a Woodhouse resident to us. He's referring to our leaflet where it says: "Labour isn't Labour anymore." That's the most common remark we've heard whilst campaigning for our socialist candidate in the by-election for the Woodhouse ward of Sheffield Council.

There is enormous anger, sometimes visceral hatred, towards the new Labour government, especially about its cutting of Winter Fuel Payments to most pensioners, whilst at the same time ministers are taking 'freebies' and won't touch the super-rich.

Woodhouse is an ex-mining village in the south east of Sheffield. Orgreave, where 40 years ago the police attacked striking miners picketing the coke works, is on the edge of the ward. It's always been Labour. But opposition to them is going all over the place. The Lib-Dems, who got less than 200 votes here in the



TRADE UNIONIST AND SOCIALIST COALITION



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

May elections, are giving it their usual by-election 'two-horse race' campaign, even though they're in an unofficial coalition with Labour and the Greens on the council. A lot of people are turning to Reform UK, who didn't stand any candidates in Sheffield in this year's local or general elections.

Reform are an added reason why the Socialist Party decided it was important to stand in this by-election, as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC). Our leaflet says: "Reform UK - more Tory than the Tories. Don't be fooled by Farage the fake. Farage is no friend of working-class people. He is a multi-millionaire and former stockbroker. He wants a US-style private health insurance system. Reform MPs voted to let bad bosses continue to fire and rehire and exploit zero-hour contracts, and opposed workers having any more rights. Farage is no 'man of the people'. He's more Tory than the Tories!" Immigrants are not to blame, it's the super-rich and their rotten capitalist system.

In our campaign for local TUSC candidate Josh Crapper, who's dad was at the Battle of Orgreave, we've delivered nearly 10,000 leaflets, had hundreds of signatures on our petition to the city council to restore Winter Fuel Payments, and lots of conversations about why we need a new mass workers' party.

From many campaign stalls, we have sold nearly 60 copies of the Socialist, and raised over £160 in donations to the fighting fund. And we're the only party to be holding a public meeting before polling day on 28 November.

Spanish state floods Over 100,000 protest conservative government in Valencia



Emily Lyndon is a Socialist Party member, currently living in Spain. She's been discussing with local people about the government's flood response.

The tragic floods that swept Valencia and neighbouring areas killed over 200 people, with many more still missing.

Spain's weather agency issued warnings of the storm. However, the regional government, which is

responsible for disaster response, did not act quickly enough to prevent tragedy from occurring. Valencian authorities only issued mobile alerts after the flooding had already started, meaning people were unprepared for the disaster.

The Valencian government president, Carlos Mazón, is a member of the right-wing conservative People's Party. He was out for lunch with a journalist when the floods began, and arrived at the emergency meeting as they were already sweeping the city.

The weeks following the storm have seen community relief efforts and demonstrations. On 9 November, over 100,000 gathered outside Valencia City Hall - Plaza del Ayuntamiento - in protest to the handling of the events by authorities.

Handprints in mud and red paint were smeared on the building with 'Mazón Asesino', translating to 'Killer Mazón'. Protesters chanted: "We are stained with mud, you are stained with blood".

Authorities cleared the building of most of the evidence of the protest in

a matter of hours, while parts of the city and surrounding areas are still suffering the consequences of the storm weeks later!

Throughout the week, protesters, made up of mostly students, continued to gather outside the building, raising their demands for accountability and acknowledgment of lives lost, holding vigils displaying items covered in mud, and the names of the dead and missing.

Community organisers in Valencia have been responsible for providing support to those in need, and for cleaning the affected areas. Workers from across Spain have been travelling to the affected areas to provide much-needed relief.

Capitalist politicians could not save people's lives, they cannot be trusted with rebuilding. Instead, democratic workers' organisation is necessary. The anger that has erupted in the aftermath of the floods, as well as the self-organisation of the thousands of volunteers, clearly shows the potential for this.

Committee for a Workers' International
FIGHTING FOR A SOCIALIST WORLD
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NIGERIA SOLIDARITY UK
New website for Nigeria Solidarity
Latest model resolutions and campaign material available at nigeriasolidarity.com
#endbadgovernance
#dropthecharges

Streeting's name-and-shame league tables will not help the NHS



PHOTO: NUMBER 10/CC

PUBLIC HEALTH WORKER

Health Secretary Wes Streeting has admitted that Labour can't sell its latest budget as a budget to save the NHS - it's not enough to make a transformative difference. Instead of offering sufficient funding to solve the crisis, Streeting plans to increase the pressure on staff by introducing name-and-shame league tables. NHS Trusts will be ranked based on a range of indicators, and poor performance will result in NHS managers being sacked.

Pitting NHS Trusts against each other like this will act to divide Trusts and discourage collaboration. Furthermore, health leaders have warned that this could demoralise staff. The NHS currently has 111,000 unfilled posts and 29% of NHS staff state they often think about leaving. Additionally, the number of people who accepted an offer to study nursing at university has fallen by 21% in the UK since 2021. The Royal College of Nursing has warned that increases in tuition fees could further reduce this number. NHS staff are being squeezed from every side!

After 14 years of austerity, NHS workers will have rejoiced when the Tories were finally kicked out of government. However, any excitement they had for Keir Starmer's Labour Party will have been short-lived. The proposed 3.4% funding increase is indeed more than the 2.8% we've seen under the last two Tory governments. However, this only returns yearly spending increases to below the 'historical norm', and doesn't cover the cost of the expanding workforce.

The proposed budget does nothing to undo the damage done by years of Tory underfunding. The NHS maintenance backlog currently stands at £13.8 billion. In August, 7.6 million people were waiting for planned treatment, and 280,000 have been waiting over a year for an operation, scan or appointment. As our population gets older and sicker, maintaining the status quo is not enough. Radical change is needed to significantly improve our NHS.

Instead of trying to 'shake the magic productivity tree', the NHS needs massive investment to recruit and retain staff, expand services, and reduce waiting times. This funding, however, must find its way into the pockets of private companies looking to squeeze profit out of the sick. All privatisation of the NHS must be reversed, and other critical services such as dentistry and social care should be nationalised and brought under democratic working class control. Only a socialist health-care system run by patients and workers can provide the service we desperately need.

Join the fightback
JOIN THE SOCIALISTS
● Visit socialistparty.org.uk/join
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● or text your name and postcode to **07761 818 206**
to find out more today!

