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# the Socialist

Issue 1174

7-13 April 2022

formerly **Militant**

# UNITE TO FIGHT



# TORY COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS

NICK HART

**W**earing hats and coats indoors to save on fuel. Cutting out all but essential journeys to save on petrol. Putting items back on the supermarket shelf mid-shop.

Ways to try and offset the skyrocketing costs of bills, fuel and groceries are becoming all too familiar to many of us. And despite this

penny-pinching, we still find ourselves wondering how on earth we're going to make ends meet.

Since the credit crunch 14 years ago, workers have had their pay held down to the extent that the average wage at the end of 2021 bought less than it did in 2008. And that's before the latest round of price rises!

And now, as inflation takes off again, many of those who were just about managing to get by are being tipped into hardship. The End Fuel Poverty Coalition has warned that the latest round of price rises could leave 8.5 million households unable to afford heat or power.

Filling up the car or paying for the travel pass to get to work, just to earn enough money to continue the work-home cycle, is leaving

many workers wondering, what's the point?

With inflation set to hit 8% or more, it's clear that all the money-saving tricks in the world won't be enough to stop large numbers of working-class people feeling crushed. The only way out is through taking action together.

Where employers try to impose pay deals that will see workers lose out in real terms, trade unions in those workplaces should prepare for industrial action. Recent victories by bin workers in Solihull, Wiltshire, and elsewhere, winning improved pay offers in the face of bosses pleading poverty, show that the first line of defence against attacks on our living standards is a strong trade union.

But workers can't be left to fight one workplace at a time. To truly tackle the soaring cost

of living, we need to change the way society and the economy are run along socialist lines.

With many of the same fuel and energy companies that are squeezing us dry, spending hundreds of thousands of pounds lobbying the Tories, Labour and Lib Dems alike, it's clear they all form part of the same big business and political establishment. We need a party that stands up for us!

As a step towards this, Socialist Party members and others are standing in this May's local elections as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition to give a voice to working-class people at the ballot box (see page 3). Join us to be part of the fightback against the cost-of-living crisis, and for a socialist system that meets the needs of ordinary working-class people!

THE COST OF LIVING CRISIS:

THE TRUTH ABOUT INFLATION >>> p8-9

THE TORIES IN TURMOIL >>> p2



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Friday before publication, or Monday morning for urgent news, unless otherwise agreed with the editors.

The Socialist goes to press on a Tuesday night. We publish online on Wednesday and in print on Thursday.

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The Socialist is the weekly newspaper of the Socialist Party, the England and Wales section of the Committee for a Workers' International socialistparty.org.uk socialistworld.net



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ISSN 1366-9621 Published by Socialist Publications, PO Box 1398, Enfield EN1 9GT Registered as a newspaper at the Post Office Printed by trade union labour at Reach Printing Services

Militant issue 1: October 1964 The Socialist issue 1: 7 February 1997

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

Tory government turmoil as cost-of living crisis deepens



Two months ago, there was a rising pile of 'no-confidence' letters in Prime Minister Boris Johnson from Tory MPs. Shaken by the Downing Street 'partygate' revelations, those MPs felt they had to echo public disgust and say that Johnson should go.

On 6 February, the i-newspaper concluded that Johnson "faces no let-up in his leadership crisis and needs a decisive development in his favour this week to see off a confidence vote."

In the following days, expectations of Russia invading Ukraine intensified, and not long after came the decisive development - the outbreak of war - that cut across the attacks on Johnson. The Tories used the background of the war and the huge wave of concern for its victims to close ranks and try to suppress the party-gate scandal.

However, with the police now issuing penalty notices to Downing Street partygoers, the nightmare leap in energy costs on 1 April, Rishi Sunak's poverty-escalating Spring budget, not to mention the end of free Covid test kits when infections are at the highest level ever, the government is heading back towards its pre-Ukraine war crisis situation.

The cost-of-living crisis, in particular, is of massive dimensions, sharply impacting on the standard of living - or worse, covering basics - of the majority of people in society (see front and pages 8-9). Government ministers blaming it on the Covid pandemic and then the Ukraine war is wearing thin.

The extra help they have given households to cope with energy bills is derisory, and their attempts at deception don't go unnoticed. For instance, although the Ukraine war is disrupting energy markets, April's



sharp rise in the energy price cap was set before the war began.

And mass outrage at partygate is still being fed. Initially, due to Tory politicians treating themselves and their staff as above the anti-Covid rules they themselves had made, the anger is now deepening further as those same Tories try to escape with fines they can easily pay, and with anonymity regarding them.

Under pressure of all this, and more, there is no easing of in-fighting among Tory seniors, ministers and MPs. Government policies are criticised by party grandees; Johnson and Sunak have been reported as being at loggerheads, and disquiet on the backbenches is resurfacing. There's hardly an issue they all agree on - from the level and distribution of taxation, to where wind turbines should be situated.

The prospect of heavy losses in May's local elections lies among their next fears. But any idea that the government will reverse its unpopularity

was squashed by the behaviour of top Tories on the eve of the energy price escalation - quaffing champagne at Claridge's hotel in Mayfair, at a reception to woo Tory donors.

Worlds apart

More and more they are exposing themselves as living in a different world to the rest of us, along with the ruling class they represent. They and their families benefit directly from the pro-rich budgets and laws they pass, and they know that if their parliamentary careers end, they will simply shift into even more lucrative positions in the upper echelons of the private or public sector.

Sunak doesn't even need that prospect to maintain a super-rich lifestyle. While he increases poverty and desperation for millions of people in his role as chancellor, his wife receives millions of pounds a year from investments, and they have jetted off to spend Easter at her luxury penthouse apartment overlooking a

Santa Monica beach in California.

With neither Blairite Labour nor the smaller pro-capitalist parties in parliament offering any real alternative, there is a gaping hole where working-class interests lie.

However, the growing volatility, insecurity, anger and inequality of this period - which are set to continue - are adding daily to the burning need for workers to have their own political voice.

A step towards that are the electoral challenges currently being prepared in many areas of the country by Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidates for the 5 May local elections (see opposite). They are showing that workers' interests can be presented to voters.

This is a path that an increasing number of trade unionists, anti-cuts campaigners, and all who need socialist change will need to support or take, along with building a new mass workers' party that can challenge all the variants of pro-capitalist agendas.

Pay, benefits, pensions

- An immediate above-inflation pay rise for workers to restore wages after over a decade of pay freezes and below-inflation rises
• Regular pay increases for all, linked to trade-union agreed measures of inflation
• Raise the minimum wage to £15 an hour, without exemptions
• Restore the pension triple lock
• Restore the additional £20-a-week Universal Credit payment. End the benefit cap
• Living benefits and pensions for all who need them, rising with the cost of living

Housing

- Freeze council and social housing rents
• Rent controls to cap rents - decided by elected bodies of tenants, housing workers and trade union representatives

Make the rich pay, not the workers

- No rise in national insurance or council tax, scrap student debt
• No worker should be made to pay more tax, raise tax thresholds in line with inflation
• Take the wealth off the super-rich, nationalise the top 150 companies and banks to be run under democratic working-class control and management, with compensation only on the basis of proven need

Price rises

- Reverse the rise in the energy price cap. Nationalise energy and other utilities under democratic workers' control and management to reduce bills by removing the profit motive
• No increase in public transport fares. Return transport into public hands, to guarantee a

fully funded, free, environmentally friendly, sustainable transport system
• Stop price rises, end bosses' profiteering. Open the books of big retailers to inspection by trade unions. Nationalise the big retailers under democratic workers' control to be run to meet need, not for profit

New workers' party

- No trust in Starmer's Labour to fight in our interests. For a new mass workers' party based on trade union and workers' struggle

Socialism

- End the chaos of the capitalist market. For a socialist plan of production, based on the need of the overwhelming majority, not for profit

Fighting council candidates to stand in over 60 local elections Vote TUSC and build the resistance to the cost-of-living crisis



Working-class people need a fighting political alternative. That's why the Socialist Party is standing candidates, as part of TUSC

On 5 May, voters will head to the polls in local council elections with the opportunity to express their anger at the Tory cost-of-living crisis.

