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WHAT

WE

STAND

FOR

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WHAT THE SOCIALIST PARTY STANDS FOR

The Covid pandemic has accelerated the crisis of capitalism and disrupted every aspect of society. In its wake the need for socialism is clearer than ever. This draft Socialist Party manifesto sums up our main demands on the different issues that face the working class. It outlines what is necessary to begin the process of achieving a socialist society, in Britain and internationally, able to meet the needs of humanity and to protect the planet. It will be finalised at our Spring 2022 national conference.

The Socialist Party demands:

Work, pensions and benefits:

- A £15 an hour minimum wage for all, without exemptions. For an annual increase in the minimum wage 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 increased annually at least in line with price rises.
- 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 – 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 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 democratic control of local education authorities, school staff and parents.
- 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 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, farm workers and small farmers.

Democratic rights:

- End discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, disability, sexuality, age, and all other forms of prejudice.
- 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 a woman's right to choose when and whether to have children.
- 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!
- 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.

If you want to find out more about joining the Socialist Party or discuss this programme then get in touch:
www.socialistparty.org.uk/join
 email: join@socialistparty.org.uk
 or text your name & postcode to
 07761 818 206

Capitalism is an ailing, crisis-ridden system based on the exploitation of the majority of the world's population. If the accumulation of vast wealth by a handful of people was a measure of a successful way of running society, capitalism would be judged in fantastic health. Despite the 'Great Recession' of 2007-09 and the new Covid-induced economic upheaval, the enrichment of the few at the expense of the many has intensified.

In Britain the average pay of the chief executives of the hundred biggest companies on the London stock market is up from 47 times that of the average worker in 1998 to 145 times today. During 2020 alone, when the Covid pandemic was at its height, the wealth of Britain's billionaires increased by a fifth. Land ownership is overwhelmingly concentrated in the hands of a very few. Just 25,000 landowners own half of England, with 30% still owned by the old aristocracy and 18% by corporations, while the public sector holds just 8.5% and individual homeowners a mere 5%.

Capitalism is no longer capable of taking society forward. Its failure was graphically demonstrated in its catastrophic inability to deal with Covid. On the one hand, the pandemic demonstrated the enormous technological and scientific possibilities of modern society, from the development of vaccines to sophisticated genomic sequencing of the evolving virus, to apps capable of recording when any individual comes into contact with someone who has the virus. These were not developed, however, as a result of 'capitalist greed', as Tory Prime Minister Boris Johnson claimed, but mainly by huge state intervention.

And on a capitalist basis none of this technology was able to prevent the virus ravaging the globe, killing more than four million people. An endless succession of decisions by governments of capitalist politicians has been guided by the imperative of protecting profits, and therefore failed to contain the virus. In Britain the list is gigantic. It included doing nothing and waiting for herd immunity at the start, moving elderly and vulnerable hospital patients into care homes without first testing them for Covid, and failing to provide the financial and social support necessary to make self-isolation possible for millions of people.

The response to the pandemic is only one example of capitalism's failings. One third of the world's population do not have enough to eat. Even in the richest countries in the world, the living standards of the majority have been falling, or at best stagnating, for many years. Of those, Britain is second only to the US for the levels of impoverishment

that have taken place. In 2019, if UK workers had got the same share of national income as in the 1970s, the average median full-time salary would have been £5,471 a year higher.

Fifty years ago the majority thought that, even if they were suffering, their children would have better lives than them. Now the opposite is the case, and the myth of unending capitalist progress has been shattered. More than two thirds of young people expect their lives to be harder than their parents and their own children's lives worse again. This pessimism is based on experience. Today, social conditions that many could take for granted fifty years ago, such as a permanent job with a living wage, a secure home, and the prospect of a living pension, are utopian dreams, particularly for working-class young people. In Britain in 2020 more than five million people had to claim benefits in order to make ends meet despite being in work, such are the poverty levels of pay. The poorest fifth of the population spent 40% or more of their income on housing, even when benefits are included.

CLIMATE CATASTROPHE

Capitalism's failure is also writ large in its failure to deal with the developing climate catastrophe. The 2021 report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warned that within two decades, temperatures are likely to rise by more than 1.5 C above pre-industrial levels, with devastating consequences. The previous IPCC report calculated the cost of the measures that would need to be carried out to prevent this would be \$900 billion a year. They would include at least a fivefold increase in investment in low-carbon technologies, such as wind and solar power, and in energy efficiency measures like building carbon-neutral homes. The deployment of renewables will have to increase by up to 14 times. In addition, green transportation will have to be introduced, including electric cars.

All of this and much more could be achieved on a socialist basis. The capitalists, however, while they are increasingly forced to be seen to take some measures to counter climate change, are totally incapable of taking the necessary decisive action on the scale required. Capitalism is based on the private ownership of the means of production by a handful, and on the continued existence of competing nation states, leaving it unable to take the necessary decisive action. The major corporations that dominate the economy are responsible for the bulk of carbon emissions, and there is no prospect of them accepting a \$900 billion hit to their profits in order to take the action needed. Nor

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will the capitalist governments in the nations where they are based, not wanting 'their' corporations to lose out to global rivals. Look at the Volkswagen scandal in 2015. The world's second biggest vehicle manufacturer had systematically rigged its diesel emissions data. The EU took no action, pressured by governments to back their 'own' automotive industry, no matter that thousands of people die directly as a result of this pollution. Look at the way the Tories in Britain have encouraged fracking, despite the threat to the environment and our drinking water, in pursuit of quick profits for British capitalism.

Even the mainstream pro-capitalist press is increasingly forced to recognise the need for fundamental change to achieve the global action necessary on climate change. The Financial Times, for example, carried a piece in July 2021 arguing that it is "far too risky" to rely on the market to act decisively to halt global warming, and instead that "central planning" is needed to "formulate plans" for "energy, transport, buildings, industry and agriculture". In other words, only the socialist transformation of society can save the planet.

AN OPPRESSIVE SYSTEM

Capitalism is also incapable of overcoming the racism, sexism, LGBTQ+phobia, discrimination against disabled people, and other forms of oppression that is built into its foundations. While mass movements have forced progress and improvements in social attitudes on all of these issues, they have not been able to eliminate oppression or prejudice, with all the horrific consequences for the oppressed. For the capitalist class, a tiny privileged minority who are exploiting the majority, 'divide and rule' remains an essential tool with which to retain power. Blaming workers from a different country, of a different religion, or with a different skin colour or gender, remains a means by which the capitalist class can distract from the responsibility of their system, capitalism, for the misery inflicted on all working-class and oppressed people.

A FAILING SYSTEM

Capitalism from its inception was based on brutal exploitation. It came into being, as the founder of scientific socialism Karl Marx put it, "dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt". Nonetheless, over the few centuries of its existence it has repeatedly transformed the world, introducing gigantic steps forward in science and technique. However, the development of technology has never been driven by meeting humanity's needs but by the insatiable lust for profit. Wealth and power have always been concentrated in the hands of a minority – the capitalist class. In its early days – despite the inevitable periodic crises that are intrinsic to capitalism, and despite

its brutal exploitation and blind, unplanned character – capitalism nonetheless took society forward. The drive to maximise their profits pushed the capitalists to invest in the development of the productive forces, of science and technique.

Today the progressive side of this basic driving force of capitalism has rotted away. In Britain, where capitalism first developed, the rot has gone particularly deep. Capitalism is not driven by what is socially useful, but by where the biggest profits can be made.

Capitalism is supposedly based on 'free markets' and 'free competition'. Never true, this bears no resemblance whatsoever to modern capitalism. The world market is massively skewed in favour of the most powerful capitalist nations while the poor countries of the world are super-exploited. At the same time, there is not free competition but a relatively small number of major monopolies who dominate in each sector. In Britain there are around 150 companies that dominate the economy. On the London Stock Exchange, for example, just the top 100 companies (the FTSE 100) account for around 80% of the total share value.

