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# the Socialist

Issue 1301

5-11 December 2024

formerly **Militant**

# STILL STRIKING TO SAVE OUR NHS

# FULL FUNDING, FAIR PAY, END PRIVATISATION



**GARETH BROMHALL**  
AMBULANCE SERVICE WORKER AND SWANSEA  
TRADES COUNCIL SECRETARY

**Some of the lowest-paid NHS workers in Wales have voted overwhelmingly for strike action this month.**

Band 2 healthcare support workers at Swansea Bay University Health Board, represented by Unison, are to take two days of strike action on 10-11 December after a 99% yes vote - eight hospitals will be affected across Swansea and Neath Port Talbot.

The dispute centres around pay. Unison has said that although the NHS handbook states that healthcare support workers at Band 2 should only perform basic personal care, the staff involved are regularly inserting cannulas, monitoring blood and performing electrocardiograms.

They are fighting for the pay that reflects this work.

This strike - which involves staff whose pay had to be topped up during the recent pay negotiations to prevent it dropping below the minimum wage - is significant.

It takes place under a double layer of Labour Party administration, with health devolved to the Senedd (Welsh parliament) in Cardiff Bay and the Welsh health secretary talking of "tough decisions", and Labour in power in Westminster.

The strikers in Wales will join

others who have taken action in the NHS over the last few months - including over 350 workers in North Essex striking against the outsourcing of their jobs.

Both disputes represent the twin crises of low pay and privatisation that are at the heart of the ongoing situation in the NHS.

While at the time of printing it's not ruled out that Wes Streeting, Keir Starmer and Welsh Secretary Jeremy Miles intervene to save face for the Labour government, it's likely that pickets will once again be

seen outside our hospitals, following those by nurses, junior doctors and ambulance staff over the past few years.

NHS workers need a pay rise to make up the 30% that NHS staff have lost in real terms in the past 15 years - that ensures a liveable wage for all staff. We need an end to privatisation and the renationalisation and insourcing of all services and staff, and full funding for health and social care. Under Labour, as under the Tories, we have to fight back to save our NHS and to make it fit for purpose.

**THE STRUGGLE FOR DISABILITY RIGHTS** >>> p8-9

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

# The truth behind Labour's benefits attacks

SUE POWELL  
GLOUCESTERSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY

Keir Starmer's Labour has pledged to get tough on benefit claimants and 'get Britain working'. About 22% of people of working age - about 9.2 million - are 'economically inactive', i.e. not employed or seeking work or training. The Office of National Statistics has warned the latest figures give a distorted picture, many carers, disabled people, students and retirees don't work and claim no benefits.

The figures are fodder for critics of the 'nanny state', including Labour which, to reduce spending, aims to get two groups "back to work" with a stick and carrot approach. They will offer youth aged 16-24 training opportunities or work (that's the carrot) but deny benefits if they refuse (the stick). Carers, sick, disabled and older workers are by far the biggest group. Labour, waving its stick again, intends to "drive down economic inactivity caused by ill-health".

Labour Work and Pensions secretary Liz Kendall pinched much of her tough new plan from the Tories. Labour's announcement prompted a media outcry about "shirkers" and calls for jobless youth and mentally ill people to be "dragged off benefits". Employment Minister Alison McGovern spoke of "people stealing off the state". How much do MPs claim for their energy bills?

### Attacks on disabled and sick claimants

Disabled people already face tough work capability assessments and sanctions. Despite Kendall's assurances about the positive effects of employment on the future of young people and the benefits to mental health, there is already more stick than carrot. Mental health professionals warn that proposals to send job coaches into mental health wards could have catastrophic effects.

Doubts about whether those registered sick or disabled are genuinely sick are farcical given the state of NHS mental health services and accessibility to GPs. The number of long-term sick people, has risen from 2 million before the pandemic to 2.6 million. This represents just 2% of the country's total workforce.

Most work capability assessments do not involve an actual doctor and are weighted massively against claimants. A nurse assessing one disabled Socialist Party member admitted she had never heard of their neurological condition, despite receiving their medical reports.

- As reported in the Socialist last week, Lynn Walsh, former editor of Socialism Today magazine and expelled from the Labour Party alongside others for being on the editorial board of the Socialist's forerunner the Militant, died aged 79.
- His funeral will be held at 3pm on 16 December at Main Chapel, The Downs crematorium, Bear Road, Brighton, BN2 4DZ



Youth Fight for Jobs placard from anti-workfare protest TU SENAN

### Effects of previous clampdowns

Stringent measures introduced by Tory prime minister David Cameron fuelled verbal and physical attacks on disabled people, and the cuts led to suicides. Ed Miliband, then Labour leader, defended the "deserving poor" but said nothing of the under-serving rich.

The Labour government has proposed giving special powers to mayors and councils in their 'get Britain working' pilot areas, but have done nothing to reverse devastating cuts to local government. They have watched idly as thousands of livelihoods have been lost at Port Talbot steelworks, Luton Vauxhall factory, and countless other jobs lost in the retail and hospitality sectors.

Despite Starmer speaking of a "bulging benefits bill blighting our society", nearly £23 billion in benefits goes unclaimed every year.

### Reality of Universal Credit stats

Universal Credit is the main source of benefits for job seekers but it is also paid to those on low wages or insufficient hours - deemed "under employed" by the Department for

Work and Pensions (DWP). Claimants already face pressure and sanctions. Nearly 40% of Universal Credit recipients work. Parents and carers on disabled people, and the cuts led to suicides. Ed Miliband, then Labour leader, defended the "deserving poor" but said nothing of the under-serving rich.

### Bogus training schemes

When youth unemployment topped a million in the 1970s, the notorious Youth Training Scheme (YTS) was introduced whereby bosses were given the first six months pay for trainees by the government. These young workers were seldom taken on as bosses could replace them every six months with another super-exploited youth.

Pay and conditions were appalling. Participation in the schemes was often only possible due to family support. Countless industrial injuries and at least one death occurred under YTS because untrained, often unsupervised, youth were put to work in dangerous conditions. Then came Youth Opportunities followed by Workfare, in which young

people worked real jobs in exchange for benefits without a real wage and rights at work. Trade unions must defend young workers and resist any attempts to establish such unshamed exploitation.

### A socialist alternative

Job vacancies have fallen by 13.6% in the last year. Britain is not facing an 'epidemic of economic inactivity' but the outcome of industry's terminal decline, decades of company closures and redundancies, the drive to push down wages, increase working hours and privatise public services - all in the interest of private profit. This Labour government is acting in the interest of the bosses' system by attacking the rights and benefits gained by the working class through a century of struggle. Only public ownership, democratic working-class control of the economy and socialist planning can provide young people with decent jobs, high-quality affordable housing and a meaningful future.



Youth Fight for Jobs protest against youth unemployment SOCIALIST PARTY

# Louise Haigh sacked by ruthless pro-capitalist Starmer government

ADAM HARMSWORTH  
COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

Labour's transport minister Louise Haigh has resigned, effectively sacked after being told to quit by Number Ten, after a fraud conviction from 2014 reached the news. What was her heinous crime that warrants being pushed out of office a decade later? She misplaced a company phone after reporting it stolen to the police.

In reality, Haigh probably isn't being forced out over that. Bluntly this is a political sacking, a public spectacle demonstrating the rightward and tightly controlled direction of the pro-capitalist Labour Party.

Haigh is no left-winger and has stood loyally with Keir Starmer amidst his attacks on workers and on left-wing Labour MPs who have voted against some of these attacks. But even her limited words and actions marginally to the left of Starmer's leadership put "a target on her back", in the words of The Times newspaper.

LBC News quoted a former Labour official saying: "Somebody who thinks that her policy of public ownership for the railways is too left-

wing, or something like that, is trying to get rid of her". In October she also named P&O Ferries a "rogue operator" and called for a boycott after their 2022 illegal sacking of hundreds of workers, an instance of fire-and-rehire practices that the Labour Party has pledged to ban. Starmer publicly rebuked her and tried to patch up relations with P&O parent company DP World, all so he could lord it over a £1 billion private-sector port investment.

Haigh's very moderate stances on railway nationalisation and criticism of companies breaking the law were enough to irritate the Labour leadership. She has now been replaced by Heidi Alexander, who proved her loyalty to the capitalist system when she was first to resign in the right-wing orchestrated "chicken coup" against Jeremy Corbyn in 2016. (See 'Stand firm and organise against the Blairite coup' on [socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk)).

Haigh might count herself lucky to not become the eighth suspended Labour MP. But loyalty to the Labour Party won't give any Labour MP the authority to do anything for the benefit of the working class outside of Starmer's increasingly tight iron grip over the party.



Protests against P&O in 2022 following bosses' firing and rehiring, which caused Haigh to dub it a "rogue employer" ISAI MARJERIA

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December-January issue includes...

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  - The future of Socialism - Tribute to founding editor Lynn Walsh
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# Royal Mail takeover continues - Renationalise now!

The takeover of Royal Mail by Czech billionaire Daniel Kretinsky continues apace. The effects of privatisation on the postal service have been a disaster for customers and workers. The Universal Service Obligation is under threat, and workers' pay and conditions are constantly under threat from shareholders squeezing profits out of the service.

Keir Starmer's Labour government could block this sale and renationalise Royal Mail immediately, as is Labour Party policy! We have covered this in previous articles in the Socialist, including 'No to a billionaire takeover - Renationalise Royal Mail!' and 'Royal Mail - what are the unions paying Labour for?' available to read on [socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk).

Kretinsky has offered to respect the Communication Workers Union's (CWU) demand for no compulsory

redundancies, but at the time of writing only until 2025! Union action fought back against attacks on pay and victimisation of reps during the strikewave, and can defeat attempts to run the service into the ground again.

But how much stronger would CWU members be if there was a mass workers' party in Parliament that represented their interests, and when motions call for Royal Mail to be renationalised, they actually fight for that!



Royal Mail workers on strike in 2022 BRUM SP

# Liverpool trade unionists discuss with suspended Labour MP the need for political representation

ALEX SMITH  
LIVERPOOL SOCIALIST PARTY

The last meeting of the Liverpool Trade Unions Council (LTUC) was attended by delegates representing several thousand trade union members in the city.

Invited to the meeting was local MP Ian Byrne, who has had the whip withdrawn by Starmer's Labour for the crime of voting against Labour's plan to keep the Tory two-child benefit cap. Delegates warmly congratulated and sincerely thanked Ian Byrne on being the only MP in the city to represent them on that issue, alongside his opposition to the cut to universal Winter Fuel Payments for pensioners.