Save our Post Offices

GARY CLARK
RETIRED POSTAL WORKER

On the evening of 12 November, Post Office workers in the Crown offices heard about deliberately leaked articles from Post Office interim chair Nigel Railton. They revealed the first stage of his strategic review, and the intention to franchise out or close the remaining 115 Crown offices in the Post Office network. That would mean 1,000 redundancies of Communication Workers Union (CWU) members.

This was leaked prior to the CWU being provided with a copy of the review document and its recommendations to government. Also, the Post Office board endorsed it prior to any consultation with the union, which goes to show the complete disregard the board has for its staff and the union, which represents the vast majority of them.

The Post Office and Royal Mail are completely separate organisations, and have been since 2012. Unlike Royal Mail, the Post Office is still owned by the government, a nationalised service, as it has been for over 360 years since its establishment in 1660.

This move follows the Horizon scandal, which saw the Post Office spend over £250 million on 15 law firms and two barristers to hound innocent sub-postmasters. Millions of pounds have eventually been paid out to claimants, with millions more to come.

After then-CEO Paula Vennells was sacked, we were told we would see a new way of running the Post Office. An organisation that people could have confidence in and be proud and happy to work for.

It's now very clear how Railton sees the future: get rid of the directly managed network. It is a massive cost-cutting exercise, to pay for the costs of one of the biggest scandals in history - adding another 1,000 victims of the Horizon scandal. What this shows is something that the Socialist Party has said over many years. Public ownership on its own is not enough. We have seen cut after cut to the Post Office network over many years by both 'Blue' and 'Red Tory' governments. It's workers' and communities' democratic control and management that is needed.

The coming months are going to be vital if the Post Office network is to be saved, instead of ground into the dirt.

This will test the CWU leadership and its relationship with the Starmer-led Labour government. The CWU should demand a reversal of these cuts, and the democratic nationalisation of both the Post Office and Royal Mail. We in the Socialist Party also call for an expansion of the role of Post Offices. Just as we have seen them turned into shops, they could be used as community hubs, where people could drop in for advice and other services, run democratically for the benefit of all and not as a money-making enterprise.



PHOTO: SLUDGEGLUPPER/CC

Sad news about Lynn Walsh

It is with great sadness that we report the news that Lynn Walsh passed away on Friday 15 November. Lynn was a central part of the leadership of the Socialist Party and its predecessor Militant over decades. The Socialist Party sends its condolences to Lynn's family and friends, and will publish a full obituary in the next issue of the Socialist.

12 page notice

Due to staff absence (and injury!), the Socialist is 12 pages this week. You can look forward to a return to 16 pages next week.

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UCU NEC: We need a leadership up to the challenges ahead

UCU MEMBER

The National Executive Committee (NEC) of the University and College Union (UCU) met on 15 November, its first full meeting since Labour came into government.

Before the general election, UCU's general secretary Jo Grady enthused about the possibilities of partnership with a Labour government.

Starmer won the election with low votes, and as we warned in the Socialist, his intention is to rule in the interests of the bosses. Concessions can be won from this government but it will need a serious industrial strategy combined with militant politics to put on the pressure. Unfortunately, this approach has not been taken by the general secretary and the senior people in UCU's leadership.

Further Education

The current leadership's strategy, of asking Labour nicely without preparing for action, has failed our members. While schools were given £1.2 billion to fund a 5.5% pay increase (still not fully funded or enough for school teachers), colleges got nothing.

UCU's Further Education Committee (FEC) narrowly voted to block a consultative ballot on the pay recommendation. This was following the union's strategy of keeping disputes local on a college-by-college basis rather than stepping up for national action - "using local bargaining to secure our national priorities in every workplace", as Jo Grady put it in her report to the NEC. Consequently branches are now negotiating local deals, mostly at or below the employers' Association of Colleges (AoC) recommendation of 2.5%.

A mere £300 million was announced in the Budget for FE, but this is legacy money from the Tories' previous pledge! It is not ringfenced for pay and in fact the leaders of the AoC have warned that this £300 million will not be put towards this year's pay claim, as per-student spending is



UCU strike rally 2022 PAUL MATTSSON

squeezed by rising student numbers. This is not the "stunning victory for our New Deal for FE campaign" that Jo Grady calls it.

Higher Education

Universities, meanwhile, hardly had a mention in the Budget! This is local on a college-by-college basis rather than stepping up for national action - "using local bargaining to secure our national priorities in every workplace", as Jo Grady put it in her report to the NEC. Consequently branches are now negotiating local deals, mostly at or below the employers' Association of Colleges (AoC) recommendation of 2.5%.

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fight for our Higher Education (HE) pay claim.

In response to the employers' final offer of 2.5%, UCU members in HE are undertaking a consultative ballot on whether they are willing to take strike action. Socialist Party members in HE are campaigning for a 'yes' vote (see 'UCU in universities: Vote 'yes' to fight on pay' at socialistparty.org.uk). We have to fight to rebuild members' confidence as, throughout our previous dispute, Grady and the team around her acted to undermine the action, including by undemocratically blocking decisions taken by the union's HE Committee.

Socialist Party members in UCU are calling for a recall of the massively delayed FE and HE special sector conferences, so members can debate strategy. We are also, alongside others, calling for the general secretary to follow through on plans for an autumn demonstration of college staff - which should now

include university staff given the crisis - which was agreed at the previous NEC but not acted on.

Repeal the Tory thresholds now

The general secretary welcomed Labour's Employment Rights Bill, saying: "An end to exploitative zero-hour contracts and unscrupulous fire-and-rehire practices is long overdue, and protections from unfair dismissal!" However, these pledges were watered down in the bill and are now subject to consultation with bosses!

Labour's pledge to repeal the Trade Union Act 2016 and the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act was welcomed by Grady. But there is no reason for these laws - which include the anti-strike 50% turnout thresholds - to remain on the statute books until next year or even later, a persisting obstacle to our members taking legal and effective strike action. These laws could be repealed

in a matter of days via emergency legislation.

This was argued for in a motion submitted by Socialist Party member Duncan Moore, supported by other lefts on the NEC, alongside the demand for a recall of the Trades Union Congress, now that the full extent of Labour's workers' rights reforms are known. Unfortunately the motion was among many not heard, largely due to time-wasting from the chair and adjournments when the meeting became fractious.

Left challenge for NEC

This all demonstrates how important it is that there is a united fighting left challenge in the upcoming NEC elections. Socialist Party member Marco Tessei has secured enough nominations to stand for a national FE seat, and we want to urgently discuss with others who also want a fighting, democratic union to ensure we maximise the left vote.

