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the Socialist

Issue 1302

12-18 December 2024

formerly **Militant**

STOP WINTER FUEL CUT

Nationalise energy Reduce bills

TOM GIBSON
BRADFORD SOCIALIST PARTY

Betrayed. That's how people tell me they feel about Labour when I'm out campaigning around West Yorkshire.

In the general election

campaign, Keir Starmer and Rachel Reeves made no indication they were going to scrap the Winter Fuel Payment for over ten million pensioners.

Pensioners I have spoken with have expressed their worries about how they would be able to afford heating, a sobering reminder of

how these 'cost-cutting' policies affect the elderly. More than a million pensioners are skipping meals in order to pay for fuel costs, according to Age UK. This is the impact of Labour's callous cruelty.

We have been getting a great response to our demand that the government reinstates the Winter

Fuel Payment for all pensioners. And our demand that councils should be stepping in now with hardship funds made available to all pensioners who need it.

Privatised energy companies have been driving up prices and raking in huge profits. We call for full nationalisation of the energy

industry, under democratic workers' control and with no compensation for the greedy bosses. Then investment in environmentally sustainable energy could be prioritised, and energy prices cut.

No one should have to make the infamously cruel choice between 'heating or eating'.

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

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

We need sick pay from day one and we need it now

REECE WILSON
ALDERSHOT AND NORTH HAMPSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY

Expressing concern that Labour's commitment to strengthen sick pay is not being followed through, 24 trade union leaders have signed up to the Safe Sick Pay campaign and written to Keir Starmer. Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) will be £118.75 per week from April, with the Employment Rights Bill making sick pay available from day one of illness, rather than day four as it stands currently, if this pledge makes it through two years of parliamentary wranglings. It will also remove the lower earnings limit, replacing it with a percentage of earnings rather than the flat SSP rate.

The Safe Sick Pay campaign reports a third of workers rely solely on SSP if sick, with 1.3 million workers "slipping through the cracks" and getting no sick pay whatsoever due to working multiple jobs. The Trades Union Congress said that "SSP is around 20% of average earnings and amongst the lowest rate in Europe." The campaign demands increasing the basic rate of SSP, removing the lower earnings limit to make it available to all workers, and removing the waiting period so that it is paid from day one. As it stands, the Employment Rights Bill meets these demands.

The trade union movement should demand more! Workers should be on full pay from day one of an illness. While big business is raising all manner of hue and cry over the changes Labour is bringing through, the FTSE 100 has increased by 7.6% this year. There is the wealth in society to provide a decent life for all and create a society where workers can rest and recover when sick, rather than dragging themselves into work and making others ill in order to pay their rent and bills.

Policies like this can be brought through parliament now to bring about an immediate improvement in workers' lives. Instead, like the removal of some anti-union laws, Labour is dragging its feet as reforms get watered down amidst pressure from big business.

Any reforms that we claw from the capitalist class, they will try to claw back to protect and increase their profits. We need strong, fighting unions in our workplaces to win and maintain these gains. And if we want a decent life for workers - those who make society run - then the working class needs to take the commanding heights of the economy into its own hands. Then we could democratically plan what we need, and stop the leeching of society by profit-making bosses.



Sainsbury's warehouse workers on strike in 2019 against changes to sickness policy

Universal Credit propping up sky-high rents

JASPER CHAPLIN
WEST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Starmer's Labour has made it a mission to drive down the benefits bill by blaming, particularly young, unemployed and sick people. But where does the money spent on Universal Credit (UC) go? UC rolled into one system a number of benefits including Housing Benefit, Jobseeker's Allowance and Child Tax Credit. On the surface, Universal Credit might appear to be a functional benefits system, but anyone who has to jump through the bureaucratic hoops knows otherwise. For anyone with variable income or fluctuating childcare costs, for example, it is a nightmare. More than half of all people on UC can't afford to eat properly, and 40% skipped meals.

Part of a UC claimant's entitlement is for housing. The maximum amount of money that can be used for housing through Universal Credit is called the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate. LHA is based on private rent levels in large areas and varies by postcode and local authority. It's based on the lower 30th

percentile of rents - lower than the average - meaning tenants in towns with higher rents will receive a payment that is not reflective of actual house prices in their area.

Labour's October Budget froze the LHA rates for next year, something the Tories have done for 7 of the last 12. However much landlords raise rents next year (8.4% on average this year), claimants' benefits won't rise to cover the increase.

The glaring issue here is that rents used for the LHA calculation are set by private landlords and estate agents, who are more interested in maximising income than providing affordable housing to tenants. This means the government, via Universal Credit recipients, is paying landlords' sky-high rents. In 2021-22, 88% of the money spent by the government on housing was on housing benefits, that's nearly £27 billion! Additionally, bills for services such as water, electricity and gas are not covered by the housing allowance, meaning people receiving LHA still have to pay high rates for these, also set by privately owned companies.

A better system would provide safe, genuinely affordable council housing for all and set strict rent controls to avoid government payments going straight into landlords' pockets.

88% of money spent by the government on housing went to benefits - not building new houses



Assad Syria government falls

The fall of President Bashar al-Assad has been met with jubilation by many Syrians relieved at the end of his authoritarian rule. Syria's recent history is one of bloody civil war engaging Assad's government forces and numerous other armed groups and militias - all with backing from different foreign capitalist states, including the US and Western European states, Turkey, Iran and Russia (see pages 8-9).

For analysis of developments across the Middle East, visit socialistworld.net - an article on Syria will be posted there in coming days.



Save our steel, nationalise now!

DANIEL FORREST
TEESSIDE SOCIALIST PARTY

Negotiations between the Labour government and Jingye group, the owners of British Steel, continue to grind along like two bureaucratic, self-interested icebergs, whilst the future of our steel industry hangs by a thread.

The last plant in Britain to make steel from iron ore stands in Scunthorpe which employs around 4,000 people. This comes after thousands of jobs were ruthlessly cut by Tata Steel at their Port Talbot plant in south Wales.

The government are in talks with Jingye over the future of the plant, with a government 'investment plan' being mulled over to convert existing blast furnaces into electric arc furnaces. In plain English, the taxpayer will pay around half of the cost, whilst Jingye would take out all of the profits, as happened with Tata in Port Talbot! All the while, workers' jobs are held hostage as part of bargaining by the company.

In a half-hearted statement, the business secretary Jonathan Reynolds has talked about potentially nationalising the plant. British Steel spent ten months under government ownership in 2020, only to be sold off to the highest bidder (the now-owner Jingye) after the public spent £600 million keeping the industry afloat.

Instead of this fleeing of the state and taxpayer by billionaires, we say nationalise British Steel permanently! Not for ten months. Not for ten weeks. Permanently and with



Teesside beam mill, owned by British Steel, which is currently supplied by British Steel's plants

Rail renationalisation: We need a high-quality, properly funded, free public transport system

JAY COWARD
SOUTH EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Under changes by the new Labour government, rail operators will be taken into public ownership when their private contracts end. Routes run by South Western Railway by May 2025, C2C in July 2025, and Greater Anglia in Autumn 2025 will come under a new arm's length body, Great British Railway (GBR).

The government is choosing to let the companies continue to profit until their contracts expire rather than nationalise now. The question in most ordinary people's minds will be: "Does this lower the fares?"

And therein lies the problem, rail fares are rising by 4.6% from March 2025. Secretary of State for Transport Heidi Alexander described this as "the lowest absolute increase for the last three years." Yet it is still an increase, and above the rate of inflation. Alexander also added "The primary aim of [GBR] is to improve reliability and clamp down on the delays, the cancellation, the waste and the inefficiency that we've seen." And that "affordability is really important to people" but that "people were willing to pay for a good service."

4.6% increase in rail fares coming next March

Nationalisation under Starmer's Labour only means nationalisation which prizes 'efficiency' above the actual people using these services. Labour's plans leave the rolling stock companies, which lease trains to the operators, in the hands of big business and leave the lucrative profits they extract from our rail system untouched.

The whole rail system should be nationalised now - no compensation to the fat-cat bosses, paid only on the basis of proven need. Properly funded and under the democratic control of the working class including the rail workforce and trade unions, the railway could be expanded, improved and made free to use. To get these policies into action, we need a new mass workers' party with this as part of a fighting socialist programme.



South Western Railway, soon to be a thing of the past

Asylum profiteers make millions from poor conditions

Build council homes for all



PHOTO: REFUGEE RIGHTS

350%
The recent
rise in home-
lessness
for asylum
seekers

EIRA HADFIELD-JONES

RHONDDA CYNON TAF SOCIALIST PARTY

To the apparent shock of Labour ministers, the privatisation of accommodation for asylum seekers has allowed the companies involved to make massive profits! Yearly profits for Clearsprings, Serco, and Mears (the three housing providers) have all been rising, with Clearsprings alone seeing a massive 60% increase. One Labour minister commented: “[The companies] made way more than was originally envisaged”. Despite claims of a “profit-sharing agreement” with the UK Government (with exact margins not being disclosed publicly), a freedom of information request found that no money has been paid back between 2019-22.