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Globally, capitalism is increasingly unstable and conflict-ridden. US imperialism is still the most powerful nation on the planet but is no longer strong enough to call all the shots. The catastrophe of Afghanistan is another humiliating blow to the US and its allies, as well as a nightmare for its peoples. The weakening of the US economically and militarily has not created a level playing field, however, but an increasingly fractious struggle between the major powers – above all the US and China – leaving the weaker nations to be buffeted by the storms. Imperialism has always offered war, conflict and oppression to the oppressed peoples of the world, as the nightmares of Afghanistan – and the suffering of the Palestinian people – demonstrate. Now, however, inter-imperialist rivalry is fuelling increasingly brutal conflicts and proxy-wars.

STATE INTERVENTION

For all the capitalist propaganda against government intervention into the economy, it actually takes place on a huge scale, to benefit not the majority of the population but the major shareholders of the big corporations. This was particularly true during the Covid pandemic, where the governments of all the richest capitalist countries pumped money into the economy at a level unprecedented outside of wartime. Britain's Tory government paid 80% of eleven million workers' wages over nineteen months, for example. Had Jeremy Corbyn, when he was the left Labour leader, proposed such a thing, he would have been even more viciously attacked for his supposedly 'Marxist' programme than was the case. In total, Jeremy Corbyn's 2019 election manifesto pledged an £83 billion annual increase in public spending. Yet in 2020, Johnson's Tories increased public spending by £203 billion, more than twice as much. This was largely supported by the capitalist class because it was aimed not primarily at helping the working-class majority, but at limiting the damage to their rotten system.

The pandemic marked a stepping up of state intervention to bail out capitalism, but it was not a new phenomenon. The response to the 'Great Recession' of 2008-09 was dubbed 'socialism for the rich', using measures like quantitative easing and ultra-low interest rates to pump money into the pockets of the elite, whilst at the same time imposing austerity on the rest of us. This orgy of cheap money did not result in any significant increase in investment in production, but in unimaginable amounts of wealth for a few. For example, in 2019 the FTSE 100 companies paid a record £110bn in dividends to shareholders, double of a decade previously.

Clearly, in a rational society there would be plenty of reasons to invest in developing science and technique. The need to create clean, green industry; the need to make sure everyone has access to the components of a decent life; the possibility of shortening the working week in order to allow more leisure time – all of these are obvious and urgent reasons to act. However, they ultimately count for nothing under capitalism, where only profit matters. As a result climate change is accelerating; in 2020 one in three people globally lacked access to clean water and adequate nutrition, and technological improvements in any company usually means not a shorter working week, but some workers being thrown on the scrapheap while others work longer hours than ever. For the capitalists in Britain it has become entirely logical in recent decades to focus on financial speculation rather than investing in production, because that is where the greater profits are to be made.

PROFITS FROM EXPLOITATION OF THE WORKING CLASS

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels first explained over 170 years ago that the capitalists' profits stem from the unpaid labour of the working class. Even in boom time the working class cannot afford to buy back the full product of its labour power. In periods of growth, capitalism can temporarily overcome this problem by ploughing part of its profits into developing the means of production. This in turn creates new factories, workplaces – superior organisation of science and technique – but even then at a certain stage all the same contradictions reappear. Over recent decades, however, investment has remained low while profits have been restored via the driving down of the share of economic output paid in wages, resulting in a huge transfusion of wealth from the working class to the capitalists – around £130 billion a year from 1980 to today. This, however, has further exacerbated the inability of the working class to buy the goods it produces, and helped lay the basis for new capitalist crises.

POLITICAL CRISIS AND TORY SPLITS

The economic crisis of capitalism has undermined support for all of its institutions, not least capitalist governments. In Britain the Tory Party, the traditional party of British capitalism, is in deep crisis. It is divided from top to bottom, and was able to win the last general election only via Boris Johnson's right-populist 'Poundland Trump' posturing, promising to 'get Brexit done'.

The working-class vote for Brexit contained lots of different elements. At root though, it was a cry of rage against the capitalist establishment, which was overwhelmingly campaigning to remain. The Socialist Party opposes the EU, which is a bosses' club driven by maximising the profits of the capitalist elites across the continent. One example of this was the brutal treatment of the Greek working class by the institutions of the EU in the aftermath of the financial crisis. Greek workers' wages fell by an average of over a third, yet the EU continued to inflict on them further devastating austerity.

The Socialist Party backed a 'Leave' vote in the binary choice referendum on the UK's EU membership in 2016 for entirely different reasons to the right-wing Leave supporters. Our starting point was fighting for working-class socialist internationalism. With no mass force fighting for 'Lexit', however – as a result of Jeremy Corbyn going back on his historic position on the issue, in one of his earliest concessions to Keir Starmer and the Labour right – the referendum campaign was dominated by right-wing capitalist politicians on both sides.

Johnson, having whipped up nationalism during the referendum and after, was then able to successfully harness popular anger that the referendum result might be ignored to win the general election. The Socialist Party does not give a shred of support to the Brexit deal that he went on to negotiate, which offers nothing but further job and wage cuts for working-class people.

For entirely different reasons the big majority of Britain's capitalist class also opposed the deal, because they thought it would be destabilising, and would hit them in the profits! They were right. For British capitalists, Johnson – like Trump was for US capitalism – is an unreliable representative of their interests. That he became prime minister – elected as Tory leader in 2019 by just 92,153 Tory party members – is ultimately a reflection of the anger and alienation felt towards all governmental parties that act in the interests of the capitalist class. Back in the 1950s there were more than two million members of the Tory Party, but that social base was only possible at a time when capitalism was improving the living standards of big sections of society. Today, being a reliable representative of the capitalist class tends to be an electoral liability. The Tories current majority in parliament will not protect them from being shaken by huge class battles, with the potential to force them out of office in short order. Only the unpopularity of the reliable representatives of capitalism on the Labour front benches might save them for a period, although that is far from guaranteed.

SEARCH FOR A SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

There is a deep anger at the horrific consequences of twenty-first century capitalism, and growing numbers searching for an alternative. This can go in all kinds of directions, including in the development of new right-populist or even far-right parties as discontent with the Tories grows. However, the dominant and most important trend is the search for a solution on the left. Particularly among young people, identification with socialism is on the rise. For example, in July 2021 an opinion poll by the Institute of Economic Affairs, which describes itself as the "UK's original free-market think-tank", found that its pro-capitalist views are in a small minority among young people in Britain. Instead they reported that 67% of UK 16-34 year olds want to live in a "socialist economic system". Three quarters of those polled agreed with the assertion that climate change was specifically a capitalist problem, while 78% blamed capitalism for Britain's housing crisis. They favoured the nationalisation of industries such as energy, water and the railways, and are concerned that private sector involvement would put the NHS at risk. 75% agreed that "socialism is a good idea, but it has failed in the past because it has been badly done."

No wonder that the capitalist elites globally are terrified of the growing opposition to their system. They fear that 'the pitchforks are coming' for them, as US billionaire Nick Hanauer famously warned in the aftermath of the 2007-09 crisis. They have no solution to their problems, which are a consequence of the insoluble contradictions of their system. Correctly they worry that the state intervention they were forced into during the pandemic will reveal to millions that the market doesn't work, and that dramatically increased state intervention is possible, therefore fuelling support for wide-ranging measures in the interests of the working class. That is what the Financial Times – the newspaper in which the British capitalist class discuss among themselves – meant when, in May 2020, they ran an editorial warning that the pandemic might bring "socialism on its coat-tails".

On the other side, the Biden government in the US has drawn the conclusion that they have to try to save US capitalism by carrying out further state intervention in an attempt to increase the living standards of sections of the US working class. After 40 years of wage stagnation for the majority, over 140 million Americans officially lived in poverty before the pandemic. Now their situation is far worse. The majority of the US capitalist class supported the stimulus, at least initially before being asked to pay towards it. They are terrified on the one hand of the growing anger and leftward radicalisation of wide sections of US society – as demonstrated in the scale and support for the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020 – and on the other hand of the size of the continued base of Trumpian right-wing populism.

