

TORIES OUT!

Starmmer's Tory-lite Labour is no alternative

Let's build a new mass workers' party

KRIS O'SULLIVAN
BIRMINGHAM NORTH SOCIALIST PARTY

Under Boris Johnson it's one law for us and one for the rich and powerful.

That means the recently revealed lockdown lawbreaking, sleaze and

crony Covid contracts. But also the policies that make the rich richer while workers and our families suffer - public service cuts, low pay, fire and rehire, national insurance hikes, profiteering privatised utilities ripping us off, and so on and on and on...

The publication of the pared-down Sue Gray report into Westminster parties under lockdown shows we can't rely on the current residents of Parliament to get

Johnson and his anti-working-class policies out.

We obviously can't rely on Tory backbenchers - but neither on the Labour so-called opposition under Keir Starmer, who have gone along with every Tory measure. Where is the voice of the working class? We need a new mass workers' party.

On 3 March the first parliamentary by-election of 2022 is taking place in my home constituency of Erdington, Birmingham. Like every working-class area, we've suffered years of austerity cuts to vital services. Overcrowded housing is a huge problem. Jobs are being thrown on the scrapheap through, for example, the threatened closure of the GKN plant.

This election is seen as a popularity poll of the Johnson government. But for us here it's also an opportunity to give a bloody nose to and fight the Blairite Labour council who've passed on all the Tory cuts.

I'm sick of Tory or Labour cuts, I want an alternative!

That's why I will be voting for and fighting for Socialist Party member Dave Nellist, standing as the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition candidate on a 100% anti-austerity platform.

He's offering a socialist alternative on the ballot paper: of a £15-an-hour minimum wage, kicking out parasitical privatisation from our public services and instead fully funding



PIPPA FOWLES/NO 10 DOWNING STREET/CC

them, a mass council house-building programme so everyone has a decent and safe home. Take the wealth off the big corporations not the working class.

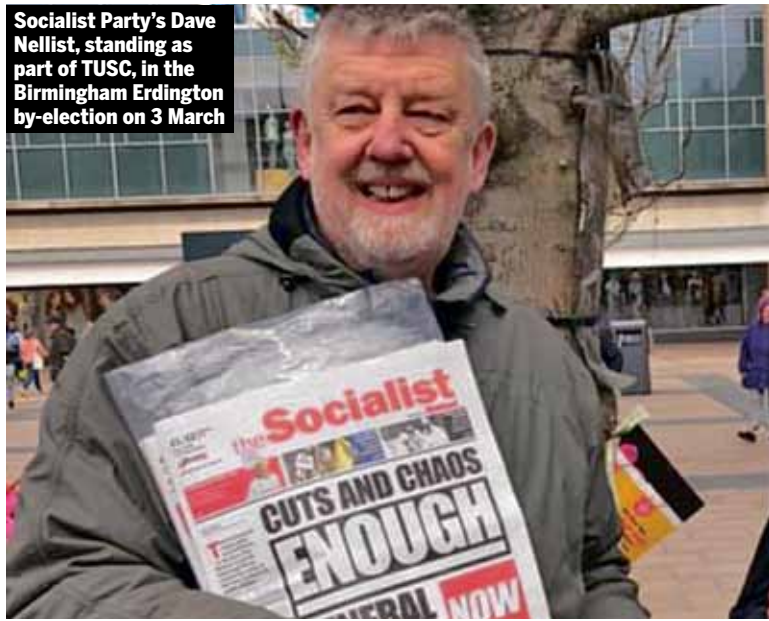
Dave has a proven track record of being a workers' MP on a worker's wage when previously in Parliament. There is an alternative to establishment politicians living on grotesque, bloated salaries divorced from the realities of working-class

families, living in second homes when people in Erdington don't even have one!

This by-election gives us an opportunity to get out a message that we can fight cuts, build our own working-class political voice - and organise a socialist fightback!

● See pages 2&3 for more on this and how to get involved and support the campaign

Socialist Party's Dave Nellist, standing as part of TUSC, in the Birmingham Erdington by-election on 3 March



Dave Nellist standing for Birmingham Erdington

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is standing Dave Nellist in the Birmingham Erdington parliamentary by-election taking place on 3 March. Dave was the MP for Coventry South East for nine years from 1983-1992, and was - alongside Jeremy Corbyn - a member of the left-wing Socialist Campaign Group of MPs. During his time in parliament, Dave and the two other

Militant-supporting (now the Socialist Party) MPs were well-known for only taking an ordinary worker's wage, giving away over half of an MP's bloated salary - currently £82,000 a year - to trade unionists and working-class campaigners fighting to defend their livelihoods and communities. Labour expelled Dave, along with many other socialists, for helping to organise mass non-payment of Maggie Thatcher's hated poll tax.

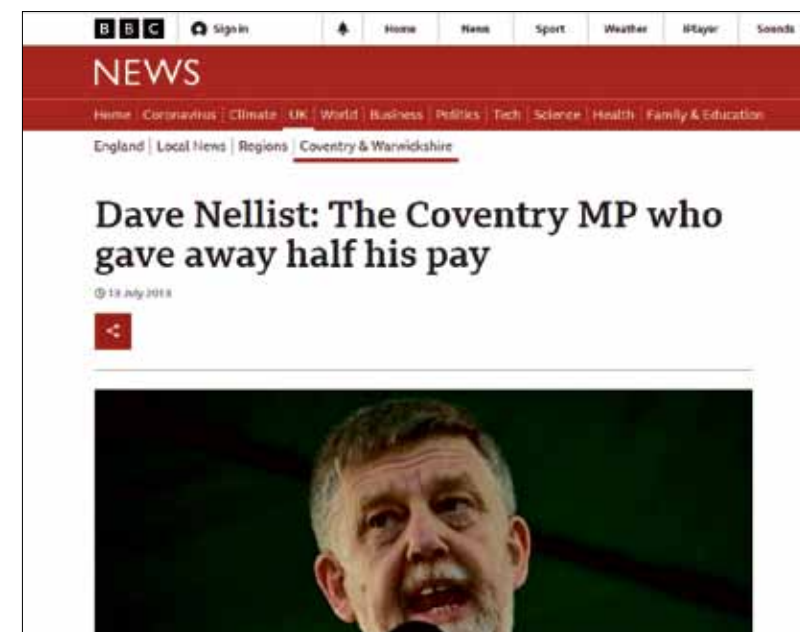
Later, for 14 years, Dave was a Coventry city councillor for the Socialist Party from 1998 to 2012. While Labour started privatising our NHS, schools and services, Dave and the Socialist Party gave a fighting voice for working-class people. Accepting the TUSC nomination for the Erdington contest, Dave said: "With Sir Keir Starmer's Labour welcoming a Tory MP into the parliamentary party last week - while confirming Jeremy Corbyn's exclusion from the PLP at its national executive committee meeting on 25 January - it couldn't be clearer that the interests of Britain's wealthy establishment will be in safe hands if and when they decide to move on from Boris Johnson's disintegrating premiership. Starmer is so obviously not on our side. "In contrast, I and the rest of the TUSC coalition wholeheartedly supported Jeremy's leadership of the Labour Party as an opportunity to put someone in Number Ten who would challenge what he called the 'rigged system' - in other words, capitalism - that works in the interests of a rich and powerful minority. "So the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, co-founded in 2010 by the late transport workers' leader Bob Crow, adjusted its electoral activity in response, not standing candidates in either the 2017 or 2019 general elections. "But we also warned that the

“” During his time in parliament, Dave and the two other Militant-supporting (now the Socialist Party) MPs were well-known for only taking an ordinary worker's wage, giving away over half of an MP's bloated salary to working class campaigners...

followers of Tony Blair within Labour - like Keir Starmer - didn't support the socialist policies of taxing the rich and public ownership that are needed to overturn the 'rigged system' and that they would drop the Labour manifesto policies of 2017 and 2019 as soon as they had the chance. "And so it has come to pass, with Starmer, for example, explicitly ruling out public ownership of the big oil and gas companies even as they boost shareholder dividends from our hiked up energy bills. "That is why I am proud to represent TUSC in the Birmingham Erdington by-election and would urge other trade unionists, socialists and community campaigners to also consider standing for TUSC in the forthcoming local council elections in May. "Red Tories, Blue Tories or Yellow Tories carrying out policies against the interests of the working-class majority cannot expect to be unchallenged at the ballot box."



Dave (right) on an earlier TUSC election campaign being quizzed by the media PHOTO PAUL MATTSOON



Dave was well-known as a socialist MP who lived on a worker's wage

Labour candidate's long record... of cutting services, pay and jobs

Paulette Hamilton, Labour's candidate for Erdington, has been a Birmingham councillor since 2004, and the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care since 2015. Instead

of using her position to fight for working-class people in Birmingham, she has presided over cuts to jobs and services. For example, in 2017, under her

leadership, the council set out to gut the vital Health and Social Care service. Already low-paid, mainly women homecare workers were faced with cuts to their contracted hours resulting in pay cuts of up to £11,000 a year. It took 20 months of strike action to force Paulette Hamilton and the rest of the Labour council to retreat. Hamilton also played a leading role in attacking striking refuse workers. In 2019 she wrote to council workers' trade unions, Unison and Unite, threatening "to seek an injunction which declares the actions of Unite and Unison in relation to the current industrial action unlawful." Perhaps hoping to avoid discussing her anti-worker record, Hamilton has said that she intends to make fly-tipping a central issue in her by-election campaign, but the council's policies have led directly to its increase. Back in 2011 it was the Labour Cabinet Member for Refuse Collection who scrapped free collection of bulky waste, saying he was confident it wouldn't lead to an increase in fly-tipping. But a rise in illegally dumped rubbish is the inevitable result of residents now having to pay £33 per item for legal disposal. Her message appears to be: 'Vote for me to clear up my own mess!'



Birmingham refuse workers and home carers, fighting back over savage cuts in pay, were threatened with legal injunctions by the Labour council

Nationalise GKN!

Birmingham's unemployment rate, at 12.6%, is already the highest of any major city in Britain, with Erdington among the constituencies with the most out of work. Now Erdington's GKN plant is set to close with the loss of 500-plus skilled jobs. Johnson's Tory government could have intervened, nationalised and saved GKN, but instead they let it go to the wall. Johnson claimed the Tories wanted Brexit to 'level up' working-class communities, but their Brexit is about

freedom for the bosses to exploit us. Johnson's new proposal for post-Brexit legislation, ripping up 'red tape' for businesses, means giving employers more liberty to attack their workers' rights, pay and conditions. The Socialist Party, in complete contrast, supported a vote to leave the EU because we oppose the EU's pro-capitalist rules that attempt to limit workers' rights and the right of governments to defend working-class interests, for example by nationalising plants threatened with closure. We fight for the nationalisation of GKN under democratic workers' control and management.