Delegates then asked Ian to consider calling a meeting of the Unite-backed group of MPs in Parliament, and also inviting Jeremy Corbyn and other independent MPs who have also had the Labour whip withdrawn, as a first step towards a

'workers' bloc' in Parliament. It was highlighted that around the table thousands of rank-and-file workers were represented by delegates. If Ian and other left MPs convened such a 'workers' bloc' meeting it could be the first outlines of working-class political representation that the Labour Party no longer provides.

### Council cuts

A Unite representative of Livv Housing workers, who are striking for better terms and conditions against an employer whose CEO is paid more money than the Prime Minister, addressed the meeting powerfully, and was given full support, including a financial contribution to the strike fund.

Among the LTUC delegates present were four Socialist Party members who, in relation to the strike, raised the demand for a mass council house building programme, with directly employed council staff to build and maintain those houses

under democratic working-class control, rather than housing association bosses raking in money while telling workers to tighten their belts. In order to pay for this house building programme, the demand was raised for local councils to use their reserves and borrowing powers and then launch mass campaigns together with trade unions, community groups, and young people to demand that the Labour government reimburse councils for any funds used to defend the right of working-class people to live and work in dignity.

After a friendly exchange of ideas, Ian resolved to come to future trades council meetings, a decision which was warmly welcomed and appreciated by delegates present. All the issues discussed at the trades council meeting can be raised again as the need for the trade unions to have genuine, fighting political representation is repeatedly posed in the era of Starmer's pro-big business Labour Party.



Livv housing group picket line MERSEYSIDE SP



PHOTO: WHITE HOUSE/CC

## Trump's election victory and the new world order

This is a short extract from the conclusion of a longer article written by **Tony Saunois**, secretary of the Committee of a Workers' International, on the new era opened by Donald Trump's election, which "will act as a great accelerator on all the existing trends, contradictions and conflicts unfolding". The full article is available at [socialistworld.net](http://socialistworld.net)

The prospect of even bigger social uprisings than we saw from 2018 onwards in Latin America, Asia and Africa, is posed in the coming period. Yet the lack of organisation and leadership, and the lower level of political consciousness, than during previous decades means that the character of the social explosions and the direction they can travel in is uncertain.

It will require a series of struggles and mass movements to forge a new generation of workers and youth who begin to draw the conclusions of what is needed to transform society, to take the movement to a lasting victory by overthrowing the ruling class.

As the tragic events in Valencia, Spain, have shown, numerous social issues can trigger mass movements. In Valencia it was the climate crisis, which is engulfing the world, that triggered a mass social movement.

In Spain, the fury was directed at all the political parties, the leaders and the monarchy – much of the key institutions through which capitalism rules. Both the king and the Spanish president were driven off the streets of Valencia by the masses. After the flooding, the masses took matters into their own hands and organised brigades of workers, and especially young people, to organise help and support and to begin to clean up affected areas. Dubbed the "broom and shovel generation", thousands came forward to support and aid all those affected by the devastation. An embryonic collective social consciousness developed, and local committees organised what the state failed to do. This shows in microcosm how consciousness can be shaped

and affected by events, as has been shown in other situations. However, to fully develop to its maximum potential, a party, socialist programme and mass organisations of struggle are necessary and need to be built.

2023 saw the working class in a number of countries move into industrial struggle on a bigger scale than has been the case in the recent period. This was still at an early stage of mass industrial struggles but indicates what can develop in the coming period.

A global political vacuum exists. In the absence of an alternative being offered by the working class and its most politically conscious layers, this can be filled by various unstable and unpredictable individuals and forces, as has already been seen in the US, Brazil, India and elsewhere.

As this new era unfolds, a new layer of young workers, students and the oppressed will begin searching for an alternative to the dystopian era that global capitalism is now in. Support for the ideas of revolutionary socialism and a party, which are more relevant today, can be harnessed and a new generation won to bold Marxist ideas and the struggle to overthrow capitalism. These ideas will be crucial in assisting a broader layer of the working class and oppressed masses to be won to the idea of a socialist alternative. This is the only road to escape the horrors that global capitalism offers today.

Committee for a Workers' International  
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## ISRAEL-HEZBOLLAH FRAGILE CEASEFIRE AGREED GAZA SLAUGHTER CONTINUES

**Socialist Party**  
**WHAT WE THINK**

**R**elief swept across Lebanon when a ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah took effect on Wednesday 27 November. Thousands of displaced people headed back to their homes in south Lebanon, with many finding them destroyed or without electricity and water. Around 4,000 Lebanese people will never return home, having been killed by the Israeli bombardments during the war. As with Gaza, the death toll has been glaringly disproportionate: 120 Israelis died, 3% of the toll suffered by the Lebanese.

The World Bank estimated a cost of \$3.4 billion for the physical damage to structures during the war. In addition, no price can be put on the destruction of over 30 ancient towns and villages which can never be restored to their historic authenticity. Reports of barbaric destruction being stepped up in the final days before the ceasefire also showed the utterly callous nature of the Israeli state's offensive.

The ceasefire agreement, brokered by the US and France, largely repeated the deal drawn up to end the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war, which said that Israeli and Hezbollah forces should withdraw from Lebanon's territory south of the Litani river and that Hezbollah should not rearm. This time, the withdrawals are to take place over 60 days and the zone they leave is to be monitored by US personnel and policed by UN and Lebanese troops.

Hardly anyone is certain that the ceasefire agreement will actually hold, not least because Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu pledged fast military action against any perceived violations of it. In the first days after it, the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) did carry out further deadly attacks and continued to threaten Lebanese civilians with death if they returned to certain villages close to Israel's border.

Hezbollah, an organisation based on right-wing political Shia Islam, had its origin in fighting Israeli state aggression and will no doubt aim to rebuild the fighting capacity it has lost during this latest war. However, in the short term it will likely aim to shore up its base in the Shia Muslim sections of Lebanon's population through turning to rebuilding destroyed homes and infrastructure. It has been promised some funding for that from its sponsor, Iran's theocratic regime, which will be wanting to preserve its influence in Lebanon despite its own domestic economic crisis.

From the start of the war on Gaza 14 months ago, Hezbollah fired rockets into Israel, to signal its military

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**Around 4,000 Lebanese people will never return home, having been killed by the Israeli bombardments during the war. As with Gaza, the death toll has been glaringly disproportionate: 120 Israelis died, 3% of the toll suffered by the Lebanese**

strength in Lebanon and the region and to try to avoid being accused of abandoning the Palestinians and Gaza's ruling party, Hamas. All along, Hezbollah's leaders insisted they wouldn't accept a ceasefire with Israel that didn't also end the bombardment of Gaza. But now, their U-turn on that position has shown how damaged Hezbollah was becoming in the face of Israel's massive firepower and foreign intelligence surveillance.

Israeli missiles killed Hezbollah's top leaders along with many of its fighters and a substantial amount of its military equipment. But this doesn't mean it won't still be the strongest military force in what is a barely functioning state. An article in the Jerusalem Post reckoned: "Hezbollah still has tens of thousands of fighters - the vast majority of its rank-and-file forces, even as a majority of its commanders have been killed" (27.11.24). It can also for the time being continue to be a leading political player in Lebanon's corrupt, highly fractious parliament and other state institutions.

### Volatility in Israel

In Israel, Netanyahu argued that the ceasefire would allow a focus on countering Iran, renewing the IDF's arms supplies and human energy, and that it would isolate Hamas in Gaza. Before September's escalation against Hezbollah to a full-blown war, IDF generals had warned against military overstretch if Israel was to fight on a second front beyond Gaza, and that overstretch was becoming evident.

One of the ways it was impacting on the survival of Netanyahu's ruling coalition was that an increasing level of reluctance by reservists to serve in the IDF operations was feeding into widespread anger against the ultra-orthodox parties in the coalition, who want to prevent the government from legislating that the ultra-orthodox must serve in the IDF. Another possible contributing reason for the ceasefire was suggested by media reports saying that if it wasn't agreed, Netanyahu believed that US president Joe Biden might take some unwelcome actions in his last two months of office, such as weapons delays or a less friendly stance in UN bodies.

Many Israelis on the political right wanted a more far-reaching deal, including the creation of a depopulated buffer zone in Lebanon's south. Depopulation rather than occupation, which hasn't been among the expansionist ambitions of most of the Israeli right, is seen as the next step as there is no desire for a repeat of the draining occupation that lasted for 18 years after Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982.

For now, Netanyahu clearly feels boosted by the prospect of Donald Trump becoming US president – especially as Trump has selected some top officials who are close to the Israeli right; and by the damage inflicted by the IDF on Hamas,



Smoke from Israeli airstrike which assassinated Hezbollah leader Nasrallah JIMMY94/CC

Gaza and Hezbollah; and by successfully sacking his defence minister, Yoav Gallant, who had argued for a ceasefire in Gaza. Those factors, along with Trump's call for the Gaza war to be finished as soon as possible, could mean that Netanyahu will order that war to be even more horrifically stepped up in the weeks before Trump's inauguration, and more measures taken to increase and consolidate Israeli annexation in the West Bank.

However, while most of Israel's capitalist class hasn't been opposed to war against Hamas or Hezbollah, only a minority backs Netanyahu's ultra-right wing government with its reliance on small far-right parties which are a liability for their interests. This has been shown by an unprecedented degree of overt differences with the government being expressed by the heads of state institutions, including the military, intelligence services and judiciary. During November, the judiciary announced it won't delay Netanyahu's trial for corruption any longer; and state prosecutors arrested four people in Netanyahu's inner circle, accusing them of leaking intelligence documents to foreign media.

These are just some of the machinations at the top, but a greater potential threat to Netanyahu's government would be a new mass movement arising against it. There have already been two mass movements during their term in office, one lasting for nine months in 2023 and another in early September 2024, both including general strike action. The war against Hezbollah cut across expression of mass opposition and helped Netanyahu to maintain his base of support in a minority of the population. But a resurgence of anger is only a matter of time, especially while Israeli hostages remain captive in Gaza, and in the longer term as working people will be expected to pay the cost of the wars. Also, the wars won't bring greater security for Israelis: while forcing Hezbollah away from the Israeli border reduces the chance of it carrying out a land attack, it can't

indefinitely prevent missiles from being fired on Israel from other parts of Lebanon or surrounding countries. The 60,000 displaced residents of Israel's north don't feel safe to return home.

### Regional instability

The ceasefire deal can appear to have reduced the possibility of an uplift of regional war, but dangers of that remain, especially regarding how the US and Israel will respond to Iran on the issue of its nuclear programme. For Iran, the weakening of Hezbollah is a blow, as Hezbollah has been the strongest force in the Iran-led regional 'axis of resistance'. Also, Iran-linked forces in Syria and Yemen have been hit by Israeli or western missiles, and now Iran's Syrian ally, the Assad regime, has been markedly

set back by a dramatic military takeover of Aleppo by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) – an organisation based on right-wing political Sunni Islam, which had established itself in Idlib province in northwest Syria. Without doubt, the coming period in the region will be one of great turmoil and uncertainty.