Unison leadership elections: The issues at stake

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN UNISON

Unison is the largest trade union in the UK, with over a million members delivering public services in the NHS and social care, councils and schools, the energy sector and beyond. Those members work for thousands of different organisations in the public, private and independent sectors.

Since its formation in 1993, as the result of an amalgamation of three existing unions, Unison was seen as one of the main bulwarks of the right wing in the Trades Union Congress (TUC), which has failed to fight austerity and seen hundreds of thousands of jobs disappear through redundancies and privatisation.

In 2021, members elected a left-wing National Executive Council (NEC), with the majority being part of the Time for Real Change (TFRC) grouping. Sadly, since then members have seen little real change and the right wing is mustering its forces to seek to retake control. The right still holds the position of general secretary.

United left challenge

The Socialist Party is campaigning for a united left challenge in next year's NEC and general secretary elections, on a programme that can really turn Unison into the fighting union our members need.

To this end, we have reissued our programme, updated very recently, which demonstrates to members what we stand for and how we believe the union should respond in the face of further attacks.

"For a fighting Unison" (see socialistparty.org.uk for the full programme) covers the major issues faced by the union and its members today, from pay and jobs, through specific problems faced by sectors such as health and social care, councils and education, to crucial concerns surrounding trade



Knowlsey Unison members on strike over pay at LIVV Housing JAMES ROBINSON

union democracy, equality and diversity, and climate change.

It is the plan of action that the Socialist Party fights for - and we appeal to others to fight together for these demands.

For a fighting Unison

Most workers join trade unions to get fairer pay, terms and conditions. If your union is unable or unwilling to get you a decent pay rise and stop employers bullying you into unacceptable conditions in the workplace, membership becomes a 'luxury' many cannot afford. "For a fighting Unison" addresses

all members, not just those still working for councils and the NHS.

Over the past decades, as services have been privatised and outsourced, Unison's right wing has all but forgotten about fighting for those members who went with the services into the independent or private sectors.

Consequently, those members' and their successors' pay has been driven down, often to minimum wage levels. The programme calls for pay claims to be submitted and fought for, for all members - from those in private social care providers, to school meals workers no longer

employed by councils, and others like private nursery schools.

It also demands a £15-an-hour minimum wage without exemptions, a rise in statutory sick pay and the repeal of all anti-union laws designed to prevent workers collectively fighting for better pay.

There is also a demand for Unison branches to have "a genuine right to campaign to change and develop our union policy - let the members decide," which would put pay campaigns in the hands of those fighting for increases instead of unelected full-time officers.

The programme makes a special

mention of democratising the union's youth structures to allow young workers a proper voice, "removing unnecessary restrictions and barriers". This includes branch-based conferences and committees, currently outlawed by the leadership.

Unison members have struggled for years against devastating cuts and privatisation - and both are set to continue under Starmer's government. The Socialist Party has campaigned for the union to lead a national fight against council cuts, and to call on Labour councils to set needs-based budgets and demand the funding from central government. Unison's right wing has hidden behind blaming Tory austerity, and the TFRC grouping has not stood up against that - letting Labour councils off the hook. Now there is a Labour government, what excuses are left?

Stop cuts

Unison must demand Labour councils refuse to implement cuts, and that Starmer's government provides emergency funding as the first step in recovering the billions stolen from councils since the 2008-09 economic crash. The Socialist Party's programme also calls for an end to privatisation, bringing services back in-house.

But while Unison is tied to the Labour Party, its demands will be frustrated by union leaders whose narrow vision is simply that 'Labour is better than the Tories'. We call for Unison's funding of parties and candidates that cut services and jobs to be democratically reviewed, and, where applicable, ceased. Currently, all political decisions in the union are made behind closed doors by the 'Labour Link' section of the union, elected only by Unison members who are members of the Labour Party.

Our programme commits to fighting for a new political voice for the working class - a new mass workers' party, based on the trade unions, 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.

Southampton NHS porters strike: We don't feel valued

HEALTH SUPPORT WORKER AT UHS

Everyone deserves to be treated with respect and dignity at work. Porters at Southampton General Hospital, organised in Unite, have had enough, and have voted overwhelmingly for strike action.

No one takes a decision like this lightly, but this has been brewing for a long time. The strength of feeling was demonstrated by the 76% turnout, 98% in favour of strike action.

The official statement from the hospital says: "Our portering service and colleagues are a valuable and an intrinsic part of the successful running of UHS [University Hospital Southampton NHS Trust, which Southampton General is part of] and all we do for patients."

But porters don't feel valued! There is clearly a gap between what management say at the top and what happens in practice. Porters describe having to tell the boss they're on their period, struggling to find drinking water and somewhere to sit between jobs. Pressure is always on to complete more work in less time. Porters are often put in an impossible position assessing the medical/infection risk of patients they transport, and being blamed for any delays.

Porters are paid not much more than the minimum wage, and many survive on food banks - so extra shifts being allocated unfairly is high up on the list of grievances. There is wide-scale support for our porters amongst staff, who recognise their value and will want to show solidarity.

● Pickets will happen on strike days from 6am - 3pm every Monday and Friday from 28 November

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PHOTO: PAUL MATTSSON

Birmingham school strikes again, as management break promises

CLIVE WALDER
BIRMINGHAM SOUTH SOCIALIST PARRY

Teachers and support staff in the National Education Union (NEU) at Benson Community School in Birmingham are on strike for the third time over management's bullying and excessive workloads. On the previous occasions, management have made an agreement with the union only to break it. This time, the workers struck for seven days from 7 November.

To date, there has been no attempt by the school to settle the dispute, only to tell the striking staff to wait and see what new management will do when they take over at the beginning of next term.

The workers are adamant that they won't back down. Their action has helped give confidence to NEU members at another Birmingham school, George Dixon Primary, to take strike action over academisation.

Join the fightback

Socialist Party members campaign for fighting, democratic trade unions, wherever possible working alongside others, to campaign for the industrial and political strategies workers need

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Ford staff stand up to dictating management

JAMES IVENS
LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Striking staff at Ford Motor Company rallied outside the engine plant in Dagenham, east London, on 13 November. In the middle of five days' rolling action that week, salaried staff at Ford told us they'd had enough of management trying to dictate to the union.

On top of an insulting pay offer rejected this time last year by members of general union Unite, bosses want to bring in performance-related pay. Related to what performance? They'll decide after workers sign up to it!