For those fed up with the rich getting richer at our expense, Keir Starmer's Tony Blair-style New Labour is no alternative - most of Labour's councillors have been carrying out Tory cuts for decades when in power.

Working-class people need a fighting political alternative. That's why the Socialist Party is standing candidates, alongside other trade unionists and community campaigners, as part of the over 200-strong Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) stand in May's elections.

TUSC national chairperson, and Socialist Party member, Dave Nellist says: "Faced with the biggest drop in living standards in sixty years, it's more than time for a fightback - starting in the town hall.

Local authorities are responsible for over one-fifth of all public spending. The 125 Labour-led councils alone control budgets of at least £82 billion. On top of that, they have usable reserves of just under £20 billion, and borrowing capacities that could boost their spending power.

That's why it's completely wrong of the BBC, in their preview of this year's local elections, to say that the cost of living is 'not something councils have real control over'. There really is no excuse for Labour councils, in particular, not to act now to mitigate the cost-of-living crisis.

They could, for example, introduce tomorrow free school meals and breakfast clubs for every pupil, including during school holidays, which would immediately help family budgets. They could reinstate

childcare provision in SureStart early years centres, and reopen the hundreds of centres closed since 2010, to reverse rising childcare costs.

Local authorities could freeze council home rents and, at the same time, through their powers to compulsorily register landlords, combat rising rents - and energy-guzzling poor home insulation - in the private sector.



Starmer's Labour councillors provide feeble 'opposition'. That's when they aren't enthusiastically implementing Tory policies

Rishi Sunak's miserly increase to the Household Support Fund in the Spring Statement was pitifully inadequate, but there's nothing stopping councils from topping it up themselves to meet real local needs. The list goes on. Councils are not powerless - if there were councillors prepared to fight.

But it is clear that Sir Keir Starmer's Tony Blair-style New Labour is not prepared to take on the vested interests of the capitalist establishment as they seek to pass the costs of the Covid crisis and now the war in Ukraine onto the working and middle classes.

When the Tories say they 'can't interfere in commercial decisions,'

as the energy corporations rip us off and P&O brutally sacks 800 workers, where is the call from the Labour frontbench for nationalisation as the lever to take back control from the CEOs and wealthy shareholders?

But locally too, Starmer's Labour councillors provide feeble 'opposition'. That's when they aren't enthusiastically implementing Tory policies - such as in Coventry where the Labour council has spent around £3 million so far to try and defeat its Unite-organised bin drivers rather than the £300,000 it would cost to settle the dispute.

The scale of the TUSC challenge in May's local elections is modest compared to what could have been achieved, and what will hopefully be achieved in the future, with the potential for thousands of anti-austerity trade unionists standing if the unions were to organise a national drive for candidates.

But nonetheless it is still an impressive list of trade unionists: headed by the senior assistant general secretary of the RMT transport workers' union and national executive members from UNISON, the National Education Union and NAPO; of former Labour councillors and council candidates now standing for TUSC; and of individual members of the component organisations of our coalition. All of them pledged to vote against cuts, closures, privatisation and other austerity politics in the town halls.

"At the very least, in over 60 local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales, the local representatives of Starmer's Labour will know that they will have to look over their left shoulder as they consider carrying out Tory-lite policies in the council chamber."



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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# In brief

## ● NHS workers must pay to park again

Bills are going up for everyone this month. But for NHS workers, there is an added charge. Over 90% of NHS Trusts suspended parking fees for their staff in March 2020. As of the beginning of April, fees will start again.

The government says the scheme has cost it £130 million. But reintroducing the fees simply takes that money straight back out of health workers' already depleted pay cheques. Health secretary Sajid Javid took the announcement as an opportunity to glibly 'thank' workers for their hard work through the pandemic. Some thanks!

## ● Education recovery outsourcers ditched

A contract worth £32 million was handed to HR firm Randstad to outsource part of the government's National Tutoring Programme for 2021-22. So far, the disastrous scheme has achieved just 15% of its target, it appears Randstad's figures were even worse. It has been dropped for the next academic year.

One MP said the government had been "pouring taxpayers' money down the drain". It wasn't poured down the drain, it was pouring into the coffers of Randstad, a company already trousering untold fortunes providing outsourced disability support for universities.

If the government was serious about educational recovery, it would seriously invest in the funding schools need, and keep the profiteers' filthy fingers out of our children's schools.

## ● Government U-turn on abortion access

Women in England will be able to continue to access abortion pills through the post. A measure, introduced during the pandemic, was under threat when Maggie Throup, Tory public health minister threatened to scrap the scheme. Public outcry has forced the U-turn in a vote in Parliament.

The scheme will give more women the right to choose, enabling access for those who, for example, have caring responsibilities, lack access to transport, or are in abusive relationships.

**WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?**

● editors@socialistparty.org.uk

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

# Ockenden review: Responsibility for maternity deaths runs to the top

## ● Fight for a fully funded, democratically controlled NHS

BEA GARDNER  
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

The publication of the final report of the Ockenden review into maternity services at Telford and Shropshire NHS Trust is an indictment of the shocking failures in their mother and baby care, spanning decades. But the report also highlights wider problems with maternity services, including dangerous understaffing and underfunding across the rest of Britain.

Shamefully, it was only due to the tireless campaigning efforts of two families that an inquiry was carried out at all. If the same level of scrutiny was given to other maternity services, how many more avoidable deaths and serious incidents would be uncovered?

The inquiry ended up investigating over 1,400 cases. It concluded that, had better care been given, the outcome could have been different in one-in-four of the stillbirth cases reviewed, and a third of the neonatal deaths. Cases of 12 maternal deaths were also reviewed, and all were found to have significant shortcomings in the quality of care offered. Shockingly, reviews into these deaths had not only failed to be carried out, but in some cases the women themselves had been blamed.

The families affected want a meaningful apology, and for those responsible to be held to account. That accountability should extend beyond Shropshire to Whitehall, where successive governments have underfunded maternity services and



March with Midwives protest in Hull, 2021. PHOTO: TED PHILLIPS

presided over real-terms pay cuts for midwives and other health workers. This, together with the scrapping of the midwife student bursary, gives the Tories responsibility for the criminal staffing crisis.

### Bullying culture

Part of the review included a survey of staff, revealing a culture of bullying and high stress levels. Some staff withdrew comments from the report at the last minute for fear of the repercussions if they were identified. Where a culture like this exists, the safety and quality of services can only deteriorate. Workers need to feel confident to come forward to flag up mistakes or unsafe practices; a well-organised trade

union in a workplace can help this happen.

Pregnancy and birth can be an extremely stressful time for expectant parents. It is a vulnerable time. You have to trust that the maternity team will look after you and your baby, in spite of the chronic underfunding and staffing shortages.

When I recently gave birth, I could see the staff were doing all they could to make it a positive experience, but they were working extra shifts and covering wards they wouldn't usually cover. In other words, papering over the cracks for the sake of their patients, but it can't carry on this way forever.