However, it is clear that the stimulus will not be sufficient to overcome the underlying crisis of US capitalism. Nor are even its limited measures a path that is easily available to weaker capitalist powers. The key Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky made the point about the US New Deal stimulus package in the 1930s that it "offered no new exit from the economic blind alley" but was possible only in a country where the capitalist class had "succeeded in accumulating incalculable wealth."

Today, the contrast between Biden's stimulus, however limited, and the Johnson government's post-Covid austerity could not be clearer. A diet of relentless cuts to benefits and public services are what is on offer for the working class in Britain, with – for example – NHS waiting lists expected to soar on present funding levels. Austerity is being combined with beefing up the state and criminalising protest via new repressive legislation, in a vain attempt to curtail the mass protests that will inevitably result.

IS SOCIALISM POSSIBLE?

As yet the growing anger at the existing capitalist order is not matched by clear ideas on the way forward; or of a viable way of transforming society. As a result the programme of the Socialist Party may currently appear unrealisable to some, even to the majority. In reality, however, it offers the only realistic way forward. Capitalism cannot be transformed into a fair and just system, capable of preventing environmental devastation.

The Socialist Party and our co-thinkers globally in the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) base ourselves on learning the lessons of working-class struggle and revolutionary movements throughout history. The twentieth century was littered with mass working-class attempts to overturn capitalism. That most of these failed was not down to the scale of the movements, or a lack of heroism and determination, but to failings and betrayals of leadership.

The exception was the Russian revolution in October 1917 where, led by the Bolshevik Party, the working class was for the first time able to overthrow capitalism and begin to build a new democratic workers' state. However, capitalism broke at its weakest link. Russia was a very poor country, ravaged by war, and the basis of socialism is overcoming scarcity and want. The task of spreading the revolution internationally was therefore extremely urgent. But while a revolutionary wave swept numerous countries, the absence of parties of the calibre of the Bolsheviks resulted in its defeat.

The resulting degeneration of the isolated Soviet Union into the dictatorial monstrosity of Stalinism, and then its collapse, is used by the capitalist class as an enormous propaganda weapon to try and discredit socialism. In reality, however, there are countless vital positive lessons to be learnt from the Russian revolution for socialists in the twenty-first century. At the same time the rapid economic development of the Soviet Union for a whole period gave a glimpse of the superiority of a planned economy, even though it was enormously weakened – ultimately fatally – by the complete lack of workers' democracy.

We take the experiences of the past – and in particular the ideas of Marx and Engels, and of Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky, the key leaders of the Russian revolution – as our starting point for analysing the tasks we face today. We do not suggest it is impossible for the oppressed to make any steps forward while capitalism remains. On the contrary, a clear understanding of the need for the socialist

transformation of society makes for the most effective fighters for reforms. The Socialist Party, then called Militant, demonstrated this on a national stage in the early 1990s when we led the mass campaign against the iniquitous poll tax. This was a system of local authority taxation where every individual – 'from a duke to a dustman' – had to pay exactly the same. We led an eighteen million-strong campaign of mass non-payment, which not only defeated the tax, but was also central to the resignation of its instigator, the hated Tory prime minister Maggie Thatcher.

A few years earlier, from 1983 to 1987, we played a leading role in the Labour-run Liverpool city council which also took on the Thatcher government, forcing it to hand back £60 million that had been stolen from the city through funding cuts. The council built over 5,000 council houses, six new nurseries, six new leisure centres, and much more. Contrast our fighting approach to the Labour councils up and down the country who are currently implementing Tory austerity, while – at best – pleading with the government to think again. Appeals to reason or to the 'better nature' of the capitalists (or the Tories!) will not win social progress. Over the centuries of capitalism's



One of the mass working class protests in support of the Militant-led Liverpool Labour council

existence, steps forward – whether economic, social or democratic – have only come as a result of mass struggle forcing the elites to make concessions. This remains the case today.

Furthermore, no gain won under capitalism is permanent. Under the pressure of mass movements the capitalist class can make major concessions in order to maintain power, but they do not hesitate to snatch them back as soon as they have the opportunity to do so. In this era of crisis the capitalist class aims to take back many of the crumbs that the working class won in the past. In Britain, the NHS and the welfare state won after the Second World War have been systematically undermined over decades. For example, for the baby boomers university was free, with no tuition fees, a maintenance grant, and the right to claim benefits in the holidays. These past gains were annihilated by successive New Labour and then Tory governments.

THE TRANSITIONAL APPROACH

Trotsky in his brilliant pamphlet, 'The death agony of capitalism and the tasks of the Fourth International', known as 'the transitional programme', explains the approach we take to the fight for the immediate demands thrown up by the struggles of the working class and young people. We are the hardest fighters to defend every past gain of the working class, and for every possible step forward. However, we carry on "this day-to-day work within the framework" of a "revolutionary perspective". The Socialist Party aims, at every stage "in the process of the daily struggle to find the bridge between present demands and the socialist programme of the revolution." Trotsky's pamphlet is explaining a method rather than a fixed set of demands which applies for all time regardless of circumstances. Nonetheless, as the crisis of capitalism develops many of the demands he included are increasingly applicable for today. Most importantly, we take the same fundamental approach when working out the Socialist Party's programme, the central tenets of which are outlined in this pamphlet.

THE CENTRAL ROLE OF THE WORKING CLASS

The working class is potentially the most powerful force in society, and the only one capable of overturning the rule of the capitalists. Marx and Engels described how capitalism brought into existence its own 'gravediggers', when it created the working class. Today some may claim that this is an old fashioned idea. However, an idea is only outdated if it no longer matches reality. Currently, on a global basis, the working class makes up a far larger proportion of the population than was the case when Marx and Engels were writing. In a country like Britain the working class constitutes a big majority of society. Opinion polls about to which class people consider themselves belonging only give

a limited picture, but nonetheless the 2016 Social Attitudes Survey reported that 60% of the population considered itself 'working class'.

It is true that the number of workers in 'traditional' manufacturing industry is far smaller in Britain today than in the past. Productivity improvements in Britain lag well behind other economically developed countries, but even here increases in productivity over decades have had a major effect. In 2019 Britain's car workers made around the same number of cars as in the 1970s but with a workforce around a third of the size. It is true that in 2019 they were overwhelmingly made by foreign-owned companies and with just 41% of the parts made in Britain, pointing to the need for international collaboration of car workers against their employers, but it shows that Britain's car workers still have enormous potential power.

At the same time, other sections of the working class have grown dramatically in numbers, like logistics and delivery workers for example. Where these workers have taken action they have been able to win important victories, such as the Deliveroo strike in 2016 which stopped pay being slashed. More struggles by workers in these sectors lie ahead. The pandemic increased the social weight of these workers further and made clear just how essential the services they provide now are.

Plus, employees who previously considered themselves part of the middle class have increasingly, as a result of their lower pay and working conditions, been forced down towards the working class, and have adopted working-class methods of struggle, as in the 2016 junior doctors' strike. Some of the most militant industrial action during the pandemic was taken by teachers, forcing Johnson into a humiliating U-turn over schools reopening in January 2021. Small business people often struggle to survive in the face of competition from the big corporations. Many can be won to supporting workers' struggles.

The fundamental power of the working class remains intact today. When London Underground workers go on strike, for example, the City of London grinds to a complete halt. Many other workers, like retail and hospitality workers for example, are currently mainly unorganised, but the Covid 'pingdemic' gave a glimpse of the importance of their role and therefore potential collective strength.

The working class has an organised power and social cohesion like no other subject class. As a worker, individual action is generally ineffective. Walking out on strike alone, for example, might only get you the sack, whereas collective action can bring whole industries, and even the whole of



Striking workers behind the banner of the Marxist Workers Party – the South African sister party of the Socialist Party of England & Wales

society, to a decisive halt. Under capitalism the working class is forced to struggle collectively through strikes, demonstrations and workplace occupations in order to win concessions and defend its interests.