Of course, this news is of no surprise – the simple fact is that privatising a service means stripping quality in the pursuit of profits, and asylum seekers have long been forced to live in inadequate housing, with pests and rampant mould. In light of issues such as these, Labour is now voicing interest in activating a pre-existing break clause in the asylum accommodation and support contracts in 2026, and passing the responsibility of asylum housing to local councils in a bid to find savings of at least £2 billion.

Labour’s proposal to move asylum accommodation responsibility back to local councils is welcome, with the possibility to limit homelessness and allow asylum seekers to establish themselves in a community, knowing they won’t eventually be moved elsewhere. The current asylum accommodation system is built on a complex network of ‘initial accommodation’ in hotels and long-term ‘dispersal

accommodation’. This dispersal accommodation is withdrawn 28 days after an acceptance, leaving asylum seekers who can’t find council housing within this timeframe homeless. With a recent rise of 350% of homelessness for asylum seekers, the chaos of this system is impossible to overstate. Labour has doubled this 28 days to 56 temporarily, but this does nothing to address massive shortages in council housing.

However, placing the burden onto local government won’t solve the crisis. Councils are faced with a £4.3 billion funding deficit next year, and Labour’s budget has failed to rectify this. Multiple councils have now declared themselves effectively bankrupt, and vital services are being cut. Labour’s pledge to build “up to 5000 additional affordable homes” is equally unacceptable, failing to meet even current demand. Socialist Party members have been organising and taking part in campaigns demanding an end to privatisation and cuts. Wait times for and conditions within council housing are at a crisis level, and a massive expansion of council home building and renovations is desperately needed.

At the same time, any rhetoric that paints the needs of asylum seekers as being separate to anyone else’s must be rejected. There is incredible wealth in society but it’s in the wrong hands. There are more empty homes than there are homeless people! Leaving councils and services without enough money to operate allows the capitalist system to divide the working class and keep us in competition. A massive expansion to council housing isn’t just a solution for the asylum system – it is a change that would benefit everyone.

Gregg Wallace allegations show need for strong workplace organisation

PIPPA EVANS

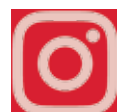
TOWER HAMLETS SOCIALIST PARTY

Allegations of workplace sexual harassment against MasterChef host Gregg Wallace have dominated the headlines. Spanning nearly 20 years, he has been accused of inappropriate sexual comments and behaviours when working on several TV programmes. Although the BBC has now been forced to pause filming of the show, numerous complaints were made to it over the years and, unsurprisingly, insufficient action was taken.

Although the allegations are serious, they won’t necessarily come as a shock. They paint a familiar picture to workers across the country, where bosses put profits over a safe work environment. Research by the Trades Union Congress found that 3 in 5 women have experienced sexual harassment at work, rising to 2 in 3 for women aged 25-30, and rising again for those on precarious zero-hour contracts. But for many, fear

of retaliation or ineffective reporting processes prevent them from reporting incidents of harassment to their employers.

The allegations against Greg Wallace are a reminder that strong, democratic trade unions are needed to fight workplace sexual harassment, demanding robust and transparent reporting mechanisms, quality training and support for victims. Trade unions must also fight for the banning of exploitative contracts, and for stronger workers’ rights to fight back against the sexist power imbalances that are inherent to the exploitative capitalist system. Unions that are supportive of workers taking action against sexist and racist employers can give confidence to fight back – history shows us that collective action is the most effective way to ensure safer work environments.



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Gregg Wallace PHOTO: BRIAN MINKOFF - LONDON PIXELS/CC



I’ve moved again, and my local shops have closed again

JOHN MERRELL

LEICESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

I have moved house four times in the last eight years. On two of those occasions, the local Co-op supermarket closed in the following 12 months. And now my present Co-op has closed too.

The loyal staff, with decades of service, were told a few weeks before that it would close on 6 December. One of the staff, due to retire mid-December, brought forward her departure to the 5th, only to discover that Co-op’s dash for the exit had been brought forward to 30 November. Bosses are making cuts to increase profits.

At the back of the store, I spoke to two staff. One who was being retained by the new owners, who are expanding the shop’s 14 hours to 24 hours’ opening, said: “We’re losing all our benefits”.

The staff are members of shop workers’ union Usdaw. One recently completed a trade union stewards’ training course.

I recommended she urgently contact the union about the new owners reneging on their Tupe obligations, which are supposed to protect working conditions when being transferred between companies. The look on her face reflected the bosses’ brutal, breakneck speed in carrying out the closure and reopening.

I left them to continue their emptying of the store, wishing them well in a most uncertain future. Whilst at the front, bemused customers tapped on the locked, windowed doors, where the lights were on, but nobody was at home.

WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?

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Starmer unpopular – but what will opposition look like?

Socialist Party WHAT WE THINK

You probably don't need the Socialist to tell you Keir Starmer is unpopular. His net approval rating has plummeted in his first months in office, as it has for all of the recent austerity politicians acting in the interests of the super-rich bosses. Not that Labour started its time in office popular, securing the votes of just 20.1% of the electorate in the general election.

What has happened so far under this Labour government to in any way quench the burning anger and frustration with crumbling services and the cost-of-living crisis? In fact, the callous decisions to keep the two-child benefit cap, and cut pensioners' winter fuel payments are only adding fuel to the fire.

It will find an expression, as it did during the strike wave. The trade unions can give working-class anger an organised expression under pressure of workers' desire to fight back.

Strikes

Starmer's government wants to give itself credit for bringing public sector strikes to a close. By calibrating pay deals to the level they judged enough to stop strikes, and with the assistance of trade union leaders to peddle the myth that Labour can 'change' British capitalism so that it serves both the interests of workers and the capitalist class.

Besides, Starmer's government hasn't stopped public sector strikes. Teachers in non-academised sixth form colleges are striking demanding a funded pay rise. There has been a whole spate of local NHS strikes over pay grading and outsourcing.

Nor will it indefinitely be able



IMAGES: PAUL MATTSSON, PAUL LANG/CC AND NUMBER 10 CC

to prevent nationwide strikes developing.

23 million people will get their chance to express dissatisfaction with Labour at the ballot box in the May 2025 local elections, the majority in local authorities led by the Tories. It is highly likely that, of the minority who decide to vote, an increased proportion will take up the 'Reform stick' to hit both Labour and the Tories.

One recent poll puts Labour third,

behind the Tories and Reform. At re-al-life ballot boxes, in the 101 council by-elections contested between the general election and 13 November, Labour's vote share was an average of 30%, to the Tories' 25% and Reform's 19%. All election statistics and opinion polls only give a glimpse of the views of a certain section of the population at any given time.

The phantom of a future Nigel Farage prime minister will be conjured, playing on many working-class

people's understandable fear and disgust of his Reform UK. "If this Labour government goes down, what comes next will be Faragism, either as a Reform UK-Conservative hybrid or neat and undiluted," Guardian journalist Jonathan Freedland writes.

And so, the argument goes, by sections of the capitalist establishment including Labour, echoed by sections of the trade union leaders: 'Don't do anything that might weaken this Labour government'.

Phantom Farage

But the next general election will take place in a completely different economic, social and political context than that which exists today, just five months into the new government. There will be huge opportunities for the working class to stamp itself on events, and in doing so knock the wind out of other forces cynically and opportunistically trying to misdirect working-class anger.

Freedland despairs about the 'inevitable' rise of 'nationalist populism', pointing to international examples such as the threat of the far-right Marine Le Pen in France.

He doesn't mention that the New Popular Front won the most seats in the election this summer and that the ongoing political crisis in France includes a surge in support for the left-wing France Insoumise. Or that the French government's collapse coincides with redeveloping strikes (see page 15). There are huge opportunities for the working class to seize the political crisis and get the upper hand.

In Britain, there is no course charted straight from Labour failure to 'Faragism'. And no possible imagined future that doesn't include a resurgence of class struggle – the memory of the strike wave still fresh, protests and political opportunities for the working class. Every possible step has to be taken to make sure that those who try to hold things back with 'don't do anything that might weaken this Labour government' are swept aside or otherwise forced to bend to working-class pressure.

That's why the elections to the leadership bodies of key trade unions taking place in the first months of 2025 are so important. And why the Socialist Party will be standing and campaigning, alongside others, for fighting trade union leaderships prepared to take on this Labour government, and prepared to take steps towards the trade unions themselves building political opposition to Labour at the ballot box.



Thames Water bonuses: water load of crap

Pollution incidents, aka releasing sewage into our rivers and beaches, up by 40%. A debt pile so massive, a result of decades of squeezing any drops of profit from the water company, the company may run out of cash as soon as March. And customers face bill increases of 50% over the next five years.

There's not much to smile about the situation at Thames Water, the crisis-ridden private water company. (See 'Thames Water crisis: We need socialist nationalisation' at

socialistparty.org.uk). But the bosses, currently begging the government for a bailout while leaving them in charge, won't be crying into their Christmas egg-nogs. They've turned the bonus taps on – to the tune of £770,000! Chief executive Chris Weston, himself getting a £195,000 bonus for the first three months at the company, defending the "competitive packages" as needing to "attract talent".