There is currently a shortage of 2,000 midwives. A recent survey from

the Royal College of Midwives found eight out of ten were concerned about staffing levels, and two-thirds were not satisfied with the quality of care they are currently offering. The grassroots protests called by campaign group 'March with Midwives' have expressed some of midwives' anger. But the leaders of the midwives' trade unions should be leading an organised expression of this anger, in a fight for decent pay, conditions and adequate staffing levels.

The tragic stories from the Ockenden report show the consequences of an under-funded, under-staffed NHS run by diktats from the top. It's why we need to fight for a fully resourced NHS, democratically run by staff, patients and the local community.

# Covid-19: Free testing and full sick pay needed to keep us safe

BEN GOLDSTONE  
WEST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Free universal testing for the Covid-19 virus has ended. As of 31 March, most people in England will have to pay for a lateral flow test. This is despite the fact that Covid case numbers have been on the rise for a while - the latest estimates suggest that one in every 16 people has Covid in the UK.

Free testing will remain for some limited groups of people, including patients in hospital when a test is required for their care, some of the clinically vulnerable, and some workers in high-risk settings.

This does, however, leave other

workers, who are still exposed to the public, and unpaid carers and visitors to care homes, having to pay for tests. This is just another example of working-class people having to foot the bill for the Covid crisis, which the government has woefully mishandled and exacerbated further.

For many, a positive Covid test is even more costly. Some will become seriously unwell, and for hundreds of thousands of workers, a positive test means taking a big hit to the increasingly squeezed pay cheque. The government expects workers to survive on just £96.35 a week Statutory Sick Pay, but only if you qualify, and with nothing for the first three days.

For many, a day off isn't an option financially.

With fuel, energy bills and food costs already rising, a crisis created by the government and the capitalist class, this additional levy only continues to strangle our living costs further. Free Covid testing must be re-established to ensure the health and safety of everyone. All workers must be paid in full and from day one if unwell, self-isolating, or looking after loved ones.

This is what the trade unions must be fighting for to ensure the health and safety of all workers, as the government and the bosses continue to cut costs and endanger the lives of employees further.

# Tories fail P&O seafarers as 'levelling-up' agenda sinks further

NICK CHAFFEY  
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

The enormous anger at the sacking of 800 P&O seafarers has put Boris Johnson's Tory government under massive pressure to act.

This latest crisis exposes his 'levelling-up' agenda. Alongside the bosses' widespread use of 'fire and rehire' to drive down wages, the rising pressure of inflation, as bills, food and fuel prices rocket, is seeing growing criticism of Sunak's failure to provide economic answers.

In the wake of the 2019 general election, Johnson promised a new employment bill that would improve workers' rights after Brexit. Unsurprisingly, that bill has now been shelved.

Workers will welcome news of a criminal investigation into P&O, but what confidence can we have in the legal system that has failed to find justice for Hillsborough families, miners at Orgreave, or the families of those who died at Grenfell?

The failure to act decisively to restore the P&O jobs has seen transport minister Grant Shapps proposing new minimum wage legislation for ferries. While this would be a step forward, it cannot be on the basis



The events at P&O show the brutal steps the capitalists are prepared to take to defend their interests and maximise their profits

of cutting the current pay and conditions of seafarers at P&O and elsewhere.

The government had called on the privatised port authorities themselves to police the proposed measures. The trade body UK Major Ports Group said it would not be doing so. Not a surprise, it represents the major port operators including P&O owner DP World!

Faced with Putin's invasion of Ukraine, Johnson took measures to impound the super-yachts and assets of Russian oligarchs. Why not take action against the ruthless P&O oligarchs who brazenly admitted to breaking the law and declared they would do it again? The fact that two P&O ships have been detained due to failed safety inspections shows the government does have powers to act now.

While seafarers and their trade unions were demanding action, Labour leader Keir Starmer offered no alternative. A bold call for the nationalisation of P&O could have forced the Johnson government to act.

The events at P&O show the brutal steps the capitalists are prepared to take to defend their interests and maximise their profits in the face of a new and deepening economic crisis. They show that, despite



PHOTO: PAUL MATTSSON

Johnson's rhetoric about levelling up the economy in the face of massive and widening inequality, the Tories serve their capitalist masters interests first and last. As P&O seafarers are abandoned, news of government subsidies to DP World as part of the Freoport plan shows the reality of the capitalist agenda.

Workers can only have confidence in themselves to fight in their own interests, by building powerful, independent, militant trade unions with a strategy of action to force

employers and their political representatives to retreat from their vicious plans.

As seafarers chanted: "Seize the ships!" it has become clear that workers will need a political vehicle of our own, a new mass workers' party, to voice the demand for nationalisation. Only public ownership under democratic workers' control and management can lay the basis for the protection of jobs, pay, working conditions, safety and reliable services.

# Ukrainian refugees abandoned by Tories

## Seize the wealth to fund homes and services for all



Ukrainian refugees crossing into Poland THE MINISTRY OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS OF UKRAINE/CC

Around 200,000 people in Britain have offered their homes to Ukrainian refugees. But of the 32,000 applications for visas during the first two weeks of the Homes for Ukraine scheme, less than 3,000 had been granted.

So much for seizing the mansions of oligarchs to house Ukrainians, as more than one Tory minister spoke of! The government can't even bring itself to invest in the staff and resources needed to administer the scheme.

There are reports of families wanting to offer their homes being unable to find anyone to answer their calls. And when they are answered, they find under-resourced staff, some without even access to a computer!

If the government can't even arrange the paperwork for people to be able to travel, what hope is there for it to provide longer-term homes, jobs and services for refugees?

The truth is, the Tories and the bosses don't see human beings needing help, they see potential low-paid workers - a source of profit. An asylum system managed and controlled

democratically by the working class would be run in the interests of people's well-being, ensuring access to homes and services for all.

The Tory government will not provide a safe and prosperous future for those fleeing the conflict. The brutal decade of austerity, the disastrous handling of the Covid pandemic, and now the dreadful cost-of-living crisis, show that the Tories are unable to offer us a decent future, wherever we are from.

The government is already cynically blaming the war in Ukraine for the cost-of-living crisis that predates the invasion. How long before Tory politicians take to blaming Ukrainian refugees too?

A decent future - with well-paid jobs, quality affordable housing and fully funded services - means challenging for the wealth of the super-rich, including seizing the wealth of oligarchs. Democratically controlled, and in the hands of the working class, the huge wealth currently hoarded by the super-rich could be used to offer a future for Ukrainian refugees and for everyone else too.



## Cardiff bin workers vote 98% to strike

Cardiff bin workers in Unite the Union have voted by 98% to strike against management bullying and the use of agencies.

This massive vote on a 77% turnout follows years of bullying by management. The bin workers earned huge respect from the public all the way through the pandemic as they kept this vital service going - even at the expense of their own health.

"All we are asking for is to be treated with the same respect by management as the public has given us", one worker said. It says it all that the bin workers who speak out need to remain anonymous in case they are singled out by management.

One of the problems is the large number of refuse workers who are employed by agencies instead of directly by the council. It means that they dare not complain about

bullying for fear of not being called in to work again - in effect fired. Unite is demanding that after 12 weeks all agency workers should be given full-time contracts by the council.

"It's incredible really that a Labour council behaves this way to its workforce", said one Unite official. "But it's all too common. In Coventry the Labour councillors are refusing to even talk to bin drivers who are on strike."

Coventry council has spent millions on using strike-breaking firms against the workers when it would have cost only £300,000 to settle the dispute. It would rather defeat its own workers than settle.