"It's a black box," one picket told us. "If they showed us what the rules will be, well, then there'd be something to discuss."

Bosses previously forced a two-tier arrangement on salaried staff, with post-2012 starters on inferior pay and pensions. Now their attack on who decides conditions means collective bargaining itself is on the line.

Meanwhile, the pay offer is a one-off payment in place of a consolidated pay rise - an effort to skimp on final pensions. Ford has allowed the dispute to drag on for so long that Unite is about to enter talks over next year's offer!

Industrial action in the run-up to that meeting sends a message to management that this isn't over. One rep told us the strikes this year are the first for salaried staff at Ford since 2012, and before that the 1980s.

A united fight is needed, of salaried staff with the hourly-paid production and skilled workers, against the plans of senior management.

The backdrop to this and other car worker disputes is big changes in the industry, driven by automation and electric vehicles. The production process, end products, infrastructure and legislative framework are all uncertain.

Defending union bargaining rights and organisation will be crucial to defending the future of the workforce. A mass political voice for organised workers to assert their interests would further strengthen that - especially linked to socialist planning for guaranteed, decent jobs and workers' control of industrial transitions.



PHOTO: JAMES IVENS



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.

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.

For all schools to be under the genuine democratic control of local education authorities, school staff, parents and student organisations.

- For a major, publicly funded, insulation and energy transition plan for existing housing stock.

- Agribusiness to be taken into democratic public ownership. For a food processing and retail industry under workers' control to ensure that standards are set by consumers, small farmers, and

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

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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 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.

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TRUMP RETURN SPELLS INSTABILITY AND STRUGGLE



WHAT WE THINK

Donald Trump has been elected again, this time as the candidate with the most votes. Millions of people in the US and worldwide are looking on in trepidation as he announces a series of ultra-right wing, ultra-loyal appointees to key government positions.

Before he was elected, Trump 'joked' about being "a dictator for one day", and many fear that his Presidency will be extremely authoritarian and repressive. And not without reason.

Trump's reactionary, authoritarian intentions are clear. And with his increased dominance of the Republican Party, plus control of the Senate and the House of Representatives, and a Supreme Court that he shifted in his direction under his last Presidency, he has fewer official constraints than he faced when he was first elected in 2016.

The need for mass opposition to his programme – including against his threats to carry out mass deportations of migrants – is clear. However, it would be a serious mistake to conclude that Trump will be able to fully implement his programme.

On the contrary, his Presidency will be beset by crises domestically and internationally. Initial protests around the time of his inauguration are not certain to be on the same scale as in 2016. But the opposition he will face in office will prove far greater. Above all, he is going to face huge opposition from the US working class, including not a few workers who voted for him in this election.

Numerous commentators in the liberal capitalist press have been expressing despair that Trump's victory means he will now prove all-powerful. Yet look at Javier Milei, the ultra-right wing Argentinian President elected a year ago. Known as 'el loco' – the madman – his government has faced general strikes and constant mass opposition. Events on this scale are ahead for Trump too.

Here in Britain, we have some experience of a 'gobshite' right-populist leader, prepared to undermine capitalist institutions, who won an election, was hailed as all-powerful, but then crashed and burned.

Back in 2019, Tory leader Boris Johnson won a landslide general election victory, with the highest share of the vote for any party since 1979. He delivered an 80-seat majority for the Tory party. But we all know how that story ended.

Johnson's promise to 'get Brexit done' was able to convince a layer of workers in Britain to lend the Tories their vote in 2019. But very few of them voted Tory in this year's general election, when the party plunged to its worst result in two centuries. That reflected hatred of the Tories, rather than the slightest enthusiasm for Keir

Starmer's Labour. In fact in 2019, with Jeremy Corbyn as leader, more people voted Labour than they did in this year's general election.

Kicking the incumbents

Britain and the US are both parts of a global trend. In economically developed countries that have had general elections in 2024, the incumbents have held on in only one in seven of the contests.

Capitalism is an increasingly ailing system, and capitalist governments have overseen falling living standards, for which they are punished at the ballot box. This was the most important factor in this election. The vote count is not yet complete but, at the time of writing, the Democrat's vote has fallen by around 7.2 million from 2020, whereas Trump's vote has increased by only around 2.4 million.

It was the most expensive election in history, with Trump and Democrat candidate Kamala Harris spending over \$14 billion between them. But, most working-class Americans felt deeply alienated from both of these candidates of Wall Street. The Election Lab at the University of Florida has calculated that turnout was down from 2020, with only 58% of voting-age adults participating.

Nonetheless, there were many voters who – frightened by the prospect of further attacks on reproductive rights and by Trump's racist anti-migrant propaganda – held their noses and voted for Harris to stop Trump.

On the other side, Trump further whipped up reactionary ideas in his election campaign, as he will continue to do in office. His victory does not, however, indicate that his right-wing divisive rhetoric has support among the majority. On the contrary, on the same day as the Presidential election, in eight states – five of them Republican – a majority voted to enshrine abortion rights in state law.

The primary motivation for most voters in this election was the economy. Right now the US stock markets are booming, but real hourly pay has fallen for 25 consecutive months.

While some undoubtedly refused to vote for Harris in protest at the slaughter in Gaza, for most it was their fall in living standards that drove them to punish the Democrats by staying at home or in some cases even voting for Trump. Had there been a 'third candidate' standing on a genuinely working-class programme, it would have transformed the situation.

To give one example, in New York District 14, Trump's vote increased from 22% in 2020 to 33% now. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC), the congresswoman for the District who was reelected on 5 November and a member of 'the squad' on the left of the Democrats, asked those voters who had backed her and Trump why they had done so. Typical answers included: "It's really simple... Trump and you care for the working class", and "Voted Trump, but I like you and Bernie [Sanders]. I don't trust either party establishment politicians".

In reality, of course, only 'establishment politicians' were available in this election, and AOC and Sanders campaigned for Harris. Yet, while



PHOTO: TRUMP WHITE HOUSE ARCHIVES/CC

Harris lost the Presidential election, she actually won the 'billionaires' race', with 83 backing her compared to a mere 52 for Trump. That reflects the divisions in the US capitalist class, with different sections – depending largely on their material interests – backing each candidate.