This whole situation smells worse than one of Thames Water's leaky

pipes. Instead of bailing out bosses we need to drain the cesspool and take our water system back into public ownership. We could run it democratically with workers' control and management to stop the waste and fix the pipes, stop pumping shit into our waterways, and kick the private profiting leaches out!



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Government attacks: PCS union needs to fight

But PCS president and general secretary still try to sink campaign

In the October Budget, Labour proposed 2% ‘savings’ in government departments. As we go to press, the government is threatening a further 5% cuts – attacking overworked low-paid civil servants for alleged ‘poor performance’.

Yet at its December National Executive Committee (NEC), the national president and general secretary of the PCS union, which organises the majority of workers in government departments, continued their months-long campaign to block any serious national campaign and throw out attempts of the membership to call them to account.

What follows is an edited version of a report by the PCS Broad Left Network. For the full report, see bln.org.uk

The December NEC opened with two major rows and a threat by the national president to adjourn the NEC, which he did not carry out.

NEC member Marion Lloyd queried why the agenda didn’t include a report on the large number of branches that had submitted motions calling for a Special Delegate Conference (SDC).

Since September, reps and members across PCS have been asking questions about the lack of any serious campaigning action from the union – ever more important as Labour tighten the screws. This inaction is not for want of trying by the left majority of the NEC, which includes supporters of the Broad Left Network [BLN – in which the Socialist Party participates], the Independent Left and other independents.

Branches have been calling for an SDC to hold the leadership of PCS to account, especially president Martin Cavanagh and general secretary Fran Heathcote. This has been met with undemocratic manoeuvring by Cavanagh and Heathcote, including putting out messages directly to all members of branches passing a motion for an SDC, attacking the views of elected reps in those branches.

Cavanagh, chairing the NEC meeting, responded to Marion that all the submissions from branches were being treated as correspondence!

He claimed (without providing

figures) that the vast majority had refused to stipulate whether their call for an SDC had been passed by an Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM). But there is no requirement in the union rules for an EGM to be held.

Skewered

One NEC member skewered the argument that the president “cannot be sure that these motions were passed at valid EGMs” by pointing out that her branch EGM had passed two motions, and one of these had been circulated to the NEC (ie accepted as valid), whereas the one calling for an SDC had not.

Another reported that the executive committee of the Revenue and Customs group had voted to write to branches to suggest that they should call EGMs, but this decision had been blocked by the unelected group secretary, an employee of the union.

An NEC member asked that Cavanagh put to the vote a proposal that all the motions passed by branches be reported for debate before the NEC ended. Cavanagh would not do so, as he would have lost the vote. He issued a ruling that he would report back on the motions but, importantly given the urgency of the issue, failed to stipulate whether this would happen before the next NEC in mid-January.

This is how every NEC meeting has progressed since May. No matter



PCS members on strike during the strike wave, 2023
PAUL MATTISSON

what the left majority on the NEC puts forward in respect of building the union’s national campaign, 90% of it is simply vetoed by the president.

Strike levy

The paper put by the general secretary contained one recommendation only: to “pause the levy” that members have been paying to build up the strike fund for a major campaign.

It is remarkable that the general secretary came with nothing serious to propose to the NEC, but she has collaborated with the president to veto anything resembling a strategy since May. This included vetoing a motion proposed by the NEC majority at this December meeting.

Nevertheless, the question of the levy is important. The levy was introduced in 2023 by the previous NEC. That NEC was led by the ‘Democracy Alliance’ and the mis-named ‘Left Unity’ grouping, which Cavanagh and Heathcote are both part of. It was ousted from its majority in the elections in May 2024.

The first time the levy was discussed by the NEC with the new left majority, in July, Marion Lloyd proposed that the levy be subject to a review, to make sure that it was fit for purpose and to reduce the burden on the lowest-paid members. This proposal was agreed by the NEC but was never implemented, as it was missed off the Record of Decisions (the minutes) by the general secretary. An attempt to amend the record to include that decision was

vetoed by the president – as it has been subsequently, every time the NEC majority has tried to raise it.

That hasn’t stopped the Left Unity grouping dishonestly campaigning to stop the levy.

The general secretary’s proposal to pause it was on the basis that the union’s strike mandate has now lapsed and there are no plans for immediate action. Put another way, Heathcote and Cavanagh have actively obstructed our national campaign, and are now arguing that, as we’re not planning immediate strike action, there is no need for the levy.

But you don’t take the bullets out of your gun when a shoot-out is looming.

Heathcote reported that there are preliminary discussions with the government on next year’s pay beginning soon. What a signal to send to ministers just prior to crucial talks, that we aren’t prepared to fight on pay!

And then there is the issue of jobs. PCS conference agreed to fight for 100,000 additional civil service jobs. But the Labour government has moved to redundancies in the Department for Transport, has just announced 5,600 job cuts in the Ministry of Defence, and is now threatening 5% cuts to government departments.

This government is not the friend of workers, and anyone who imagines that gains will happen for civil servants – or any other section of the working class – simply by osmosis, is wrong. We must be ready to fight.



PCS members at Cabinet Office on strike, 10 December, 2024
ROB WILLIAMS

Citizen Housing workers: ‘They failed, we won’

Citizen Housing is a housing association based in the West Midlands, with over a thousand staff and 30,000 homes.

Unite members at Citizen have taken strike action over pay and won an improved offer: £500 plus a 4.5% backdated pay rise, up from the initial offer of 3.2%.

A CITIZEN HOUSING REP TOLD THE UNITE HOUSING WORKERS BRANCH:

“

A new fighting team of reps definitely impacted events. The dispute was mainly about pay, but it was also about making up for previous years when pay settlements had been low. Some years ago, trades workers had experienced pay cuts of up to £13,000 so they feel especially aggrieved.

There was another element of defending the union, as management were definitely out to attempt to break us. They failed, we won.

Management underestimated our numbers and our determination to fight. They thought we had fewer members than we did, because they were only looking at members who were on ‘check-off’ (union fees taken from wages), whereas most of our members are now on direct debit.



BIRMINGHAM SOCIALIST PARTY

“

Management underestimated our numbers and our determination to fight

They were so bullish early on but got a rude awakening. They told us there was no more money and we would have to ballot our members. So we did, and we got an 87% vote in favour of strike action on a 67% turnout.

We prepared well for the strike by holding focus groups, union open days, meetings in the mess room, and we even managed to get a piece

on the company website about our proposals.

Our regional official sent out multiple emails, we made sure that each member received at least two calls from the reps. In addition, we had a WhatsApp group where we were able to answer all the members’ concerns.

Strike grew union

Membership grew in the run up to the strike, during the strike, and it is still growing now. We had members join us from Unison who were displeased with the fact that their union had not balloted and kept them in the dark about what was going on. Workers joined up on the picket line and more are joining after the victory.

We enjoyed great support from the workers with hundreds on the picket

lines. 180 walked out on the first day of the strike and more joined as the strike rolled on. The picket lines were very vibrant, it was a great atmosphere. We had two picket lines, one in Birmingham and another in Coventry. The Strawbs ‘You can’t beat me, I’m part of the union’ was on repeat.

We had great support from the

“

180 walked out on the first day of the strike and more joined as the strike rolled on

local community and other Unite branches. Reps went to speak at various Unite branches in the Midlands to get financial and political support. We had support from the local trades council as well as the former Socialist MP Dave Nellist. People from Acorn, the local trades council and the Socialist Party visited the picket line to show solidarity.

The strike has brought us much closer together. It has been the best team-building exercise ever. Workers who do not normally come into contact with one another met each other on the picket line. Office workers and the trades were brought together.

We now want to prepare for next year’s pay deal, and fight for improvements to terms and conditions, in particular fighting for a reduction in the working week.

PCS members fight victimisation

NEC MEMBER AND BROAD LEFT NETWORK CHAIR MARION LLOYD SAYS:

“Major congratulations to the PCS union reps and members at HMRC



Benton Park View, Newcastle, who pushed for and decisively won a strike ballot over the dismissal of three union reps. The employer must be told: this is not going away. Reinstate our reps now and avoid the pain of a prolonged dispute!

“This same day sees the escalation of the dispute of outsourced PCS members working for G4S and ISS. Pay up and bring these services back in-house.

“And brave members striking in the Disclosure and Barring Service over the imposition of an inferior system which will not deliver quality service for our communities.

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RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR ACCELERATES

NIALL MULHOLLAND

COMMITTEE FOR A WORKERS' INTERNATIONAL (CWI)

It is often a paradox of war that as the end begins to loom in the distance, the ground fighting intensifies. With the election of Donald Trump to the White House, the war in Ukraine, which has been grinding on for more than 1,000 days, has significantly escalated. Trump has said that he intends to bring the war to an end "within 24 hours". Leaving aside Trump's bombast, both sides in the conflict regard his coming to power as an alarm call to try to gain as much territorial advantage as possible before any negotiations or truce.

The outgoing US president, 'genocide Joe' Biden, has relented to the demands of Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky, and allowed ATAC-MS long-range missiles to be used against targets inside Russia. The Zelensky regime lost no time in deploying the weapons to the north of the Kursk region, where Ukrainian forces occupy about 600 square kilometres of Russian territory.