After achieving this huge vote for strike action, Cardiff Unite intends to start strike action next month unless the workers' demands are met.

**SOCIALIST PARTY WALES**

## Campaign needed to fight DWP office closures



JJ ELLISON/CC

**DAVID SEMPLE**  
SECRETARY, PCS WIGAN AREA BRANCH  
(PERSONAL CAPACITY)

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has announced 48 office closures affecting over 8,000 staff.

Management claim staff in these offices will be mostly accommodated elsewhere. We don't believe this. Despite soothing words, we know management are making plans for redundancies.

Even if space does exist elsewhere, which we seriously doubt, members affected will be forced into costly, lengthy and difficult journeys. For those with caring responsibilities or health conditions these may be impossible journeys. The loss of local jobs and services from local communities is further reason to oppose the closures.

A Zoom meeting of over 100 DWP reps on 31 March should have been the occasion for the current Left Unity leadership to outline its plans for opposing the closures. It could have provided an opportunity for union reps to fully debate and agree

a programme of action.

Instead, the meeting served to underline the woeful 'do nothing' record of the union's leadership in DWP. A briefing issued on the day of the meeting failed to give any clear indication of what support offices directly affected could expect, or what steps the leadership envisage for opposing the closures.

The reps' meeting lacked any semblance of democratic debate or accountability, controlled as it was from the top, with no opportunity for reps to chat. Reps were split up into regions with leadership-appointed facilitators, who then reported back to the reconvened full meeting.

We welcome union reps coming together and, in fact, have repeatedly called for this, and been opposed by the leadership for doing so. However, the absence of a fighting programme to combat the closures and defend jobs at the 31 March reps' meeting, was an opportunity lost. A top-down approach, and the stifling of debate does nothing to build the confidence and understanding of reps.

Socialist Party members in the

DWP and other supporters of the rank-and-file socialist group, the Broad Left Network, made clear our position within the limits of the meeting format. We oppose the closures. We oppose job losses. We believe the closures should form part of a campaign across the DWP to include pay, permanent contracts for fixed-term appointments, extra staff to ease work pressures, and an end to micro-management of staff.

This campaign should lead to a statutory strike ballot which we believe will be necessary to force the DWP and the government to fund the demands of the campaign.

Their previous record and failed response to the office closures announcement demonstrates the current Left Unity leadership is not up to the task that it faces. It should step aside. It won't, but the DWP PCS Group elections which start 17 April give members an opportunity to replace this leadership.

We urge support for the Broad Left Network candidates in this election - details can be found at pcsbln.wordpress.com.

## Fawley refinery pay strike starts 8 April



After three mass protests at the Fawley refinery near Southampton, contractors and Unite union members will begin strike action on 8 April, demanding a decent pay rise and sick pay in line with other workers at Fawley.

Unite general secretary Sharon Graham said: "Exxon is filthy rich, making vast sums from high energy prices, including £6.25 billion in 2021 alone, yet it is colluding with these employers to reduce the workers' incomes.

"They have no business whatsoever tabling a pathetic pay offer that is in fact a cut to wages, and absolutely not when RPI inflation is running at 8.2% and expected to climb higher.

"Unite's top priority is our members' jobs, pay and conditions, and our Fawley membership will have the union's 100% support in their fight for a pay rise that reflects the cost of living."

Unite regional officer Malcolm Bonnett says: "Unite's Fawley members are utterly determined to win sick pay parity with the rest of the refinery's workforce and a decent pay rise.

"Instead of letting the strikes drag on, causing more and more disruption to the refinery's operations and clients, it is in Exxon's and the employers' interests to put forward an offer our members can accept."

**SOCIALIST PARTY REPORTERS**

## National Shop Stewards Network conference 2022

**Workers fight the cost of living squeeze - trade union lead never more needed!**

- **Speakers include: Sharon Graham, Unite general secretary**
- **Saturday 2 July 11am - 4.30pm at Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London, WC1R 4RL**
- **Register on the day or email the NSSN at info@shopstewards.net**
- **Attendance fee £6**

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## A new week, a new strike as Beeston delivery drivers join Just Eat/UberEats strike



**IAIN DALTON**  
LEEDS SOCIALIST PARTY

On 1 April on the back of action spreading in recent weeks from Heckmondwike to Morley and Birstall, delivery drivers at the Elland Road McDonald's in Beeston, Leeds, joined the ongoing strikes in the shadow of

the famous football ground.

Like drivers in those towns, who have also been picketing McDonald's, they are striking against both Just Eat and UberEats, both of which operate from McDonald's. This reflects the escalation of the demands of those taking part in the strike, angry at the low pay on both apps,

## "Just Eat/Stuart you can't hide!" Couriers continue action in Sheffield

**ALISTAIR TICE**  
SHEFFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

Just Eat takeaway delivery drivers, contracted by Stuart Delivery, have been taking targeted strike action in Sheffield for over 100 days now, since Stuart cut their base rate of pay by 24% on 6 December. Many of the striking drivers have joined the independent union, the IWGB. Stuart has never recognised the union and refused to negotiate with it.

But after 30 drivers and supporters invaded Greggs House in Newcastle on 24 March (Greggs is one of Just Eat's main clients that drivers have been targeting), Stuart's UK managing director conceded a face-to-face meeting with Pariss Dixon,



## Bristol UCU strikers say 'don't take us for fools'

**ELENA NEWTON**  
BRISTOL UNIVERSITY SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Following another week of action by university staff, an April Fool's Day themed rally to mark the end of this strike wave was held at the University of Bristol. After a morning of picketing, staff and students gathered outside the Victoria Rooms wearing fancy dress, the most memorable costume being the 'spud of solidarity'. Staff wrote messages to vice-chancellor Hugh Brady, including 'Boo to Hugh', on potatoes which were placed on the steps of the building, in a strange but memorable protest.

Speakers at the rally continued to assert the University and College Union's (UCU) 'Four Fights': for pay increases, job security, manageable workloads, and no pay gaps. Despite no deficit in university funds, management at the University of Bristol

combined with rising fuel costs.

While in Sheffield the strike started when Just Eat contractor Stuart lowered its pay rates, strikes have recently targeted Greggs, which only uses Just Eat. Many drivers work on multiple apps and have been concentrating on totally shutting down different outlets for a period of time, one day a week.

While I was standing with drivers on the picket lines, but a handful kept working, sometimes a consequence of language barriers, many more drivers engaged with pickets and cancelled orders, leading to a build-up of undelivered orders in the McDonald's store.

Drivers in Beeston will shortly hold another meeting to discuss future action, and the Socialist Party will continue to give our full support, as well as mobilising the wider trade union movement in Leeds behind them.

The IWGB Sheffield couriers branch chair. Drivers' hopes were raised of a breakthrough.

But the managing director, Brendan Hamill, arrogantly dismissed the drivers' concerns and said that the £4.50 base rate would never be restored, that the £7.50 they used to get paid for 2.5 mile deliveries was "ridiculous" and "should never have been paid", and the restored waiting time payment would be 17p a minute after 15 minutes waiting. What an insult! 85 pence for waiting 20 minutes!

So drivers' hopes turned to anger, and around a dozen nearby pickets invaded the hotel that the meeting was held in, chanting: "Just Eat/Stuart, You can't hide, We can see your dirty side", chasing Hamill out of Sheffield for a second time in this dispute.

This anger has only made the strike activists even more determined to escalate the strike in Sheffield as it spreads around the country, with couriers in more towns and cities forced to take action due to the rising cost of living, especially of fuel.

continues to remain complacent about cuts to staff pay, relying on casualised fixed-term contracts for teaching staff. Consequently, there is a lack of security in both the lives and careers of these workers.