Nonetheless, the majority of the US ruling class wanted Harris to win, as the most reliable representative of their interests. They are alarmed by Trump's reckless willingness to undermine the existing institutions of US capitalism – both domestically and globally. The endless succession of 'establishment figures' backing Harris was one factor which allowed Trump to pose, ludicrously, as a candidate who defends the 'little people' against the elites.

Yet when he was last in power, Trump cut taxes for the rich so drastically that the 400-richest families were paying less in tax than their servants! His intentions are no different this time. At the same time, far from improving the US economy, Trump's policies are set to deepen the next US, and global, recession.

True, temporarily his election has sent the US tech companies' shares soaring even higher, as the markets salivate at the prospect of even fatter profits as regulations are axed. But at a certain stage, the tech bubble on

the US stock markets will burst. One of numerous possible triggers for the inevitable next recession.

Back in 2007-08, when the bursting of the US sub-prime mortgage bubble triggered the Great Recession and all its consequences, its severity was partly limited by the preparedness of US imperialism to act as the world's banker, effectively underwriting China's 2008 stimulus packages.

In today's multipolar world, with the US increasingly putting up barriers to try and block China's further development, there was already no prospect of cooperation on that scale again.

With Trump in the White House that is doubly true. Joe Biden kept the tariffs against China that Trump introduced in his first term, and added further state subsidies to US-based manufacturing. Trump will further ratchet up protectionism, attempting to defend the interests of US capitalism at the expense of the rest of the world.

This will solve none of the problems of US capitalism, with higher tariffs only increasing the costs of goods for American workers. Meanwhile, Britain, a declining power outside of the EU trading bloc, will be among those hardest hit. Keir Starmer's pro-capitalist Labour government will endeavour to make sure it is the working class, not the elites, who pay the price for that.

Even with now-impossible levels of global cooperation limiting the consequences, the Great Recession had devastating effects, from which capitalism has not recovered. In Britain, for example, in 2024, GDP economic output per head is 29% below where it would have been if pre-2007 trends had continued.

It also had huge political effects. It enormously undermined the parties of the capitalist establishment.

Trump's dominance of the Republicans is a reflection of that, as are similar right-populist and far-right phenomena globally. But it also led to a new generation to begin to look for a socialist alternative to capitalism. The support for Bernie Sanders in the US, and Jeremy Corbyn in Britain, were both indications of that.

Crisis and struggle

Future crises will have further seismic effects on the consciousness and outlook of the working class in both the US and Britain. Already the working class has begun to re-enter the scene of history as an organised force.

Even in his first term, Trump had a whiff of the power of the working class, when, for example, in January 2019, Sara Nelson, president of the Association of Flight Attendants, called for a general strike to end the federal government shutdown which

was leaving around half a million federal workers unpaid.

This time, however, Trump has come to power in a period which has already seen – albeit from a low base – the largest number of strikes in the US since the 1980s. Trade unions are more popular than at any time in the last 60 years.

Faced with inevitable new attacks on wages, jobs, and living conditions under Trump, we will see a further development of strikes, alongside other battles against war, over the consequences of climate change, and in defence of migrant, women, and LGBTQ+ rights.

However, as in Britain, in the US there is a vital need for the working class to have its own party – able to link together the different struggles around a common programme for the ending of this rotten capitalist system, and the building of a democratic socialist society able to meet the needs of all.

Inevitably, in Britain and the US, there will be forces in the workers' movement who continue to call for support for the supposed 'lesser evil' in order to block the likes of Trump. This year's US Presidential election showed clearly that this approach does not work – only independent action by the working class offers a way forward.

Why I joined the Socialist Party



BILLY JONES
GLOUCESTERSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY

Last year I found myself looking at the state of the world and thinking it was completely dire. I wanted to get involved somehow to make things better, but had no idea how to go about it - plus the feeling that, because I live in Cheltenham, I was too far away from any sort of action didn't help either.

Then one day I was walking down the high street and came across two Socialist Party members selling papers at a stall. What at first I thought would be a quick chat turned into a really interesting conversation about the effects of 14 years of Tory rule,

particularly on the NHS, and how, under a socialist system, society would be run to benefit the majority of people, as opposed to only the top 1%.

Over time I found myself going to local branch meetings, and I genuinely believe that listening to the Socialist Party members at these meetings, jotting down notes of what they say, has led to my understanding of politics rising tenfold in a matter of months.

All this time I've felt completely welcomed - one of the goals of the party is to represent regular working-class people and to help them raise their voice, regardless of their background or identity. This was made very clear when I attended Socialism

2024, where we were able to meet socialists from all across the country and discuss everything from economics to the rise of the far-right in Europe.

Looking at the state of the world used to make me feel hopeless, but now that I've been able to adopt a socialist framework into my life - there is hope! Being a young person trapped inside a viscous two-party system, both sides just as greedy as the other, can make politics seem like a dead-end.

Socialism has shown me that, through mass workers' struggle we can fight for and achieve the world that we want - and I've joined the Socialist Party in order to help make that a reality.

£51,260 pledged to build the socialist opposition

We've broken the £50,000 barrier! Last week we reported pledges to this year's Socialism 2024 appeal reaching £49,474, asking 'can you help us get over £50,000?' And you have! £37,135 has been pledged.

£51,260 has been paid in so far. A reminder that pledges should be paid in by 31 December 2024. You can pay in online at socialistparty.org.uk/donations/socialism-2024

Thanks for all your contributions. Every penny will go towards strengthening the socialist opposition. A quarter of which will go towards the Committee for a Workers' International, helping to build the socialist opposition internationally.

DONATE TODAY

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

Unis face financial crisis - fight for funding not fees



PHOTO: BERNAI KARTAV

FUNDING NOT FEES

The Funding Not Fees campaign demands that big business foots the bill for education, not students and workers. We call for fully publicly funded higher education, paid for by taking the wealth off the super-rich, as the means to:

- Scrap tuition fees
- Introduce living grants, not loans
- Stop all cuts and closures on campus

If you agree, get involved in the Funding Not Fees campaign!

Join the student fightback: join... socialist students

- Visit socialiststudents.org.uk/join
- or call 020 8988 8761
- or text your name and school, college or uni to 07749 379 010

York uni Funding Not Fees protest

LOUIE NARDINI
YORK SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Students are standing up against Labour's new hike of tuition fees. With Bob Marley music being blasted and megaphone chanting, people stopped to talk to us at our protest at York uni.

One student asked how it would be funded. We stated that a 1% wealth

tax could easily generate £25 billion, and that a push for higher corporation tax and a decrease in income tax on ordinary people could easily lift the burden on many working students. We also talked to the Vision student magazine and gave leaflets to passers-by about Labour's proposals, and why they should not be trusted by students.