Unsurprisingly, Russian President Vladimir Putin reacted furiously to the use of these missiles and others delivered from the UK government. Putin stated that this has led to "a new spiral of tensions". The Russian military launched an 'experimental' missile attack against Ukraine targets and hundreds of drone attacks on energy facilities and other targets.

Putin also announced the "lowering of the nuclear weapons use threshold" by Russia. It is speculated in the West, alongside nuclear weapons sabre rattling, that the Putin regime will give military aid to the Houthis forces in Yemen, which could be used to devastating effect against international shipping.

Following Putin's invasion in February 2022, the war morphed into a war of attrition, with a frontline more than 1,000 kilometres long, from the southern Kherson region to Kharkiv in the northeast of Ukraine. In recent months, however, fighting on the ground has been going in favour of Putin's regime. "Russian forces make gains on the battlefield at a faster rate than at any point since 2022", commented the Financial Times. The Zelensky regime has lost nearly 20% of Ukraine's territory and tens of thousands of soldiers (according to Western politicians and media, Russia has lost many more troops, running into the hundreds of thousands, but these figures are not independently verifiable). Russia has captured more than 1,200 square kilometres in Ukraine since August, twice the territory Kyiv's troops hold in the Kursk region.

Although Ukraine troops seized parts of the Kursk region in August, they have been on the rearguard since October, steadily losing ground to Russia in Kursk. Zelensky's August gamble also came at the expense of losing territory to Russia in Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region.

Ceding control of Kursk to Russia would be a significant setback for Zelensky, depriving him of a valuable bargaining chip in future negotiations. Military analysts say that Zelensky, up against a larger and better-equipped Russian army, will primarily try to strengthen Ukraine's eastern position and stabilise its defences in case it is forced by Trump into negotiations with Putin.

Even Western media have reported that there is widespread demoralisation among Ukrainian soldiers, with reports of desertions. Many civilians attempt to avoid the call-up and there are reports of forcible conscription. Increasingly the population of Ukraine has called for negotiations to bring the conflict to an end. The days of fever-pitch patriotism and war enthusiasm are long gone.

Unsurprisingly Putin is in no hurry to go into peace talks, with momentum in his favour. He demands that he will only enter talks if Ukraine accepts Russian occupation of four Ukrainian regions.

Syria

However, the Russian army has also faced overstretch, such as its recent intervention in Syria and failed attempts to shore up the now-deposed Bashar al-Assad regime. The hated Assad dynastic regime, in power since 1970, imploded, leading to jubilation among sections of the Syrian masses. The right-wing Islamist group, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), joined by the Syrian National Army (backed by Nato-member Turkey) and former members of the western-backed Free Syrian Army, swept across Syria as they saw the opportunity to strike against the weakened and rotten Assad regime while its key allies, Russia, Iran and Hezbollah, were engaged in the Ukraine war and Gaza and Lebanon conflicts.

In the initial aftermath of Assad's fall, partly reflecting the desires of the masses from below, even HTS representatives talked about defending the rights of minorities and declared their victory as: "The victory of the great Syrian revolution after thirteen years of patience and sacrifice."

However, no trust can be placed by the working masses in Syria in HTS and other reactionary forces that have toppled Assad. To successfully cut across a new round of sectarian and ethnic conflict will require the building of united, non-sectarian defence committees to defend workers, the poor and others against attacks from all sides. To genuinely see the last of dictatorships, poverty and conflict requires a government of representatives of the workers and poor, prepared to break with all the imperialist powers.

Although it is reported that both Russia and Iran had lost faith in the Assad regime in recent months, the fall of the regime in Damascus is still a big blow for their interests in the region. The loss of Russia's bases in the country would seriously undermine

the Russian army's reach in the region and Mediterranean. Donald Trump asserted on social media that the fall of Assad was a setback for Russia and Putin now needs to enter talks to end the war in Ukraine.

It remains to be seen what takes place in Syria in the next days, weeks and months. Can a 'transitional government' hold together given the sectarian and ethnic divisions and competing militias? The Russian military may be forced to step in again to defend Moscow's interests, taking precious resources away from Ukraine.

Ukraine war's consequences

The Ukraine conflict has had consequences across the region and globally, interacting with the fallout from the Gaza and Lebanese fighting. We have seen a significant rise in military spending in the US, Europe, Russia and China over the last number of years. The Ukraine conflict has only speeded up this process. While the working class across Europe and internationally is facing the squeeze of the cost-of-living crisis, obscene amounts of money are being spent on weapons.

The Ukraine war also looms over the politics of the region. Recent elections and referendums in Georgia and Moldova, where there are significant Russian-speaking minorities, have resulted in sharp polarisation and street clashes. Recently in Romania there was the shock election result of a populist nationalist, and supposedly pro-Putin politician, winning the first round of the presidential elections. The annulment of this result by the courts could spark new street protests and fighting.

Although facing Western sanctions, the Russian economy has opened new trade links to China, Iran, North Korea and others. Russia has become a 'war economy', with factories and production tailored towards the war effort.

With the coming to office of Trump, it is likely that Zelensky will face huge pressure to negotiate an end to the conflict. At the same time, he will be under pressure from Ukrainian nationalists, including the far-right elements, not to give an inch of Ukrainian territory to Russia. It is not ruled out that he could be removed from office by whatever means for Ukraine to sit down at the table and discuss with Russia.

Under pressure from the Trump White House, it is possible that a negotiated truce agreement can be reached between the two sides over the next months. This is not definite, however, as war has its own momentum. A truce may take place without any formal negotiated agreement. This could become another so-called 'frozen conflict' in the region, where the level of fighting declines, at least for a period.

It is mooted by some Western politicians that the European powers should keep arming and funding the Ukraine war effort should Trump



withdraw support to Kyiv. But this is predicated on agreement on such a policy between the major European powers, at a time when Germany and France are in economic and political crisis, and it would entail huge financial and military costs. And continuing a war against Russia would have to be without the state-of-the-art military assistance of the US, the world's strongest armed power.

There can be no long-term solution to war, division and poverty in Ukraine and Russia based on capitalism - of the rule of the oligarchs who will exploit national and ethnic divisions when fighting rivals, and with the meddling of outside powers who used Ukraine as a pawn in their geo-strategic considerations.

For the working classes of Ukraine and Russia, the only way out of this horror is to return to the ideals of the Bolsheviks and the 1917 October socialist revolution. This is the only way to win genuinely long-lasting peace and prosperity. In the first place, this requires building mass working-class organisations, such as independent trade unions, and mass parties of the working class with bold socialist policies to oppose the oligarchs and the rule of Putin and Zelensky.

Socialist approach

The analysis and approach of the CWI to the war in Ukraine has been vindicated by events. The CWI did not fall into the trap of cheering along either Putin or Zelensky. Some on the left drew the erroneous conclusion that Putin's Russia must represent some sort of progressive rule or that Zelensky was leading a military struggle comparable to the fight against Franco's forces in Spain in the 1930s.

There is nothing whatsoever progressive about the rule of Putin and his oligarch friends. They represent the interests of the rich elite which are opposed to those of the working class and all minorities.

Indeed, when launching his aggression against Ukraine in February 2022, Putin, in a long rambling speech, attacked the Bolsheviks, especially Lenin, for supposedly having created an artificial Ukrainian nationhood. The reality is that Lenin understood that the way to win over the oppressed nationalities to the socialist revolution was to guarantee their right to self-determination, up to and including separation, if that was the wish of the oppressed nations.

Ukraine became a republic within the workers' Soviet Union. Under the rule of Stalin and the Great Russian chauvinist bureaucracy, however, the principles of Lenin were trodden upon. Instead of a socialist federation voluntarily entered by nations based on genuine equality, we saw the monstrous Russian bureaucratic-dominated USSR dictatorship.

Today, it is necessary for socialists and Marxists to condemn the invasion of Ukraine by Putin's forces. From the start of the war, the CWI supported the rights of Ukrainians to

sovereignty and to resist foreign occupation, advocating for this to be organised by workers on democratic lines and making a class appeal to Russian troops. The CWI never gave an inch of support to the reactionary Zelensky regime, which, like Putin's regime, is based on the rule of capitalism and oligarchs, and which has conducted the war utilising right-wing Ukrainian nationalist propaganda, and a capitalist hierarchical army that includes far-right elements, in league with Western imperialism.

At the same time, Marxists must consider the sentiments and demands of those living in Crimea and the ethnic Russians in the Donbass region and other parts of eastern Ukraine. They have the right also not to be coerced under Zelensky's Ukrainian nationalist, right-wing regime. We support the right of the people of these areas to determine their future, in a genuinely democratic manner, free from all outside meddling.

Winning the working class of Ukraine, Russia and the region to a socialist programme will not be easy or straightforward but the 'alternative' under capitalist restoration is being played out before us like a dystopian movie - wars, ethnic divisions, poverty and right-wing dictatorial rule.



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WE NEED A ‘PEOPLE’S BUDGET’ IN OUR AREA

51 disabled adults are losing their day centre in east London. This is the consequence of Labour councils passing on 14 years of Tory central government cuts. Councils will have a £4 billion shortfall next year. This is on top of billions of pounds stolen by Tories from local councils, an average 26% cut in their spending power.