The decisive role of the working class in the socialist transformation of society arises because of the collective consciousness which it develops in the workplace, and because it faces common attacks from big business, which it can only defeat through collective action. This allows it to prepare for the collective, democratic control and management of society, preparing the basis for establishing workers' democracy and beginning the task of building a new socialist order.

This is not, as some left intellectuals argue, a 'European idea' which is not applicable in Africa or Asia. Even in countries where the working class makes up a small minority of society, as was the case in Russia in 1917, they will still play the key role in changing society, bringing behind them the poor peasantry and urban poor. This has been repeatedly demonstrated. A recent study in the Washington Post looked at a century of protest in 150 countries. It concluded that the common factor in movements being successful was the active involvement of the working class, especially the industrial working class. Numerous examples could be given. In South Africa the powerful revolutionary black working class was the key force in the heroic movement to overthrow apartheid. More recently, in the Arab Spring of 2011 it was strike action by the working class which acted as a key tipping point in the mass movements to overthrow the Tunisian and Egyptian dictatorships. In many countries

in Africa and Asia – such as Nigeria and India – there is a recent history of gigantic general strikes which dwarf most in Europe over the same period.

Given the historically low level of workplace struggles in Britain in recent years, these points will not be obvious to many who are first becoming involved in fighting for a new society. Nonetheless, under the hammer blows of capitalist crisis, working-class understanding of the nature of society is increasing.

WORK IN THE TRADE UNIONS!

The pandemic laid bare for many workers – including some of the lowest paid and most oppressed – that it was them, and not the bosses or the government, who are the key to keeping society running.

At the same time – faced with being told to risk their health, and later being told by their employers that they would have to pay for the pandemic with cuts to their wages and conditions – growing numbers looked towards collective action for the first time and therefore turned to the trade unions. In 2020 trade union membership increased for the fourth year in a row, with growth concentrated in the public sector where more than half of workers are trade union members. It remained much lower in the private sector but there was still a marked increase in the number of militant and determined strikes.

In 2021 the trade unions had 6.5 million members in Britain. Trade unions are the base organisations of working-class defence. Trotsky, writing in the Transitional

Programme in 1938, made the point that, "Trade unions, even the most powerful, embrace no more than 20 to 25 percent of the working class, and, at that, predominantly the more skilled and better-paid layers." This did not lead him to underestimate the vital importance of revolutionaries working in the existing trade unions, fighting to "strengthen them and raising their spirit of militancy". He raised, however, that – at moments of high struggle – it would be necessary to form ad hoc strike committees and factory committees involving the whole workforce, not only trade union members.

In Britain in the post-war period this idea was less relevant, as trade union membership was over 50% of the workforce and the shop stewards combine committees played, in essence, the same role as the factory committees Trotsky argued for, including exercising elements of dual power in the workplaces. The workers through these organisations exercised the right to veto management decisions, sometimes controlling the right of hiring and firing, and the amount of overtime worked, for example. Today, however, with 23.7% of the workforce unionised, the situation is more like that envisaged by Trotsky. Mass factory or workplace committees therefore could be thrown up in future struggles, as could attempts to found new trade unions on a bigger scale than has so far taken place.

At this stage, however, the main response of workers looking for a means to fight back collectively has been to become involved in the existing trade unions, as the best available means to fight back. During the pandemic for example, at one stage 400,000 workers attended an online meeting of the education workers union, the NEU, in order to discuss the fight for health and safety in the workplace. The vast majority of them had never attended a union meeting before, but saw it as the only effective means to force the government to retreat.

Of course, many obstacles exist to workers becoming active in the trade unions. A trade union is more attractive if its leadership is prepared to fight for its members, but – for example - during the pandemic the majority of national trade union leaders fell into line behind the government rather than offering a militant defence of members' health and safety, pay and conditions. They did so under the banner of a supposed common 'national interest'. As the Socialist Party warned, and the Tories handling of the pandemic made clear, in reality there is no single national interest but very different class interests.

In general, the tops of the trade unions are dominated by right-wing leaders, who often see their role as 'concession bargaining' – negotiating the scale of the defeat – rather



National Shop Stewards lobby of the Trade Union Congress (TUC) in 2016

than leading militant struggle. They are surrounded by an unelected officialdom – a bureaucracy – often highly paid and unaccountable to trade union members.

The solution is not to condemn or ignore the trade union movement, but to understand – as those who joined the trade unions during the pandemic did – their enormous potential power and therefore wage a struggle to transform the unions into fighting, democratic bodies. The Socialist Party works to build our base in the trade unions, and to collaborate with others, around a programme for the transformation of the trade union movement. We fight for trade unions that are independent of the capitalist state, with members having democratic control over their own policies, constitutions and democratic procedures. We call for all trade union officials to be regularly elected, subject to recall by their members and paid a worker's wage.

The Socialist Party plays a key role in building the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN), founded by the transport workers' union, the RMT, and bringing together rank-and-file trade unionists from across the movement. We also campaign to get leaders elected who can play a role building a fighting trade union movement, and in recent years have had elected members of eight trade union national executives, and many hundreds of workplace reps and union branch secretaries. In 2021 in Northern Ireland, a member of our sister section was elected as general secretary of NIPSA, the biggest public sector trade union there. Even as a small minority in the trade unions, by fighting intransigently for a clear programme we can sometimes make a decisive difference to struggles that develop. Over the coming period, with stormy struggles developing, it is urgent that fighting, socialist trade unionism is strengthened in the movement in order to be able to make a decisive difference.

At each stage the Socialist Party puts forward a fighting programme for the immediate issues facing trade unionists. Which demands are foremost varies, of course, depending on the concrete situation. During the pandemic, for example, the fight for adequate health and safety measures was inevitably central for many workers, whereas when it receded the fight over jobs and pay took centre stage. Now the campaign for the trade union movement to build for coordinated action against post-Covid austerity and to break the public sector pay cap has come to the fore.

The basic trade union premise that 'an injury to one is an injury to all' has to be refought for. When the government or bosses set out to try and defeat any group of workers – such as the looming attacks on the rail unions – the whole movement has to come to their defence.

The Socialist Party stands for the repeal of all the undemocratic, anti-trade union laws which have created a situation where fear of legal action has resulted in the unions self-policing themselves, blocking effective national strike action. While defying the anti-trade union laws cannot be done lightly, without weighing up the relative balance of forces and possible consequences, they cannot be allowed to block effective action. Coordinated and well-prepared strike action would be able to defeat both the Tories and their repressive anti-trade union laws, which unfortunately the trade union leaders allowed to pass with only token resistance.

COORDINATED AND WELL- PREPARED STRIKE ACTION WOULD BE ABLE TO DEFEAT BOTH THE TORIES AND THEIR REPRESSIVE ANTI-TRADE UNION LAWS

NEW STRUGGLES FOR THE 'NEW NORMAL'

Running through every struggle is the battle for trade union control over decisions in the workplace, to maximise the elements of workers' control and take as much power as possible from the bosses. While winning widespread workers' control is only possible under conditions of intense class war, as a step towards the revolutionary nationalisation of industry, increased trade union strength can force the bosses to concede elements of it. During the pandemic a number of struggles took place in which workers were able to establish trade unions – rather than bosses – deciding what constituted a safe workplace.

Similar struggles will be required post-pandemic. Take, for example, the thorny issue of homeworking, which has affected a section of mainly office workers during and after the pandemic. The employers do not have a uniform position on it, other than making sure any change in working conditions allows them to maximise their profits. Some, therefore, are keen to move to greater homeworking, because it can save on the cost of premises and can actually increase the levels of exploitation of the workforce. Surveys have shown that homeworkers work an average of an extra 25% a week, usually without any extra pay, and sometimes even with pay cuts. It also potentially makes union organisation harder, as workers are isolated

at home. Other employers prefer to get workers back into the workplace, on the basis that it allows them to pile on the pressure more effectively.