In March, the university published a joint statement with the Bristol UCU branch on the dispute. However, staff and students alike recognise that this is not enough. Words must be matched with action. The UCU highlights that in relation to inflation, the value of pay for staff in higher education decreased by 17.9% from 2009-2019. This is alongside further cuts to pensions, and pay gaps in terms of gender, race, and disability.

No pay rise is a cut to pay. Students at Bristol University have shown solidarity with the UCU, with a student action group being founded to organise direct action, aimed at shaping the way in which the

university is run. In March a group of students occupied the Wills Memorial Building, which was especially symbolic as this building is synonymous with the university's wealth and prestige.

Student support for the strikes is both widespread and powerful, with students recognising that the UCU disputes are part of a wider trend in the marketisation of higher education.

Speakers asserted that they will not be taken as fools by university management, in keeping with the rally's April Fool's Day theme. Staff are well aware that the university has the capability of meeting their demands, yet management are actively choosing not to offer concessions on the Four Fights. We can expect to see more strike action in the future if the UCU is met with further resistance from university management.

## National Education Union conference



Teachers on strike recently JAMES IVENS

**SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN EDUCATION (SPINED)**

## Can we win the action needed on pay?

We have come a long way since last April. At conference last year, a motion was passed that committed the union to action on pay. The national executive stated categorically: "At the moment we cannot win a national ballot." SPinEd members proposed that this line be removed, as balloting for national strike action should never be ruled out. But July 2021's pay freeze came with barely a mention.

This year, conference will debate the amendment to Motion 10, again on pay. It proposes to "conduct an indicative ballot in either the summer term... or early in the autumn term." Socialist Party members will be supporting this amendment and arguing that, if adopted, the executive should draw up a clear timetable of activities building towards that ballot, with a clear window for conducting the ballot outlined.

Socialist Party members, along with others in the Education Solidarity Network, have consistently argued that the only way to win a decent national pay award from the government is to build for a national ballot for action.

In early September 2021, we raised on the executive that the union needed to step up and actively oppose the pay freeze, linking the fights over workload, Covid and pay. Joint general secretary Mary Boustead said there were bigger issues. We didn't go away!

At the October executive, following our submission of a motion on national action on pay that laid out a clear timetable of activities to build towards ballots for national action that would take place before the government made its decisions in July, an alternative paper with a less-clear timetable for action was submitted and agreed. However, this motion, despite not specifying a clear timetable for a ballot, represented a major step forward and had widespread support.

Our message on pay is out there now in members' minds. Many cost-of-living increases are just now hitting and will galvanise more members to speak out; and if, as warmer weather comes, ventilation is easier

and Covid disruption eases even a little, members will have more time for things other than the daily grind. All members must be actively involved, and the union must fight for all our members. Support staff, further education, supply and independent sector members may have pay agreed in different ways, but by fighting together, we can strengthen the union and win together!

Trade union attempts to appeal to successive Tory education ministers to 'see sense' and act on workload have failed to deliver meaningful change for most members.

A campaign for a national contract for education can change that. A motion to create one was the only one on the agenda not heard at last year's conference. It was discussed at a later national executive, where much of the detail was taken out, but was agreed as a campaign. Why? Because it would need us to do more than campaign in words. It would need us to build a systematic campaign from the bottom to the top of the union, before turning

outwards. Union negotiators have also failed to seriously challenge a pay-and-conditions document that gives employers free rein, particularly the open-ended requirement on teachers to "work such reasonable additional hours as may be necessary to enable the effective discharge of the teacher's professional duties".

We need a new contract for education that replaces that clause with a clear limit on weekly working hours. For now, many teachers feel they have no choice but to work long hours in order to be ready for their classes and to meet management demands. So, a contractual limit is not sufficient alone.

The call for a new contract should be placed on the review body, government and all employers. NEU members should also make clear that they expect all their executive members to give such a lead - or to stand aside for those who will.

## Reinstate Pete Randle!



**Coventry bin workers, on strike over pay, rallied and lobbied the Labour council in support of victimised Unite union rep Pete Randle on 5 April. Pete, who is also a member of the Socialist Party, has been suspended by the council. These workers have been taking all-out strike action since 31 January over pay, against a Labour-run council determined to break the union**  
PHOTOS: UNITE WEST MIDLANDS



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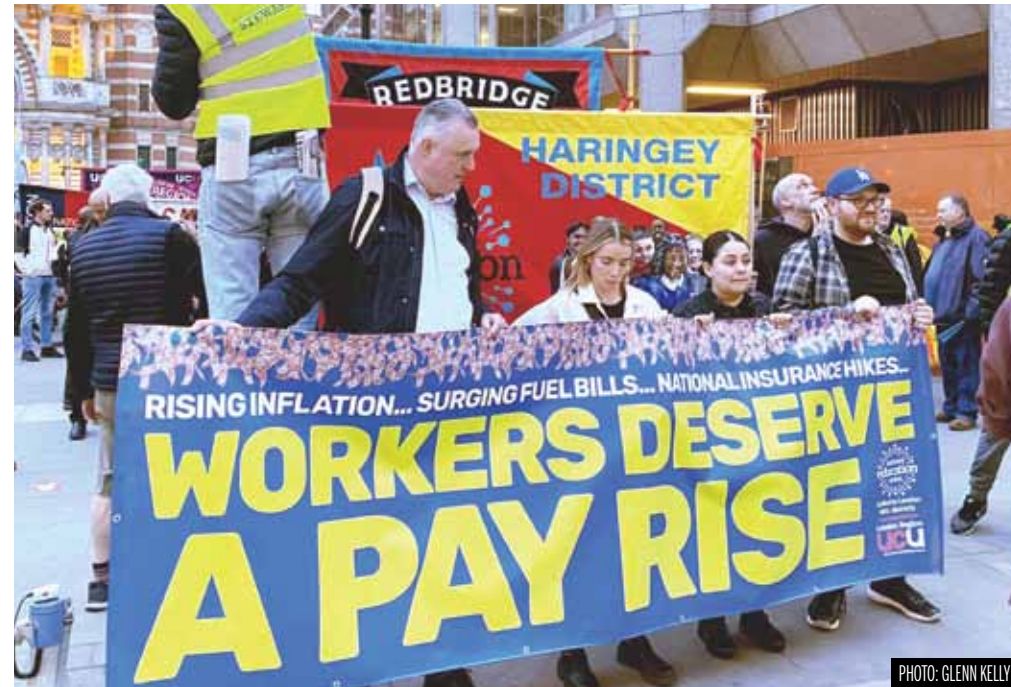


PHOTO: GLENN KELLY

In the first in our series on 'busting economic myths' Hannah Sell, Socialist Party general secretary, looks at what lies behind the current inflation crisis and how workers can fight back.

This year, 2022, is predicted to see the biggest fall in living standards in the UK since 1956. Inflation, according to the Retail Price Index, is already at 8.2% and is expected to rise further throughout the year. Soaring energy and food prices are leaving growing numbers of working-class people choosing between heating and eating.

Capitalist economists and politicians are divided on how to deal with multiple crises facing their system. On one issue, however, they are overwhelmingly united: that it should be workers who bear the brunt of the pain.

It would be too unbelievable, even for Tory politicians, to claim that it is wage rises that have caused the current surge in inflation. But that isn't preventing a sustained campaign against any increases in workers' pay to counter inflation.