But even though the Tories have been kicked out of Westminster, Labour is continuing with austerity.

We won’t take this lying down. The workers’ movement should come together to coordinate opposition.

Community campaigners and trade unionists should draw up ‘People’s Budgets’ based on people’s needs, summarising all the services required by the community. Enfield Trades Union Council in north London has unanimously passed a motion saying just that (see opposite).

Local councils could deliver

hardship payments for everyone impacted by Labour’s winter fuel cut. And send the bill to the government.

Even just the councils with elections this May, a minority, together have over £7.5 billion in reserves. That money could be used to fund the services we need, while buying time to build a mass campaign to force the national Labour government to pay up.

1.3 million people work for local councils. When they strike, they have huge strength. The Labour government has already once decided to pay up to avoid strikes.

One third of the country will vote in the May 2025 county council elections. Many of these are still controlled by the Tories.

So, it’s important that the Socialist Party is preparing to stand – as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) – for no-cuts People’s Budgets. And we want to discuss with anyone who wants to stand for that.

£4 billion council shortfall



1.3 million council workers

Unions fighting local cuts

Enfield Trades Union Council unanimously passed this motion to campaign against local council cuts in September. It was moved by Socialist Party member John Dolan.

THIS TRADES COUNCIL NOTES:

- The crisis in local government acutely affects communities in Enfield
- Many councils, including Enfield, have carried out damaging cuts and yet are on the brink of financial collapse due to ongoing government cuts
- That the pay of local government workers has been driven down for more than a decade
- The most deprived areas of Enfield, such as Edmonton, have been hit by multiple cuts.

THIS TRADES COUNCIL SUPPORTS:

- The current pay campaign of local government workers.

- The campaigners for more council housing and for better regulation of the private sector
- The campaign against library closures in Enfield.
- The campaign to get Edmonton Green Leisure Centre reopened.
- The call on councillors to resist cuts to funding, and to demand an end to austerity from the new Labour government.

THIS TRADES COUNCIL RESOLVES TO:

- Launch a campaign for a legal needs-based, no-cuts budget.
- Hold a community-based ‘Peoples Budget’ Enfield event, prior to the Enfield Council budget-setting meeting in early 2025.

- Read more – ‘Enfield challenges Labour and Tory politicians over cuts’
- And see ‘Councils on the frontline – and where the fightback can begin’
- Both at socialistparty.org.uk



26% spending cuts

Labour council rubber stamps closure of disabled adult day centre

Fight goes on

CHRIS CORNEY
WALTHAM FOREST SOCIALIST PARTY

The Labour council cabinet unanimously passed the decision to close Markhouse Centre in Waltham Forest – without even taking a proper vote, just a murmur of agreement – to jeers and cries of “cowards” from the public gallery.

In a final attempt to persuade councillors to stop the planned closure of the centre for disabled adults, Socialist Party members joined service users’ families and supporters at Waltham Forest Town Hall on 3 December.

Socialist Party member Kevin Parslow, spoke to the council chamber in his capacity as secretary of Waltham Forest Trades Union Council. He branded it a terrible decision for the 51 adults who use the service, and the workers whose jobs will be lost.



The decision was based on the alleged high cost of building repairs in a bogus ‘independent’ survey report. Service users produced evidence that, far from being ‘independent’, the survey company had Labour councillors sitting on the board of directors. Evidence was produced to councillors that the figures for repairs were wildly exaggerated, but to no avail.

It seemed that the decision had already been made months before, as it

is likely that the council wants to sell the land for the centre to developers. 51 disabled adults will now lose what for many was a second home, their carers will lose vital respite, and the workers could lose their jobs.

‘Difficult decisions’

One Labour councillor called it “one of the most difficult decisions in my ten years as a councillor”. But she did not respond to demands that the

council should use some of its £50 million reserves to keep the centre open, and demand proper funding from central Labour government.

People’s budget

She and her Labour colleagues showed no appetite to follow the methods used by the Militant (now the Socialist Party) led Liverpool Council in the 1980s. Mobilise local people, set budgets based on need,

and successfully extract funds from central government to provide housing and protect vital services.

Waltham Forest, and other Labour councils up and down the country, have tamely passed on cuts to services. They try to blame 14 years of Tory austerity, but now they demonstrate that getting rid of the Tories has made no difference.

Private developers

The dwindling estate of publicly owned properties is being sold off in order to sustain profits for private developers, as the price of decades of economic capitalist failure is passed on to the most vulnerable.

The fight goes on. Service users are threatening judicial review of the decision. The Socialist Party supports every effort to save this vital service.

By mobilising the whole community to resist cuts, the remaining services will be preserved, and decades of Labour and Tory austerity will be reversed. Bold protest action can maximise pressure on this cutting council to reverse this scandalous decision.

Interview: Nottingham anti-cuts councillor resigns from Labour

Shuguftah Quddoos was the only councillor – out of 55, including 50 Labour – to vote against a budget of over £30 million cuts and charges in March, including the equivalent of over 550 job losses. She held the ceremonial ‘Sheriff of Nottingham’ post at the time.

Socialist Party member Gary Freeman spoke with Nottingham independent anti-cuts councillor Shuguftah, who resigned from the Labour Party on 28 November.

Gary Freeman: Why did you resign from the Labour Party?

Shuguftah Quddoos: I have been suspended by the Labour Party since voting against the budget in March.

I am concerned about the impact that the new government’s decision to remove the winter fuel payment will have for many older people, and its refusal to lift the two-child benefit cap on families. I am deeply concerned at their position on an international level, with the genocide taking place in Gaza, Lebanon, and Palestine.

I love this city. And in the last six months, campaign groups across the city have reached out to me, including from outside the ward.

People want a representative who represents them. This completely took me back, that my being the only councillor to vote against the budget would lead to me being the person people felt they could reach out to.

Gary: In your resignation statement, you mention that you were inspired by the Poplar Rebellion that appeared on the Save Our Services WhatsApp group.

Shuguftah: That’s what history is there for – to inspire us. The more I researched it, the more confident I became. Having shared the link with other councillors to consider a collective action here, I was deeply disappointed with the lack of interest.

Obviously, I will be voting against the cuts budget coming up. After I resigned, the Labour Party was quoted by the media as saying: “The new Labour leadership at Nottingham City Council is focused on taking the tough and responsible decisions to fix our local authority, and it is making progress.”

That is code for making cuts. I have always said: “I am not afraid of making tough decisions. I am afraid of making the wrong ones.”

Gary: You have been identified with Nottingham Save Our Services (SOS). You were on our campaign stall outside the last full council meeting, encouraging people to come to the stall and talking with them.

Shuguftah: Yes. I met you in January. It was icy and cold. I spoke at that meeting [the official launch of the campaign].

I was thinking about the situation in the Labour Party. I went to the follow-on meeting, and joined the campaign.

I seek to be an open-minded



Nottingham independent anti-cuts councillor Shuguftah Quddoos speaking at a Save Our Services meeting. CHRIST TREGENZA

person, to really listen to what residents are saying, and what community groups are saying to me, as an elected representative.

I’ve had more solidarity from the Save Our Services Group than from anyone, than from the Labour Group. All those years, since being elected in 2019, support from the campaign has been touching from everyone.

I thought, even on the day, some others would vote against. I saw councillors going in. One councillor from The Meadows stood by a ‘Don’t close Meadows Library’ poster, and said: “I’m not going to tell you how I’m going to vote.”

I made the decision to vote against the budget, to be able to then look my residents and officers in the eyes, and be able to know that the I did the right thing to defend them. I needed to be able to sleep at night.

Despite pressures from other councillors, who claimed it would make no difference, my one vote, I then decided to present the petition against the cuts at the meeting.

I emailed the chief whip at 12.03pm, resigning. I was chuckled off the scrutiny committee around 2.30pm.

The budget will go out to public consultation on 17 December for four weeks. This Labour leadership are of the view that we need to make tough financial decisions to balance the books.

The rapid pace of making these cuts

is making local people feel alienated. They are looking for a budget consultation of four weeks over Christmas and New Year on millions of pounds of cuts.

Gary: Do you have anything else to add at the moment?

Shuguftah: I am a socialist. The party has always been second to the people that I represent.

I will fight and represent our residents. The Labour Party says that “there is no alternative”, which is code for cuts. I am looking to put forward an alternative budget.

If you told me a year ago that I would resign, I would have asked why. At the last campaign stall, I was getting people to sign the petition. I received an email from the chief whip, who is a trade union member, saying: “You’ve also been seen on an SOS stall”, and he would like an explanation.

I’ve put out my statement, and as the journalist Joe Locker has reported: “If I cannot speak up without being sanctioned, I cannot remain”. I can now speak freely.

- See “‘Sheriff of Nottingham’ opposes taking from the poor”
- And read about the lessons from Poplar, 100 years on – see ‘It’s better to break the law than break the poor’
- Both at socialistparty.org.uk

Help us raise the funds to back class struggle

MIKE CLEVERLY
WALTHAM FOREST SOCIALIST PARTY

I joined the Militant, the forerunner of the Socialist Party, in 1977. I had been a trade unionist and Labour Party member since I was 15, back in 1957.