TUSC AGAINST CUTS

TUSC LOCAL ELECTIONS CONFERENCE

11am - Sunday 6 February, on Zoom

Register by entering
Zoom ID: 867 5383 4352
or online visit: bit.ly/3qFIUec

Speakers include:

- Ian Hodson, BFAWU president
- Onay Kasab, Unite Lead for Local government

Platform speakers from the constituent components of the TUSC steering committee - the RMT transport workers' union, the Socialist Party, Resist, and the individual members' representatives - will introduce the discussion. Visit tusc.org.uk to see TUSC's draft platform, core policies and how to stand as a candidate.

Would you be interested in coming to help us leaflet and canvas?



People will travel from far and near to the campaign, possibly from your area. There will be campaigning taking place every day from now to polling day. To volunteer, fill in the form at bit.ly/TUSCErdingtonVolunteer and this way we can link you up with others who are coming to lend a hand.

You can also make a donation towards the campaign here - nellistforerdington.com/donate.html For more info, phone/text 07530429441 or email tuscbirmingham@gmail.com Promoted by Joe Foster, 11 Kerby Rd, Birmingham B23 7EX on behalf of Dave Nellist

Socialist Party WHAT WE THINK

Why a socialist candidate for Birmingham Erdington is vital

The Erdington by-election is taking place as the living costs of the majority soar, and the Tory government drowns in cover-ups, corruption and lies. The contrast between Dave Nellist, 'the MP who gave away half his pay', and Johnson and his cronies could not be greater. As anger against the Tories reaches boiling point, Starmer's New Labour has finally managed to take the lead in national opinion polls. But all it has to offer is another version of pro-capitalist, pro-austerity politics. It is no surprise that Tory MP Christian Wakeford - with his record of voting for benefit cuts for the poorest and against measures to limit tax avoidance by the richest - is welcomed with open arms into Labour. His 'moderate' approach to politics fits right in with Starmer's 'pro-business' programme, which includes zero pledges to nationalise anything! Meanwhile Labour's National Executive Committee voted last week by 23-14 to continue to refuse to let Jeremy Corbyn sit as a Labour MP. In response Labour left Laura Pidcock resigned from Labour's NEC.

She rightly attacked the Labour leadership for just wanting "small tweaks to the status quo" in society, while being "noticeably determined when it comes to rule changes that alienate the left". She concluded that when "poverty is endemic" lefts should stop "giving our energy to people who want to block fundamental positive change." This, however, raises the urgent question of where socialists and trade unionists should put their energy. If Jeremy Corbyn had responded to the NEC decision by refusing to be gagged, and publicly announcing his intention to contest his seat at the next election outside of Labour, it would immediately have raised enthusiasm for the possibility of creating a left electoral alternative to Labour. As yet he has not done so, however.

Meanwhile, increasing numbers of workers are having to strike to demand wage rises that keep up with inflation, students are organising national action to fight for free education, and community campaigners are fighting against a tidal wave of evictions. But these struggles and others need a political voice. We cannot accept a choice between different brands of big business politicians: the working class needs its own party, putting forward socialist politics.

The Socialist Party participates in the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) in order to campaign for steps towards such a party. TUSC brings together the transport workers' union, the RMT, and leading trade unionists from seven other

unions, along with ourselves, Resist (established by the former Labour MP Chris Williamson), and independent socialists. It is an umbrella, which exists to allow trade unionists, socialists and campaigners to stand in elections on an anti-austerity programme. One indication of the increasingly urgent discussions in the trade unions on working-class political representation is that speakers at the TUSC national conference on 6 February will include an official representative of Unite, the biggest Labour affiliate, as well as Ian Hodson, President of the Bakers' Union, which recently disaffiliated from Labour. The Birmingham Erdington by-election comes at a crucial moment, where debate is growing about the need for a working-class alternative to Starmer's Labour, but no mass force has yet taken decisive steps to found one.

“” Dave Nellist's candidature offers an opportunity to vote for a socialist alternative

Labour's candidate is a long-standing Birmingham councillor, who has been a Cabinet member when two groups of council workers - in refuse and home care - were forced to strike in order to prevent the council slashing their pay and conditions. Supporting the Birmingham refuse strikers, Howard Beckett, representing Unite at the 2017 Labour Party conference, told Birmingham City Council "if you behave like Tories we'll treat you like Tories". To then leave workers in Erdington with no choice but to vote for the red Tories - or the yellow Tories or blue Tories - would be a huge wasted opportunity. Dave Nellist's candidature offers an opportunity to vote for a socialist alternative, and in the process to popularise a socialist programme and speed up the development of a mass workers' party. Already hundreds of trade unionists and socialists have been in touch asking to support Dave's campaign. We appeal to all readers of the Socialist to follow suit, by doing what you can to help in the campaign (details left). Don't leave it there, however. On 5 May over 6,500 council seats are up for election. A fantastic follow-up to Dave's campaign would be to get 1,000 or more trade unionists and socialists to refuse to accept a choice between different brands of pro-cuts councillors, and instead stand in the elections themselves.

the Socialist

formerly **Militant**

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3-9 February 2022

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

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

CONTACT US

editors@socialistparty.org.uk
020 8988 8777 - ask for the editors

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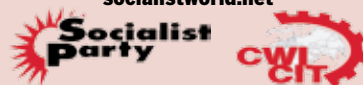
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"The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it."
Karl Marx

NHS mandatory vaccination to be ditched as Tories U-turn to avoid even deeper NHS crisis

Ministers have announced plans to scrap the order forcing all NHS staff in England to get vaccinated against Covid. Health Secretary Sajid Javid confirmed the move in a statement to MPs on 31 January, just three days before the deadline for unvaccinated staff who have face-to-face contact with patients to get their first dose or be dismissed. Before the announcement, **Naomi Byron**, Unison rep and member of Unison's National Executive Council (personal capacity), spoke to the Socialist:

A House of Lords committee has estimated that 126,000 staff could leave the NHS, or be dismissed, because of the introduction of mandatory vaccinations. They also estimated that it would cost £270 million to recruit and train replacements for those staff.

The NHS is already chronically understaffed with around 100,000 vacancies; these levels of understaffing are affecting patient care and causing chronic exhaustion among many NHS staff. A Unison survey at the end of last year said that two-thirds of staff who responded were thinking about leaving the NHS. The top reason they gave was the effect that their work was having on their mental health.

In October, there were six million people, almost one in ten of the population, on waiting lists in England, and it keeps increasing.

In the care sector, where mandatory vaccination was introduced in the autumn, the Care Quality Commission is warning of a serious and deteriorating situation around staff recruitment and retention.

The vacancy rate in the care sector went up from 6% in April, to 11.5% at the end of December. It nearly doubled in the period when mandatory vaccination was introduced.

The government argues that this measure is about protecting public health. But we can't believe that the Tory government has public health at heart.

At the same time as they are planning to sack thousands of health workers, they are also passing the Health and Care Bill through parliament, which aims to entrench privatisation and continue the break-up of the NHS, including the potential of the break up of national pay bargaining.

The threat of dismissing staff if they don't get vaccinated is counter-productive. I believe that more people would take the vaccine if we continued the positive education programme about the benefits of the vaccine. By attacking a minority of NHS staff, around 90% of whom are already vaccinated, the government is seeking to blame workers for the NHS crisis, caused by years of government cuts and privatisation.



The Tories' claim of defending the NHS can't be squared with its destructive and privatising Health and Social Care Bill PHOTO PAUL MATTHESSON

Government piles National Insurance rise onto shoulders of the lowest paid

ADAM POWELL-DAVIES
OXFORD SOCIALIST PARTY

The working class is already suffering from spiralling prices and stagnating wages, but there will be no let-up around the corner. The government plans to up National Insurance contributions from April - a measure they claim is to raise funds for the NHS. This will again hit the poorest, lowest-paid sections of the working class hardest.

The rise means that workers will

pay 1.25p more per pound, representing a 10% increase for workers compared to last year and equivalent to hundreds of pounds. Naturally, that extra 1.25p will mean more to low-paid workers, especially as the price of everything else continues to soar.

Boris Johnson and Rishi Sunak have called the National Insurance rise 'progressive' on the grounds that higher earners will pay more. But these 'higher earners' also earn much more!

NHS funding should be provided by making the wealthy minority pay, not the working-class majority that is already struggling to make ends meet.

This means making big business pay for the NHS funding crisis. Look, for example, at private contractor Serco, which has made obscene profits off the back of public health while running a botched test-and-trace system. NHS workers currently employed by Serco in east London are striking against the company's low pay.

April will also see the energy cap rise by over 50%, while councils across the country plan to raise council tax by the maximum, the non-referendum triggering rate of 1.99% in the same month. Combine this with continuing inflation, and it looks like everything is set to hit the working class all at once.

This makes it all the more important that socialists stand at the ballot box on behalf of working-class communities in May, as a fighting alternative to the pro-business policies of both the Tories and Starmer's New Labour.



Many workers are taking militant action over the cost of living crisis PHOTO SOCIALIST PARTY

We say:

- An immediate 15% pay rise for all health and care staff including those in privatised sectors. Minimum wage of £15 an hour. Scrap zero-hour contracts immediately
- Reverse all privatisations. Scrap the Private Finance Initiative and Health and Social Care bill. Bring all outsourced workers and services in-house on permanent contracts
- A fully publicly funded NHS and care system, free at the point of use. Scrap prescription charges in England, dental and all health charges
- Nationalise the private health care sector, care homes, the medical supply industry and the pharmaceutical companies - integrate them into the NHS
- Reinstate student bursaries and scrap tuition fees
- We can't trust pro-privatisation, pro-austerity, anti-working class politicians. Fight for the building of a new mass workers' party
- A socialist NHS - democratically run by elected and accountable committees including service workers and users
- A socialist planned economy to end oppression, poverty and inequality



While the big energy companies rake in the profits, millions of households are being pushed into fuel poverty PHOTO BP/CC

Gas and electric bills set to soar by 50% this year Nationalise the energy sector now

JAIME DAVIES
CAERPHILLY SOCIALIST PARTY

While millions will have to choose between heating or eating, the big energy companies are laughing all the way to the bank. BP and Shell are making £900 a second in profit!