There can be no military solution to the conflicts, whether through the weaponry of the world or regional powers, or through the resistance of militias like those of Hezbollah and Hamas, which are not democratically controlled or offering a political alternative to the capitalist system that breeds war. Nor is any solution possible on the basis of capitalist 'peace' negotiations. Trump wants to revive links between Arab countries and Israel, as pushed in his first term

“”

**Willingness to enter into mass struggle has been shown by movements in many countries, including in Iran, Lebanon, Israel, Egypt and Tunisia**

through the Abraham accords. But the Arab masses are not willing to ignore the plight of the Palestinians in the way that their ruling elites want to, and the Israeli ruling class is determined to prevent the Palestinians from achieving national liberation.

Despite the revived lip service being paid by the western powers to the need for a Palestinian state, they haven't even departed enough from their alliance with Israel's present leaders to actually stop the slaughter and humanitarian crisis in Gaza, or the increased repression and land seizures in the West Bank, never mind pioneer moves towards a Palestinian state. This doesn't mean that international negotiations for a Palestinian entity won't be resurrected when the present prolonged round of bloodshed is over, but on a capitalist basis it wouldn't be a genuine, independent state or one that could provide decent living standards for most people within it. That can only be achieved on a socialist basis, through struggles towards the building of a socialist Palestine alongside a socialist Israel, as part of a socialist confederation in the region.

The indictment of Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant on war crimes charges by the International Criminal Court (ICC) is significant in being the first indictment of western allies by that court and in applying a little more pressure on Netanyahu and Co, but won't in itself stop the war on Gaza. Likewise with all the other gestures by the western powers so far against the war. US imperialism denounced the ICC warrants and, notwithstanding minor threats it might have made to try to obtain the Israel-Hezbollah ceasefire, it continues to supply massive firepower to Israel – Biden has just approved an extra \$680 million in arms supplies, over and above the estimated nearly \$18 billion of military aid already given during the war. Meanwhile, as winter sets in, the situation in Gaza is becoming even more desperate.

Ordinary people worldwide can place no trust in the capitalist ruling elites to end the conflicts, or in them acting in the interests of working people at home. Willingness to enter into mass struggle has been shown by movements in many countries, including in Iran, Lebanon, Israel, Egypt and Tunisia. The missing ingredients have been consciousness that the working class has the real power in society – without it the capitalists can run nothing, and the building of independent, democratic, mass workers' organisations that can learn the lessons of past struggles and put forward a socialist alternative. Capitalism can't provide a future free of poverty, war and environmental destruction; and disillusionment in it as a system is at an unprecedented level globally. So development of socialist consciousness and organisations has the potential to become a fast process in the period to come.

Join the fightback

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PAUL MATTISON

# PCS must fight to protect MoD jobs

## PCS MEMBERS IN THE BROAD LEFT NETWORK

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) has announced a minimum 10% reduction in jobs, which means more than 5,500 job losses.

No discussion has taken place with the PCS trade union, graphically illustrating that, despite the Labour government's platitudes, the public sector and especially the civil service is not 'safe in their hands'.

This announcement comes on top of a recruitment freeze, originally due to end in March 2025, meaning that thousands of jobs have already been lost. Job cuts have also been announced elsewhere, including in transport and education.

This shows how vital it is that PCS builds a serious campaign, involving the whole of the union, to fight to protect jobs, improve pay, defend pensions and win better conditions – as has been consistently argued by the left majority of the National Executive Committee (NEC) and supporters of the Broad Left Network (BLN). We cannot tolerate further years of cuts, privatisation, low pay, poor working environments and attacks to crucial services. Enough is enough.

This is the position we in the NEC majority have argued since taking office in May this year, following just such a fighting strategy being agreed at our May conference.

But opportunities have been wasted as a result of the general secretary Fran Heathcote and national president Martin Cavanagh blocking all

our attempts to relaunch the 'national campaign'.

## Squandered

PCS should have exercised the strike mandate won in areas covering more than 20,000 members in June. This could have been a platform to build for a successful ballot across the rest of the membership and would have sent a warning shot to the new government. But this mandate was squandered due to obstruction by the president and general secretary.

Worse still, when the Labour government announced its 5% pay remit, rather than press for more, the general secretary rushed to welcome this 'new' approach.

The recently elected left NEC majority said 'not so fast'. Firstly, it's not enough. Secondly, it's not fully funded, which means departments will cut staff. The NEC majority wanted the general secretary to go back to the employer to put the union's demands for a 10% pay increase as a step to restore the value of our wages, and no job cuts. Fran Heathcote and Martin Cavanagh blocked this.

You cannot help but assume the employer has been emboldened because of such a weak response, hence huge job cuts.

This weakness was further evidenced by the general secretary's response to the MoD job cuts announcement: "We had been given no warning that this was coming," describing the 10% staff cut as "disrespectful". No warning? The October budget set out 2% 'productivity, efficiency and savings' targets!

Hardly a response that reassures thousands of staff facing uncertainty, or that puts fear into the employer.

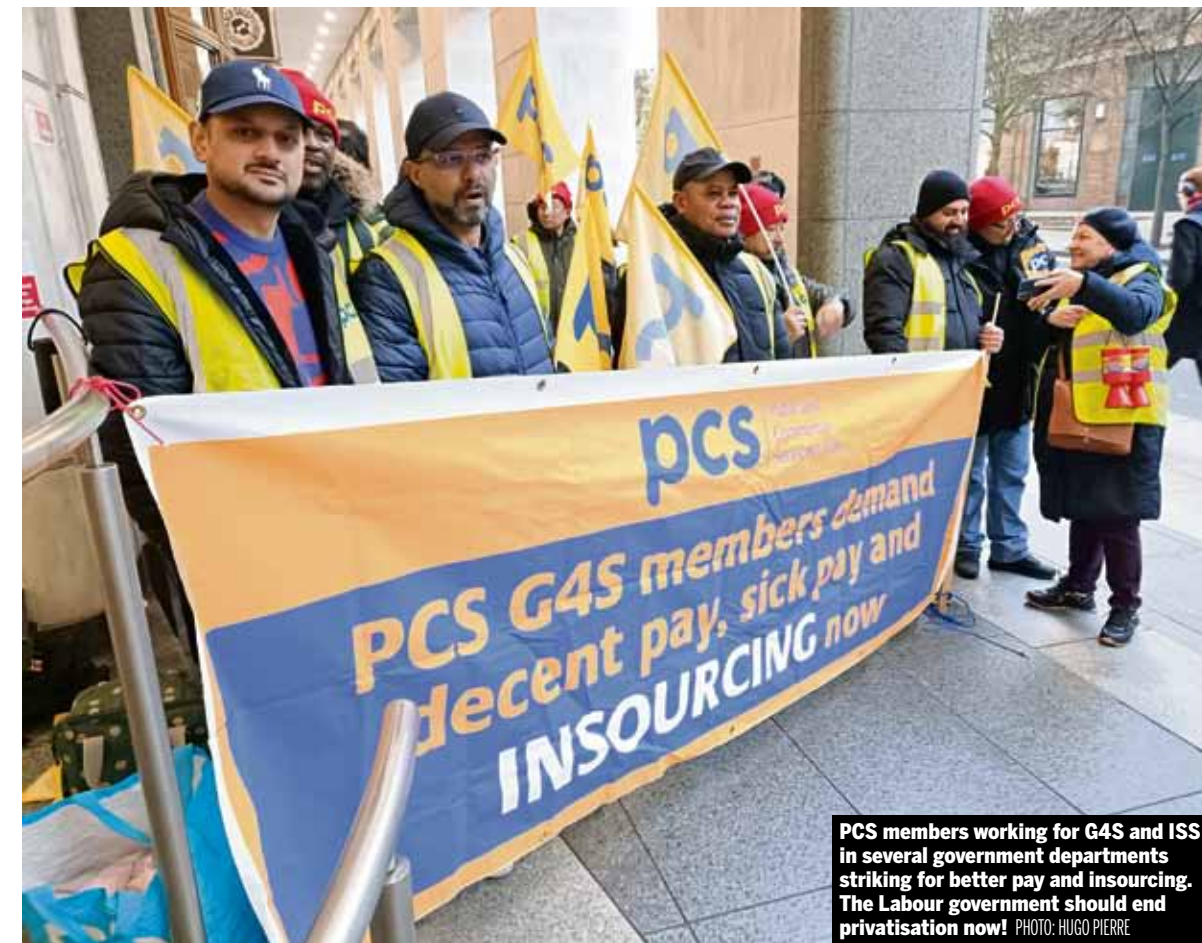
Members deserve better. The union's Defence Sector Group Executive needs to demand a meeting with the employer, and urgently draw up plans to fight these cuts, including urgent meetings of reps and members.

These announcements reinforce the NEC majority view that it would be wrong to stop the strike levy now – instead, we have argued for a review of the levy and a reduction in the amount paid in by low-waged members. The election of a Labour government has not removed the need to fight. The attack on jobs by the MoD is a harbinger of what is to come, and we must be prepared.

## Special Delegate Conference

Each NEC meeting and the obstruction we face reinforces our belief that renewal of the democracy in PCS is absolutely vital. If your branch has not already agreed to support the call for a Special Delegate Conference, it's urgent it does so. This would enable reps to debate how to rebuild the national campaign on pay, pensions, jobs and other vital issues, and to make clear who runs the union.

- If you are in PCS, join the Broad Left Network and join us in the struggle. bln.org.uk
- The left NEC majority, elected in May, includes Socialist Party members and Broad Left Network supporters. The BLN brings together socialists and activists across the union who want a fighting democratic PCS



PCS members working for G4S and ISS in several government departments striking for better pay and insourcing. The Labour government should end privatisation now! PHOTO: HUGO PIERRE

# Nationalise to save jobs and skills at Vauxhall Luton



PHOTO: THOMAS NUGENT/CC

## MARK PICKERSGILL STEVENAGE SOCIALIST PARTY

## Green transition that protects jobs

The owners of the Vauxhall van plant in Luton have announced its closure, ending 120 years of vehicle production in the town. Production of electric vans will be transferred to Ellesmere Port. However, up to 2,000 jobs are at risk, according to trade unions. Local parts suppliers will also be affected.

The loss of these well-paid jobs will have a big impact on the town. The plant used to employ 37,000 workers in its heyday in the 1960s. In 2002, 2,000 jobs were lost when car production ended.