Leicester uni students and staff plan fight against cuts

LEICESTER SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Socialist Students at De Montfort University (DMU) in Leicester have been campaigning against the vice-chancellor's plans to make cuts in academic staff and increase tuition fees. The vice-chancellor Katie Normington emailed staff to inform them that she "cannot rule out" redundancies in the light of financial difficulties, only two years after the last round of redundancies. She has warned that if voluntary redundancies are not forthcoming then there would be 'formal' (i.e. compulsory) redundancies. Her salary is £249,000 in 2022-23 according to DMU's own annual accounts.

Cuts in academic staff could mean fewer courses on offer and/or an increase in workload for the remaining staff.

DMU is claiming that its spending will be greater than its income, and it will have to use cash reserves to balance the books. Socialist Students says 'open the books, let's see how much is in the cash reserves and where money is being spent'. University and College Union (UCU) members are claiming that DMU has invested in an expansion of operations in London and Dubai. It is thought that around £10 million was invested. DMU has also invested in Cambodia and Kazakhstan.

The Leicester Mercury quoted one UCU member as saying that the university has turned into an "unrecognisable corporate franchising operation".

But why should education be run like a commercial business? Britain is the sixth-wealthiest nation in the world. Education should be fully funded and free to students. Education workers, students and the wider working class should decide how universities are run and funded.

DMU Socialist Students will be stepping up the campaign to scrap tuition fees, cancel student debt and replace student loans with living grants. We will also be contacting the UCU and the students union to suggest a joint campaign to defend jobs and against a rise in tuition fees.

This is why we have taken to the streets raising the demands of our 'Funding not Fees' campaign, and received a positive response. Few students disagree with an end to tuition fees, grants not loans, cancelling debt or fair pay to all, and many will be prepared to rally against the university bosses when more attacks come in the future.

This downturn hasn't been felt in the pockets of management. But ordinary young people have been hit with a rise in tuition fees and the worst student cost-of-living crisis in history.

Follow, comment, like
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International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women 2024 Kick sexism off campus!

ISIS SMYTH
LIVERPOOL SOCIALIST STUDENTS

The cost-of-living crisis is hitting young people and students particularly hard. 25% of young people are skipping at least one meal every day, and often a lot more than that, in order to save money.

We can feel the disregard the ruling class has for the working class, and it's vile. But even more outrageous is the double oppression that working-class women are forced to endure.

Not only are working-class women students going hungry, but they are also experiencing an epidemic of sexual assault on the very campuses of the universities leaving them in thousands of pounds in debt.

A survey by Revolt Sexual Assault in 2018 found that, of those who responded, 62% of students and graduates had experienced an act of sexual violence in universities across the UK. The fact that these were disproportionately women makes what we already know clear: sexual violence is overwhelmingly an attack on women.

Disgracefully only 2% of those felt they could report it to the universities and could say they were satisfied with the measures taken in response. Most occurrences of sexual misconduct happen in halls of residence and on-campus social spaces like student union bars. These are places

where students are supposed to feel safe. And a quarter said they skipped lectures, changed modules or have taken other measures to avoid the perpetrator, with 16% dropping out of university as a result of their attack.

Women are being denied the right to safety and to higher education. A third of unis have been found to silence victims using non-disclosure agreements.

Violence against women was endemic under the Tories and Labour's policies are going to change nothing. Keir Starmer recently pledged to halve violence against women and girls in a decade, but he is totally incapable of doing this.

Nothing on violence against women and girls was mentioned in Labour's recent Budget and, of the minimal first steps Starmer had announced in his plan to tackle this violence, universities were not mentioned once, despite women university students and other young women being more likely than any other age group to experience sexual violence. It's been reported that 97% of women between ages 18-24 had experienced sexual harassment or assault. When I spoke to my friends about this, a lot of them said they expected it to be higher.

Universities are run like profit-seeking companies and Starmer has no ambition to change this. To university management, the lining of their own pockets is more important than women's safety and far too

little funding is being put into keeping women safe on campus. But this is simply the reality of capitalism in which women's bodies are objectified and commodified.

Socialist Students says that universities should be publicly owned and under democratic workers' and students' control. This is the only way that universities will be accessible and safe for all. We advocate for special elected and accountable committees of students and campus trade unions to oversee issues of sexual misconduct on campus.

But this alone won't end the issue of sexual violence. Huge gains in recent decades have been won, advancing women's rights. But the problem still persists. When the amount of sexual misconduct reports that the police and universities are receiving is growing, and when a woman is still killed by a man every three days in England and Wales - likely a huge underestimate - it's clear that something needs to change.

Movements to tackle violence against women must be led with the understanding that capitalism is the core issue. Because women's oppression was created in a class society, it just cannot be eradicated under one. We need socialist change to create a world where women's safety isn't sacrificed for profit, and where equality and peace can prevail. We need socialist change to rid the world of the dehumanizing idea that women are objects to be bought and sold, picked up and put down whenever powerful men want.

That's why every year on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, Socialist Students hold a national day of action. So join us on 25 November to kick sexism off campus and rally in solidarity against capitalism.

• This is adapted from a speech delivered at the Funding Not Fees closing rally for Socialism2024, 10 November, London



Readers' Opinion: Assisted dying

The Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill, dubbed the 'assisted dying bill', has been presented to Parliament. It proposes legalisation of assisted dying for terminally ill adults expected to die within six months, with the need for authorisation by two doctors and a High Court judge, among other conditions. What position the workers' movement should take on assisted dying has been a subject of debate, including in the retired members section of the PCS civil service union which debated the issue at its National Forum earlier this year. **Alexis Edwards**, retired PCS member, makes her contribution to the debate.

Socialists have long fought for the demand for the 'right to choose' when and whether to have children: "My body, my choice". Now it is a demand being raised linked to an individual's right to choose when and how to end their life.

Jon Dale's article 'Assisted dying: what would a socialist programme look like?' (socialistparty.org.uk March 2024) asks whether assisted dying should be legalised in Britain. Polls at that time indicated three in four support this. Jon explains in his article that under capitalism there is no equality of choice.

Working-class families face harsh choices every day – when shopping for food and other essentials, when deciding whether to turn up the heating or where we can afford to live. These choices impact on all aspects of our lives 'from the cradle to the grave'.