Every six months, the energy regulator Ofgem reviews what the maximum amount should be that providers can charge domestic customers for energy bills. When last reviewed in October, around 15 million households in the UK saw energy bills rise by 12% to their highest-ever level, as the cap was increased to a staggering £1,277 per year.

This month Ofgem is set to review

the cap on prices again, and in all likelihood the cap will be further increased with energy bills going up from April. A 'sharp increase' is unfortunately not an exaggeration in terms, with the industry predicting a 50% increase in bills this year, an average annual cost of £2,000 per household.

Providers such as British Gas, Scottish Power, EDF and SSE to name some of the bigger companies, are trying to justify the price hikes, citing the rise in raw energy costs since last summer as their reason. But they are still paying bonuses and pay rises for the bosses and big shareholders. For example, the CEO of Centrica, Chris O'Shea, has a salary of over £750,000

a year that he can put towards keeping his home boiler firing.

While workers in the sector face redundancy, 9.4 million elderly people worry about affording to keep warm; companies like Shell are not making millions but billions out of the energy crisis. Shell is forecast to have made £13.5 billion in 2021.

BP boss Bernard Looney is even on record saying that the company is like 'a cash machine'.

The best solution to the energy crisis is to nationalise the companies involved and bring them under democratic workers' control. By doing so we could immediately use the massive profits held in the sector to improve services and bring costs down, as well as give all workers a decent pay rise and take on those who have already been made redundant.

Rather than decisions about energy needs being made behind the closed doors of boardrooms, a nationalised sector could be run by the workers themselves, the trade unions and the wider working class. Prices could also be kept down, not having to fund enormous pay-outs and bonuses for private owners and interests.

And with a nationalised energy sector, priority could be given to investing in researching renewable alternatives to domestic gas heating. This is a seemingly utopian prospect under private ownership where it is easier and more profitable in the short term to continue with gas while the planet coughs and splutters.



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WHAT WE STAND FOR

The Socialist Party fights for socialism - a democratic society run for the needs of all and not the profits of a few. We also oppose every cut, fighting in our day-to-day campaigning for every possible improvement for working-class people. The organised working class has the potential power to stop the cuts and transform society.

As capitalism dominates the globe, the struggle for genuine socialism must be international. The Socialist Party is part of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) which organises across the world. Our demands include...

PUBLIC SERVICES

- No to ALL cuts in jobs, public services and benefits. Defend our pensions.
- No to privatisation and the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). Renationalise all privatised utilities and services, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need.
- Fully fund all services and run them under accountable, democratic committees that include representatives of service workers and users.
- Free, publicly run, good quality education, available to all at any age. Abolish university tuition fees now and introduce a living grant. No to academies and 'free schools'!
- A socialist NHS to provide for everyone's health needs - free at the point of use and under democratic control. Kick out private contractors!
- Keep council housing publicly owned. For a massive building programme of publicly owned housing, on an environmentally sustainable basis, to provide good quality homes with low rents.

WORK AND INCOME

- Trade union struggle for an immediate increase in the minimum wage to £12 an hour without exemptions as a step towards a real living wage of at least £15. For an annual increase in the minimum wage linked to average earnings. Scrap zero-hour contracts.
- All workers, including part-timers, temps, casual and migrant workers to have trade union rates of pay, employment protection, and sickness and holiday rights from day one of employment.
- An immediate 50% increase in the state retirement pension, as a step towards a living pension.

- Scrap Universal Credit. For the right to decent benefits, education, training, or a job, without compulsion.
- Scrap the anti-trade union laws! For fighting trade unions, democratically controlled by their members. Full-time union officials to be regularly elected and receive no more than a worker's wage. Support the National Shop Stewards Network.
- A 35-hour week with no loss of pay.

ENVIRONMENT

- Major research and investment into replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy and into ending the problems of early obsolescence and un-recycled waste.
- Public ownership of the energy generating industries. No to nuclear power. No to Trident.
- A democratically planned, low-fare, publicly owned transport system, as part of an overall plan against environmental pollution.

RIGHTS

- Oppose discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, disability, sexuality, age, and all other forms of prejudice.
- Repeal all laws that trample over civil liberties. For the right to protest! End police harassment.
- Defend abortion rights. For a woman's right to choose when and whether to have children.
- For the right to asylum. No to racist immigration laws.
- For the right to vote at 16.

MASS WORKERS' PARTY

- For a mass workers' party drawing together workers, young people and activists from workplace, community, environmental, anti-racist and anti-cuts campaigns, to provide a fighting, political alternative to the pro-big business parties.

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

- No to imperialist wars and occupations.
- Tax 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.
- 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 bosses' neoliberal European Union and single market. For a socialist Europe and a socialist world!

Do you agree? Join the fightback!

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- Visit socialistparty.org.uk/join
- or call **020 8988 8777**
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May Day Greetings: Back the paper that backs the working class

SCOTT JONES
MAY DAY GREETINGS CAMPAIGN ORGANISER

Thousands of workers fought back in 2021 and that strike wave has continued into 2022. These hundreds of struggles, including many victories, are reported every week in the pages of the Socialist newspaper. The Socialist supports these workers, whether it's in fighting for better pay, organising a safer workplace or defending victimised union reps.

It's clear that the rest of the media does not do this and either repeat misinformation or only put forward one side of things. We need organised workers to support the alternative - the Socialist.

Here, and globally, the capitalist establishment has been rocked by mass popular uprisings and is on the ropes in many places. The need for organised workers' action against the Tories and in our interests couldn't be clearer.

Which paper details a fighting industrial strategy to keep workers

safe and rewarded for all the sacrifices and work we have made? Who explains how councils can set budgets that defy the Tory cuts? Where can you read about the practical programme needed to build a mass party for working-class political representation? The Socialist.

We report and discuss strategy for the strikes and struggles the bosses' media attacks or ignores. So celebrate International Workers' Day 2022 in the traditional workers' movement way by sending May Day greetings to the traditional workers' movement.

● Socialist sellers and readers should use a sign-up sheet to ask colleagues for contributions to a workplace greeting. Visit the strikers the Socialist has supported to ask for a greeting as well.

● Trade unionists should propose a motion for May Day greetings to their union branch or committee. Make sure you send it now! The deadline for a 20% discount is full payment by 30 March - and the final deadline for greetings is 20 April.

● More and more young people have moved into action in the last year. Groups of supportive students should campaign for funds to send a greeting. Community campaigns too, on every issue where the working class is fighting.

● But it's crucial that you start now. Select an organiser in your region, trade union group or Socialist Party branch. List who you want to ask for greetings. And schedule the time to campaign for the funds.

2021 was another record breaker. Any group of workers or campaigners which wants to help fund us is welcome - our minimum price is negotiable if needed.

But the tasks facing socialists and workers are mounting. We must build on our successes again. Let's get those greetings in!

● Send greetings, see prices and make payments: socialistparty.org.uk/mayday
● Resources and enquiries: scottjones@socialistparty.org.uk



May Day Greetings 2021

PCS 2022 elections

Nominate Broad Left Network rank-and-file socialist candidates

KATRINE WILLIAMS
PCS MEMBER

The Broad Left Network (BLN) is standing candidates in the 2022 PCS national elections. It is challenging the current, failed, almost invisible Democracy Alliance (a pact between Left Unity and PCS Democrats).

The Broad Left Network is a rank-and-file socialist group, united around a fundamental purpose of reclaiming the union for its members, and to building a serious campaign that reverses the erosion of union power and wins for members.

During February and early March, PCS branches will be arranging their annual general meetings. At these meetings nominations will be made for candidates for president and the

executive. BLN candidates received over 40 nominations in the 2021 elections and will be aiming to increase this number in 2022.

At its conference in January the BLN adopted a fighting programme to democratise the union, and take up workplace issues, from pay to Covid. It is this programme which the BLN candidates will put forward in the 2022 PCS elections.

The BLN conference also agreed its slate which includes a number of Socialist Party members. These are the candidates which we believe activists in the union seeking a bold, fighting leadership should nominate.

STATEMENT FROM MARION LLOYD - BLN PRESIDENT CANDIDATE
"The current union leadership is

non-existent and has done little to nothing to tackle the key issues facing our members. In March 2020 they ditched the union's pay claim in the interest of so-called 'national unity' - a sign of weakness which has emboldened the Tories and, in my view, provoked last year's pay freeze. Little wonder the government, shamefully, felt able to ignore the union, and not consult or even attempt to reach agreement about how PCS members should be treated in the context of Tory announcements about Covid and any mass return to the workplace. If we are serious about tackling the government on a forced return to the workplace, pay, jobs, pensions and the whole range of issues we are having to address, then we need a change of leadership."

Coventry bins: all-out against strike-breaking Labour council



The first day of the strike COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

ADAM HARMSWORTH
COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

For weeks, Coventry's bin lorry drivers in Unite have been on strike over low pay and Christmas working, with a packed and determined picket line in cold winter weather from 6am each strike day. As the strike has progressed, the Labour-run council has shown its hostility to the workers. First, they slandered the workers with misleading statements.

Then they opened waste drop-off sites to undermine the strike. The drivers' reps have been treated with contempt in negotiations, and the council has sent leaflets to thousands of homes with their 'facts'. This all prompted the drivers to go all-out from February until at least the end of March.

The Labour council has responded in the most treacherous way. They have been caught hiring agency workers to do the drivers' work! The jobs are advertised at £18-£20 an hour - the drivers are only on £11.49 to £14.37 an hour. The council is burning taxpayer money to break the strike, after a decade of savage cuts to services, which include the bin service. It reduced weekly collections to fortnightly, which cost dozens of jobs.

But there's more: the scab workers are being hired to Tom White Waste, a company the council bought for £14 million. As a final detail in this horrendous attack on striking workers, the non-driving crews are being threatened with disciplinary action if they don't work with the scab workers. They include Unite members and are an obvious attempt to divide and rule.

The Labour council has betrayed the workers. Meanwhile, the strikers have had a wave of donations and solidarity messages from trade unions and Coventry Trades Union Council, alongside members of the public. Battle lines are drawn, with unions and socialists on the side of the drivers against the Labour council.

The drivers have every reason to be confident in winning. The council has blundered repeatedly. But to stop the council assault on working people in Coventry, we must also build the trade unionist and socialist challenge to the pro-cuts parties. We call on trade unionists, socialists and community campaigners in Coventry to consider standing as anti-cuts candidates or support the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition in May to build the socialist alternative.