I visited the Militant’s headquarters in Hackney, and met some supporters, and this posed a question. How can an organisation with a few hundred members, at that time, rent these premises, and produce a weekly newspaper and monthly magazine?

Peter Jarvis worked in our print shop. He’s a Socialist Party member in Hackney today.

He talked to me. “Our members are serious about financing our organisation.” That discussion was the clincher for me.

Infamous

We are rightly famous for our ability to raise money. And we explain why we need it. The leaflets you will see on demonstrations and campaigns are produced by our members. Not only does our ‘fighting fund’ provide us with vital funds, it also demonstrates our support among the working class.

Wherever you see a ‘Socialist’ paper

being sold, you will see our familiar rattling tins. We are proud of being able to ask for the ‘solidarity price’, and more, when we sell our paper.

The ‘fighting fund appeal’ is an important item on the agenda of our public meetings. Individual members pay subs every month, making a real sacrifice.

Workers fighting back

Many know that the Socialist Party can be relied on to support your struggles, as the tenants on the Butterfields Estate, and the health workers at Whipps Cross Hospital, in my area, know.

Members of the Socialist Party are serious about finance. I think that readers of our Socialist paper are serious too.

Sometimes we are surprised that our readers are generous. It often seems that they were just waiting to be asked, as I was all those years ago.

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Yorkshire	1,582	2,650							
London	2,594	5,000							
Wales	1,099	2,400							
South West	914	2,100							
Northern	305	800							
Southern & SE	823	2,400							
East Midlands	588	2,050							
Eastern	194	1,300							
Other	761	2,400							
TOTAL	11,239	25,000							

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SOUTH KOREA PROTESTS BLOCK ATTEMPTED COUP

CARL SIMMONS (CWI JAPAN)

At 11pm on 3 December, President Yoon Suk Yeol of the Republic of Korea (South Korea) made a public broadcast in which he accused his political opponents of “anti-state activities,” “collaboration with North Korean communists” and of trying to overthrow the country’s “liberal democracy” by creating a “legislative dictatorship”. The Army Chief of Staff, Park An-su, announced that “all political activities... rallies and protests are banned.” The decree put all media under the control of military authorities and ordered trainee doctors, who had resigned en masse, to return to work within 48 hours and banned strikes.

Detention orders were issued for a number of Yoon’s opponents including the leader of the opposition Democratic Party (DKP), but also the leader of his own conservative People Power Party (PPP) and, according to some reports, the leader of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU).

The KCTU played a central role in opposing this attempted coup. In an emergency meeting, the KCTU leadership called on its members to begin an indefinite general strike until Yoon was removed from office. The threat that the power of the organised working class would be mobilised to overturn the coup and defend democratic rights was central to the coup’s rapid collapse.

While this cut across the call for an indefinite general strike, key groups of workers, such as metal and railway workers, had already taken strike action in a bold signal of workers’ resolve. The militant Korean labour movement has a chance to put its stamp on future events, intervening in the deepening political crisis of the ruling crisis and Korean capitalism.

Coup collapses

The National Assembly was not in session at the time of Yoon’s broadcast and police officers blocked entrances to the building in an attempt to stop MPs from voting on the declaration. However, in social media posts read by millions, opposition leaders called for people to assemble outside the National Assembly building to oppose the bill.

Most broadcasters also ignored the decree and continued to cover the popular mobilisation that developed. As Assembly members arrived, protesters confronted police and members of the army’s special services and helped them climb over fences into the building.

Eventually, enough Assembly members were able to make it to the National Assembly to hold a vote, including those from Yoon’s party, voting unanimously to lift the martial law. Six hours after the declaration, Yoon had conceded defeat and lifted

martial law himself.

Most of the coverage in the Western press has treated this attempted coup and its aftermath as merely an aberration in South Korea’s development as a bastion of liberal democracy in Asia. It was the result of a politically incompetent and unpopular president frustrated by his inability to pass his budget and important policies through an opposition-dominated National Assembly and who moved against it to prevent it from launching an investigation into his wife for corruption.

According to this narrative, the defeat of the coup shows the resilience of South Korean ‘democracy’. One Singaporean television news channel even declared: “Capitalism is the unsung hero of South Korean democracy”. This account bears little relation to reality. Other accounts mention the political polarisation between the ruling and opposition parties, both of which are firmly committed to capitalism, drawing superficial comparisons with US politics but ignoring important differences. What lies behind Yoon’s coup attempt and what is likely to happen from now?

Vibrant Asian democracy?

While South Korea is today an advanced capitalist country, it is hardly a typical one. Formerly a Japanese colony, after Japan’s defeat in World War Two, Korea was plunged into war between 1950 and 1953. The Korean War was the first major conflict of the Cold War between the imperialist powers and the Stalinist Soviet Union.

Out of the Korean War, a regime modelled on Stalin’s Russia emerged in the North and an impoverished and autocratic capitalist state emerged in the South. Democracy had to be fought for by mass popular movements that faced brutal repression from right-wing US-backed regimes. As industry developed from the 1970s onwards, the labour movement and independent trade unions played a major role in the struggle for democratic rights.

While Yoon’s coup may have been the first open coup attempt for nearly forty years, today’s South Korean state still carries the imprint of its autocratic past.

The National Security Act introduced in 1948, just prior to the Korean War, is still on the books and it allows for up to seven years imprisonment for anyone “who praises, incites or propagates the activities of an anti-government organisation”. In 2013, the Constitutional Court dissolved the United Progressive Party, a broad vaguely leftist party that had won 13 out of 300 seats in the National Assembly, on the grounds of allegedly ‘pro-North Korean views’.

Leaders of the militant KCTU have repeatedly been arrested on various spurious charges under both ‘liberal’ and ‘conservative’ governments.

Political polarisation

Observers have pointed to the political polarisation between Yoon’s misnamed People Power Party (PPP) and the opposition Democratic Party (DKP). While the DKP has its origins in the democracy movement that overturned military rule in the 1980s, it is a pro-capitalist, broad-tent party that includes people who would be labelled ‘centre-left’ to ‘centre-right’ in most countries. Because of repression, which has made organising left-wing parties difficult, and a voting system rigged against them, much of the Korean left, including trade union leaders, have tended to support this party as the ‘lesser evil’. Invariably though, DKP governments have not kept their promises and betrayed the labour movement.

Yoon was originally appointed as the public prosecutor for Seoul Central district by former DKP president Moon Jae-in, and had played a role in prosecuting former presidents such as Park Geun-hye and a number of former officials and business executives. The relationship turned sour when he attempted to prosecute a number of DKP representatives.

Yoon subsequently joined the conservative PPP and narrowly won the party’s primaries to become its presidential candidate on a programme of unregulated free-market capitalism.

Foreign policy

The immediate trigger for Yoon’s coup was probably the investigation into his wife for corruption. However, there is evidence that the coup was planned up to six months before. Beyond the ‘personal factors’ that divide the capitalist political parties, there are more substantial differences within the South Korean elites. The attempted coup exposed very real policy divisions within the ruling class.

The rise of China as a major power and the war in the Ukraine have led to changes in foreign policy. Korea lies on one of the fault lines of what the IMF has called the world’s “shifting geopolitical tectonic plates”. Despite the fact that South Korea is firmly integrated into the system of US alliances, with over 27,000 US troops stationed on its territory, its elites have adopted a basically pragmatic foreign policy. This includes pursuing the eventual reunification of the Korean Peninsula which necessitates engagement with both China and Russia. The South Korean economy benefited enormously from trade with China between 2003 and 2023, becoming its largest trading partner. It is only in the last two years, with the rise in trade frictions between the US and China, that the relationship has soured and South Korea has adopted a policy of ‘de-risking’ and looking to alternative export markets and investment opportunities in south east Asia.

Ironically for the man who just



President Yoon Suk Yeol PHOTO: REPUBLIC OF KOREA PHOTOSTREAM/CC



Protest against the coup PHOTO: HASHLEU/CC

launched a military coup attempting to suspend democratic rights and detain political rivals, Yoon adopted a policy called ‘values diplomacy’. It emphasised building stronger relationships with countries which ‘shared common values’ with the South Korea. Yoon used the word “freedom” some 35 times in his inaugural address. Despite much talk about a ‘rules-governed international order’, what it means in reality is a much harder line in relationships with North Korea and China, and a closer relationship with the US and, most problematically for Yoon, with Japan.

The South Korean ruling class has historically cloaked itself with an anti-Japanese nationalism in an attempt to cut across class divisions. As the former colonial power, there are many historical and other disputes between South Korea and Japan.

While socialists are internationalists and stand for the closest possible unity of Korean and Japanese workers, we are not indifferent to the grievances of those who suffered under colonial rule. The Japanese military regime that committed crimes in Korea and other Japanese colonies was also the enemy of the Japanese labour movement. Yoon’s policies have coincided with the US Biden administration’s promotion of alliances aimed at countering China and a coup, stated in an interview with the liberal Hankyoreh newspaper: “The president’s declaration [of martial law] was valid for all of two or three hours. But this is likely only the first wave. The embers are still glowing.”