Andrew Bailey, Governor of the Bank of England, put it crudely, demanding "to see a moderation of wage rises" as the way to "get through this problem more quickly". No doubt Bailey, on £575,000 a year, doesn't need a wage rise to be able to pay his gas bill, but it is a different story for the rest of us.

Bailey was criticised by capitalist commentators for the crassness of his statement, but not the content of it. For example, Martin Wolf, chief economics columnist for the Financial Times wrote: "This remark was certainly unpopular and probably useless. But analytically he was right. The more wage earners seek to restore their purchasing power in an economy hit by these externally imposed losses, the higher will be inflation and the more merciless the needed monetary squeeze."

He went on to say: "If people play a game of pass the parcel, by insisting on higher wages and salaries in order to offset the reduced real incomes, the outcomes would either be a squeeze on profits, which would damage investment, or cause an inflationary spiral, which would damage almost everybody."

Is he right? Is the inevitable consequence of workers successfully fighting for wage increases going to be creating further misery? The answer

to this is a clear and unequivocal 'no!' What is more, the only way to prevent a further dramatic undermining of the living standards of the working class is for the trade union movement to lead a serious struggle to fight for real wage increases across the board.

#### Capitalist chaos

Capitalism is a chaotic, unplanned system, based on the private ownership by a tiny minority - the capitalist class - of industry, banks, science and technique. It is driven not by any rational plan, but by the thirst for profit of this tiny minority. Ultimately, that profit stems from the exploitation of the working class. Yet the working class has no say whatsoever in the economic decisions made by the Tory government or those whose interests it defends - the owners of industry and the bankers.

The current surge in inflation has a number of causes, including the huge sums pumped into the economy by governments to prevent economic disaster during the pandemic, the inevitable spike in demand as economies reopened, and the disruption of global supply chains caused by Covid measures and events since - not least the war in Ukraine.

The global increase in energy prices, which has fed through into the prices of other commodities, is an important factor. This in itself has multiple causes. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has triggered further rises, coming on top of the increases flowing from the surge in demand for energy as Covid restrictions were lifted.

However, this is not to suggest that the current price increases are simply 'acts of God' in which the energy companies have played no role. On the contrary, fat profits are being made out of our soaring bills. For example, two UK oil and gas producers alone, Neptune and Harbour, have just paid \$1.2 billion in dividends to shareholders. Based in the North Sea, neither has seen any increase in their production costs, but that hasn't stopped them taking the opportunity of soaring global prices to make a quick buck.

Overall, around 50% of Britain's gas comes from the North Sea, but the increased costs to consumers in Britain are just as high as in countries

like Germany that are more reliant on Russia.

Not only are big shareholders and speculators making a fortune out of rising energy prices in the short term, but there has also been a complete failure over many decades to invest the large profits made, above all in clean energy, which has prepared the ground for the current crisis.

Failure to invest does not only apply to the energy industry. Martin Wolf's fear of a 'profit squeeze' leading to a fall in investment is laughable. His own newspaper, the Financial Times,

pointed out in February: "It is difficult to overestimate the lack of UK capital expenditure growth, compared with the wider economy, its historical trend or other countries." In other words, investment levels are already at very low levels.

#### Huge profits

This doesn't stem from a lack of profits to invest. On the contrary, in 2019, for example, the FTSE 100 companies paid a record £110 billion in dividends to shareholders, double the figure of a decade previously.

# THE TRUTH ABOUT INFLATION AND HOW TO FIGHT IT



Workers are taking strike action to demand pay rises, including university support workers (left) and outsourced NHS workers in East London whose strike was successful (right) PHOTOS: KCL UNISON, ISAI PRIYA

This is a condemnation of modern capitalism, particularly in Britain. In its early days, despite the inevitable periodic crises that are intrinsic to it, and despite its brutal exploitation, the system nonetheless took society forward. The drive to maximise their profits pushed the capitalists to invest in the development of the productive forces, science and technique. Today it is more profitable to keep the money in the bank or gamble it on the financial markets!

And they have plenty of money to put into the bank. In Britain, around

£250 billion a year (in 2020 prices) from 1980 to today has been transferred from the pockets of the working class to the capitalist class. That process was already in full swing before the 2007-08 Great Recession and has accelerated since. There would be nothing inflationary about workers succeeding, via struggle, in forcing the bosses to transfer some of that vast wealth back into the pockets of the majority.

Martin Wolf and his ilk argue that, in response to increasing wages, bosses would have no choice but to

increase the price of their commodities, thereby creating an inflationary spiral. In fact, however, the capitalists always increase prices to the maximum they can get away with and still sell their products - as the current increase in energy prices graphically demonstrates.

Conversely, they do not lower their prices because their workforce is being paid less, but only if they are forced to in order to be able to sell their commodities. The wages of workers assembling iPhones in China have increased, but they still only earn around £2 an hour, while the iPhone 13 costs a whopping £750.

Capitalism is increasingly a system in crisis. The war in Ukraine is the latest horrific example of the growing tensions between the major capitalist powers, and the resulting increase in trade barriers. And within that British capitalism - a second-rate power - is falling further behind its rivals.

#### Race to the bottom

Over recent decades successive capitalist governments - Tory and New Labour - have encouraged a 'race to the bottom', relying on low wages and super-exploitation to make British capitalism 'competitive'. Of course, no country can win the 'race to the bottom'; there are always lower-paid workers somewhere else. Now this Tory government pays lip service to 'levelling up' but is, in reality, allowing real wages to plunge much further via 'inflation' austerity.

There is no prospect of world, never mind British, capitalism entering an era of sustained growth and offering

sustained improvements in living standards for working-class people. On the contrary, we are facing a difficult and uncertain period, with a new recession ahead at a certain stage.

While a certain amount of inflation can be useful to the capitalist class - as a tool to make the working class pay for Covid crisis expenditure and also to lower the real value of historic debts - they are desperate to prevent it growing further or continuing long term. However, given the enormous levels of debt in the British economy, any attempt to cut across inflation via significant rises in interest rates could trigger a new downturn. For example, 20% of businesses are 'zombies', only able to meet debt interest payments even at the current low level of interest rates.

And whatever measures the Bank of England and government take, they will not automatically be able to prevent further inflation. Any devaluation of sterling, for example, would lead to further increases in the costs of imported goods.

What conclusions should the workers' movement draw from this? Firstly, to launch a determined fight for wage rises at least in line with inflation for all. The national trade union demonstration on 18 June should be turned into a massive show of strength, and used as a launch pad for coordinated action over the question of pay.

And as Starmer's New Labour is not prepared to fight for the interests of working-class people, it is also necessary for the trade unions to begin to build a new mass workers' party in order to have a political voice.



Given the enormous levels of debt in the British economy, any attempt to cut across inflation via significant rises in interest rates could trigger a new downturn

#### The struggle against inflation austerity should be organised around a fighting programme, including:

- A £15-an-hour minimum wage for all, without exemptions. For automatic increases in the minimum wage linked to average earnings or inflation, whichever is higher
- For all wage rates to be automatically increased at least in line with price rises. Substantially increase pensions and other benefits to compensate for inflation
- As a first step in fighting inflation on a working-class standpoint, set up popular committees, including trade unions and consumer groups, to monitor prices and measure the real cost-of-living increases for working people
- Open the books of companies, especially the big companies that dominate the economy, to determine their real costs, profits, executive pay and bonuses, etc
- Immediate nationalisation of the big oil and gas companies, to be run as public companies under workers' control and management, to meet the needs of the majority of society, and in order to carry out a major switch to clean, green energy, without any loss of jobs, pay or conditions

- Renationalise the electricity, gas, and water utilities, to be democratically run under workers' control and management to serve the needs of society
- Nationalise the banks and financial institutions, to provide cheap credit for the planned development of industry and services, and to provide cheap credit for housing and small business.
- Nationalisation should be carried out with minimum compensation, on the basis of the proven need of shareholders.
- For a new mass workers' party, based on the trade unions, drawing together workers, young people, and activists from workplaces, and community, environmental, anti-racist and anti-cuts campaigns, to provide a fighting, socialist, political alternative to the pro-big business parties.