Please nominate PRESIDENT

● Lloyd, Marion (BEIS)

VICE-PRESIDENTS

● Brittle, Fiona (Scot Gov)
● Brown, Sarah (Met Police)
● Semple, Dave (DWP)
● Rosser, Jon-Paul (HMRC)

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

● Bartlett, Dave (MOJ)
● Brittle, Fiona (SG)
● Brown, Alex (NHS Digital)
● Brown, Sarah (Met Police)
● Davies, Jaime (HMRC)
● Denman, Kevin (Met Police)
● Dennis, Alan (DSG)
● Doyle, Nick (HMRC)
● Exley, Matt (Culture Sector)
● Foxton, Gill (DFE)

● Francis, Sue (UKSBS)
● Heemskerck, Rachel (DWP)
● Lloyd, Marion (BEIS)
● McDougall, Rachele (Crown Office)
● Parker, Nick (ACAS)
● Rees, Dave (DWP)
● Ritchie, Rob (Met Police)
● Rosser, Jon-Paul (HMRC)
● Semple, Dave (DWP)
● Tweedale, Saorsa-Amathia (DWP)
● Suter, Paul (DWP)
● Williams, Katrine (DWP)
● Worwick, Craig (DWP)
● Young, Colin (DFE)
● Young, Bobby (HMRC)

● For more information or to join the Broad Left Network, see pcsbln.wordpress.com

Scunny scaffs strike restarts with a bang, barricades and a win!

ALISTAIR TICE
SHEFFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

Scunthorpe scaffolders' first week of renewed strike action in 2022 (after successfully reballoting following 12 weeks of strike action before Christmas) kicked off with a real bang - with flares, barricades and a win!

Two days before the strike restarted on 26 January, Unite the Union organised co-ordinated protests in all four UK nations against Actavo, the contractor who refuses to pay its 60 scaffolders at British Steel Scunthorpe the national agreement rate for the job.

Promised talks between Actavo and client British Steel, with Unite produced nothing, so on the 27 January, a prestigious industry awards ceremony at a swanky London club was rudely interrupted by Unite, the Blacklist Support Group and the National Shop Stewards Network activists, with banners, noise and flares.

Next morning, a barricade went up again across the Gate A entrance to the steel plant, blocking incoming

traffic for hours.

And on 31 January, strikers paid a visit to Lindsey Oil Refinery at Immingham. It's the scene of the 2009 engineering construction workers' strike to protect the national agreement, which spread like wildfire across the country.

There, the Scunny scaffs got support from the scaffolders working for Altrad, a company that has been scabbing on the strike at British Steel. This threat to disrupt Altrad work on other sites resulted in Altrad promising to pull out of the British Steel plant while the Actavo strike is on, quite a result. Now the strikers will target other scabbing scaffolding firms to get them off as well.

The renewed strike action and intensified leverage campaign is bringing this long-running dispute to a head. British Steel is threatening Actavo, Actavo is threatening the workers, but after starting industrial action one year ago, the strikers are hardened and emboldened. As the Unite shop steward said: "We've got them by the bollocks!"



Picket line at British Steel ALISTAIR TICE

Sheffield couriers continue campaign

A cavalcade circled McDonald's in Sheffield on 30 January with car horns blaring, coloured smoke flares, banners, loudspeakers and vocal support from around 60 supporters who joined couriers opposing the 'offer' of a pay rise of minus 25% by Stuart which employs Just Eat couriers.

In effect, the bosses are offering a punishment to couriers, rather than a reward, for providing an essential service throughout the pandemic, including within the NHS by delivering prescriptions. The chief executive of Stuart has given himself a pay rise of 1,000%, taking his annual pay to £2,000,000 while demanding that his frontline workers take a pay cut.

The protesters' children present were no doubt entertained by the rich spectacle, but their parents have a fight on their hands. But they are up to it. It was crystal clear that the Sheffield couriers' campaign has moved up a notch, after taking 40 days of targeted strike action against Stuart clients like McDonald's and now Greggs.

STEVE MERRIMAN
SHEFFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

Bus workers win

Stagecoach bus workers in Unite have won a pay rise in Peterborough and Cambridge after balloting for strike action against the original 1.5% offer. The threat alone forced the bosses to give workers in Peterborough a rise of at least 12.2% for the period April 2021 to October 2022, and a lump sum of £300, while Cambridge and Fenstanton staff will receive at least 7.4% for the above period and a lump sum of £500.

Uni strike dates

The University and College Union (UCU) has announced the next wave of industrial action dates in the USS pension and 'Four Fights' pay and conditions disputes, starting on Monday 14 February, involving 68 unis.

The strike dates are:
● Week 1: Monday 14 to Friday 18 February (five days), USS Pension dispute only (44 institutions)
● Week 2: Monday 21 and Tuesday 22 February (two days), both the pension and pay dispute (68 institutions)
● Week 3: Monday 28, Tuesday 1 and Wednesday 2 March (three days) pay and working conditions dispute only (39 institutions)
● See 'Universities: Strike action at 68 in two disputes' at socialistparty.org.uk for more

Victory at NewVic college! 'The picket line gives us power'



NewVic picket line JAMES IVENS

JAMES IVENS
LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

The sixth-form strike in Newham, east London, has won! After 12 strike days at Newham Sixth Form College (NewVic), management has withdrawn proposals to become a privately run 'academy'.

In talks on 31 January, the day before action was due to continue, the boss conceded not to consider academisation before 2025. The agreement further states there will be no presumption of academisation after that date. Reps and management concluded the dispute with a joint statement.

The strike also won a "joint negotiating and consultative committee" between the union and college bosses. This will address the other burning issues in dispute - unbearable workload and bullying.

Principal Mandep Gill has shown repeatedly he is slippery. So the pressure needs to stay on.

The secret to this victory was simple: the strike was solid. Senior leadership was unable to open classes on any strike day. There's no substitute for industrial leverage.

The Newham district of the National Education Union (NEU) moved towards a strike ballot the instant the principal mentioned academisation. Now well used to running ballots, the branch won a 98% vote for action.

Bosses received notification of a quick escalation and long series of strike days. This showed management and members alike that the fight was serious.

The branch's focus on picket lines and weekly rallies to discuss concerns and tactics kept the strikers strong. As one striker told a January rally: "The picket line is everything, it gives us so much power... We are grinding them down."

The college was consistently shut. The boss had no choice but to come to the table.

It's just the latest proof that strikes get results from Newham NEU. School workers elected the Socialist Party's Louise Cuffaro secretary in 2018. Since then, the branch has been on the front foot, always seeking to fight for members through collective action.

A strike at Louise's own workplace, Avenue Primary School, pushed Newham's Labour council to adopt an anti-academy policy around the last local elections. Despite this, it did nothing to stop NewVic management.

The council issued no public statement, no letters to students and parents, no presence on the picket. This is despite Socialist Party members openly proposing this to two councillors at the one strike rally they attended. In fact, the council has even paid off the PFI debts of two community schools without strings - in the knowledge this will likely result in academisation.

If, as he claimed, he had answered all the NEU's concerns, why the strike? The boss's response? "He didn't have one!"

As well as the NEU group keeping the pressure on, sixth-formers can work towards an independent students' union - to address their own needs, and to organise solidarity with the NEU.

The need for a new, mass party for the trade unions and working class is clear. Many Socialist Party and NEU members will be standing alongside others for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition this May as a step towards that.

Student involvement

On the day the boss caved in, Newham NEU had held a lunchtime meeting to organise NewVic students. Several had visited picket lines, and brought more with them to hear the union's case.

Students understood the threat that academisation poses to this working-class community college. They have their own issues with management. Socialist Students members attended in solidarity.

The official students' union at NewVic is controlled by that same management. Nonetheless, one member had challenged the principal in a meeting.

As well as the NEU group keeping the pressure on, sixth-formers can work towards an independent students' union - to address their own needs, and to organise solidarity with the NEU.

Get all the latest union news...



ROB WILLIAMS

SOCIALIST PARTY INDUSTRIAL ORGANISER

The strike wave that has developed during the last few months of 2021 is growing in 2022. It has claimed significant victories for workers. The stored-up anger that has developed through the Covid pandemic has started to burst open.

Yet, at the beginning of Covid nearly two years ago, the unions in an official sense seemingly collapsed. Many union leaderships capitulated to the idea of 'national unity', the false claim by the Tories that there is a joint interest between workers and their unions on one side, and the employers and their Tory government on the other.

Virtually all official industrial action between March and July 2020 was suspended or cancelled, although many union reps and members heroically took, or threatened, unofficial action to ensure workplace safety. Even unions which in the past period have been seen as more militant succumbed to national unity. Notably, the leadership of the PCS civil service union 'parked' the union's full national pay claim, even before the national executive had met. Only now, two years later, is the union even consulting members nationally on pay.

In September 2020, Trades Union Congress (TUC) general secretary Frances O'Grady stood side-by-side with Tory Chancellor Rishi Sunak and the head of the CBI bosses' association to approve Boris Johnson's government announcement of the watering down of furlough. Actually, this decision was subsequently delayed for a whole year, such was the outrage of workers coupled with the capitalists' fear for the economy.

However, the national unity lie did break down because the bosses unleashed a brutal offensive against their workforces. They sensed an opportunity to go on the attack in sectors such as aviation, which was virtually at a standstill during the severe lockdown.

'Fire and rehire'

The weapon of choice was invariably 'fire and rehire' - imposing worse pay and terms and conditions on workers. Unite alone has estimated that 10% of their members have been targeted in this way. Scandalously, alongside the likes of British Airways, the Blairite Labour council of Tower Hamlets in east London was one of the first to use this vicious measure, provoking a strike of Unison members.

Coupled with the capitulation of many of the union leaders to national unity and the fact that much of the union's organisation and functioning was itself thrown back, the sharp contraction of the economy because of the first severe lockdown was a factor in the lack of official struggle.

As Marxists explain, there is no automatic correlation between the economy and workers' struggle. Sometimes, if a downturn is severe it can undermine workers' confidence as they see unemployment rise and worry about their jobs being lost. Undoubtedly, companies like British Airways saw an opportunity in the summer of 2020 to roll out their agenda to attack the workforce. But, bravely, British Airways workers, like many others, fought back.

This resistance has been of a level not seen for a whole period. While still mainly localised and at a relatively low level compared to the 1970s

and 1980s, the strike wave is one of the most significant for over a decade, particularly regarding the private sector. The prevalence of one-day strikes, which we saw over the last decade, has been replaced by far more intensive action, with many strikes being indefinite. Bus workers in Manchester and British Gas workers took 85 and 43 days of strike action respectively against fire and rehire last year.