What position does the Socialist Party argue that the trade union movement should take? Firstly there should be no enforced change in working arrangements. Any decisions should be under the democratic control of the trade unions in the workplace, with the maximum possible freedom for workers to decide where they work from. Where workers are based in the workplace, trade unions should decide what health and safety measures are necessary, but this also applies to homeworking. Employers providing adequate equipment for workers at home, and no extension of working hours, should be prerequisites. So should facilities for regular trade union meetings inside working hours, in order to counter the potentially isolating effect of homeworking.

THE 'NEW NORMAL' FOR THE YOUNG

The pandemic has had its biggest impact on the future of young people. In June 2021, before the end of the furlough scheme, 13.2% of young people were officially unemployed, but with many more economically inactive. And the numbers of unemployed were far higher among some sections, with almost 40% of young black people unemployed. Even where young people are in work they are more likely to be suffering underemployment and casual insecure work.

The Socialist Party stands for a trade union struggle to fight for young people's future. Most do not currently understand the role of trade unions, because they've never had the opportunity to see it. In 2019 only 4.4% of trade union members were between 18 and 24, whereas 40% were 50 or older. Generally, young workers are concentrated in largely non-unionised service and retail sectors. The Socialist Party fully supports the relaunch of the Youth Fight for Jobs campaign as an important part of attracting young people to the workers' movement, and demanding that the trade unions launch a serious struggle for high-quality training and jobs for the next generation. All training schemes should be on union rates of pay, with high-quality training and a guaranteed job at the end.

One hundred years ago the trade union movement was fighting for a living wage and a maximum working day of eight hours. Today the battle has to be fought again. The average working week in Britain is 41 hours, with 12% of workers slaving for more than 50 hours a week to make ends meet. Meanwhile others, including many young people, are left unemployed or trying to survive on just a

few hours work. The Socialist Party stands for sharing out the work – with a maximum working week of 32 hours with no loss of pay – so that everyone has the right to full-time work on a living wage, but no one should slave every hour to make enough to live on. This – combined with a major programme of increased public services – could eliminate unemployment and underemployment.

RACISM AND SEXISM IN THE 'NEW NORMAL'

The pandemic shone a spotlight on all forms of inequality in capitalist society. Death rates were consistently highest in the most poverty-stricken, overcrowded communities, which were also the communities where frontline workers are more likely to live. This meant that the poorest sections of the working class suffered most, within which black and Asian workers are disproportionately concentrated. As a result black men were more than four times as likely to die from Covid as white men, for example. The prevalence of police harassment against BAME groups was also highlighted during the pandemic; they were almost 50% more likely to be arrested under coronavirus laws than white people. The magnificent Black Lives Matter movement in 2020 showed the appetite for a movement to fight racism. The Socialist Party fights for the building of such a movement, on a mass democratic basis. We call for the workers' movement to make the fight against racism a central part of its programme, not just words but in action.

The pandemic also highlighted the oppression that all women, particularly working-class women, continue to suffer. Women were more likely to lose their jobs or have their hours cut during the pandemic. They also took the brunt of the burden of added childcare and home schooling, when schools closed for long periods. Women also suffered a second pandemic, as intimate partner violence rocketed. On average, two women a week are killed by a partner or ex-partner. In the first Covid lockdown this horrific figure more than doubled. Sexual harassment has also increased. Post-pandemic austerity means not only further cuts to jobs and wages but also further cuts to the services women rely on, including support services for women who have suffered or are suffering violence. The Socialist Party fights for the trade unions to take up a whole raft of demands that will be crucial to the struggle for women's rights in the post-pandemic period, including free high-quality childcare, access for all to flexible working hours that put the needs of workers first, a massive expansion of public services including specialist services for women fleeing violence, and for a mass council house building programme to provide high-quality housing for all who need it.

THE NEED FOR A POLITICAL VOICE FOR THE WORKING CLASS

Vital as the trade unions are, capitalism cannot be overthrown by trade union struggle alone. Even an all-out general strike – while it can bring the country to a halt – can only pose the question of who governs society. It cannot on its own take power from the capitalist class. To achieve that, the working class also needs its own party – a political leadership – capable of leading a struggle for socialism. The Socialist Party aims to build at least the first steps to such a party, which will be filled out as struggles develop. Without such a party revolutionary movements will still develop, but will not be able to take and consolidate power. For example, the enormous power of the 2011 revolution in Egypt succeeded in overturning the old regime but the absence of any kind of mass party of the working class and poor initially allowed the Muslim Brotherhood to step into the vacuum, and then the old regime to regain its grip.

Right now, however, in the wake of the defeat of Jeremy Corbyn and his supporters within the Labour Party, the idea of building any kind of mass party that fights in the interests of the working class seems difficult to many. At this stage the anger of working-class and young people is dissipated, with those who are most active heading in all kinds of different directions. Some are concentrating solely on protesting around individual issues, others are limiting themselves to organising in the workplaces, others again are trying to help the poorest via food banks and other forms of charity work. While concentrating on any of these may be an understandable reaction to the disappointment of the Corbyn experience, alone they do not deal with the central tasks the socialist movement faces. Protesting and workplace struggle can play a very positive role in pushing back the capitalists' attacks on the working class and even winning temporary victories. However, until the capitalist system itself is overthrown every struggle will have to be endlessly refought. Charity work is a desperate attempt to deal with the gaping wounds of hardship created by capitalism. The capitalist class, however, has no objection to socialists putting all their energies into that, leaving them free to continue their rule unchallenged.

FOR ANTI-CUTS COUNCILLORS

Often the services that are now very partially filled by charity work were previously carried out by local authorities. The Socialist Party fights for the election of councillors who are prepared to use council resources, including reserves and borrowing powers, to meet the needs of the population, while building a struggle to demand the money required from central government. Local authorities have considerable

potential power. Currently, for example, Labour leads over 120 councils, with a combined spending power greater than the state budgets of 16 EU countries. Yet Labour councils continue to implement cuts to essential services year after year. Frequently local community activists respond by trying to step up their charity work to fill the gap, only to find that the following year the gap widens again as more cuts are made. Launching a struggle to fight for more resources for the local community is what is needed. This means making demands on the existing council, but also being prepared to stand for election to the council on a 'no cuts' platform. The struggle to wield the powers and resources of local authorities in defence of the working class is one of the sharpest expressions of the need for a new mass workers' party.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Trotsky begins the transitional programme by saying that, "the world political situation as a whole is chiefly characterised by a historical crisis of the leadership of the proletariat", that is the working class. The difference between today and then is that we face not just a crisis of leadership but also of organisation, or rather the lack of it, as well as a clear programme.

This is still is an overhang from the aftermath of the collapse of Stalinism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the early 1990s. This was a major victory for capitalism worldwide which the capitalist classes milked for all it was worth. Socialist ideas were temporarily relegated to the margins, and levels of working-class organisation were pushed back. Tony Blair's election as Labour leader in 1994 signalled a headlong rush by the Labour leadership to abandon even lip-service to socialism and to fully embrace neo-liberal capitalism. Of course, even prior to the triumph of Blairism Labour governments had ultimately acted in defence of the capitalist system. Nonetheless, Labour had been a 'capitalist workers' party' with its leaders susceptible to pressure from the working-class base of the party, via its democratic structures, and was therefore not reliable from the point of view of the capitalist elite. New Labour, by contrast, was considered by Thatcher as one of her greatest achievements, because there were now two major parties that capitalism in Britain could rely upon to govern.

Expelling the Socialist Party, then known as Militant, from the Labour Party – as the most determined fighters against the right – was vital preparation for the victory of Blairism. The Socialist Party, as we became in 1997, then worked

independently as a small but important force fighting to maintain socialist ideas in difficult conditions, including fighting for the development of a new mass workers' party as a means to solve the crisis of working-class political representation. We understood that the crisis of capitalism would inevitably lead to a new generation drawing socialist conclusions, which would find an organisational expression.