If we look at the 'right to choose' when and whether to have children, including in relation to access to free abortions, the choice for the poor and for the wealthy is never equal. The wealthy have always had access to all the support they need to bring up their children; they have secure, safe homes with the space they need; they have the means to provide the best equipment, toys, food; they have the freedom to decide whether to

change society, we continue to make demands for the best we can get.

If we apply this principle to the end of our lives, it is absolutely correct that we demand the rights to access assisted dying – the right to choose. There is a lot of fear, particularly amongst the elderly that, rather than giving them access to the right to choose, due to the pressures of poor housing, lack of support and 'being a burden', assisted dying will be too easy an option to 'get rid of them'.

As things stand now, decisions are made about an individual's end of life which take into account an individual's access to facilities and care. There are existing inequalities at the end of life, as there are throughout life, and socialists should fight to end those inequalities.

As Jon's article explains, end of life choices are not the same for the poor as they are for the wealthy. But that is not an argument to deny us that right. It is an argument to make the demands; for decent housing; for fully funded health care, including palliative care; for nationalised care facilities; and for the right to choose. But most importantly to fight to end the capitalist system that limits our life choices – for a socialist society to truly meet all our needs 'from the cradle to the grave'.

We need to take the same approach to our rights throughout our lives. We recognise that capitalism can never meet our needs, it is designed to use us to benefit the system at our expense. So, while fighting to

work or stay home; they don't need to rely on family support, they can pay for cleaners and nannies.

The less fortunate never have equal freedom of choice, the pressures to opt for an abortion are far greater. Prior to winning access to free abortions for all, the wealthy always had access to privately paid for abortions and care. They never had to consider cramped, poor housing conditions; job security; childcare costs etc – all these things have an influence on that 'right to choose'. As socialists, however, we never raised these influences that may pressure women/families into decisions they might otherwise not make, as a reason to oppose abortion rights. We raised then, as we always have and continue to do, the need for a fully funded health service, fully funded free childcare and education, and decent housing. Still today, there are women who feel they have no choice but to abort a pregnancy due to their circumstances and living conditions – at least they can now do this safely.

When we need to take the same approach to our rights throughout our lives. We recognise that capitalism can never meet our needs, it is designed to use us to benefit the system at our expense. So, while fighting to

WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?

• editors@socialistparty.org.uk

or, if you're not online, write to the Socialist Inbox, PO Box 1398, Enfield EN1 9GT



PHOTO: PAUL MATTSOON

Germany: The end of the traffic light coalition

Trade unions and the Left Party must take up an independent and militant class position

SASCHA STANIC
NATIONAL SPOKESPERSON FOR SOL (CWI IN GERMANY)

The end of the coalition between the social democratic SPD, the Greens and the liberal FDP on 6 November did not really come as a surprise. The government's crisis had steadily deepened in recent months, and the coalition parties had increasingly shown themselves to be incapable not only of formulating a common policy, but even of holding joint summits on the economic crisis. The outcome of the elections in three East German federal states in September, the continued economic crisis and the ever-louder demands of the capitalists for an 'economic turnaround' had increased the pressure on the coalition.

With Donald Trump's election victory in the US announced just hours before the government fell, it is clear that many people are deeply concerned about the instability of the situation and about their future. Trade unions and the Left Party (Die Linke) must respond to this with a decisive alternative programme to all pro-capitalist parties.

The conflicts in the now-shattered coalition express conflicting ideas among different representatives of capitalism about how their system can best be maintained. No part of this government represented the interests of working people. There is agreement on many issues: improving the conditions for profit for banks and corporations, supporting the Ukrainian war and Israel's war against the Palestinians, arming the Bundeswehr and militarising society, restricting migration and deporting refugees. Their disagreement is about the best way to achieve these goals.

Put simply, two strategies are clashing: a frontal assault on the working class or an attempt to involve the trade union leaderships and carry out attacks in a somewhat less harsh or piecemeal fashion. The conflict over the 'debt brake' (the constitutional limit on government debt) expresses this in a distorted form – distorted because some capitalists also favour a reform of the 'debt brake' in order to gain more leeway for state investments that serve their profit interests (i.e. not to enable socially useful and necessary investments in education, health, the environment, social services, etc.).

FDP: a headlong leap?

The background to the collapse of the coalition, provoked mainly by the FDP, is also the daily growing

demands of capitalist representatives for a so-called 'economic turnaround'. By this they mean drastic attacks on the rights and living standards of the working class and tax breaks for capitalists – something we have been warning against for months and why Sol members launched the 'Wir schlagen Alarm' ('We are sounding the alarm') campaign, together with other militant trade unionists. The document by FDP leader Lindner, presents a programme for this 'economic turnaround' demanded by the capitalists. At the same time, it was a 'divorce paper' and a provocation towards the SPD and the Greens, who could not leave it unanswered without losing face.

Politically, the FDP has taken a headlong leap with its approach. It remains to be seen whether this will be successful or turn out to be a 'suicide out of fear of death'. But all the parties represented in the 'Ampel' ('traffic light') coalition must have weighed up in the last few weeks whether continuing muddling through in a permanent crisis and a de facto ten-month election campaign until the regular election date in September next year would have improved their starting positions. Apparently they have come to the conclusion that this would not have been the case and that a brutal end would rather offer the chance to make up ground in a now intensive four-month election campaign for the new elections, proposed by Chancellor Olaf Scholz for March.

SPD will signal left

Scholz's strategy became clear in his speech to the press. On the one hand, he is signalling to the left by attacking the FDP as anti-social and anti-working class (rightly so) and probably raising some left-wing demands such as an increased minimum wage, a collective bargaining law, etc. At the same time, Scholz defended the rearmament programme and support for the capitalist and nationalist Zelensky regime in Ukraine as a 'security policy', while making offers of 'constructive cooperation' to the opposition conservative CDU/CSU until the new elections. In doing so, he wants to drive the conservatives into making policy decisions and show themselves up over the next four months. It is not surprising that the CDU/CSU is not enthusiastic about this. The SPD and Greens will have foreseen the vociferous calls from all sides (CDU/CSU, FDP, AfD, BSW, employers' associations) for faster new elections, but will probably be able to sit these out.

It is uncertain whether the



Chancellor Olaf Scholz PHOTO: CHRISTOPH BRAUN/CC

minority government, consisting of the SPD and the Greens, will be able to find a majority in parliament for any measure in the coming months, but ultimately this is of secondary importance. With the end of the coalition, the election campaign has now begun anyway. It cannot be ruled out that the prospect of new Bundestag elections will influence the course of the talks to form new governments in Saxony, Brandenburg and Thuringia after their recent state elections. Given the problems in forming governments in these federal states, it is possible that new elections could also take place in one or more of them.