However, since then, workers in a number of sectors are recovering their confidence. In particular, this has been in specific areas where there are labour shortages and supply chains have been strained because of the pandemic. It has been estimated that there is a shortage of 100,000 HGV drivers. This has been as a result of a number of factors.

Some workers have left the industry because of long hours and poor conditions while some workers from abroad have moved back to their home countries as a result of Johnson's Tory Brexit. These factors have exposed decades of underinvestment in training, as a result of the privatisation and deregulation of the haulage industry. This has impacted on workers in refuse and the buses, some of whom have left to become HGV drivers, causing shortages elsewhere.

Inflation

On the one hand, workers such as these can feel the balance of forces moving in their direction. On the other, workers are driven into struggle by the rise in the cost of living. Real inflation, more accurately measured by RPI (rather than the oft-quoted CPI), is now at 7.5% and when Johnson and Sunak's National Insurance rise is added, workers will need pay rises of over 8% to receive a real-terms wage increase.

No wonder it is being reported that the Tories will no longer be reporting the RPI rate! Similarly, is it a coincidence that the government's Office for National Statistics is saying that it doesn't have the capacity to publish monthly strike figures?

There has been a rising wave of disputes over pay, many of which have been in haulage, refuse and bins, which have often achieved significant pay rises, headed up by the Liverpool tanker drivers who won 17% and Wincanton drivers who won 24%. These struggles and the resulting victories have themselves given confidence to workers. Given the sharp rise in the cost of living, these pay battles have an offensive and defensive character.

While Unite was the union with most strikes during the last decade under the leadership of Len McCluskey, the election of Sharon Graham as general secretary is a shift change. The Socialist Party supported Sharon precisely because of her militant industrial strategy, and her victory was in part a product of the existence of militant activists. The union reported before Christmas that it had over 50 live disputes and says now that it is up to 75. Unite also reported that it had won over £25 million in pay rises for its members as a result of its industrial campaigns.

The union is now even more 'battle-ready' with the setting up of a national disputes unit and the developing of 'combines', bringing together reps and activists from the same industrial sectors. The first combine meeting for local government in January in order to mobilise for an industrial action ballot saw over 140 union reps meeting together.

THE WINTER STRIKE WAVE ESCALATES AS WORKERS FIGHT BACK AND WIN



South Wales Stagecoach workers who won their pay strike on the picket line. DAVE REID



There has been a rising wave of disputes over pay, many of which have been in haulage, refuse and bins, which have often achieved significant pay rises, headed up by the Liverpool tanker drivers who won 17% and Wincanton drivers who won 24%

Sharon Graham's election has undoubtedly had a galvanising effect on the union, consciously utilising the changed balance of forces to win gains for members. This is the most effective 'leverage'.

It is essential that 'broad left' organisations uniting left-wing activists and members are built in all of the unions, to bring together the most militant activists and reps behind a strategy to transform the unions into fighting organisations and, where the left has won victories, to maintain and consolidate those victories.

But it's not just Unite that has taken action. We explain, including during the national unity phase of the pandemic, that unlike the leaders of the Labour Party and the TUC, the union leaders have to be far more responsive to the pressure of their members.

This includes right-wing pro-Starm-er leaderships of unions such as shop workers' union Usdaw and general union Community, who have been forced to sanction strikes during the pandemic. Only an increased pay offer from Tesco just before Christmas averted a fourth Usdaw strike, while Community members in Somerset took two months of strike action to face down fire and rehire at Clarks.

The UK economy is in a very perilous condition. In an attempt to check inflation, the Bank of England could be forced to further raise interest rates. Given the level of indebtedness, especially regarding mortgages, even a relatively small rise could have devastating effects.

The economic outlook could change quickly and mean workers are having to confront challenges that

pose the need for a far greater scale of struggle and the need to raise political demands.

If plant closures and mass redundancies are threatened, even indefinite strikes may not be enough. Action such as plant occupations would be posed, married to mobilising the community, demanding that plants be taken into public ownership.

Similarly, the disputes opening up on the railways, where the RMT, in particular, is standing up to the bosses' attacks on National Rail, the train operating companies, and London Underground, are of a fundamental character. The scale of the attack poses the need for a well-prepared fight, looking for wider solidarity and putting demands on the other rail and transport unions to join the fight. The budget cuts in London have already shown the need to demand that Labour mayor Sadiq Khan refuses to implement Tory cuts. And the need for the RMT union to be prepared to stand or support anti-cuts candidates in the local elections.

The decision of last autumn's Unite policy conference, the first under Sharon Graham's leadership, to call on Labour councils not to pass on any more Tory cuts is a vital part of the union's industrial strategy in local government. The union exposed Coventry Labour councillors during the current bin strike for not coming out in support of the strike.

This sends out a clear message that Unite members come before Unite's relationship with cutting Labour councillors. Given Sharon's position that the union should support only those politicians who support the union's policies, this opens up a debate within Unite about political representation and poses the need for a new political vehicle for workers.

Ten years ago, the main scene of struggle was in the public sector in response to the Con-Dem coalition's attack on pensions. That reached its height with the November 2011 'N30' 24-hour public sector general strike. The right-wing union leaders and the TUC rushed to come to a settlement, emboldening the Tories to roll out their brutal cuts offensive.

Anti-union laws

It also gave the Tories confidence to bring in their Trade Union Act in 2016, with a pitiful response from the TUC and most of the trade union leaders, who refused to even call a single national demonstration in opposition. The Act includes undemocratic 50% turnout thresholds in industrial action ballots. These have acted as a real barrier for national action, predominantly in the public sector.

This has also been a factor in the tendency towards localised disputes, which have proved easier to overcome the threshold. It was therefore a tremendous vote by the RMT on London Underground to overcome the threshold with 10,000 members.

But this undemocratic barrier, on top of the Tory anti-union laws brought in by Thatcher and Major, and maintained by Blair and Brown's New Labour, cannot be meekly accepted by the unions. One University and College Union (UCU) university branch had a strike vote of over 80% but was denied from taking action because their turnout was two votes short of 50%!

In 2019, an unelected High Court judge ruled out the Communication Workers Union national Royal Mail

strike ballot result, even though there was a 97% vote for action on a 76% turnout. But unions must resist these laws, judging collectively how to do it, while avoiding the isolation of reps and activists.

The inaction of the public sector union leaderships, particularly on pay during Covid is also a big factor in the lack of strikes. Johnson announced in November 2020 that there would be a public sector pay freeze but there was no coordinated strike ballots across the unions in response.

The biggest union in local government, Unison, has a year later eventually carried out a strike ballot but it fell far below the 50% threshold. The leaders of the major unions in schools and the civil service have not yet even called industrial action ballots, but they have called consultative votes in which Socialist Party members will be campaigning for big votes to pave the way for strike ballots.

The UCU union did beat the 50% threshold in an impressive result but because the vote was 'disaggregated', breaking the ballots down to each college, the action that began late last year and is set to restart this month with some more colleges joining after successfully rebalancing, is not totally national. But it will involve the majority of higher education members. Unite has launched a strike ballot in local government using similar tactics.

NHS fightback

The mood of NHS workers was shown by the demand for a 15% pay rise, when inflation was appreciably lower than the present level, but this was allowed to dissipate. But despite this, the consultative NHS votes in Unison and the traditionally anti-strike RCN nurses' union showed overwhelming support for action. As inflation rises, this mood can explode in the public sector and, has been shown in the past, NHS workers can take action outside of official ballots.

The crisis-ridden character of the Johnson government should give the public sector unions confidence that a serious joint fight could smash the Tory pay freeze.

The UCU vote along with that of the RCN is further evidence that wider layers are being drawn in to the working class and the union movement by the crisis of capitalism itself. Unite has members who are economists and researchers at the National Institute of Economic and Social Research who threatened strike, and reportedly bar-risters are looking to take action.

At the other end of the scale, gig economy couriers in small independent unions have been taking action in previously unorganised workplaces with a predominately young workforce. Young workers are seeing the importance of getting organised and what can be achieved when fighting back.

This shows the pole of attraction that the unions can be when they take action. But in this period of capitalist crises, militant industrial struggle must be joined with a socialist political programme to face up to the scale of the challenges facing workers, both in the workplace and their communities.

Get all the latest union news



with the NSSN bulletin
shopstewards.net

Portsmouth: Council workers leaving and tenants' double whammy

NICK DOYLE
PORTSMOUTH SOCIALIST PARTY

Council workers are leaving. They can't live off the wages paid by the council.

The council has committed to paying the living wage. But Portsmouth council workers should be paid a minimum of £15 an hour. And the council should fight for the funds to do so, not threaten cuts.

There is likely to be a 6% council tax rise. Social housing tenants face a double whammy of this and rent increases. The council made at least £100 million cuts in the last decade, and is cutting more this year.

Projects to beef up the council's 'green' credentials have had little or even negative impact. They include solar panels that aren't even connected.

The council's plans for a Clean Air Zone would mean further taxation, hitting the poorest the most, who often can't afford the new 'cleaner' cars. If Portsmouth Council was serious about environmental measures, it could properly insulate every council building, and bring local public transport under public control, so that services could be based on need rather than profit.

What is needed is a People's Budget - no more cuts, council tax rises or rent increases. This would only be sustainable if the council was prepared to build a campaign in Portsmouth's workplaces, unions

and communities to demand back the £100 million, and what is needed in real terms for the people of Portsmouth.

When Militant supporters, now the Socialist Party, were elected to run Liverpool in the 1980s, the council was facing bankruptcy. That Labour council went on to create thousands of jobs, build thousands of decent homes, winning back £60 million from Thatcher's Tory government.

A mass workers' party that was prepared to build such a campaign today could improve living standards, and bring down this rotten Tory government. The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) banner is available for anti-cuts candidates. If you agree, please consider standing and join the Socialist Party.



Portsmouth public sector workers on strike in 2014. NICK DOYLE



Dave Mitchell (second left) and supporters campaigning against cuts

North East Lincolnshire Vote TUSC in Park ward on 17 February No to Tory sleaze and Starmer's Labour

Socialist Party member Dave Mitchell, the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidate in Park ward, said: "Every year our council tax goes up! Our Tory council admits it's to pay for cuts.

"Cuts that their Tory government have been making since 2010. Cuts

that have decimated youth services and now children's services that are rated 'inadequate'; yet they'll waste money on vanity projects.

"But when Labour was in charge of the council, it just carried out the Tory government's dirty work by passing on the cuts in local jobs and services."