The parent company Stellantis took over Vauxhall in 2021 from General Motors. It blames the decision to close the factory on government quotas for the production of electric vehicles or ZEVs (zero-emission vehicles). The quotas mean that 22% of cars and 10% of vans produced have to be ZEVs, otherwise a £15,000 fine is imposed for every vehicle produced over that quota. By 2035, all vehicles produced will have to be ZEVs.

Stellantis also owns Citroen and Peugeot in France, together with Fiat and Chrysler. This year, the company announced a 3 billion euro share-buyback scheme. It is a multi-million dollar company seeking to protect its profits.

The closure of vehicle plants means that workers' jobs are sacrificed for that particular pursuit. Stellantis has been criticised by the Italian government for exploitatively moving car production to low-wage countries. The company has also imposed temporary closures on car plants in the US.

Across Europe, other car companies are cutting back. Ford announced 4,000 job losses, which includes 800 in the UK, and VW is closing three car plants in Germany. Stiff competition from China is also eating into the profits of these companies.

In the UK, only 18% of vehicle sales this year were electric. The cost of electric vehicles is prohibitive for most people. The complete lack of infrastructure, including the sparsity of charging points, is also a barrier for people wanting to move to electric vehicles.

Since the announcement of the closure, the CEO of Stellantis suddenly resigned, and £2.4 billion was wiped off the share price.

Workers should not have to pay the price for the bosses' failure. A jobs massacre is taking place – this announcement follows the destruction of jobs and skills at Tata Steel, Grangemouth oil refinery, Harland and Wolff shipyard, and others.

We say no job losses in the car industry. Instead, the skills and experience of workers at Vauxhall and elsewhere should be harnessed to produce carbon-neutral technologies.

The Socialist Party stands in solidarity with the workers in Luton, and everywhere where mass redundancies and closures are threatened.

Immediate preparations for militant industrial action, allied to a call to working-class communities in Luton, can give workers confidence that it's possible to oppose Stellantis's plans, and send a clear message to senior management that their plans will be fought.

But as part of this, it is essential that the car unions link action to the demand for nationalisation as an alternative to capitalist devastation. Because private enterprise, which always puts profit first, cannot be relied upon to implement a transition to affordable electric vehicles and a carbon neutral world.

The solution is to nationalise the car industry under democratic workers' control and management, to plan production and implement a green transition that protects jobs and skills.

# Unison young members conference supports fighting policies

## SOCIALIST PARTY YOUNG UNISON MEMBERS

The fourth young members conference of public sector union Unison took place in Swansea at the end of November, with the most lasting impression being that young activists are ready to fight for change. There was an overwhelmingly left-wing outlook from members, which at times came into conflict with the bureaucracy of the union.

Last year, two-thirds of motions were ruled out of order. This year, members managed to get 20 motions into conference, with six emergency motions getting through.

Unfortunately, because of the long time allocated to speakers, panel discussions and workshops, there was only around four hours in total to debate these motions. In an attempt to get all motions heard, points of order to move onto the vote were made after just one or two speakers, stifling any potential debate on some incredibly important motions. These included motions on redundancies in local government, public service cuts, the rise of the far right and



Eve, Sam and Rachel at the conference. RACHEL COX

the continued attacks on our trans members.

## No cuts

Socialist Party members were able to intervene in these discussions, speaking on eight of the 20 motions,

with wide support in the conference for what was being proposed.

Moving a motion on fighting public service cuts, Socialist Party member Eve Miller said: "We should have needs-based, no-cuts budgets implemented in councils to ensure

services stop being starved and can effectively function for all."

This motion, supported by conference, called for a campaign with all the union's service groups to campaign for a policy of no cuts to our public services, to fight for the funding needed to bring services back to pre-2010 levels, and to increase Labour's public service spending.

## Jobs and homes not racism

A motion on fighting the rise of the far right was moved by Socialist Party member Sam Church, reminding conference that in 2017, when Jeremy Corbyn was the Labour leader, a stokes for UKIP fell dramatically.

This shows that policies that benefit the working class can attract those that have been disillusioned by the capitalist parties and are the prime target of Nigel Farage.

The motion passed, asking Unison's National Executive Committee (NEC) to propose that the Trades Union Congress organises a major Saturday demonstration on the theme 'Workers' unity not division – jobs, homes and public services not racism'.

## LGBTQ+ demands

Socialist Party member Rachel Cox intervened in a debate on the continued support of trans rights. She made the point that however good Unison's policies are on LGBTQ+ issues, if the union does not challenge the Labour Party on these issues – including health secretary Wes Streeting, who continues the puberty blocker ban and continues the under-funding of health services, which lead to wait times of five years for initial appointments – then it is failing to support members.

We should back politicians who do support our policies.

Among young members there is a strong appetite for a unified left to bring about real change in the union. There is a push to change the young members' conference to a branch-led conference, like the other sectors in the union, rather than a regional-led one, so that decisions on who attends would be made by elected members rather than regional staff.

There appears to be a strong base for further collaboration and development of a fighting left in Unison.

# Sixth form NEU strike: 'We aren't getting anything!'

National Education Union (NEU) members at sixth form colleges took three days of strike action on 27 November and 3 and 4 December, demanding money from the Labour government to fund a pay rise.

One teacher at Wyggeston and Queen Elizabeth sixth form college in Leicester commented to Socialist Party and Socialist Students members:

"We're on strike because we've been denied the 5.5% pay rise that the rest of the teaching profession has been awarded and that's just grossly unfair.

"Sixth form colleges that are academies have been granted the rise, where those of us who are non-academised have not. It's grossly inequitable, it's cheap to fix. And it's staggering that the government hasn't done anything about it yet. We hope they would do the right thing."

Nick Chaffey reports that at Barton Peverill College in Eastleigh, Hampshire there was strong support for the strike and an increase in union membership. "Why are we doing the same work as schools but getting less funding? Colleges get 22% less funding than schools, and in the new funding we aren't getting anything!"

Socialist Party members in



Itchen sixth form college, Southampton (above), Notre Dame sixth form college, Leeds (below), Monoux college, Waltham Forest SOCIALIST PARTY



Bristol report that several support staff refused to cross the picket lines in solidarity.

A support staff member of NEU at Monoux college in Waltham Forest, east London, told Martin Reynolds: "I'm not crossing the picket line. I'm in solidarity with my teacher colleagues. The government allocated £300 million to the further education sector. But the sector definitely needs more than that and they haven't explicitly said that money can be allocated towards pay. We've been underfunded for decades now and it is still the case."

"They just don't give us any respect or credit for what we do," another Monoux striker said, explaining that the fight over funding for pay is linked to everything sixth form staff face.

James Ivens reports that at Leyton sixth form college, also in Waltham Forest, cheery strikers were talking about the new government. While one had concluded Labour isn't going to change things for the better, others said: "Give them a chance" or "They just haven't thought this through."

At the strike protest outside the Department of Education, this idea was unfortunately encouraged by NEU general secretary Daniel Kebede, when he said: "This could have just been an honest error. Let's hope it is and that it's corrected."

But Keir Starmer's government did not provide full funding for the school teachers' pay award, and in the October Budget only increased funding for education, councils and the NHS by tiny amounts, leaving public services starved of cash. The

'error' will only be corrected if the government feels it has no choice. So it is good that additional days of strike action have been announced.

## Further strike days: 13 December and 7-9 January



## 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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# THE STRUGGLE FOR DISABILITY RIGHTS

## A history of oppression and struggle

Capitalism is a system based on profit. The capitalists exploit workers, squeezing as much out of each worker for the smallest possible wage they can get away with. Those whose ability to perform tasks generating profits for the bosses is impaired face discrimination. Backing this up, throughout its history, capitalism has fuelled negative stereotypes and continues to scapegoat disabled people.

Separate institutions for disabled people developed in the late mediaeval period but developed further under capitalism with workhouses and madhouses, including the notorious 'Bedlam'.

In 1913, the British Parliament passed the Mental Deficiency Act, which invented the term the 'moral imbecile', covering people with mild learning disabilities, prostitutes, unmarried mothers, and criminals, linking this to 'genetic inheritance'. In 1927, the term was replaced by 'moral defective', which included people who did not conform to the moral values of mainstream society.

The world's first national organisation run and controlled by disabled people was the All-Russian Cooperative of Disabled People (VIKO) which was launched in December 1921 after a vote of the Council of People's Commissars. This was followed by the formation of the All Union Society of the Blind in 1925 and the All Union Society of the Deaf the following year.

Although the world's first socialist revolution in Russia 1917 had taken place in an economically backward country, ravaged by the effects of war and then surrounded by the allied armies of intervention, the new Soviet state was an enormous step forward for disabled people.

Within VIKO, all decisions were made democratically and only disabled people could vote. This contrasted with organisations helping the disabled in capitalist countries which were almost all run paternalistically and without democratic structures.

VIKO provided work opportunities for disabled people, established kindergartens, resorts and health centres, vocational schools and sports centres. These organisations did not survive the rise of the Stalinist bureaucracy, which carried out a political counter-revolution, unpicking social reforms and removing any element of working-class democracy.

In Britain, the National League of the Blind, a registered trade union, marched in 1920 to demand better working conditions. The 1944 Disability Employment Act promised sheltered employment, reserved occupations, and employment quotas for disabled people. Reserved occupations included lift and car park attendants, which was not very aspirational.

In 1951, 800 members of the British Limbless Ex-Serviceman's Association took part in a 'silent reproach'

March to Downing Street.

The modern disability rights movement in the United States can be traced back to the admission of Ed Roberts to the University of California in Berkeley in 1962. Ed was paralysed from the neck down due to childhood polio.

He was initially housed in the campus hospital. When he was joined by other students with disabilities, they got a grant from the US Office of Education and created the Physically Disabled Students Programme which was the first of its kind. This was the beginning of the Independent Living Movement.

The development of the social model of disability, which explains that people with impairments are disabled by the way society is organised, came from disabled people's struggle. The new activists were inspired by the Black civil rights struggle. Atlanta activist Mark Johnson later remarked: "Black people fought for the right to ride at the front of the bus. We're fighting for the right to get on the bus".

In 1979, a student at Newcastle University, Caron Walker, who subsequently joined Militant, the Socialist Party's predecessor, had the same experience as Ed Roberts. Initially she was accommodated in the university sick bay. Inspiring a group of students, she asked to move to a group flat. I can still remember the patronising university doctor opposing this and then claiming the credit for the success of the arrangement. Caron is remarkable, but it didn't stop her from being outrageously banned from numerous pubs and nightclubs as a fire hazard.

When Caron, a wheelchair user, was elected as a Newcastle City Councillor in the 1980s, the right-wing members of the council Labour group described her as the "mouth on wheels".

In 1975, the Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation declared in its fundamental principles that disability was a social creation, a distinct form of oppression, that could be challenged and eliminated. This insight was hugely empowering.