Finally, it is necessary to draw the conclusion that we can't afford this rotten system. The measures above, together with international cooperation with workers in other countries, would be steps towards the democratic socialist planning of the economy, the only answer to the profit-dominated chaos of capitalism.

#### Join the fightback

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# Jane James - a celebration of her life



Jane (centre) campaigning against the Iraq War ALISON HILL

Two weeks ago the Socialist carried a fitting and moving obituary of former Socialist Party executive committee (EC) member Jane James, written by her brother and party comrade Mark Pickersgill.

Subsequently, several members of the current Socialist Party EC attended the 28 March funeral celebration of Jane's life that took place in Stevenage, and welcomed the opportunity to add to the tributes that have been paid to her.

Socialist Party general secretary Hannah Sell opened the ceremony by welcoming Jane's family, friends and comrades to celebrate the life of a "wonderful woman". Hannah said: "I worked together with Jane in the Socialist Party for many years, and considered her a good friend.

"She was small in stature and was not a loud person, but it would have been a big mistake to be fooled by that. She was immensely strong, determined, kind, and dependable - in the very best sense of the word. There is no one you'd rather face a difficult situation with than Jane."

Socialist Party EC member Judy Beishon spoke about Jane's considerable contribution to the work of the party and to building support for socialist ideas. Judy drew attention to the various roles Jane had played, including as a regional party organiser, national treasurer, a national industrial organiser, and leader of the party's work among women. Judy

also reminded those present of the wide range of subjects Jane had written articles on for Militant and later the Socialist.

Jane was always willing to do what was necessary and "approached everything with a professional and methodical approach, an admirable lack of fuss."

She was hardworking and dedicated; and her good humour and cheerful personality meant she was a pleasure to work with. Also, "very importantly, she was always willing to make the sacrifices she asked for from others, the mark of a true leader of our party."

Jane didn't step away from the party work in the end - it was forced on her by illness. She stayed active as a revolutionary socialist for as long as she could.

The attendees also greatly welcomed the touching contributions made by Jane's daughter Sarah on behalf of herself and siblings Clare, Jade and Fern; Steve Glennon on behalf of Stevenage Socialist Party; Teresa Mackay, a long-time friend and comrade of Jane; Mark Pickersgill, on behalf of Jane's siblings and close family, including Mark's partner Clare Doyle; and Jim Horton, Jane's long-term partner.

The event was closed by singing the international song of the socialist movement - The Internationale - to aptly reflect the socialist conviction to which Jane was so dedicated.

# On the streets with the Socialist



Just some of the events where the Socialist newspaper was sold in the past week...



Coventry

## Newcastle

"It was a much better read than I expected, and not extreme at all." This is what a retired shop steward, who'd bought a paper off us a couple of weeks ago, told us when he bought another copy of the Socialist on our campaign stall in Newcastle.

There's definitely growing anger against the cost-of-living hikes. People mentioned the poll tax struggle. There's a recognition that we need mass action to fight back.

It's good that the Trades Union Congress has called a demo for the 18 June. Now it needs to pull out all the stops and build for it. When you fight you can win!



Newcastle

## Coventry

We had a very busy campaign stall in Coventry city centre on Saturday 2 April.

People are outraged that staff parking passes at Walsgrave Hospital have just risen 25%! Our already dreadfully underpaid NHS workers are now asked to fork out £600 a year for the privilege of parking at their own workplace!

"My daughter's a nurse there, I know all about it. It's disgusting!" one person told us as she came up to sign our petition to scrap hospital parking charges - which now has well over 5,000 signatures.

Our petition in support of the striking bin workers has also been popular. More residents are seeing the council's lies and distortions for what they are, and sympathise with the fight for a decent pay rise in this cost-of-living crisis.

The Socialist sold well. As the headline said, with rising prices and taxes for workers while bosses get richer, it is very clearly "Them and Us."

## Oxford



Oxford Socialist Party

During a sale of the Socialist this week, we spoke to one person who said he would have ignored us in the past. But after the recent behaviour of the government and its handling of the pandemic he was willing to reconsider his views on socialist politics.

An ex-Tory voter, he explained how the fact that the government was willing to spend over three times the amount pledged by Jeremy Corbyn in his election manifesto showed how claims about a lack of money for public services were obviously false.

Despite describing himself as "relatively comfortable" income-wise, he was still scared to put the heating on during the day due to fears about massively inflated energy bills - a fear no doubt shared by many working people today. He also supported the need for a new political voice for workers, separate from either the Conservatives or New Labour.

It is clear to us in the Socialist Party and to a growing number of people in society that no one is safe from the greed of the capitalist class and the politicians, Tory or Labour, who represent them. Only a socialist alternative will provide the secure future that we deserve.

# "If you fight and unite your community you can win" How we campaigned and won a new hospital in Ascot

VAL AND TERRY PEARCE MEMBERS OF SAVE HEATHERWOOD HOSPITAL CAMPAIGN (SHH) AND BRACKNELL SOCIALIST PARTY

In 2011, a small group of activists from Ascot, Bracknell and Windsor became seriously concerned that we could lose our local hospital, Heatherwood. We had already seen it lose its A & E status and other cuts to its services were being discussed by the local NHS establishment.

We were further alarmed by a consultation document 'Shaping the Future' and proposals to close the minor injuries unit, maternity unit and changes to the rehabilitation ward. So we decided to form a community action group, Save Heatherwood Hospital (SHH).

SHH campaigned relentlessly against the local NHS establishment, Bracknell Forest Council, and local Tory MPs.

We live in an area with no recent

history of struggle. The hospital is in Ascot High Street, right opposite the racecourse - blue chip land.

Our first job was to get residents inside, and convince them that we could and would save our hospital. We took our petition around and, after a faltering start, we soon had people signing in droves, ultimately securing about 24,000 names.

We arranged two marches and rallies right through the heart of Ascot, as well as a car cavalcade, street theatre, lobbies, and interviews with local TV and radio.

We fully engaged with the consultation which offered four options, three of which included closing Heatherwood. We won the argument against closure, but they still ignored us.

We suffered some setbacks. We lost the minor injuries unit, which was privatised and moved out of the hospital. The maternity unit

and mental health ward were also moved out. It was clear that closure was looming.

However, our campaigning and pressure began to bear fruit. The local hospital trust met with us and agreed that Heatherwood Hospital had a future. Not only was it considering saving the existing hospital, but it wanted to build a new hospital on the same site!

This proposed new hospital didn't meet all our demands: it would be smaller, with no return of lost services, and no A&E. However, we had travelled a long way: from no hospital at all to a new smaller unit, but a hospital none the less.

The final barrier was planning permission from Windsor and Maidenhead Council. We heard that a planning officer was going to recommend against us, but we mobilised to lobby the planning meeting, which overwhelmingly found in our favour. We celebrated outside Heatherwood Hospital.

After over ten years of campaigning the new hospital has just opened. It's not a perfect result, and we must be vigilant that we keep this hospital in the NHS, but we have shown that if you fight and unite your community can win.