GARRY KNIGHT/CC

Essex cuts racket must end

DAVE MURRAY
ESSEX SOCIALIST PARTY

Essex Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is meeting on 1 February to discuss what services people need locally, especially council housing, and how to fight for this at the local elections in May.

The government's measure of housing need is heavily biased towards the interests of property developers. So it is very difficult to assess the real position.

In Basildon, Essex, official figures say 17,109 new homes need to be built by 2034. But there's no indication from these numbers of the kind of housing we actually need - that is, genuinely affordable council housing.

Official homelessness statistics are not very reliable. They add the number of people sleeping rough, which is done by body count, and the number of people in temporary accommodation arranged by local authorities.

In April 2020, Essex Live compiled

the figures and came up with 5,246 homeless people in the county. This does not reflect the number of people sofa surfing or living in insecure or unfit housing, who do not qualify for help under homelessness legislation.

Local authority housing registers are also extremely unreliable. Since 2011, councils can restrict people's ability to apply for social housing, allowing them to dramatically shrink waiting lists without providing any additional social housing. Basildon's housing register has less than 2,000 people on it - a gross underestimate of the need for council housing.

The average price of an Essex house is £410,187. The official definition of 'affordability' is 80% of the market rate.

This means that a house costing £328,149 is considered affordable, even though it is roughly nine times the local average salary. Of course, most people earn less than the 'average' £38,000.

In Basildon, both Labour and Tory

administrations have invested in a commercial housebuilding operation, Sempra, which is doing nothing to meet local housing need. Councils of every political colour have got into bed with the property developers.

TUSC, which the Socialist Party is part of, says:

- Large-scale building of local authority rented housing at rents comparable to existing council tenancies - roughly 50% of the rent level offered through the private housing racket
- Use existing council powers for rent control and proper enforcement of standards in the private sector
- Extend local authority powers to act against land hoarding and profiteering through harmful commercial and residential developments
- Use council financial reserves and prudential borrowing powers to address the housing problem, and restore and extend essential services that have been killed by austerity

Bristol Labour £19.5 million cuts Vote TUSC in Southmead on 17 February

MIKE LUFF
BRISTOL NORTH SOCIALIST PARTY

At a Bristol council cabinet meeting, a GMB union representative for Avon and Wessex declared: "Low-paid citizens face a triple whammy of a 3% rise in council tax, 4% rise in rent, and probably 20 to 30% rise in their service charges."

The union representative for Bristol Unison said: "This is a real kick in the teeth for council employees and their employment law rights." There is an attack on the trade union facility-time budget from £195,000 to £50,000, and £5.5 million cuts to the workforce.

The privatisation of a short-term residential unit for vulnerable adults, higher parking and allotment charges, and making 'Meals on Wheels' pay for itself - all need to be opposed.

Sharon Graham, Unite union general secretary, has said: "Local authorities can agree balanced, legal budgets that do not make cuts. It is



Anti-cuts candidate Tom Baldwin (second right) MIKE LUFF

perfectly possible for them to use their reserves and borrowing powers to plug gaps, while at the same time campaigning for adequate central government funding to safeguard council services."

The campaign has now started for Socialist Party member Tom Baldwin, standing as part of the Trade

Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), in the Southmead by-election on 17 February.

TUSC conference

- Sunday 6 February
- See pages 2-3

Tories sinking, workers rising - help fund the socialist fightback

Fund the fightback
DONATE TODAY

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

The Tories are on the ropes, while workers face more and more attacks on their jobs, wages and living standards. It is more critical than ever that we do all we can to get our socialist message across. That means setting out a clear plan of how we can campaign to get rid of the Tories and fight for a new mass workers' party.

In the pages of the Socialist, there are many examples of workers fighting back and winning. But we urgently need to raise the finances for the Socialist Party to make sure we have the leaflets, posters and placards to get our socialist message out as widely as possible.

It is vital that Socialist Party branches make the most of all opportunities to raise fighting fund. We are asking all Socialist Party branches to plan their fundraising now to make sure they reach this quarter's target.

Can you organise an extra campaign stall during the week as well as at weekends? Is there a transport hub, a workplace or college where you can organise a weekly sale of the Socialist?

The results from our campaign stalls so far this year show that workers and local communities are responding to our socialist message. A few examples are:

- £50 from three stalls in Sheffield campaigning for a socialist answer to the problems facing the NHS and with a socialist programme for the struggle of the Just Eat delivery drivers
- £44 for South West London Socialist Party campaigning in Clapham for a 15% pay rise for NHS workers and to say 'Tories Out'



Workers are rising - Barts NHS strike. PAUL MATTSOON

- Devon Socialist Party raising £25 and raising socialist ideas on the demo in Exeter against the Tories' anti-protest bill
- £16 raised in one stall in Erdington, Birmingham campaigning against the cost of living rises and for Dave Nellist's election as a workers' MP on a worker's wage
- Over £16 in Cardiff demanding the Just Eat delivery drivers
- £44 for South West London Socialist Party campaigning in Clapham for a 15% pay rise for NHS workers and to say 'Tories Out'

As well as fundraising from our campaigning activity, what other events can you organise to reach your

fighting fund target? Camden and Haringey raised over £70 from their 'hummus feast'. Swansea and West Wales Socialist Party raised £180 from the sale of second-hand books.

At the end of the quarter, there will be a fighting fund appeal at the Socialist Party conference in March. Make sure you plan now to get the best possible donations for this. If all our Socialist Party branches put those plans into action, we can smash through this quarter's fighting fund target.

CHRIS NEWBY
SOCIALIST PARTY FIGHTING FUND ORGANISER

AREA	SOCIALIST PARTY FIGHTING FUND		Q1: JANUARY-MARCH 2022		DEADLINE: 31 MARCH 2022
	£ RECEIVED	£ TARGET			
Yorkshire	989	2,550	39%		
South West	613	1,800	34%		
Wales	652	2,300	28%		
East Midlands	487	1,850	26%		
Northern	100	750	13%		
West Midlands	261	2,600	10%		
Southern & SE	202	2,350	9%		
London	369	4,600	8%		
Eastern	77	1,200	6%		
North West	20	3,850	2%		
Other	125	1,150	3%		
TOTAL	3,893	25,000	16%		

Why I Joined the Socialist Party...

I'm tired of austerity and status quo

I am tired of austerity and the squeeze on the working class and lower middle class. What happened to the concept of 'quality of life', where families have the right to a fair standard of living, an affordable home, a comfortable income, allowing them to build roots, and have a familiar local network of friends and family?

As a lecturer and tutor, I see the immense strain school teachers and university professors are under - large classes, poor working environments, and unstable incomes. We need more investment to attract teachers, rather than training them up before they are forced to emigrate to places with better working conditions and pay.

I lament the crumbling of NHS services, and strongly support free, fully nationalised, health services for all.

We need to replace fossil fuels and nuclear power with renewable energy, not 50 years on, but now.

I have been dissatisfied with the status quo and questioning issues for over a decade. We are not encouraged to have a voice, as the common person, or to exert influence on shaping the circumstances in which we live.

Do you ever feel that you are not represented by mainstream politicians? From atrocities and gross human rights abuses in the Arabian region and Africa, fuelled by the economic concerns of the powerful and wealthy, to economic and social discontent in our home in places like Britain.

Few speak up against ever-increasing economic disparity. But with the Socialist Party, I have found a voice calling for workers' rights, fairer pay and an end to insecure work.

I hope my small summary has lit a spark in you.

FARHANA MANZOOR
CAMDEN AND HARINGEY SOCIALIST PARTY

Do you agree?
JOIN THE SOCIALISTS
socialistparty.org.uk/join

Socialist Students getting organised for 2 March walkout

Some things Socialist Students groups are doing to build support for the 2 March walkout and other protests this term.

Coventry - More see capitalism as problem

While some students came over to our 19 January campaign stall out of curiosity, stopping for tentative chats before eventually signing up, we also had some who saw us and practically ran over to find out more.

A growing number have seen how cruel capitalism has been during the Covid crisis, and want to be part of fighting for change. Standing in the wind and cold is well worth it when you catch people who are interested.
ADAM HARMSWORTH



JAMES IVENS

London - We need to get organised

London Socialist Students organisers are making plans, starting with a meeting on 16 January.

Students are fed up with the marketisation of higher education, and

the treatment of students as cash cows. The mood is changing on campus - that we do need to fight back.

But nothing is automatic. It is an important step forward for the NUS to call the 2 March demo, but our job is to organise locally to build support and fight for a wider strategy to defeat fees.

At our meeting, we agreed to write to student unions calling on them to organise and build for a mass meeting on campus with students and university staff. Socialist Students will also help organise local campus protests before the national demo.

UAL Socialist Students has already organised a campaign stall on campus to talk about the day of action, and we met students who wanted to get involved. Other London Socialist Students groups are organising regular campaign activities and meetings too.

BERKAY KARTAV

Socialist Students annual conference is on Saturday 26 February in London to discuss how to rebuild the student movement, and what next after 2 March - visit socialiststudents.org.uk to sign up for updates about the conference

Film review: Belfast

Worth watching portrayal of previously airbrushed workers' unity



NIALL MULHOLLAND
EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Kenneth Branagh's semi-biographical film opens with images of modern-day Belfast, and then moves back in time (in black and white) to 15 August 1969, and the soundtrack of Van Morrison.

Most of the film is from nine-year-old Buddy's (Jude Hill) point of view. He has all the distractions of a boy - a crush on a schoolgirl friend, ambitions to be a footballer, trying incompetently to steal chocolate from a corner shop - while all around him the city descends into sectarian conflict.

Buddy's father (Jimmy Dornan) works as a joiner in England, is heavily in debt, and returns home every few weeks, leaving his mother (Caitriona Balfe) to bring up Buddy and his older brother, Will (Lewis MacAskie).

The close-knit Protestant family includes Granny (Judi Dench) and Pop (Ciarán Hinds), who is sick with a disease caused by working as a miner near Leicester. Their working-class house has an outside toilet, like many at the time. The family finds escape at the movies, where we see, for a short spell, colour on the screen.

Light and dark

The opening scene has all the light and dark that pervades Belfast. Buddy plays with his bin-lid shield and a wooden sword on his busy and friendly working-class Victorian street.

The sunny day is shattered by a rioting mob that has come to burn out the street's minority of Catholics. The residents resist the intruders.

A barricade is erected at the end of the street and manned by 'vigilantes'. British troops, ordered into Northern Ireland the day before by the Howard Wilson Labour government, smash through the barricade, but it is set up again.