In July 1988, the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People (BCODP) organised its first national protest at the Department of Health and Social Security. Nicholas Scott, the Tory Minister for Disabled People, refused to meet the march, so the marchers organised a sit-down protest which blocked the Elephant and Castle roundabout, on one of the major traffic routes in central London.

BCODP exposed and discredited establishment disability organisations, wealthy disability charities such as Radar, Mind and Cheshire Homes. Instead it promoted organisations run and controlled by disabled people. In 1990 and 1992, it targeted ITV's annual telethon event leading ultimately to its cancellation. Significantly, in 1992 the television technicians, members of BECTU trade union, rather than organising a collection for the telethon

as previously, collected for BODP.

The Direct Action Network and the Campaign for Accessible Transport began smaller-scale direct action. In July 1993, there was a by-election in Christchurch, a small town in Dorset. The Tory candidate, Robert Hayward, whilst previously an MP had, in January 1992, talked out the second reading of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. Activists dogged his campaign, including on one day 35 activists in wheelchairs followed him canvassing. He lost the by-election with a swing of 35%.

Although race and sex discrimination legislation had been in place for twenty years, in May 1994 Scott talked out another disabled rights bill. In 1995, the Tory government, in the face of a mass movement involving 100,000 people, caved in. The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) was the nineteenth attempt to introduce legislation. The DDA was narrow in scope, lacked any enforcement agency and was known to disabled activists as 'doesn't do anything'.

It did however, introduce into law the concept of 'reasonable adjustments', something that disabled activists still fight to strengthen and enforce.



PHOTO: PAUL MATTISSON



Those whose ability to perform tasks generating profits for the bosses is impaired, face discrimination



Trade unions, which are the largest democratic organisations of disabled people, should work with other disabled people's organisations for reform of the social security system



PHOTO: PAUL MATTISSON

David Maples, convenor of the Socialist Party Disability Group, introduced a discussion on disability at Socialism 2024, 9-10 November. This feature is based on his speech, and is published during UK Disability History Month 2024.

## How can disabled people fight back?

Trade unions can play a significant role in the fight for disability rights, for their members and wider society. The RMT transport union led the fight back against the cost-of-living crisis with repeated strike action on the railways. An important part of their campaign was opposition to the closure of railway station ticket offices. The campaign gained significant public support and was enormously beneficial to disabled travellers in helping to provide a safe travelling environment.

A UK government study in 2008 found 79% of disabled people in the UK aged over 65 reported that they acquired their impairment after the age of 50. Many trade union reps find that disability cases are a significant part of their caseload.

A major reason for the disability employment gap is disabled people not being adequately supported in the workplace, although it is not limited to this.

The 1995 Disability Discrimination Act introduced the concept of 'reasonable adjustments'. We support reasonable adjustments, but who decides what is reasonable? Union reps will be wearily familiar with employers delaying responding to reasonable adjustment requests, and disabled members consequently leaving the workplace.

We believe that there should be a statutory requirement for employers to respond to reasonable adjustment requests within two weeks. Trade unions should also negotiate for outsourced occupational health services to be brought in-house.

However, the concept of reasonable adjustments leaves discretion with the employer. They can refuse to implement reasonable adjustments on the basis of cost. The key issue for disabled workers is who controls the workplace.

Disabled job applicants would be more confident to disclose disabilities if trade unions had control, or even adequate monitoring, of the recruitment process. Workers' control of the workplace, with decisions about the organisation of work taken democratically, would benefit all workers. On this basis, the employer-biased concept of reasonable adjustments could be replaced by a trade union-centred concept of necessary adjustments.

In the last 30 years, significant progress has been made with accessibility. There is now a general expectation that buildings should be accessible and that disabled toilets should be provided. However, in the 20 years to 2020 the number of public toilets dropped by 39%.

Whilst there has been progress regarding physical disabilities, there has been very limited progress regarding neurodiversity. Amongst the very few public buildings which provide a supportive environment for neurodiverse people are public libraries. Since 2010, one-fifth of all libraries have been closed. A further 950 have had their hours reduced. Poorer areas are four times more likely to have lost their library than richer areas.

Rather than promising a crackdown on benefit fraud, which encourages hate crime against disabled people, the new Labour government should be working to help disabled people.

The Department for Work and Pensions should be resourced so that Access to Work applications, a scheme to help disabled people access and maintain employment, are dealt with promptly.

Trade unions, which are the largest democratic organisations of disabled people, should work with other disabled people's organisations for reform of the social security system. This should include:

- A significant increase in statutory sick pay (SSP)
- Flexible benefits set at reasonable levels that take account of fluctuating conditions
- Qualification conditions for the state pension not to penalise disabled people

Trade unions should press these demands. They should expect members of their parliamentary groups to champion them. They should organise a lobby of parliament and a national demonstration for a new deal for disabled people.

The Socialist Party disability group is newly formed. We are working on a short pamphlet, a model trade union resolution, encouraging disabled members to join trade unions, and developing accessibility guidelines for events. We would welcome invitations to speak at trade union and community organisations.

## Employment and benefits

42.6% of disabled people of working age in Britain are 'economically inactive', compared to 14.9% for those who are not disabled. Many face discrimination from employers. The Trades Union Congress reports a Disability Pay Gap of 17.2% - disabled workers earn £2.35 an hour less on average, equivalent to £4,300 a year for someone working a 35-hour week. Disabled workers are also a third more likely to be on a zero-hour contract.

The pandemic, and the failure of the Tory government to have a recovery plan for the health service, has created a significant increase in people unable to work. What is needed are reasonable adjustments, adequate health and social care services, work flexibility and more. None of this is going to be offered by the new Labour government. However, its October Budget did include a tightening of 'Work Capability Assessments', the consequence likely to be tens of thousands of disabled people having their benefits cut.

Meanwhile, Isabel Oakeshott, a journalist and partner of Reform UK deputy leader Richard Tice, commented: "How many young people are supposedly too sick to work and are being supported by the state? Rachel Reeves basically turned this into a budget for those who prefer to just sit on the sofa and order their Deliveroo and drive their Motability free

vehicle. Basically, these people are, frankly, parasites."

This is a reminder of how capitalist politicians will use disabled people as scapegoats, attempting to divide the working class and justify further austerity.

In Autumn 2010, the then Chancellor, Tory George Osborne, announced £4 billion in benefit cuts. "A welfare cheat," he said, "was no different to a mugger who robs you in the street". It was not surprising that when he presented medals at the London Olympics in 2012, the 80,000 people in the stadium booed him.

Understanding of conditions such as long Covid, ME and neurodiversity is still very limited. These issues have had a particular impact on young people. The insecurity of living in a rigged society arranged for the benefit of the super-rich and with inadequately funded mental health services has taken a particular toll.

The idea that the UK has generous public social spending is a myth. In 2009 it was 24.1 percent of GDP, compared with an OECD average of 22.1%.

Investment is needed to fully fund existing services, as well as research to develop new services. Almost all trade unions have policies which recognise the need to support a diverse membership and diversity in society. Disabled workers and the trade unions should have a central role in democratically planning service provision.

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# Stop Derbyshire care cuts

Lobby of Derbyshire County Council on 14 November PHOTO: DAVE GORTON



ELAINE EVANS  
CHESTERFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

Tory-controlled Derbyshire County Council had to rethink some of its adult care closure plans following a countywide campaign by Derbyshire Unison, joined by community groups and service users' families. Chesterfield Socialist Party has played an active role in the campaign with petitions, flyers and two public meetings in Bolsover and Shirebrook.

Although there has been success, the majority of home and day centre closures and sell-offs will continue.

There are 312 care homes in Derbyshire (206 residential and 106 nursing homes), the vast majority in the private sector. The council operate just 16 and was planning on closing 11. The number of outright closures has been reduced to eight, but plans are now for seven others to have reduced services.

The council claims "it had to re-design the service due to a lack of demand for residential care". At the same time, they say they've had 'significant interest' from the private sector to take on the running of the homes. So which is it? Why is there 'significant interest' if there's a lack of demand?!

## A politically motivated attack

Unison says while 50% of council care home beds are being deliberately kept empty, spending on private care has increased by 60% to £113 million a year. Spending on agency

staff has more than doubled in five years.

This is not just about council cuts through a lack of national government funding. It is also a politically motivated attack on the principle of public services by moving them into the arena of private profiteering and big business. As Unison says: "They are not saving money. They have just ripped a hole in the public purse for years to come."

Some service users' families attended the Socialist Party meetings. It was heart-rending to hear of their anxieties about their loved ones having to be rehoused, away from the care staff they know, fearing their happiness will suffer and, potentially, their lives shortened by the upheaval.

## We need socialist councillors!

The county council elections are in 2025. We plan to stand candidates as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC). It is abundantly clear Labour has no intention of rocking the capitalist boat. They have not brought forward any plans to 'socialise' care again and they will continue to endorse privatisation and private profiteering at the expense of ordinary people.

People should come first, not profits. We need councillors who will refuse to implement further cuts. We need councillors to work with unions and community groups to bring forward 'needs budgets' based on demand and necessity, not profit. We need socialist councillors to rescue our dying social care system!

# We tell Southampton Labour council real impact of austerity

JAMES GRETEN  
SOUTHAMPTON SOCIALIST PARTY

Socialist Party members Sue Atkins, on behalf of the Venny playground campaign, and Maggie Fricker, from Southampton Trades Union Council, delivered deputations to the Labour council, highlighting the devastating impacts of austerity on local communities and services.

The 'Venny' is the only local green space for 2,000 children. The council has failed to maintain it, instead suggesting community fundraising.

Sue critiqued this dereliction of duty: "We pay our council tax to provide the services we need, not to then have to raise our own funding on top of that."

Replying to Sue, councillors said they were "absolutely committed to the maintenance of that space", which is a victory for community campaign. We will now need to make sure they stick to their commitment to refurbish the Venny.

Maggie pointed out Southampton Labour's failure to fight for its May local election pledge for the restoration of £500 million government funding cut since 2010. This could keep Startpoint Sholing nursery open, and expand good-quality nursery provision, in line with public sector union

Unison policy.

The Labour council's responses mirrored the fiscal rhetoric of prime minister Keir Starmer and chancellor Rachel Reeves. Maggie's call for a trade union campaign alongside Southampton council to restore government funding was dismissed, with the council emphasising "fiscal responsibility" and "balancing the books".

The legacy of Conservative austerity demonstrates that this only hollows out essential services. True fiscal responsibility comes from recognising that insufficient funding will inevitably render services unable to perform.

We need to continue campaigning in our communities, with council workers and their trade unions, to fight cuts to council jobs and services, as well as opposing increases in charges, rents, and council tax.

The decision to close Startpoint nursery has been challenged so the fight will continue.