GREAT RECESSION CREATED OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE LEFT

In the wake of the 2007-08 Great Recession, that began to happen. Corbynism in Britain, the movement in support of Bernie Sanders in the US, Podemos in Spain and Syriza in Greece all developed from the movements which erupted against the consequences of the Great Recession. The eventual defeat of these first steps towards new left parties was not as a consequence of electoral unpopularity – as the capitalists and their supporters falsely claim – but as a result of the weakness and failures of the leaderships of these formations.

Take Syriza in Greece which went from 4.8% of the vote in 2009 to winning the general election in 2015. This was against the background of more than 30 general strikes against austerity. The working class saw in Syriza a means to fight back electorally. But the Syriza leadership then capitulated to the demands of the capitalist class and the institutions of the EU, betraying the working class and implementing terrible austerity. The capitulation did not, needless to say, lead

to electoral success but instead to being defeated by the capitalist New Democracy party in 2019.

Corbyn did not win a general election, but Starmer's claims that his more 'moderate' – right wing – leadership is necessary for electoral success are ludicrous. Back in 2017 Corbyn won an extra 3.5 million votes, the biggest vote gain for any party in Britain in a single general election since 1945. Even in the 2019 general election Labour got 10.2 million votes, something that was not achieved by Blair after the 2001 election, or ever by Gordon Brown or Ed Miliband. However, Corbyn and his supporters have now been largely driven out of the Labour Party. Starmer is so confident in the stranglehold that the pro-capitalist right has on the party that he can openly praise Blair's legacy. But Corbyn's defeat was not preordained. Ensuring that future movements, which will be on a much bigger scale, do not meet the same fate means learning the lessons of Corbynism's mistakes.

Corbyn faced enormous obstacles as Labour leader. The capitalists could not trust him to do their bidding so they set out to destroy him. He faced blatant and open sabotage from the pro-capitalist wing of his own party, which included a big majority of MPs. He was constantly reviled in the capitalist media. The hatred he faced from the capitalist class and their representatives was a back-handed compliment. It was a sign that they feared the movement that might be mobilised behind him. When we led two mass movements against Tory prime minister



Maggie Thatcher – first in Liverpool and then nationally against the poll tax – we got more than a taste of the same medicine. Of course, the relentless attacks on Jeremy Corbyn did have an effect on big sections of voters, but this could have been cut across if Corbyn and his supporters had stood their ground and fought for a left programme, mobilising a mass movement in their support. The failure to do this then allowed Starmer to pander to the idea that a leader who was ‘acceptable’ to the billionaire press barons was a prerequisite for electoral victory, not mentioning that only a candidate willing to do the bidding of the billionaire press barons and the broader capitalist class would ever be acceptable to them.

Our experience in leading Liverpool city council in the 1980s is an example of what could have been done, albeit on a local level. Liverpool city council stood firm for its pro-working class policies, and built a mass movement, including city-wide public sector strikes and massive demonstrations, in support of its stance. We were constantly reviled in the capitalist media and attacked by the right-wing Labour leader Neil Kinnock. Catholic priests in Liverpool even threatened members of their congregations with excommunication if they voted Labour! Yet Labour’s vote in Liverpool went up. Had the swing to Labour in the 1987 general election in Liverpool been repeated nationally Labour would have been swept to power.

It was the Corbynite’s constant attempts to make concessions to the Labour right – and behind them to the capitalist class – in the vain hope of pacifying them, which muddied the waters and led to their defeat. In the Corbyn era the possibility of transforming Labour into a mass workers’ party with a socialist programme was posed. The Socialist Party fought tenaciously for that outcome. We applied to affiliate to the Labour Party in order to offer our strength to that struggle. We put forward a programme at each stage to democratise the party and to deselect the pro-capitalists who continued to dominate the Parliamentary Labour Party and the council chambers. Such an approach would have created huge enthusiasm among broad sections of the working class. Instead, unfortunately, the Labour left kept retreating under the right’s relentless onslaught, leaving the pro-capitalist wing of the Labour Party in the driving seat of a party which still had a Blair-era undemocratic structure.

HOW WILL A NEW MASS WORKERS’ PARTY BE FORMED?
Having failed to be transformed while it had a left leader, the Socialist Party does not think that the fight for working-class political representation can be won within the current framework of the Labour Party’s structures and rules. Instead a struggle for a new mass workers’ party is needed.

THE EVENTUAL DEFEAT OF THESE FIRST STEPS TOWARDS NEW LEFT PARTIES WAS NOT AS A CONSEQUENCE OF ELECTORAL UNPOPULARITY – BUT AS A RESULT OF THE WEAKNESS AND FAILURES OF THE LEADERSHIPS OF THESE FORMATIONS

The Socialist Party was one of the founding organisations of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) in 2010. TUSC organises on a federal basis, allowing different organisations to come together to collaborate and provide an anti-austerity banner for socialists and trade unionists to stand in elections. In the Corbyn era it stopped contesting any parliamentary elections, instead campaigning for a Jeremy Corbyn-led government with an anti-austerity programme. After Corbyn’s defeat, however, it is playing a very important role – virtually alone – in offering workers a voice in the electoral arena. The RMT transport workers’ union is affiliated to TUSC, and many individual leading trade unionists participate in it, alongside the Socialist Party, Resist and individual supporters.

The Socialist Party demands that the left unions should take the first steps towards solving the crisis of working-class political representation by calling a conference to discuss how a political voice for the working class can be built. At this stage the majority of even left trade union leaders, however, have not drawn the necessary conclusions about the consequences of Starmer’s victory for their members. Nonetheless, from below, the forces from which a new party will be formed will coalesce. One indication of this was the survey, conducted shortly after Starmer’s victory, by the Bakers’ Union (BFAWU) on their members’ views on affiliation to Labour. A majority, 53%, disagreed with continued affiliation to Labour. This was not non-political trade unionism, however, as 56% wanted to keep a political link. The union’s report noted that many of their members “have started to look at smaller independent parties as an alternative to the mainstream ones.” Since then a Bakers’ Union conference has voted overwhelmingly to disaffiliate from Labour, in response their President, Ian Hodson, being expelled from the party for opposing the witch-hunt against the left.

Over the coming period as struggles develop, the need to have elected representatives in parliament and council chambers, supporting workers instead of opposing them, will push forward the development of steps to a new party. This, after all, was what drove the development of the Labour Party over a century ago as trade unionists, fed up with a choice between capitalist politicians, began to come together to get their own representatives elected.



UNITED STRUGGLES AGAINST RACISM AND OPPRESSION – NOT CULTURE WARS

Moves in this direction would represent an important step forward for the working class. Instead of numerous individual separate struggles, a common party of workers and young people would help to bring them together in a united struggle against the capitalist system.

It is very noticeable, and positive, that this is the natural instinct of broad sections of the working class. The start of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020 was marked by a huge outpouring of anger against racism by working-class youth from every ethnic background. There was an understanding that overcoming racism did not just require changes in individuals' social attitudes, but a fundamental change to the society which creates the basis for reactionary ideas.

However, the absence of a mass democratic organisation of the BLM movement, and also the complete failure of the trade unions to mobilise for it (except the Socialist Party and other individual trade unionists and socialists) created a vacuum. This allowed space for proponents of identity politics to attempt to assert their claims to lead the movement. Many young people who are becoming active in the struggle against racism, sexism and LGBTQ+phobia use some of the language of identity politics. But many also do not agree with the proponents of it who see things only

in terms of 'identity' and attempt to divide every section of the working class according to their specific oppressions, including dismissing white workers as 'privileged', for example.

Those ultimately reactionary ideas jarred with the majority of participants in BLM, who saw that the movement had wholehearted and active support from many white working-class youth, but also that many of the issues on which they want to see change – including poverty, low pay, joblessness and housing – affect the whole of the working class. Identity politics potentially divide and weaken movements against oppression, while also handing an ideological weapon to the Tories to try to undermine the struggle, by trying to whip up the so-called 'culture wars' and claiming – outrageously – that they are the ones that stand up for white workers.