While a second coup attempt is not the most likely development, it cannot be ruled out. The opposition is correct in arguing that Yoon must go immediately.

For Yoon, the desire for a closer alliance with Japan has meant re-writing Korean history. He promoted controversial figures from the Korean ‘New Right’ who argue that the Japanese occupation was a positive factor in the modernisation of Korea. Controversially, in 2024 he appointed New Right figures as the director and chair of the Independence Hall of Korea, sparking protests from the Korean Liberation Association (an organisation that commemorates Korean independence) and others. His ‘solution’ to the forced labour issue, where Japanese companies had been ordered by Korean courts to compensate the victims, involved Korean companies paying the compensation instead and provoked outrage and criticism from wide layers of the population.

An indication of the importance of the question of relations with Japan was that the impeachment resolution drawn up by the DKP and put to the assembly on 7 December contained the following paragraph: “In addition, under the guise of so-called ‘value diplomacy’, Yoon has neglected geopolitical balance, antagonising North Korea, China, and Russia, adhering to a bizarre Japan-centred foreign policy, and appointing pro-Japan individuals to key government positions, thereby causing isolation in north east Asia and triggering a crisis of war, abandoning his duty to protect national security and the people.”

The war in Ukraine has produced further problems for Yoon’s foreign policy. The war has taken on elements of a proxy war between North and South. The North has attempted to break its isolation by building stronger links with both Russia and China and has sent troops to fight on the Russian side. South Korea, which has one of the most developed

armaments industry in the world, has provided some assistance to Ukraine supplying them with body armour and medical supplies but has so far resisted requests from the Ukrainian Zelensky regime for the supply of artillery and air defence systems. Yoon has refused to rule out the supply of these weapons, making it dependent on what North Korea and the Russian do from now. A recent opinion poll showed 82% of the public were opposed to supplying Ukraine with arms. This is not due to any sympathy for the Putin-regime, but a fear it would retaliate by supplying the North with weapons and technologies, including those related to its nuclear programme.

Where to now?

The drama unfolding in South Korea has definitely not reached a conclusion. While Yoon has rescinded the declaration of martial law, he is still in power. Despite massive popular pressure, an opinion poll showed 72% supported impeachment. On 7 December the ruling PPP boycotted Saturday’s impeachment vote, leaving the assembly inquorate. Anger was expressed by protesters outside the National Assembly, which organisers claimed was over a million strong.

Kim Min-seok, a DPK MP, who was ridiculed when he pointed out in August that Yoon was preparing a coup, stated in an interview with the liberal Hankyoreh newspaper: “The president’s declaration [of martial law] was valid for all of two or three hours. But this is likely only the first wave. The embers are still glowing.”

While a second coup attempt is not the most likely development, it cannot be ruled out. The opposition is correct in arguing that Yoon must go immediately.



By taking the initiative and the lead in the struggle to defend democratic rights the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions could lay the basis for the creation of a genuine mass party of the Korean working class

The PPP fears the impeachment of Yoon because the presidential elections that would then need to be held within sixty days would likely mean a disastrous result for it. The party is likely trying to delay any election until after the DKP leader’s appeal against a corruption conviction, and who is also the DKP’s likely presidential candidate. The PPP party leader Han Dong-hoon has talked about an ‘orderly resignation’. But as someone who was targeted for detention in the coup, he is playing a dangerous game. He has claimed that Yoon has had his powers over the army removed and that he and the Prime Minister are in control. But few trust the promises that Yoon has

made to Han, that he will resign at a time of the party’s choosing.

The opposition has correctly pointed out that there is no legal basis for what is basically an extra-legal seizure of power by the ruling party and have promised to submit further impeachment resolutions. It has also stated opposition to other possible ways of removing Yoon, for example by a bill to shorten his term in office.

The capitalist class, both in South Korea and internationally, fear that Yoon and the ruling party’s attempt to cling to power will lead to a deepening of the movement and its radicalisation. A report published by Eurasia Group on 8 December warned that, in addition to swelling demonstrations, “strikes and more violent forms of dissent” are likely. The popular movement is unlikely to subside and disappointment can rapidly turn to anger.

In its latest statement, the KCTU calls for the dissolution of the ruling PPP. But who is going to enforce this, the constitutional court? How is this going to be accomplished? The KCTU has called on its members to participate in the candlelight demonstrations for the ouster of Yoon. The working class needs to rely on its own forces. The labour movement can’t put its trust in the opposition leaders either. Unions should take the initiative in building popular committees based on workplaces, but drawing in residents and citizens groups, to give direction to the movement, to ensure Yoon’s removal and begin building an alternative to the pro-capitalist political parties whose defence of the profit system makes them incapable of consistently defending democratic rights, whatever positions they may have taken on Yoon’s attempted coup.

By taking the initiative and the lead in the struggle to defend democratic rights, the KCTU could lay the basis for the creation of a genuine mass party of the Korean working class. That would need the broadening out of the struggle, and the raising of additional demands, which could include the abolition of the National Security Act and all undemocratic aspects of the present South Korean constitution.

Far from capitalism being “the unsung hero of South Korean democracy,” democratic rights can only be secured in Korea by the organised working class placing itself at the head of the mass movement and making a decisive break with capitalism and the power of the capitalist conglomerates that dominate South Korea’s economy.

• Read in full at socialistworld.net





WHAT WE STAND FOR

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

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

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

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

WORK, PENSIONS AND BENEFITS

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

PUBLIC SERVICES

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

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

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

ENVIRONMENT

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

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

DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

- For united working-class struggle to end discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, disability, sexuality, age, and all other forms of prejudice and oppression.
- Repeal the anti-trade union laws and all others that trample over civil liberties. For the right to protest and to strike! End police harassment. For the police to be accountable to local committees, made up of democratically elected representatives of trade unions, local community organisations and local authorities.
- For the right to choose when and whether to have children – for the right to access abortion, contraception and fertility treatment for all who need it.
- For the right to asylum – with democratic community control and oversight of emergency funding resources. No to racist immigration laws.
- Expand democracy. For the abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords. For all MPs to be subject to the right of recall by their constituents at any time, and to only receive a worker's wage.

- For proportional representation and the right to vote at 16.
- For the right of nations to self-determination. For an independent socialist Scotland and for a socialist Wales, both part of a voluntary socialist confederation of Wales, England, Scotland and Ireland.
- Oppose the dictatorship of the billionaire owners of the media. For the nationalisation of newspaper printing facilities, radio, TV and social media platforms. Access to these facilities should be under democratic control, with political parties' coverage being allocated in proportion to the popular vote at elections.
- For a new mass workers' party, based on the trade unions, and drawing together workers, young people and activists from workplaces, and community, environmental, anti-racist and anti-cuts campaigns, to provide a fighting, socialist political alternative to the pro-big business parties.

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

- No to imperialist wars and occupations!
- Take the wealth off the super-rich! For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and the banking system that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working-class control and management. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need, not to the fat cats.
- A democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, and in a way that safeguards the environment.
- No to the EU bosses' club. Organise a campaign with European socialists and workers' organisations to use the talks on post-Brexit relations to tear up the EU pro-capitalist rules. For a real collaboration of the peoples of Europe on a socialist basis as a step towards a socialist world.

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Book review: Rebecca's Country Class struggle behind the Rebecca Riots



SCOTT JONES

The Rebecca Riots are little known outside of Wales, and even in the country itself, though the basics are known by most - men wearing women's clothing smashing up tollbooths - the reasons, organisations and class struggle behind the movement are not.

This is what Rebecca's Country, the second book on the movement by writer Rhian Jones, explores in a very comprehensive and entertaining way. It is also written from a distinctly Welsh perspective with the tale of a salmon swimming up the river Teifi a particularly lovely analogy which Rhian read at the book's launch.

The Rebecca Riots has a great cast of characters, as you would expect, and Rhian starts by outlining them all, such as militant John Jones, known as 'Shoni Sguborlaw' - Johnny Big Barn. He was a notorious 'troublemaker' turned Rebecca rioter, a product of working-class Merthyr in the industrial Valleys.

His story highlights one of the key themes of the book and one of the most important aspects of the Rebecca Riots - the linking up between the rural rioters of West Wales and the industrial working class of the Valleys and east Wales. Workers in the Valleys, were building burgeoning trade unions and forming the Chartist movement, which culminated in the Newport Rising of 1839. The same year, 'Rebeccaism', as Rhian calls it, emerged when privately owned tollgates that had been set up started to be attacked, beginning at Efail-wen in Carmarthen.

The use of costume and the method of direct action were also very similar to the 'Scotch Cattle' that were used to intimidate scabs in mining towns. The tollgates were a symbol of the increasing financial demands on rural labourers and small farmers who also had to contend with rising rents and falling pay and prices for goods. This precarious existence was exacerbated by brutal bosses, landlords and landowners, much like the struggle of the working-class iron and coal workers in other parts of Wales.

As Rhian outlines, links were made. The rural town of Llanidloes was occupied by Chartists protesting the

collapse of the local textile industry and mass meetings with Chartists took place in fields around the region.