Austerity is an attack on equality and justice, showing the underlying ills of capitalism, and the need to build a socialist movement.

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# Sheffield by-election Labour punished, but Reform a threat

ALISTAIR TICE  
SHEFFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

The collapse of the Labour vote in the Woodhouse council by-election in Sheffield was striking, falling by two thirds since May. It reflected the anger, and often visceral hatred, towards Keir Starmer, Rachel Reeves, and "Labour isn't Labour anymore", particularly over the cuts to the winter fuel allowance.

It was only the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), which the Socialist Party is part of, that took a petition to the November city council meeting, demanding that they use the Household Support Fund to restore the allowance to 75,000 pensioners in Sheffield.

Labour lost the seat. But Sheffield Socialist Party is pleased and relieved that Reform UK did not win.

However, the addition of another Lib Dem councillor will do nothing to stop the council cuts. They are part of the unofficial 'collaborative council', along with Labour and the Greens.

This by-election became very contested between Labour, Lib Dems, and Reform, who tapped into disillusionment with all the establishment parties, and slogans about "putting 'our' people first", and "Make Britain Great Again".

Voters wanted to punish Labour. The Lib Dem vote went up from 6%



in May, to 33%, and Reform also got 33%, having not stood previously.

Despite our campaign of 12,000 leaflets and 15 campaign stalls, and the positive responses we got in so many conversations, of all the ways people chose to express their disgust at Labour, just 2% voted for TUSC candidate Josh Crapper.

We got positive feedback for our socialist policies and campaign, but our vote definitely suffers from not having a national profile, unlike the other parties. This highlights the urgent need for the establishment of a new mass workers' party by the trade unions.

The Reform vote must sound alarm bells for the workers'

movement. The Socialist Party welcomes Sheffield Trades Union Council recently establishing its anti-racist/anti-fascist committee, to challenge the far right in the workplace and on the streets.

And we welcome trades council support for a People's Budget - first proposed by a Socialist Party member through their Unite trade union branch - as a working-class alternative to the 'collaborative' council continuing Tory/Labour cuts.

Such a People's Budget can be the starting point for a positive anti-austerity programme around which trade unionists, community campaigners, and socialists can put up a challenge at the ballot box.

# Exposed to inequality and injustice Why I joined the Socialist Party

SOPHIE ALLEN  
DORSET SOCIALIST PARTY

Raised in a council estate, but going to school in a middle-class area, I have seen classism firsthand. Growing up alongside other people, who were systematically given better opportunities, because their family had more money, was something that never sat right with me.

For example, I had no phone to take pictures of work, I had the old style of uniform, didn't have a school locker, and didn't have the right equipment to complete some of my work.

People would regularly say to me: "Why can't you just buy this?" Finding out that we didn't have the money, they would ask: "Why? Don't your parents work?"

Within school, I saw anger against people who needed benefits to survive, calling them "lazy", which annoyed me. My mother worked full-time, and still struggled to keep a roof over our heads.

The lack of sympathy towards my mum's situation angered me. I would attempt to educate my peers. Some did respond positively, as they weren't aware of situations where someone needs help.

Our family's case was rather extreme, with the unexpected death of my father. But there are other unexpected events that can affect someone's ability to survive without extra help.

I have had a lot of privileges within my life, the NHS being the greatest privilege living in this country can offer, in my opinion. However, I never understood why this couldn't be universal. I always saw healthcare the same as water, a basic right.

Capitalism thrives on hate. To be profitable, it seems you must step on others. I refuse to accept this. Sexism, classism, homophobia, transphobia, hate towards religions, foreigners and different ethnicities, all of it seems pointless to me.

I cannot wrap my head around

how others will fall for this scheme of trying to turn ourselves against each other. The gap between working and middle class is a very blurred line, compared to the ruling class. The fact some people cannot physically comprehend the amount of money certain individuals have speaks volumes.

Previously, I had fallen victim of the mindset that nothing will change, there is no point in fighting. Capitalism caused me to quit pursuing education, to move out at 18, and get stuck into the cycle of working to survive. Socialism has given me new-found hope.

Capitalism plays a major role in a lot of misplaced anger. A lot of people who blame immigrants for 'taking jobs', are also struggling, but placing their anger in the wrong direction.

This can be applied to many scenarios, and is why the Socialist Party's existence is so important. It's the people on top who should be directing that anger towards.

Dorset Socialist Party PHOTO: DORSET SP



# South London walkout against war on Gaza

CARMEN  
UAL SOCIALIST STUDENTS

"Workers and students will never be defeated". This was shouted through south London on 28 November.

Students and staff from Goldsmiths and UAL universities came together in solidarity with the Palestinian people, and frustration with our universities' ongoing complicity in genocide.

We marched from Goldsmiths - with speakers calling shame on the institution for trying to silence staff and students - to UAL Camberwell campus.

UAL students are angry with the university refusing to divest from Israeli state terror, blocking positive action from staff and students.

The Dean of Students has

threatened UAL Students for Justice in Palestine. When a student was physically attacked at a Gaza rally on campus, the university did nothing.

We temporarily occupied the entrance of the Camberwell building. But while police stood with intimidation, we made our voices louder.

Another speaker reminded us that this is not just a fight against Israeli state terror, it's a fight against capitalism. To stop education systems funnelling finances to weapons manufacturers, we need to fight for a socialist future.

Another speaker stated: "If management can't change their institution, then we'll do it for them, from the ground up, whether they like it or not."

As well as a ceasefire and divestment, Socialist Students believes that the education system needs to be

transformed all together. We fight for fully funded higher education, paid by taking the wealth off the super-rich. A education system democratically run by the staff and students, more accessible to marginalised students.

UAL hands out only four scholarship places to asylum seekers. Many young people are displaced because of capitalist war, universities must do their best to support those in the most desperate of circumstances.

UAL Socialist Students and UAL Students for Justice in Palestine will continue to oppose the war on Gaza, alongside the Funding Not Fees campaign.

Join the student fightback  
JOIN socialist students  
socialiststudents.org.uk/join

# Protests follow police raid on Kurdish Community Centre



BERKAY KARTAV  
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

"They were asking for our votes before the elections and now they are attacking us," said one of the protesters outside Turnpike Lane station on Thursday 28 November, protesting against the police raid on the Kurdish Community Centre (KCC) the previous day.

The police arrested seven Kurdish activists on the day of the raid, and a few more people were arrested at the protests, leading to even more anger towards the police and the Labour government.

The police claim that those arrested have links with the Kurdish insurgent group PKK, which is a proscribed organisation in Britain, the EU and Turkey. PKK has been waging an armed struggle against the Turkish state since the early 1980s.

The attack on the KCC is seen by Kurdish people living in London as an attack on them and their democratic rights to organise. Hundreds of Kurdish people turned up to the protest on Thursday and marched from Turnpike Lane station to the KCC, which is still sealed by the police as part of the investigation. There was another march in central London on Sunday too, this time marching towards Downing Street.

Keir Starmer continuing to supply arms to Israel and now this attack on Kurds in London, who themselves fled from repression, is a further sign of whose side the Labour government is on - definitely not the working-class and the oppressed.

Kurds are the biggest nationality in the world without a state, living mainly in Iraq, Iran, Syria and

Turkey. The governments in those countries brutally suppress Kurdish people, denying their democratic and national rights.

Most recently, Turkey has removed the democratically elected mayors of the pro-Kurdish DEM party from office, and appointed government trustees. The Turkish government has also bombed Kurdish-controlled areas in northeast Syria, killing civilians including children, following a terror attack on the Turkish Aerospace Industries in Ankara in October this year.

The arrests in Britain are among other recent arrests of Kurdish activists across Europe. Turkey, as a Nato member and an ally of British and US imperialism - albeit an unreliable one, is using its influence with the pro-capitalist governments in Europe to crack down on Kurdish opposition in these countries.

We call for an immediate end to attacks on the democratic rights of Kurdish people.

There can be no trust in US imperialism or other Western countries or institutions in the struggle for Kurdish liberation. These governments seek to defend their own national interests. They cynically use the plight of Kurdish people, while making back-door agreements with the Turkish government.

The continuation of attacks on Kurds and national oppression show the vital need to build mass democratically organised struggle and independent workers' organisations, with a socialist programme. Such a socialist force has the potential to unite the working class of all backgrounds in a struggle against capitalism, and for genuine national liberation for all the oppressed nationalities in the region.

# Your views on assisted dying

MPs voted in favour of the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill, with a 55-vote majority. It will be subject to further scrutiny, debates and votes if it is to pass into law. It proposes giving terminally ill people the right to choose to end their life if they are expected to die within six months, subject to a number of safeguarding procedures.

The Socialist has invited contributions from readers to the wider debate about access to assisted dying. We publish responses from readers.

• To read what we have published previously search 'assisted dying' at [socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk)

## 'Haves and have-nots'

My father died just before Covid hit, but had been in declining health over the previous year and had, at one point, asked me to help him die. He said he had lived long enough - he was in his late 90s - but I said I could not do that as I would end up in prison. In fact, he was diagnosed with lung cancer a short while later and went very quickly. What was very apparent was that, towards the end, the medical profession makes the decision to 'help end your life' by increasing the dose of morphine you are given.

I also recently lost my mother, aged 101. Again, she felt she had lived too long and was ready to go months before she finally died, with the medical profession helping to shorten the end with morphine doses.

So, I don't think it is the case that doctors have to preserve life 'at all costs'. After all, the NHS is near breaking point and I don't think there is any doubt that medical professionals make decisions that impact who lives and who dies in many situations.

At the end, my mother was living in a retirement home. There, they have control of medications so residents can't 'save up' a painkiller to help end their life, if that is what they would choose to do. Many staff told me about residents who felt it was their time to go and some chose, as my mother did, to starve themselves. Again, that is not a nice way to go but the choice is limited.

You don't have to be ill to want to end your life. I believe, if you are elderly and able to say what you want on the question of living longer, surely those wishes should be respected too?

I am so glad that my parents didn't have any of the illnesses where death is drawn-out and painful. That must be horrible and surely something we should be more 'humane' about, listening to the wishes of those affected?

I agree with what has been pointed out by others, that the right to live or die is not equal between the 'haves' and the 'have nots'. If you have money, you can go to another country for help to die, if you haven't, you can't afford to.

Of course, under capitalism, 'choice' of any sort is limited, everything is dependent on what money is available. That's why as well as demanding the right to assisted dying, it is essential to fight for socialist change to ensure the best possible care towards the end of life and a society where every individual is valued, whatever their age.

RUTHIE MCNALLY  
WORCESTER

## 'A nice euphemism?'

The bill before parliament on 'assisted dying' follows decades of ageist propaganda. Anyone who is old or ill (or both) is denigrated as a cost to the NHS.