Critics have found Belfast sentimental, a 'chocolate box' version of events. The film does have its weaknesses, and not just that it can be mawkish.

There are passing references to the civil rights struggle, but no real

context - no explanation about the 50 years of Unionist state misrule and repression of Catholics. Nor is there any examination of why many Protestant working-class people had fears and concerns for their future, which were whipped up by bigoted politicians.

But whatever its weaknesses, the scenes of courageous efforts by working-class Protestant and Catholic neighbours to stop sectarian attacks ripping their communities apart - an aspect of 'Troubles' history that has been largely airbrushed out of most accounts - if for no other reason, does Belfast credit and means it deserves to be widely seen.

Local 'defence committees' and 'peace patrols' sprang up in many parts of Belfast and beyond in 1969, as Catholics and Protestants living in 'mixed areas' instinctively drew together to oppose sectarian pogroms. Trade union shop stewards in the industrial workplaces played a key role in organising workers against attempts by bigots to divide workers.

Tragedy

Tragically, the leadership of the labour and trade union movement did not draw all these actions together in a powerful force to push back the bigots, and to unite workers around a fight for jobs and decent homes for all, and against the sectarian 'Orange' and 'Green' bosses. An all-out civil war was avoided in 1969 and the early 1970s, but thousands were forced out of their homes, hundreds killed and sectarian divisions greatly enhanced.

By the film's end, the local thug who tries to wean Buddy's brother Will into his emerging loyalist gang is on the ascendance. He threatens Buddy's father, who refuses to take a sectarian 'side'. The family is faced with a heart-rending decision to stay in Belfast or leave for England, putting behind sectarian strife and debts but also close relatives.

For all its limitations, Belfast strikes a chord. As the lights went up at the cinema showing I attended in east London, there were tearful people from Ireland, north and south, of all ages.



Hackney Unison helped save Fernbank and Hillside children's centres in 2021

Hackney Unison to encourage anti-cuts candidates

This was emailed to all 1,600 union members of Hackney local government Unison.

At the January branch committee the following motion was passed. It was also agreed to circulate to members.

In just over three months' time, all council seats across London will be up for election. This only happens every four years.

This year could be more crucial than most, as after 12 years of Tory austerity, funding for local councils has been slashed to the bone. Many of you, if not already informed, are likely to face restructures, with some job cuts, possible downgrades, and

in general more work for less in the next 12 months.

If you are interested in knowing more about implementing the practicalities of this motion please contact Brian Debus, Hackney Unison chair.

● Hackney Unison branch committee believes that despite talk of "levelling up", it is clear that the Tory government and bosses intend to continue to make working-class people pay for their crises. This includes attacks on jobs, pay, conditions and services, alongside tax hikes and price rises. As part of this, we anticipate further austerity being inflicted in local government,

which is responsible for over one fifth of all public expenditure

- This branch committee further opposes Labour councils continuing to carry out Tory cuts
- We note that Unison is affiliated to the Labour Party, and will only sponsor official Labour candidates
- Nonetheless, this branch resolves to encourage our members to consider standing as anti-cuts candidates in the council elections scheduled for May 2022
- We note that there is nothing that prevents them standing as candidates, in a personal capacity, for any party, which truly supports trade unionist and socialist principles

Covering basic costs is hard, and it's getting worse

HARRISON CAIRNS
NORTHAMPTON SOCIALIST PARTY

At the start of lockdown, as a key worker in the funeral industry, I faced difficulties paying for rent, food, a car, insurance, tax, fuel, phone and internet, like many others.

I also had minimum payments on debts incurred through desperation, rather than thoughtless spending.

The possibility of covering everything became harder.

Yet that trial is being made harder still. With costs being passed down, instead of eating into the profits of shareholders, it's us, the working class, who face the brunt.

When will it be too much? I have too often had to decide to cover my rent and go without food.

Will I be doing this again? It very

much feels likely. Cutting down portions, finding the cheapest ingredients to get by, eating minimal amounts.

Without a new mass workers' party to fight against the covetous acts of big business, instead accepted by a limp Labour opposition and encouraged by the self-indulgent Tories, no wonder there is little hope felt by those facing the worst of these price rises.

School students strike in Austria

Laura Rafetseder
Sozialistische Offensive (CWI in Austria)

In the middle of the Covid Omicron wave, Austrian students walked out in a school strike on 26 January, following a warning strike on 18 January.

Their demands included better health and safety measures in schools, and easier final exams for this year. The government wants to 'get back to normal' - but school students have suffered from the effects of the pandemic over the last two years with distanced learning. Previous graduating classes had easier conditions for their final exams.

The pandemic no doubt restricted the possibility for protest. Students were therefore hesitant to meet up for joint demonstrations across schools - but that decision was also down to the leadership of the organisers.

Joint demonstrations did happen in the 26 January strike - with masks and a plea to get tested first - but they were not as big as they could have been, with a few hundred in different cities across Austria.

The 18 January warning strike was called by a broad platform for school student representatives. But the 26 January event was called by the Aktion Kritischer SchülerInnen (AKS), the school students organisation linked to the SPÖ (Social Democrats).

For 18 January, school student representatives called for the strike to take place during the whole morning. Whereas, AKS called for a less far reaching, one-hour warning strike that day.

Then AKS narrowed down the demands for 26 January, focusing solely on easing final exams. It was harder



School Students walk out on 26 January Sozialistische Offensive

to mobilise the classes that would not graduate this year.

Sozialistische Offensive took part in the demonstrations and distributed leaflets with suggestions on how to build the movement. We argued that action committees at the schools were needed to organise a proper school strike, to decide on the demands in meetings of the school students, and to make sure all the students at the school were mobilised for the strike.

We also argued that the movement should not be taken prisoner by the SPÖ, who obviously looked to the school students as potential voters, as the voting age had been lowered to 16 in 2007.

Young people, along with working people, the poor and retired, need a party that represents their interests, in contrast to pro-capitalist parties like the SPÖ and Greens. The latter is in a governing coalition with the right-wing People's Party (ÖVP).

After the election successes of the Communist Party in Graz and Links

(Left) in Vienna, we proposed that they should take a joint effort towards building an election alliance as a step towards a new mass workers' party.

The need for such a party is all the more urgent if we look at the causes of students' frustrations, ie the increasing pressure to perform well at school in order to be able to compete in the labour market.

It is the capitalist profit system that is at the heart of those frustrations. We need to break with it, for a socialist transformation of society that puts people's need at the centre, instead of profit for the few, so that education can be radically different.

• See also 'France: Education workers and students walkout' on page 15

Committee for a Workers' International
FIGHTING FOR A SOCIALIST WORLD
socialistworld.net

Tories attack Universal Credit recipients with 'get any job now' threat



J. JELLISSON/CC

KATRINE WILLIAMS
PCS MEMBER

Bosses used the pandemic as an excuse to maximise profits by driving down wages and conditions, and now struggle to recruit. The Tories are putting maximum pressure on unemployment benefit claimants to take any job, however unsuitable, and regardless of the safety and conditions, with their 'Way to Work' scheme.

UK benefits are at their lowest level, in real terms, since the 1980s. The Tories are keen to sanction even this meagre income. They are slashing the time where you can look for jobs in your normal line of work from three months to just four weeks.

However, the trade unions are starting to use the leverage of labour shortages to fight back. The unemployed want work, but also want reasonable living standards and decent jobs.

Some of the sectors with the highest number of vacancies are among the lowest paid, where vital workers are massively undervalued and overworked - health, social care, retail and hospitality.

The trade union movement needs to campaign for pressure and legislation, coupled with union action, to be brought to bear to force employers to pay a decent wage and value their workforce with job security, good working conditions and well-designed jobs. The Socialist Party

fights for a £15-an-hour minimum wage.

The last thing PCS union members in the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) want, and the public need, is another raft of numerical targets to hamper delivery of services. Measuring services, by counting appointments booked and referrals to schemes, never works.

This creates unbearable pressure on Jobcentre workers. If the Tories genuinely wanted to help claimants, they would make all the thousands of temporary DWP staff permanent to help tackle the high workloads and backlogs, and give individualised support to claimants to help find suitable work.

The Tory spin does not stand up to scrutiny. The Tories quote figures like being at least £6,000 better off in full-time work. But 74% of children living in poverty are in working households. Getting stuck in low-paid jobs does not help workers get into better jobs.

The Tories misjudge that attacking benefit claimants will divert attention from their antics and from big business profiteering.

The Socialist Party fights for the right to a job for all. We fight for a massive government programme of investment in socially useful job creation, with trade union rates of pay, secure and stable hours, and with free training schemes for skilled work. Share out the work with no loss of pay.

Socialist Students national conference 2022

Come along to discuss

Building the Socialist fightback on campus



NEW VENUE ANNOUNCED:

Highcroft Community Centre

485 Slade Rd,
Erdington
Birmingham
B23 7JH

(Check Facebook description for pointers on how to get there from New Street station)

SATURDAY 26TH FEBRUARY, 11am-4:30pm

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As Biden and Putin square up over Ukraine...

Workers' unity needed to resist war, and end inequality and poverty

NIALL MULHOLLAND
COMMITTEE FOR A WORKERS' INTERNATIONAL (CWI)

The beating of war drums is getting ever louder. For weeks, Western media and politicians have raised the prospect of an imminent Russian invasion of Ukraine, and are threatening dire consequences for the Putin regime, including new sanctions.

In reply, Moscow strongly denies it has plans to carry out an attack on its neighbour but demands that the western powers pledge that Ukraine will never be allowed to join Nato (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation).

Over 100,000 Russian troops are estimated to be positioned on the borders with Ukraine.

The US, Britain and other European powers are hurriedly arming Ukraine. US military chiefs announced plans to send a force of 8,500 troops to Nato countries in eastern Europe to "protect" the alliance's flank.

Downing Street has said extra military support from the UK to "Nato allies" could be forthcoming, including jets, warships and military specialists. The British government is also "considering offering Nato another 900 troops to Estonia", according to press reports.

Demands

Russia regards Ukraine's membership in Nato as a direct threat to its security.

On 17 December 2021, Putin's government gave the west a list of demands, including a commitment to halt any further eastward expansion of Nato, the removal of multinational Nato troops from Poland and the Baltic states, the withdrawal of US nuclear weapons from Europe, and, most crucial, that Ukraine never be allowed to join Nato.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken spurned Moscow's written request for guarantees that Ukraine would not be allowed to join Nato.