Meanwhile, the direct action of the Rebeccaites escalated and evokes images of another Wild West. In Narbeth, a crowd "led by an athletic female on horseback... rode off with a triumphant firing off of their guns." This was in the context of unrest everywhere in Britain in the early 1840s. Following the armed uprising in Newport, half a million workers in mines, mills and factories had taken strike action over cuts to wages, rents and working hours, as well as Chartist demands. There were even two attempts to assassinate Queen Victoria in 1843. And Rebeccaism did win some demands over the tollgates, but others showed the scope of this highly organised movement went beyond this, such as calling for financial support for unmarried mothers and children, rural and industrial workers' rights.

In some ways it was no surprise that the rural population in West Wales joined the fight, but it's no less significant, as Rhian says: "Servants, labourers and industrial workers were now meeting and organising independently." The Carmarthen Journal even said: "Labourers and farm servants have discovered that they have class interests distinct from their employers."

So, at a time of strike waves and rural unrest, there are many lessons from Rebeccaism. Industrial workers in struggle were evoking Rebeccaism for decades afterwards, and Rebecca's Country is a great introduction to the movement and brilliant analysis of it. As Rhian says: "Many problems familiar to our Victorian ancestors – poverty, high rents, unemployment, the privatisation of common space, the policing of protest – either have never gone away or are making a stark return."

- *Rebecca's Country: A Welsh Story of Riot and Resistance can be purchased at uwp.co.uk/book/rebeccas-country*
- *For a review of Rhian's first book on Rebeccaism search 'Uncovering the class struggle behind the Rebecca Riots' and for more on the Newport Rising and Chartist search 'Chartism' both at socialistparty.org.uk*

French government collapses: Workers and youth must seize advantage

Gauche Révolutionnaire (Revolutionary Left - CWI in France) reporters wrote the following article on 4 December

Three short months and then he's gone! President Emmanuel Macron only managed to keep in place his stopgap, appointed prime minister Michel Barnier and his government, for three months. His roadmap was clear: to continue the same policies that only benefit the biggest bosses and the richest. Barnier, good riddance!

His appointment had been a new stroke of typical authoritarianism in Macron's toolkit. And above all, it has been a new admission of weakness, after his sudden dissolution of the National Assembly last summer and subsequent general election put his camp, so hated, in a minority.

Most of us are already in a very difficult situation, and it is their policies that have made everything worse. There are five million unemployed who can't find a job, even though the 40 largest companies made €150 billion in profits last year and already €72 billion in the first half of this year. For everyone to have a job, the workers' movement says: 'The money exists: in the coffers of the bosses!'

Macron gives large companies so much public money through subsidies and other measures - money which is ours in reality - that the state is simply unable to say how much! And then they pretend to discover a magical deficit to justify their attacks. Since the announcement that the legal clause 'Article 49.3' would be used by the government to force through its 2025 budget without parliamentary approval, the capitalists and their media have declared themselves worried about the economic future of the country. As if the economic outlook was good before last week! They are concerned about political and social stability, but at the same time they are focused on making the maximum-possible profits, as quickly as possible, by super-exploiting workers and the 'markets' created by the chaos of the wreckage of our former public services. Macron will therefore use the pretext of the crisis to try to continue the same policies and impose an austerity budget.

National Rally party (RN)

Le Pen-Bardella's far-right RN has often found it difficult since September to hide the extent to which it agrees with the government's policies. It had validated the installation of prime minister Barnier. In the debates on the budget, they agreed with all the substance: the reduction of wages, through the reduction of social security contributions for the bosses (thus theft on the backs of the workers and the population), the destruction of public services, etc. To appear to be the opposition and to keep their anti-Macron electorate, they finally voted 'no confidence' in the government.



The short-lived French Prime Minister, Michel Barnier PHOTO: EUROPEAN PEOPLE'S PARTY/CC

But we can see the reality; their policies are just as anti-social and anti-working-class as ever, and even more racist and, without a doubt, more authoritarian and repressive.

Measures for workers

The fall of the government and a call for the resignation of Macron are supported by the left party France Insoumise [LFI], which is welcome. This should be supported much more openly by organisations that defend workers - including trade unions. After all, how else can policies in favour of workers, youth and the population be implemented?

The question of a government formed by the New Popular Front [NFP, an alliance led by France Insoumise] is once again on the table. But even more than in September, the Parti Socialiste [a party within the NFP] is tempted to carry out policies compatible with the capitalists and more or less like those of Macron. This is what they are already doing with EELV [the Greens, also in the NFP] or the PCF [Communist Party,

in the NPF too] in several local authorities that it leads.

Strike against Macron's policies!

The end of the Barnier chapter opens a new page. The government has collapsed while at the same time a national civil service strike is taking place on 5 December, organised against the budget plan of Barnier and co, and in defence of public services. Anger and strikes are multiplying in all sectors - against layoffs (at Michelin, Auchan, etc), job cuts (in education, the France Travail employment agency, SNCF rail company, etc), against budget cuts, for wage increases. We are seeing an increase in anger in an organised way.

The only guarantee that a policy in favour of workers will be applied is by workers entering into struggle all together, with massive strikes, supported by a mobilisation of youth for their own future, which would tip the balance of forces in favour of the working class. This is what can stop the policies of austerity and wrest measures to really improve our lives, now.

After the civil service strike, we must take advantage of the political crisis to amplify the struggle. Workers must be at the centre of this battle. The workers' organisations should call for a strike of everyone together, both public and private sectors, on 10, 11 and 12 December, building on the mobilisations that have already been announced; a militant strike, for wage increases, more jobs and no layoffs, but also against austerity that will affect everyone - through public services and local authorities. A massive strike against the entire agenda of Macron and the capitalists.

For a workers' government!

The weakness and crisis of those in power can benefit us, workers and youth, if we enter political struggle and action. Enough of pro-capitalist policies, it's we who should decide! We need a government with a firm programme against the capitalists, which defends the interests of workers with policies to satisfy the needs of the population, through planning the economy democratically and ecologically sustainably. Workers need to organise, through democratic decision making in workplace-based assemblies, trade union bodies, supported by left political parties that oppose capitalism, with community activists, young people etc, to form the basis of such a new government.

A government formed on that basis would be able to renationalise privatised public services, and take into public ownership, under the control and democratic management of workers and the population, the companies that are laying off workers and all the major sectors of the economy, including finance, energy, transport and distribution. This will allow us to recover the billions from the ultra-rich and multinationals (and tax evasion) so that everyone has a job, a home. A struggle for a socialist economy free from private ownership of the means of production and exploitation is on the agenda.

Join Gauche Révolutionnaire!

A mass workers' party would be the best tool for workers and youth to be able to organise and defend this class programme. The militants of Gauche Révolutionnaire (Revolutionary Left - CWI in France) put all this up for discussion with young people and workers, in the streets and workplaces, with strikers, militants, trade unionists... Strengthening the struggle and more broadly the organisation of workers and youth, proposing a programme to put an end to capitalist barbarism by building socialism. This is what we are fighting for.



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the Socialist

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formerly **Militant**

Hundreds march in Rugby to

SAVE OUR NHS

ADAM HARMSWORTH
COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

Over the past couple of months, hundreds of people in Rugby, Warwickshire have protested and fought against a massive cut to their hospital. On Wednesday 4 December, nearly a quarter of Rugby's hospital beds were taken away, as Hoskyn Ward at Hospital of St Cross was shut down. Two protests against the closure were organised, with over 400 attending each time.

Rugby is the fastest growing town in the West Midlands, but its NHS services are being cut! The NHS under the Tories got rid of Rugby's maternity services and ambulance station, and downgraded the A&E. Rugby voted Labour at the general election, kicking out the Tories. But the Labour government has kept the NHS starved of resources, pressuring this closure. Coventry and Warwickshire Integrated Care System is currently halfway through cutting a £160 million financial deficit in the current year.

Newly elected Rugby Labour MP John Slinger, formerly of 'Tony Blair Associates', declined to attend either protest. He instead arranged a meeting between the protest organiser, the local NHS leadership, and other local groups. But by the time the meeting went ahead, the ward was already being prepared for closure, making the meeting entirely pointless. This is how Labour 'defends' the NHS.

Cuts

As the winter crisis unfolds in the NHS, more cuts are being revealed across the service. Weldmar Hospicecare, a hospice with £1 million deficit, has lost 40% of its funding from NHS Dorset. NHS Cheshire and Merseyside has cut a third of the Holistic Cancer Centre's funding as part of saving £65 million. And the trade union Unison has launched a petition calling on the Scottish government to urgently fund the NHS to stop devastating cuts to vital health services across the country.

The outlook for the NHS is as bleak under Labour as it was under the Tories. According to NHS investigators, The Lowdown, the 42 Integrated Care Systems across England are nearly all making decisions to restrict spending by a collective total of around £8 billion. But cuts and closures aren't inevitable. Communities can defend existing services with organised protests, ideally led by the trade unions and backed with strike action.

We need to build socialist opposition to Labour now, demanding a fully funded NHS, publicly owned with private profiteers kicked out, and democratically run so working-class communities can have the services we need and not what austerity politicians say we can afford.

Protesters in Rugby
COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY



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