Thanks to the cut in winter fuel allowance, pensioners have to choose between food and heating. Many pensioners will end up with having the 'right to die' from hypothermia thrust upon them.

I take a number of medications for heart failure. They cost money. A sugar-coated cyanide pill from the government could put a stop to that expense. And they wouldn't have to pay my pension either.

Does that sound far-fetched? In



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

Canada, a woman called Christine Gauthier who asked for a stairlift was offered euthanasia instead. Other disabled Canadians report similar experiences.

Like racism and misogyny, ageism serves to divide the working class.

'Assisted dying' is a nice euphemism. Soon the right to die (and die poor) will be the only right we have left.

DEREK MCMILLAN  
WEST SUSSEX

## 'I would not trust this lot'

These are my thoughts as a disabled person. Personally I would want to hold out to the bitter end. I support access to assisted dying, but not under capitalism. My fear is that it will be used as an easy and cheap option to bring an end to the life of someone with serious health problems.

We already see the Labour government shamefully peddling propaganda against disabled people being a burden, telling sick and disabled people to get back to work, threatening to cut benefits.

I would not trust this lot as far as I

could spit. Even less, the Tories. I'm sure many disabled people are now feeling the same.

Endless propaganda against disabled people was used by the Nazis in the 1930s, leading ultimately to 'Action T4', mass murder of hundreds of thousands of disabled people.

It looks like this Labour government has more NHS privatisation in the pipeline. Imagine private companies like Serco or G4S getting the contract to administer assisted dying.

On the basis of profit-driven capitalism, and under any capitalist government, I think there is too much room for abuse, and the risk of it being used as a clinical way to stop giving end-of-life care.

The MPs voting in favour of assisted dying are the same as those voting to cut and privatise our NHS. We desperately need a new party to give the working class and disabled people a political voice.

From pharmaceuticals to all aspects of care, it all needs to be taken out of private hands and run for the benefit of our health not profit.

I would call on all disabled people to join the Socialist Party to fight for a future!

JAMES MORBIN  
OXFORD

# Who are you?

JOSH ASKER  
EDITOR OF THE SOCIALIST

The Socialist has received a letter from Adrian Rimmington from Chesterfield, highlighting the number of unnamed articles in a recent issue of the Socialist, asking: "What are these people afraid of?"

The Socialist takes great pride in being written by working-class activists and young people engaging in daily struggles in workplaces, colleges and communities. As much as possible we aim to name the contributors. But there are a number of reasons why this might not be done.

For example, one author Adrian mentions is "Socialist Party members in Unison". The article published under this name had been discussed and agreed collectively by Socialist Party activists in Unison, and was attributed to reflect this.

Other examples are "UCU member" and "Public Health Worker". In these instances, the authors have requested to be made anonymous. With the proliferation of precarious employment, zero-hour and fixed-term contracts, workers can be anxious to avoid doing anything that might single them out to an existing or future employer.

Unfortunately, socialists and fighting trade unionists can be subject to victimisation by bosses. Some employers even include spurious, often ambiguous, clauses into employment contracts aimed at intimidating workers from speaking out politically.

Trade union organisation is key to challenging all of this, and for giving workers confidence to exercise their right to campaign politically.

On occasion, trade unionists have reported on meetings they have attended online from inside a broom cupboard, unable to have secured their bosses' permission to attend. In an instance like this, the author's anonymity is a tactical decision to protect them from potential disciplinary action.

In the Socialist Party's history, its members have also disgracefully been subject to victimisation by sections of the right wing of the trade union movement. Where there is a risk of this, there is also a tactical decision to be made, weighing up the pros and cons of an activist publishing an article in their own name.

In general, the editors of the Socialist share Adrian's desire for articles to have named authors. For workers with anxieties about being named, we tend to encourage them and give them confidence to do so.

But above all, our objective is to strengthen the workers' movement, and the socialist voice within it. Key to that is a healthy workers' press - read, written and sold by workers and young people engaged in the struggle for socialist change.

# Sheffield bus workers on all-out action

ALISTAIR TICE  
SHEFFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

Shunters, fuellers and cleaners at the First bus garage in Sheffield have begun indefinite strike action. This follows three months of escalating action by these Unite the Union members, who are employed by Bidvest Noonan.

They were joined on strike in November by their colleagues at the Doncaster depot, who are also now on indefinite strike.

They are fighting for the 'real living wage'. As an accredited real living wage employer, South Yorkshire First should pay all workers at least £12 an hour, including workers employed through third-party contractors.

But apart from fining Bidvest for not cleaning buses, First does nothing to enforce this on its outsourced contractors.

It's not like they can't afford it - Bidvest Noonan is part of the Bidvest Group, which earned £278

million in profits in the half year to December 2023. But Bidvest is refusing to talk, saying it will not pay the real living wage until contract renewal in November 2026, another two years!

Backed by Unite, the workers are determined to stick it out and think that Bidvest will not be able to cope over the busy Christmas and new year period, and dirty winter weather. The strikers are also planning a trip to London to take their claim to Bidvest head office.



ALISTAIR TICE

# DO YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?

• Send your news, views and criticism with [editors@socialistparty.org.uk](mailto:editors@socialistparty.org.uk) - or if you're not online, PO Box 1398, Enfield EN1 9GT  
• We reserve the right to shorten and edit letters. Confidentiality will be respected if requested

# THE SOCIALIST INBOX

## ● Petrol profiteers

More than 150 years ago, Karl Marx identified the general tendency of companies under capitalism to monopolise their markets. A contemporary example, whereby the dominant companies are the market price setters, is on the supermarket forecourts. Why? Because Marx's long-standing foresight is mismatched by the petrol-price regulator's "concern about weak competition in the sector and the impact on pump prices" (The Times' 29/11/24).

The fact that the regulatory body is based on a false premise is espoused in its title - 'Competition and Markets Authority' (CMA) - whose description under states this profiteering as "retail spread: the price drivers pay at the pump compared with the price paid by the retailers". The CMA reports these 'retail spreads' have remained above long-term averages since 2020.

During the Covid pandemic there

was necessarily widespread working from home, which led to a general fall in drivers' demand for petrol. However, those who had to go to their workplaces, 'key workers', were forced to pay inflated prices. Since, this profiteering has been allowed to continue such that "drivers were over-charged by £1.6 billion in 2023".

What was the toothless regulator's response? A compulsory scheme whereby fuel retailers shared their price information with motorists. The Tories refused, but the Labour government has committed itself to introduce a fuel-finder scheme by the end of... 2025!

Compare this 'benign neglect' by governments with their anti-trade union legislation which attempts to deny workers obtaining pay rises to afford this ongoing cost-of-living crisis. Thanks to Marx and Engels, Marxists understand the exploitative nature of capitalism and the consequent need to support workers in their struggles to replace it with socialism.

JOHN MERRELL  
LEICESTER



## ● Farmer tax

I'd like to add to the article in issue 1300 by Dave Reid, 'Farmers' protest exposes capitalist crisis in agriculture' (see [socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk)).

I have a connection to farming, as my wife grew up on a farm and coincidentally my son also married a farmer's daughter. My daughter-in-law and her sister inherited the family farm when their father passed away, and the farm has been valued at over £1 million. So, does that mean they are well off? Well not exactly, no.

Along with the farm, they inherited £600,000 of debt. If the inheritance tax had been in place at the time, the debt would have risen to £800,000 plus. I'm not sure they would have been able to service that debt and keep the farm going.

As it is, the two sisters only employ one worker (my son) and the business can only afford to employ him part-time. When you see the land, with the buildings and farm equipment etc, it looks like a lot, but the income they derive from it is very modest. My son also works part-time for DVLA to make ends meet.

I've certainly got no objection to taxing the rich, but make no mistake, this measure by the Labour government will hit people whose standard of living is no better than that of the working class.

DAVE WARREN  
SWANSEA AND WEST WALES



Socialist Party members in Rotherham  
SHEFFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

# Trade unions mobilise to counter far-right flop

## Rotherham

ISAAC  
SHEFFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

Over 150 anti-racists from trade unions and other groups turned out in Rotherham on 30 November, organised with the support of Rotherham and Sheffield trades councils, to oppose a protest called by the Tommy Robinson-inspired 'Unite the Kingdom'. It was anti-climactic to say the least, only seven turned up.

I'd expected something akin to the Battle of Cable Street, but they were more like Sesame Street! And Rotherham wasn't an exception, planned 'Unite the Kingdom' rallies flopped not just in South Yorkshire, but across the country, in areas such as London, Coventry and Newcastle.

A dozen Socialist Party members, including myself, were there with our

placards which read: "Jobs, homes, and services for all, smash racism". We proudly marched with our TUSC banner reading "No cuts, closures, or privatisation".

Sheffield Socialist Party member Mick Suter, a housing officer and Unison steward for Rotherham council, gave a fantastic speech, rightly criticising the incumbent Labour council for its lack of action around issues like the cost of living, opposing cuts and building houses.

Far-right protests in Britain are a strong reminder of the need for direct action to fight back against bigotry in society, and to provide a socialist programme that unites the working class, and helps fight back against the ever increasing greed and inequality we see in capitalist society every day!

## Torquay

JANE  
DEVON SOCIALIST PARTY

The local Trades Council, trade union branches including the NEU and UCU, and other groups produced a fantastic turn-out of over 100 to counter a tiny far-right demo of six.

One of the very few far-right demonstrators had a sign saying she was a concerned mother, speakers from

the trade union side addressed this well. Socialist Party member Duncan Moore from UCU and the Local Trades Council pointed out that yes, she was right to be concerned about her children's future but that she was laying blame in the wrong place, it should be laid at the door of billionaires, global companies and government, not at the door of refugees or migrant workers!



MICHAEL KONWALCZYK & EYEEM CC

# Sudan: Masses can end general's civil war and humanitarian catastrophe

JOHN GILLMAN

Since April 2023, Sudan's civil war has unleashed an unrelenting nightmare, especially for the poor and working class, showing the complete incapacity of capitalism to take society forward. None of the different wings of the capitalist class, whether it be the generals, the paramilitary leaders or the past civilian rulers, has a way of ending the war to bring in a 'stable government'.

The conflict has brought widespread suffering, with carpet bombing, dreadful sexual violence, even the poisoning of food with raw fertiliser - no wonder there has been over 150,000 civilian casualties and a staggering displacement of over 12 million people from a population of 50 million.

Disease is spreading rapidly, and famine which the war has brought has been called the "the world's largest humanitarian catastrophe... and the world's largest hunger crisis" by the United Nations, with over 25 million - half the population - suffering acute food shortages.