A new mass workers' party could play an important role in bringing together different movements against oppression in a common struggle, but that will not be achieved automatically. To do so fully would require adopting the approach of the Socialist Party, supporting and taking seriously the struggles for equality of all oppressed groups, but as part of a united struggle of the working class, the only force capable of ending capitalism and therefore laying the basis for the creation of a society free from oppression.

A SOCIALIST PROGRAMME FOR VICTORY

inevitably new broad workers' parties are not likely – certainly initially – to be united around a rounded-out approach to how to achieve socialism. The Socialist Party has a clear programme for the ending of capitalism and the socialist transformation of society. While we argue for our programme at each stage, we also understand that a new workers' party with a more limited approach will be a step forward, acting as a forum, a 'workers' parliament', within which democratic debate can take place about how to win a new world. In today's era of capitalist crisis, a wing of the party supporting a clear programme for socialist transformation would grow, aided by the Socialist Party, laying the basis for the development of the type of mass workers' party that will be necessary to lead the way to and through that transformation.

Particularly important will be for a new broad party to be based on the working class, be independent from all pro-capitalist parties, and to have a democratic and welcoming approach to new forces attracted to it. We would also call for all of its elected representatives to take only a worker's wage. The experience of the Corbyn years will mean that, in the coming era, the debate around these issues will start on a far higher level than over the last five years.

The huge hostility Corbyn faced from the capitalist elite gives a glimpse of what a left government would face. In reality, Jeremy Corbyn's programme was modest by the past standards of the socialist and workers' movement. It was limited to some relatively small measures to tilt the balance in society towards the working class. However, the capitalists were not prepared to accept even those limited reforms, and feared that workers' 'appetite would grow with the eating', pushing Corbyn to take more far-going socialist measures.

The era we live in today bears no resemblance to the post-war upswing from 1950 to the early 1970s. Then, a combination of factors, including the world balance of forces in the era of Stalinism and rapid economic growth, created a situation where the capitalist class was forced to concede significant concessions to the working class over a few decades.

During the post-war upswing Keynesian policies dominated, and, today again, countries that can afford to have taken some 'Keynesian' measures, particularly the hugely increased state expenditure during the pandemic. There the resemblance ends, however. Today's measures are desperate attempts to try and prop up the system in

an historic era of capitalist decline. The capitalist class is determined to ensure that it is the working class that pays the price for those policies, whether it is via the post-Covid austerity we face in Britain, increased inflation undermining wages, or most likely a combination of both. It will also not prevent the capitalist class trying to stymie any left government that tries to implement a programme which threatens its interests. That poses the question what programme is necessary to successfully fight for a society, as Corbyn aimed to, 'for the many not the few'.

HOW TO WIN

The pressure exerted on the Syriza government in Greece which was elected in 2015 gives an idea of the challenges. It is true that being one of the weakest economies in the Eurozone was a major lever used by international capitalism to bully the Syriza leadership, but that does not mean that international capitalism would shrug its shoulders if Britain, the fifth largest economy in the world, elected a left-wing government.

No amount of pressure could prevent socialist policies from being implemented, however, provided there was a determined movement of the working class and a clear-sighted leadership. In Greece the outcome could have been entirely different had the leadership of Syriza not capitulated but shown the same determination as the Greek working class and poor. What was needed was a refusal to pay the state debts, and the nationalisation of the banks and finance companies under democratic workers' control and management. This would have ensured the credit required to develop all sectors of the economy. There would also have had to be capital controls to prevent any flight of capital. Such measures would have undoubtedly met the entrenched resistance of the capitalist class. This would have unavoidably raised the need for nationalisation of the major corporations, and the introduction of a state monopoly of foreign trade, to form the basis of a democratic plan of production run by elected representatives of the workers and the wider community.

Greece would then have needed to make an appeal to the workers and poor of the world to stand in solidarity with them. At that time, when the countries of the EU's 'periphery' were all suffering terrible austerity and general strikes were rocking southern Europe, such a stance would have generated huge international support, and been a major inspiration to workers across the EU and beyond to take the same road.

The Syriza experience is not the only example of left governments that remain within the framework of capitalism retreating under pressure. Another is the Parti Socialiste government, led by president François Mitterrand, in France in 1981. Swept to power on a wave of enthusiasm, Mitterrand's election led to celebrations on the streets. The government's programme included a 10% increase in the minimum wage, the introduction of a 39-hour week, increased pensions and the nationalisation of a number of major corporations and banks. Initially, a number of these reforms were implemented, but the government came under wholesale attack from French and international capitalism and from the markets. After only a hundred days in office the government went into reverse. In June 1982, a freeze on wages was introduced and public spending was cut by 20 billion francs as part of a general turn to what today would be called austerity.

For any left government to implement its programme it would therefore require extra-parliamentary action, that is, the mobilisation of the working class in support of the government's policies. This could win important victories. However, as long as the levers of power remain in the hands of the capitalists, policies implemented under that mass pressure would be temporary.

NATIONALISE THE 'COMMANDING HEIGHTS' UNDER WORKERS' CONTROL

That is why the Socialist Party stands for not just the nationalisation of a few companies, but the major monopolies and banks that dominate the economy; around 150 in the case of Britain, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need. This would be vital to breaking the power of the capitalist class, and laying the basis for the development of a socialist plan of production, which could really meet the needs of humanity while protecting the planet.

A socialist plan would create the basis to transform people's existence. Hunger and poverty would quickly become a thing of the past. The science and technique created by capitalism could be harnessed and developed to meet the needs of all.

Things that seem no more than a daydream under capitalism would become reality. To give one example, when he was Labour's shadow chancellor John McDonnell put forward the aspiration of a four-day week, which was widely ridiculed by the capitalist media. Many workers, unable to make ends meet while working five, six or even seven days a week, were also understandably sceptical. On the basis of a socialist plan of production, however, such a proposal would be entirely realistic. New technology could

be used, as it never is under capitalism, to share out the work with no loss of pay rather than to throw workers on the scrapheap. At the same time the unnecessary work created by capitalism – different companies competing against each other to develop identical products, vast sums spent on advertising those identical products, plus of course the abhorrent arms industry – could all be eliminated.

A SOCIALIST PLAN WOULD CREATE THE BASIS TO TRANSFORM PEOPLE'S EXISTENCE.

Combined with a huge expansion of public services, the nightmare of unemployment would be brought to an end. From 2010 to 2018 alone 800,000 public sector jobs were lost in Britain. The resulting catastrophic cuts to public and health services were a major factor in worsening the quality of our lives – from raising the Covid death rate to increasing flood risk. A socialist government could go far further than reversing the cuts, however. Some measures could include providing good, free, public sector social care for all that need it; implementing a massive programme of building high-quality, carbon-neutral council housing; hugely expanding public transport and making it free in order to lower car usage. This could be combined with major public investment into the development of clean, socially-useful production and infrastructure. This is just a tiny glimpse of what would be possible if all the technology created by capitalism was harnessed and developed further for the good of the whole of society.

THE CAPITALIST STATE

Despite the capitalist class's attempts to smear socialists as 'violent' or 'dictatorial', it is they who have a record of overturning democratic elections if they threaten the rule of capital, and of using the most brutal violence imaginable. Look at the experience of Salvador Allende's Popular Unity government in Chile which, from 1970 to 1973, nationalised approximately 30% of industry. The Chilean capitalist class, backed by US imperialism, carried out an incredibly brutal coup establishing the Pinochet dictatorship. Thatcher openly said this was justified because of the "threat" of "communism". Today Allende, murdered by Pinochet's thugs, is rightly remembered as a hero by the new



generations of Chileans and also internationally. He is often praised by Jeremy Corbyn, for example. The most important lesson of the Chilean experience, that conciliating with the capitalist class does not work, has not, however, been learnt by Corbyn. The Pinochet coup could have been prevented by the active mobilisation of the mass of the working class to break the stranglehold on power of the capitalist class.