What's next?

According to the latest opinion polls, it is clear that the next Chancellor will be called Friedrich Merz and there is much to suggest that there will be a government made up of the CDU/CSU and SPD, formerly known as a 'grand coalition'. It can be assumed that the SPD will – as it has done so often in the past – reach for the ministerial chairs in the name of 'statesmanship' and will be able to come to terms with a Chancellor Merz. The FDP and the Left Party have to fear not getting into the next Bundestag, but Sarah Wagenknecht's right split from the Left Party, BSW, cannot be too sure either, as its three most

The Left Party should wage a militant election campaign with a focus on a few central issues, such as: saving jobs at Volkswagen and other industrial companies by implementing a socialist plan to convert production to meaningful and sustainable products; repairing the ailing health care system and public transport, financed by the profits of banks and corporations and the wealth of the super-rich; creation of affordable housing; opposition to capitalist wars and arms deliveries to Ukraine and Israel; and measures against the still far too high prices and too low wages.

The demands and measures to solve these grievances must go to the very foundations of the capitalist system, otherwise they will be ineffective: democratic public ownership instead of private ownership of corporations and banks, massive taxation of the outrageously high accumulated private wealth. An integral part of the election campaign must be an anti-capitalist concept for the fight against climate change that does not ask the masses of the population to foot the bill and guarantees all jobs, and a message of solidarity with all discriminated minorities – migrants, refugees, LGBTQ+ people, disabled people – with women who are also affected by discrimination, with all groups fighting for their legitimate rights.

If the Left Party convincingly approaches such an election campaign – if its candidates follow the example of its new chairpersons Ines Schwedtmann and Jan van Aken and declare that they will only accept the inflated parliamentary allowances that correspond to the average wage of a skilled worker and donate the rest, if the federal party finally distances itself from capitalism-friendly government policy of the Left Party in Bremen, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania and Thuringia – then a mobilisation of the party's members and supporters could be achieved that would carry the party over the 5% hurdle in the federal elections.

Together with consistent struggles by the trade unions for the interests of workers and against cuts at all levels, this would also be the best way to keep the AfD in check.

This would not yet overcome the crisis of the Left Party, but it would halt the decline for the time being, and then a necessary debate could take place on what contribution the Left Party – together with other forces from trade unions and social movements – can make to creating a mass party of workers and young people with a socialist programme, which is so urgently needed to represent the interests of the working class and to change society.

recent opinion poll results were only six percent nationwide, just one point over the entry bar. But today's polls are not the results of the new elections. A lot can happen in the remaining four, or possibly two, months. There is no doubt that the far-right populist AfD could benefit from these developments.

The Left Party

It would also mean that trade unionists should speak out in favour of voting for the Left Party in the upcoming elections, because – despite all its limitations, mistakes and adaptation towards the SPD and the Greens – it is the only voice of a left-wing opposition that can make it into the Bundestag. A Bundestag without the Left Party would shift the political balance of power in the Federal Republic to the disadvantage of the working class. That is why Sol will also call for and campaign for the election of the Left Party.

In the coming days and weeks, we will make proposals for a militant and socialist election campaign for the Left Party and put them up for discussion in the party. We will not refrain from criticising the party's policies and orientation, which failed to initiate a necessary change of course at its recent federal party conference. The campaign for doorstep conversations, which began under the motto 'Everyone talks, we listen', must now be turned into an election campaign – and the spirit should be: 'We have answers to the crisis of capitalism!'

Who's who?

SPD: social democrats
FDP: neoliberals
Green Party: greens
Die Linke: The left party
AfD: the far right
BSW: a right-wing split from the left party
CDU/CSU: conservatives

Trade unions

For trade unions and the Left Party, the new situation is a challenge. The social-democratic trade union bureaucracy will praise Scholz for sacking the neo-liberal FDP man Lindner and will more or less openly campaign for the SPD. Trade union activists should not go along with this and should criticise it. Above all, the unions must now fight to preserve the jobs that are under threat in many companies and they must prepare resistance against the attacks on the rights and living standards of the working class that can be expected from the next federal government. This means intervening in the election campaign with clear demands and using the politicisation to organise workers.

Where cuts are already being made at the expense of the working class, the trade unions and union activists, as well as those affected, and left-wing and social organisations, should take the initiative to resist



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RESIST TRUMP'S BILLIONAIRES AND BIGOTS

Fight for a socialist future



Socialist Students organised protests against Trump's inauguration in 2017 LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

TOM PORTER-BROWN
BIRMINGHAM CITY UNI SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Students at Birmingham City University are in disbelief that a Trump victory was possible. International students, women, and trans people, to name a few, are angry if not frightened at what this will mean for them. During campaign stalls and meetings, students have expressed their concerns and why they think Trump, with his wretched record, was re-elected. But the stand out detail is that there is little if any trust in the current capitalist parties.

This just another reason Socialist Students highlights the importance of fighting for a mass working-class party, to present students and workers with a real political alternative.

What Trump says and what Trump does are very different things. But he has already appointed a gallery of billionaires and bigots to help him. Students and working-class people have good reason to fear more global instability and crisis.

Students are already struggling to scrape by with meagre funding available to us. We already know that Keir Starmer's Labour government will try to make us pay for any further economic crisis, and not the billionaires.

"There is no climate crisis", according to Trump-appointed energy secretary, Chris Wright. More cause for alarm for students and young people looking to a bleak future of climate disasters.

Trump's apparent disdain for Starmer's Labour, and indeed other European countries, could result in students in the UK wishing to study in the US needing to pay even higher fees, and vice versa.

The failure of Joe Biden's Democrats to improve working-class people's living standards has led to a second Trump presidency. This is a serious lesson for what could be on the horizon in Britain - if a mass working-class political alternative is not built.

So what can students do to oppose Trump? If he makes you angry or scared, get organised with others who feel the same way, to resist his right-wing policies. And also, come and discuss with Socialist Students about what can be done to fight for a socialist future free from billionaires and bigots.

● See: Trump return spells instability and struggle, pages 6-7

Join the student fightback
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WHAT WE STAND FOR: THE SOCIALIST PARTY'S MAIN DEMANDS >>> see column on p6-7