This tragic situation stems from a counter-revolution against the falsely promised July 2023 elections and the mass protests led by neighbourhood resistance committees calling for full civilian rule. The 2019 revolution, which toppled the long-standing dictator Omar al-Bashir, resulted



Sudanese refugee camp PHOTO: PUBLIC DOMAIN

only in a fragile power-sharing agreement between a capitalist civilian government including the 'Forces of Freedom and Change' and the military, falling short of what could have been achieved given the masses coming onto the scene of history and a powerful two-day general strike. If a party had been in existence that had been built among the working class and poor, then the movement five years ago could have had a more insurrectionary character, sweeping aside capitalism and its corrupt hangers-on.

Many of the big international and regional powers have been involved backing one side or another.

The Rapid Support Forces (RSF), led by General Mohamed Hamdan

Dagalo, also known as Hemeti, was formed in 2013 from the Janjaweed militia, infamous for horrific crimes in Darfur. The RSF had since been deployed to suppress uprisings and demonstrations when the army was deemed unreliable. In 2013, after IMF-mandated fuel subsidy cuts triggered mass protests in Sudan, the RSF killed 100 protesters after arriving with machine guns on the back of their pickup trucks. During the mass movement in 2019, it massacred 128 people in Khartoum and threw many in the Nile for the crocodiles to eat. That doesn't stop the RSF being backed by other elites including the United Arab Emirates - which has been buying gold after the RSF took over gold mines - Libyan warlords, and, at times, Russia, though Russian support may be shifting

under pressure from Iran and its other allies.

Meanwhile, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), led by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, has its own backed from Egypt and is apparently being supplied by Turkey and Iran, and has also committed atrocities, including bombing civilian areas in Khartoum and elsewhere.

Both the RSF and the army have shown little concern for the interests of the working class and poor, focusing instead on enriching themselves, their elite allies, and their foreign backers.

Western imperialism has also been courted and has attempted to organise peace talks, and would probably happily deal with whichever gangster general wins. But these talks have collapsed as both sides in Sudan still

believe they can win outright.

## Workers and youth movements

Beyond the recent uprisings and revolution, Sudan's working class and poor have a long and proud history of struggle. The Sudanese Communist Party was once the second largest in Africa, galvanising support among young people and workers, particularly on the railways and in other key sectors. However, this momentum was squandered. Instead of arming the masses with a clear socialist programme, the party focused on a 'Sudan-first' strategy, seeking progressive capitalists that are no more than a mirage in reality. Yet the masses have stepped into history many times including during the 'Khartoum Spring' in 1964 and the revolution of 1985 removing General Nimeiry. But each time they end dictatorship, when the ruling class feels confident it won't be challenged, another coup takes place to keep the masses from going too far. Any idea of even capitalist democracy would pose a threat to the corrupt ruling elites. There has been little political stability since independence in 1956 with 17 coups taking place.

## Neighbourhood committees

The neighbourhood committees had the potential to become a mass force during the 2019 revolution when they met and discussed the next steps, organising protests. This was kept up, even against the military coup in 2021. However, not being armed with a socialist programme, they fell short in taking the revolution forward, coat-tailing the movement looking for progress in the capitalist nightmare, despite their bravery, being targeted by the state and some of their leaders being assassinated.

They now play a role of anti-war and humanitarian activity. A new movement in the any part of the Middle East such as Egypt or Iran could have a powerful echo in Sudan itself. If they learn the lessons of the struggles, revolutions and the Arab Spring arm themselves with a socialist internationalist programme, then the Sudanese working class, youth and poor can once again rise, end the civil war and sweep away the rule of the gangster generals and the whole rotten, corrupt capitalist system.

# BT job cuts: really stupid artificial intelligence



PHOTO: ELLIOT BROWN/CC

BT ENGINEER

In May 2024, less than a year after BT workers had taken strike action over pay, BT announced £3 billion cost-cutting measures by 2030. The estimation is that this will involve a cut of 55,000 jobs - more than 40% of its global workforce. Of that figure, 10,000 could be replaced by Artificial Intelligence (AI). And of those job losses, over half will come from inside the UK.

Fast forward to the recent New Labour Budget and another announcement from the group that it intends to cover costs by a combination of higher prices and going harder and faster on the existing plans. Bosses blame an extra £100 million bill from the rise in Employers' National Insurance payments and minimum wage rise.

BT has invested billions - with the help of public funds - building fibre optic and 5G networks. Now the investors are pushing to extract as much profit as possible from the

infrastructure.

Part of the plan is to replace jobs with AI and automation. But this has not been without problems. A lot of money has been spent rolling out tech for use by the workforce, ostensibly to improve productivity.

However, as one senior manager experienced, as soon as one new application hit the real world in the workforce, it failed. Before he met the workers outside, no one in higher management had any idea how bad some of the rollouts had been.

Not that the workforce hadn't warned this was the case, just that those in charge hadn't been open to taking on board just how bad some of the software releases, signed off as ready to work, had been. Rather than testing, taking on board workers' feedback and waiting to sign off once properly working, many of the apps we use need frequent manual workarounds, to be fixed when funds became available.

Increasingly, skilled workers are being driven out of BT, replaced by

inexperienced task-driven, typically non-union, contractors. So the work is there, just being done by cheaper labour without the skills to resolve issues. The consequence is delays.

The harder and faster rollout of AI and automation is designed to circumvent this. When a customer places an order, AI will provide the instructions for work for on-the-ground engineers, automation will cut out all the planning and assessment jobs. AI developers would, call this a 'productivity enhancer', BT workers would say otherwise!

So far, job losses have in the main been voluntary. But there have been compulsory job losses through a separate strategic buildings review. But on job cuts, compulsory or voluntary, and outsourcing, the leadership of the Communication Workers Union (CWU) has been utterly silent. In the recent telecoms section elections, only two candidates raised the issue of automation and AI, as an aside. Since the 2023 pay dispute, members and officers have been left

to deal with individual issues on a case-by-case basis.

Politically, by refusing to press Labour on CWU policy to renationalise BT, workers remain at the mercy of the shareholders and finance capital. The rollout of AI and automation is still at an early stage. No doubt many of BT's competitors will be looking at how the AI rollout progresses. Certainly they will note how the CWU hasn't pushed back industrially.

Early workplace experience of AI and automation certainly doesn't point to it increasing labour productivity in telecommunications. Only with BT and the telecoms network renationalised in full, with workers playing a direct role in AI and automation design, could the technology meet its potential. And rather than spelling job cuts, increased productivity could be used to reduce the working week, without loss of pay, terms and conditions. Work could then be shared out, and contractors on inferior terms offered a role in a renationalised network.



## 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 privatizers. 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.

- Agribusines to be taken into democratic public ownership. For a food processing and retail industry under workers' control to ensure that standards are set by consumers, small farmers, and all workers involved in the production, processing, distribution and retail of food.

### DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

- For united working-class struggle to end discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, disability, sexuality, age, and all other forms of prejudice and oppression.
- Repeat the anti-trade union laws and all others that trample over civil liberties. For the right to protest and to strike! End police harassment. For the police to be accountable to local committees, made up of democratically elected representatives of trade unions, local community organisations and local authorities.
- For the right to choose when and whether to have children - for the right to access abortion, contraception and fertility treatment for all who need it.

- For the right to asylum - with democratic community control and oversight of emergency funding resources. No to racist immigration laws.
- Expand democracy. For the abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords. For all MPs to be subject to the right of recall by their constituents at any time, and to only receive a worker's wage. For proportional representation and the right to vote at 16.
- For the right of nations to self-determination. For an independent socialist Scotland and for a socialist Wales, both part of a voluntary socialist confederation of Wales, England, Scotland and Ireland.
- Oppose the dictatorship of the billionaire owners of the media. For the nationalisation of newspaper printing facilities, radio, TV and social media platforms. Access to these facilities should be under democratic control, with political parties' coverage being allocated in proportion to the popular vote at elections.
- For a new mass workers' party, based on the trade unions, and drawing together workers, young people

and activists from workplaces, and community, environmental, anti-racist and anti-cuts campaigns, to provide a fighting, socialist political alternative to the pro-big business parties.

### SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

- No to imperialist wars and occupations!
- Take the wealth off the super-rich! For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and the banking system that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working-class control and

management. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need, not to the fat cats.

- A democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, and in a way that safeguards the environment.
- No to the EU bosses' club. Organise a campaign with European socialists and workers' organisations to use the talks on post-Brexit relations to tear up the EU pro-capitalist rules. For a real collaboration of the peoples of Europe on a socialist basis as a step towards a socialist world.

Do you agree? Join the fightback!

## JOIN THE SOCIALISTS

- Visit [socialistparty.org.uk/join](http://socialistparty.org.uk/join)
- or call 020 8988 8777
- or text your name and postcode to 07761 818 206 to find out more today!



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# the Socialist

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# DON'T RAISE OUR FEES

# DON'T CUT OUR STAFF

## Make the super-rich pay

JACOB GYTON  
LEICESTER SOCIALIST STUDENTS

**D**e Montfort University (DMU) vice-chancellor has threatened staff with redundancies and cuts. This is one of many attacks on students and staff, by financially unstable universities.

University bosses expect students to pay increased tuition fees to help cover their exorbitant wages. DMU's vice-chancellor made £249,000 last year.

These problems are not local to

DMU in Leicester. The University of Exeter has announced 200 job cuts.

More than 100 of 140 UK universities are expected to make cuts, with as many as 10,000 people being made redundant.

And Labour now wants to raise our tuition fees. But we are fighting back to make sure they don't get away with taking another penny.

Clearly, running universities like businesses, instead of centres of education, doesn't work. Universities benefit from funding from weapons companies, such as Lockheed Martin and BAE Systems - both

companies have produced arms used in the genocide in Palestine - and are still unable to balance the books.

Uni education should be free, with unis properly funded by the government and super-rich instead. This is why Socialist Students has established the 'Funding Not Fees' campaign, fighting for:

- Proper funding for all universities, take the wealth off the super-rich
- Eliminate tuition fees, and reintroduce maintenance grants for all

- End low pay, job cuts, and 'casualisation' of higher education workers

### Funding Not Fees

The Funding Not Fees campaign has been lobbying local MPs to support the campaign, and talking to local union branches representing university workers to join us too, as well as hosting demonstrations nationwide on 'Budget Day'.

The only way we can bring about change is through organised, mass action. Everyone, from lecturers to students to cleaners, who want

properly funded higher education, must get involved with Funding Not Fees.

Socialist Students national conference takes place on 8 February in Leicester. It provides an opportunity for all students and young people to discuss how to build the fight against fees, and for socialist change, in our schools and campuses.

Join the student fightback  
**JOIN** socialist students  
socialiststudents.org.uk

WHAT WE STAND FOR: THE SOCIALIST PARTY'S MAIN DEMANDS >>> see column on p14-15



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