The rulers in Moscow have long accused the West of renegeing on a promise, after the demise of the Soviet Union, that Nato would not expand eastwards. But nuclear-armed Nato has spread to countries like Poland and the Baltic states, bristling with hugely destructive conventional arms.

The western imperialist powers were able to do this when the Russian economy collapsed in the wake of catastrophic capitalist restoration in the 1990s, and when its army was poorly equipped and demoralised.

Under Putin, however, with

economic growth in some sectors, especially the energy sector, the Russian forces have been overhauled into a more modern army. And Russia still holds the world's second-largest store of nuclear weapons.

In the last decade and a half, Putin's foreign policy has been more assertive: intervening in Georgia, annexing Crimea, intervening in Syria, acting as a so-called 'peacekeeper' between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and earlier this year, helping to prop up the regime in Kazakhstan after it faced a mass revolt.



Unlike in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the US is no longer able to act as the 'world's policeman'

The ruling elite in Moscow has made it clear that it will not stand by and tolerate Nato incorporating Ukraine, with Nato arms and forces on Russia's immediate border.

Nato's 30 members include several former Soviet republics, some of which border Russia. Under Article 5 of the Nato Treaty, all agree to come to one another's aid in the event of an attack.

As the western powers and media go into hysteria, accusing Putin of "aggression" (while US officials revealed plans to deploy up to 50,000 troops to the borders of Russia and Ukraine), Washington threatens "severe economic sanctions" against Moscow.

This includes cutting Russia's access to Swift, the global banking payments system. In reply, the Putin regime claims that it has planned for such eventualities.

However, given the integration of finance and trade in the world economy, punitive sanctions on Putin's regime could come back to bite other economies; especially if Putin retaliates by cutting gas supplies to Europe, in spite of the fact that that in turn would lead to a reduction in Russia's income.

The allegations of Russian aggression and military adventurism made by western leaders are just so much hypocrisy. The United States and its allies, Britain, in particular, have waged a series of catastrophic wars

since 1991, in Iraq, Syria, Libya, Afghanistan and elsewhere. Millions have died and whole countries are reduced to ruin.

Despite the West's stance, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, who is only too aware that Ukraine would face overwhelming military superiority from Russia in the event of an invasion and has seen war fears cut Ukraine off from international debt markets, dismissed the argument that a Russian invasion was imminent. Concerned at the West's goading of Russia, Zelensky warned that precisely this escalating brinkmanship could tip Europe into an all-out conflict.

Ukraine's ambassador to the US cautioned against "panic". Zelensky also accepted an invitation from Putin for talks.

Western governments are no doubt taking advantage of the stand-off with Russia to try to divert attention from their disastrous Covid policies. British PM Boris Johnson has further cause to ratchet up his demagoguery against Russia - mired in scandals and under police investigation, he is just about holding on to office.

But the Biden administration and European powers also have vital geopolitical and economic interests in Ukraine and Eurasia and they aim to increase their influence and power in the region. This inevitably means coming up against Russia, the region's biggest power, and its allies.

Unlike in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the US is no longer able to act as the 'world's policeman'.

The US's main adversary on the world stage, China, has given public support to Russia in its dispute with the West over Ukraine. The Chinese regime has its own disputes with the US and western powers, not least concerning Taiwan, which could eventually lead to armed conflict.

Divisions

There are also some differences among the US and EU powers over Ukraine. French President Macron urges "strategic autonomy" and calls for "de-escalation" and a "European solution".

The German government says it cannot send lethal weapons into conflict zones for historic reasons. Instead it sent 5,000 military helmets to Ukraine, which Kiev's mayor dismissed as "a joke".

Much to the US's consternation, Germany's chancellor, Olaf Scholz, has only gone as far as saying that "all sanctions are on the table" when it comes to the recently completed gas



(Above) A Ukrainian paratrooper on a combat training exercise PHOTO MOD UKRAINE/CC

pipeline (Nord Stream 2) between Russia and Germany, which awaits EU approval.

In a telephone call to French President Macron last week, Putin reiterated that he has "no offensive plans" regarding Ukraine. The Russian president knows there is little appetite for war in Russia.

Russia's military is vastly more powerful than Ukraine's, but attempting to invade and occupy an armed country, with most Ukrainians very hostile, would likely entail huge military casualties and risk widening the war.

Putin would presumably prefer concessions rather than a military confrontation with Ukraine.

However, if tensions continue to rise and Nato expansion and sanctions go ahead - with threats from the Democrat chair of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations that sanctions could take place "immediately in response to Russia's efforts to undermine the Ukraine government" - Putin may consider limited military action.

This can take the course of occupying separatist-controlled parts of eastern Ukraine, and/or seizing coastal areas to create a land-bridge between Russia and Crimea.

The separation of the ethnic-Russian enclaves in eastern Ukraine and

the Russian annexation of Crimea took place in 2014 after a pro-Western takeover of government in Kiev, involving ultra-Ukrainian nationalist and fascist elements that removed a pro-Russian Ukrainian government.

Putin could use any reported discrimination or oppression of Russian speaking Ukrainians as a pretext for a further incursion into Ukraine.

Working-class interests

For the working class of Ukraine and Russia, there is absolutely nothing to be gained by the war talk, Nato expansion, sanctions, and any armed conflict.

Over 14,000 have died in fighting between Russian-backed enclaves in eastern Ukraine and Ukrainian armed forces. A wider conflict in an ethnically-divided Ukraine would bring with it unimaginable horrors.

The working class of the region and internationally needs to navigate an independent course. Nato is not a benign force but an armed alliance of imperialist interests, representing the geostrategic aims of capitalist powers.

These governments show disregard for the lives and well-being of the working class in their own countries during the pandemic, putting profits first - why would their foreign policy be any different?

Northern Ireland: Bloody Sunday 50 years on

A pivotal event in the course of 'The Troubles' in Northern Ireland took place 50 years ago, known as 'Bloody Sunday'.

On 30 January 1972, soldiers from the British Parachute Regiment unleashed a brutal armed assault on the largely Catholic-nationalist Bogside area in the city of Derry, leaving 13 unarmed civilians dead (a fourteenth died later).

The 2010 Saville inquiry report concluded that the killings were "unjustified" and "unjustifiable". Former Tory PM David Cameron formally apologised on behalf of the British state for the shootings, but no one has ever been brought to court.

A comprehensive article, on socialistworld.net, to mark the occasion, including extracts from Militant (forerunner of the Socialist) at the time, explains Bloody Sunday in the context of the unresolved 'national question', which continues to resonate in Northern Ireland today, and the role of the workers' movement, linked to the struggle for socialism, in bringing about a lasting solution.



Image of a Bloody Sunday mural PHOTO SUZANNE MISCHYSHV/CC

France: Education workers and students walkout



On Thursday 27 January striking students and teachers from my lycée (state secondary school) joined other demonstrators in Albi to protest at the lack of consideration for the health of teaching staff and students. Other similar demonstrations took place all over France. We marched behind a banner saying: "Mobilisons nous pour nos droits et notre avenir (Let's mobilise for our rights and our future)".
ORÉLIE ADAMS

This was the second major walkout in the state education sector in January against the increasingly detested Macron government, which: has failed to ensure adequate protection against Covid infection for teachers and students alike; has not provided enough testing; and has failed to provide replacement cover for teachers falling ill. These failings have led to a severe disruption of classes.

Coup d'état in Burkina Faso

On 24 January 2022, a group of military officers toppled President Roch Kaboré's government in Burkina Faso.

The military junta - the Patriotic Movement for Safeguard and Restoration, led by Lieutenant Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba - has suspended the constitution and the National Assembly (parliament). It has also detained President Kaboré.

This coup d'état marks a new turn in the revolutionary process, which began nine years ago when a two-day mass uprising toppled the 27-year-old dictatorship of Blaise Compaore.

An article on the coup d'état and the political background in Burkina Faso by HT Soweto, Democratic Socialist Movement (CWI in Nigeria), can be read at socialistworld.net

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the Socialist

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'SERCO OUT, SERCO GO!'



PAUL MATTSOON

NHS WORKERS STRIKE FOR 15% AND AGAINST OUTSOURCING

SOCIALIST PARTY REPORTERS

Hundreds of outsourced NHS workers in east London have begun a two-week strike for higher pay and an end to privatisation - key issues in the NHS nationally too.

Cleaners, porters, security guards, caterers and receptionists at Barts Health NHS Trust are employed by private company Serco. 600 members of general union Unite across three of the trust's hospitals are in dispute.

The pickets at Whipps Cross in Waltham Forest, Royal London in Tower Hamlets, and St Bart's in the City of London, were alive with chanting, singing, dancing and speeches. They have all had numerous visits from trade

unionists and Socialist Party members.

Other staff, patients and passers-by have all given enthusiastic support to these key workers fighting back. Even the BBC, usually a mouth-piece for the government and employers, woke up and took notice - running the Barts strike on breakfast, lunchtime and evening news!

Starting the picket lines at 5.30am, workers chant "Serco out, Serco go!" The energy continues all morning, and culminated on Monday 31 January in a rally at the Royal London Hospital at lunchtime.

Socialist Party member and Unite Barts branch secretary Len Hockey spoke to the rally calling for a 15% pay rise for all, and for Serco's contract to be brought back in-house. Bosses at Barts Trust are to blame for

these workers' appalling pay and conditions, caused by outsourcing.

Outsourced Barts workers earn far less than their directly employed counterparts. Bringing them back in-house means bringing them back up to the rate for the job - which itself needs increasing. All NHS workers need 15% to start to reverse the money robbed from them by inflation.

The threat of strike action alone forced Serco bosses to raise their derisory 1% pay 'increase' offer to 3%. The workers have also rejected this - 'RPI' inflation has jumped to 7.5%, and the price of many essentials has risen even more!

Serco has given the NHS Trust 18 months' notice that it will be ending its contract in April 2023 - unable to screw enough profit

out of even this vulture arrangement. We say: bring it back in-house now!

The big numbers on the picket lines reflect the massive vote for strike action - 97%. One striker told the Socialist: "Serco do not treat us fairly. We want them to give us a pay rise - but also for them to go."

The strike is due to continue until at least 13 February, with picket lines every Monday through Saturday at each hospital. As we go to press, strikers are due to rally at Whipps Cross on Friday 4 February at 11am.

• For details of picket lines, rallies and how to support the strike, check the latest National Shop Stewards Network bulletin at shopstewards.net

WHAT WE STAND FOR: THE SOCIALIST PARTY'S MAIN DEMANDS >>> see column on page 5