In a country like Britain, where the working class makes up a big majority of society, an entirely peaceful transformation of society would be possible, provided that the full power of the working class was mobilised to effect that change. The ominous public statements by a number of serving army generals about the prospects of a Corbyn government – like Britain's most senior general expressing his "worry" that Corbyn's programme might ever be "translated into power" – are a warning of how far the capitalist class would be willing to go against a democratically elected government.

The generals are one thing, however. They would not get support from the working-class ranks of the army to take action against a government that had the active support of working class people and was acting to provide decent jobs, housing, and living wage for all. That is why the Socialist Party stands for the right of members of the armed forces to join a trade union and to organise to defend their

interests against the tops, including fighting for the right to elect their own officers.

MASSIVELY EXTEND DEMOCRACY

The machinery of the capitalist state is not neutral but ultimately exists to defend the existing capitalist order. The unelected House of Lords and the monarchy are both means by which the capitalist class would try and block a democratically elected socialist government. Anyone who doubts that the reserve powers of the monarchy could be used in this way only needs to look back to 1975, when the Queen's representative in Australia – the Governor-General – dissolved parliament, removed the then Labour Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, and appointed a right-wing replacement. The abolition of the House of Lords and monarchy would therefore be an important immediate step a socialist government would need to take.

This is only one way in which the Socialist Party argues for a massive expansion of democracy from the very limited and truncated form it takes under capitalism; where we get to vote every few years for MPs who do what they like once they are elected, not least lining their own pockets. Levels of cronyism and corruption have reached new heights as the Tories hand out contracts to companies that have donated to their party. A democratic workers' state would be entirely different. All of the existing democratic conquests won by the working class could be extended, such as the right to strike and protest, always limited and now more and more curtailed under Johnson's Tories.

In a workers' state, nationally, regionally and locally, elected representatives would only receive a workers' wage, and be accountable, subject to instant recall at any time. There is another crucial sense in which democracy would be far fuller. In a capitalist 'democracy' most of the important decisions are not taken in Westminster or local council chambers, but in the boardrooms of the big corporations. By nationalising the major corporations, together with the creation of decision-making bodies consisting of representatives from workplaces and communities at all levels, it would open up the possibility of real workers' democracy with mass participation in every aspect of decision making – from planning housing, to education, to the development of clean, green production. A socialist plan could be drawn up involving the whole of society working out what was needed.

In contrast to capitalism, workers' democracy would also give nations a real right to self-determination. A clear majority of the working class and young people in Scotland now support independence, seeing it as a means to escape cuts and austerity. Such an escape would not be on offer



from a capitalist independent Scotland, but would be on a socialist basis. In Wales, there is not currently the same level of support for independence, although it has risen recently, particularly among young people. That is why we call for an independent socialist Scotland and for a socialist Wales, both part of a voluntary socialist confederation of Wales, England, Scotland and Ireland. Some organisations on the left argue against support for self-determination on the grounds it would cut across workers' unity. In reality, however, the best way to ensure maximum unity in struggle is for the workers' movement in England to support the right of self-determination for all nations.

THE SO CALLED 'FREE PRESS'

The myth of a capitalist 'free press' is laughable when it is owned and controlled by a handful of billionaires together with the state broadcaster, the BBC, increasingly losing the veneer of supposed 'neutrality' it had in the past, and instead blatantly defending the interests of British capitalism. The current director-general is a former Tory council candidate! The bile piled on Corbyn is evidence enough of their bias.

As disillusionment with traditional media grows, many increasingly look to social media for information. This too, however, is ultimately owned by a few billionaires, and is governed by algorithms that set parameters about what

can be posted and viewed. When they fear that capitalism is under threat, access to social media can be removed altogether – in the 2011 Egyptian revolution, for example, Facebook was simply shut down for the duration. The Socialist Party stands for the nationalisation of all of the facilities of the media – printing presses, radio, TV and the internet – under democratic workers' control and management. All political parties and views could then democratically be given access on the basis of their support in the population in elections.

SOCIALIST INTERNATIONALISM INSTEAD OF CAPITALIST CONFLICT

Capitalism is a global system, and the struggle for socialism also has to be global. While the working class in one country will be able to make a beginning, it will be essential that socialism spreads beyond the borders of one country. Otherwise, the forces of global capitalism would eventually be able to overwhelm an isolated workers' state, while the pollution created by global capitalist production would continue to poison the air and oceans. However, in a globalised world, where the productive forces have long since outgrown not just the narrow limits of private ownership, but the straitjacket of the nation state, it is inconceivable that socialism would remain within the confines of one country. The enormous similarities between the struggles facing the working class worldwide would mean that support for socialism would spread like wildfire around the globe. We've already had many glimpses of the internationalist outlook of the working class today, from the global character of BLM to the way the Middle East and North African revolutions spread rapidly across the whole region.

THE ROLE OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY

At this stage there is an enormous gap between the crisis in the capitalist system and the levels of anger against its consequences on the one hand, and working-class cohesion, organisation and understanding of its potential power on the other. Support for socialistic ideas in a broad sense has risen dramatically, but conclusions about what that means and how to achieve it have not yet been drawn by the majority. We are heading into a period of major stormy struggles as the working class does its best to defend itself from the onslaught on living conditions and wages that is coming. There is no doubt that, with or without the Socialist Party, as a result of the brutal experience of those struggles – both defeats and victories – further lessons will be learnt on how to ensure that the further big movements to come will more seriously challenge capitalism.

However, the Socialist Party in England and Wales, along with our co-thinkers around the world in the Committee for a

Workers' International, has a crucial role to play in speeding that process up and making sure that the lessons of the past are used to build mass revolutionary parties which can successfully lead the way to end this rotten capitalist system and begin to build a new democratic socialist world. Right now we are able to play a very important role in numerous areas of struggle: including in the trade union movement, initiating and building Youth Fight for Jobs, on the university campuses, and participating in numerous local community campaigns against evictions, gentrification, cuts to local services, in defence of the NHS, on the environment, and much more. We also play a key role in the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition as part of the struggle for a new mass workers' party. We produce a weekly newspaper and monthly magazine, plus numerous leaflets and pamphlets, which reflect all the struggles that workers and young people are involved in, as well as the role of the Socialist Party in far more depth than this short pamphlet is able to.

We aim to be the most effective fighters on every immediate issue facing the working class, but always to link those struggles to the need for socialism and the central role of the working class in achieving it. As Marx and Engels put it in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), we fight for the "attainment of the immediate aims, for the enforcement of the momentary interests of the working class; but in the movement of the present also represent the future of that movement."

Even with our current modest numbers, we are able to punch well above our weight, because of our clear programme, our base in the workers' movement, and because we don't just act as individuals but are regularly discussing the best paths forward, and can then act collectively to pursue them. In the coming period we will have opportunities to grow exponentially. In 1981 we had less than 2,000 members, but within nine years we had led the council in Britain's eighth biggest city in a mass struggle against the government, and organised the millions-strong anti-poll tax movement that brought down Margaret Thatcher. What we subsequently achieved was muted by the objective fact of the ideological triumph of capitalism after the collapse of Stalinism and its impact on workers' consciousness and their organisations. But the next period will be completely different to the 1990s. We urge everyone who has read this pamphlet and agrees with it to join us today and help to build the Socialist Party. Our strength is not only important for its own sake, but because of the difference it will make in the numerous class battles that are ahead. As Corbynism demonstrated, general support for socialist ideas will not be enough. We are aiming to build a party with the clear programme, strategy and tactics required for victory.

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The Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) is the international socialist organisation which the Socialist Party is affiliated to. The CWI is organised in many countries. We work to unite the working class and oppressed peoples against capitalism and to fight for a socialist world.

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