The new Heatherwood Hospital

# Newham residents meet to fight park land sell-off

EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS

On 28 March, over 100 people attended a Zoom public meeting called by the 'Trees not Towers' campaign. Strong objections were made against the City of London Corporation's plans to sell the former nursery part of West Ham Park.

Parks are essential in Newham, which has high levels of inequality, poverty and pollution and one of the lowest rates of people-to-green-space ratios in the country. Nearly 13% of children in Newham aged between four and five, and nearly 30% aged 10 to 11, were classified as obese, ten years ago.

West Ham Park's 77 acres is a 'green oasis' in east London and is used extensively by local people. During the Covid pandemic, the number of people visiting the park doubled.

Chair of a local housing co-op and Socialist Party member, Niall Mullholland, spoke at the public meeting about how he often brought his children to the park when they were growing up, and how he now takes part in organised Sunday runs there.

The City of London shut down the nursery several years ago, claiming that it was no longer economically viable. Yet this area could be either reopened as a functioning plant nursery, run by the community, or

# A big thank you for helping us reaching our fighting fund target



PAUL MATTSOON

We want to say a big thank you to everyone who helped us reach our £25,000 fighting fund target for the first quarter of 2022. The final figures will be reported in next week's issue of the Socialist.

The Socialist Party is putting forward an alternative to the many crises facing the working class: in the last few weeks we had the war in Ukraine, a worsening of the cost-of-living crisis and the offensive attack on workers by the bosses, including the sacking of 800 P&O workers.

We say it doesn't have to be like this. We are helping to build campaigns to increase our pay and living conditions. We are also standing as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition and boldly putting forward an electoral challenge in the May elections.

Keep supporting and donating to us to get our socialist message out as widely as possible. Whether this is through the pages of the Socialist or our leaflets, placards, posters and banners. All of this costs money, and reaching our fighting fund target gives us the money to produce

all this material.

At the start of March, with 4 weeks to go, we were on 47% of our target. Our members and supporters have pulled out all the stops to raise money to spread our socialist ideas far and wide. At the Wales Socialist Party conference and the regional conferences in Southern and South East and Yorkshire we had tremendous fighting fund appeals.

Despite the difficult weather conditions in the first couple of months, we had good responses on our campaigning stalls and demonstrations, on a whole range of issues from nationalising the energy companies, fighting the pay cuts hitting workers, like the Just Eat strikers', to ending the war in Ukraine and defending the NHS.

Reaching our target has been a brilliant achievement, but the fight for socialism continues in the next quarters, and so will our fundraising. Help us to kickstart the new quarter that begins on the 6 April by making a donation now. And if you agree with us aren't a member, join us now.

**SOCIALIST PARTY FINANCE DEPARTMENT**

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# Sri Lanka: Eruption of anger at hardship and economic crisis

## Poor people should not be made to pay

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

TU SENAN  
 COMMITTEE FOR A WORKERS' INTERNATIONAL (CWI)

Protesters across Sri Lanka are defying a government curfew and arrests and continuing to demonstrate against the crippling economic crisis afflicting everyone apart from the super-rich.

Essential items such as food, medicine, fuel and gas are in short supply while the prices for these goods are skyrocketing. Electricity blackouts mean that fridges and air conditioners can't operate. Lengthy queues for food and fuel has even led to people dying in the heat.

The government of the much-hated president, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, has implemented a state of emergency, banned social media and put military personnel on the street.

He also attempted to defuse public anger by offering up a sacrifice of virtually all of his cabinet ministers resigning, including several family members, while promising 'reform'. But many have had enough and repressive measures and cabinet reshuffles cannot contain the eruption of anger that is taking place.

A number of opposition parties, including former allies of Gotabaya, were claiming that the government no longer has majority support in parliament. And 40 MPs belonging to the president's governing coalition have now resigned. There were reports that there could be a 'no-confidence motion' leading to an election.

The main opposition parties in Sri Lanka hope to do well in an election against the unpopular Rajapaksa family.

But the government is claiming to be holding so-called 'all-party' meetings and working towards a compromise 'deal'. Any so-called 'interim arrangement', drawing in some of the opposition parties, and even protest leaders, into the government, will not solve the current crisis.

The main demand of the country-wide protest against Gotabaya and his government is not just replacing them with opposition leaders, but to end the hardship that is faced by millions now.

Neither the government nor the opposition has any viable solution to end the crisis. The government is attempting to buy time by shuffling around the cabinet. This will not be enough to satisfy the protesters. More decisive battles are yet to come.

The 'kicking-the-can-down-the-road' policy of the government is unlikely to last long as it simply cannot borrow enough to pay all its debt.

The government may have to borrow almost the equivalent of its total debt in order to import essential food and fuel, and start paying what it promised to pay this year.

No lender is willing to go that far as many are predicting 'inevitable default'. But the government repeatedly denies that it faces default and continues to maintain that it will pay all its debt, using what's left in the depleted foreign reserves.

Even sections of the capitalist class are amazed as to why the government is hell-bent on paying the debt. "Why would they want to, I'm a bit flabbergasted. They are bankrupt, pretty much," asked Richard House, head of emerging market debt at Allianz Global Investors. He added: "They are wasting precious reserves. It's just delaying the inevitable" (Financial Times).

Given the government's refusal to default, it is likely that some sort of 'restructuring' or some form of 'debt swap' is possible. This will be at the cost of dismantling state services, a reduction of wages, handing out parts of the country to the international and local vulture capitalists, increasing poverty, and harsh conditions for millions for generations to come.

Poor people and workers will be asked to pay for the crisis that they did not cause. The president, while claiming that he did not create the crisis, is making every effort to punish the poor for it.

The capitalist profit motive and the policies of the capitalist state in general, are the fundamental reason for the crisis. No capitalist opposition parties in Sri Lanka blame capital-



**Workers, farmers, and students should start forming their own committees and, in the local communities, to mobilise mass opposition**

ism, but instead reduce everything to 'mismanagement'.

All the right-wing opposition parties claim that the main reasons for the crisis are the 'unsustainable' debt policies and the tax cut that was made by the government in 2019.

Reducing Value Added Tax (VAT) from 15% to 8% is repeatedly cited as the main failure by right-wing economists and the opposition, who make no reference however to much lower corporate tax (which has gone down to 18%, and in some cases even below 14%, from around 36% in 2009).

It is false to assume that the crisis could not have developed if the pre-2019 tax system had been maintained. This argument, however, is linked to renewed pressure from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the capitalists to increase income tax and VAT, along with maintaining high prices for fuel and other key commodities.

This means the government may be pushed into implementing these measures, as well as dismantling public services, under the guise of 'reducing state expenditure'.

The latest report of the IMF admits that it "encouraged the authorities to reform state-owned enterprises and adopt cost-recovery energy pricing".



Protests demanding the ousting of president Gotabaya Rajapaksa are continuing, despite state repression

It is not clear how far the IMF will now go to bail out the economy. It could fall out with other key lenders.

The capitalist class, in fear of its losses, is trying to frighten people by saying default would be a disaster. But with or without default, the continuation of capitalism will be a disaster for the masses!

But economic default will not be a 'huge disaster' if the burden is not transferred to the wider population. Armageddon will not descend on Sri Lanka on the day after the default. But the fear created by the government and capitalists about the default is linked to preparing the masses to bear the brunt of the losses. This should be resisted.

However, without socialist measures the crisis will be long and deep. Full capital controls must be implemented immediately, along with price controls of essential commodities. The 'commanding heights' of the economy must be brought under workers' democratic control, to plan for and produce the immediate needs of society. It should be paralleled with decisive investment in improving local manufacturing and farming.

Workers' committees should be formed in workplaces to oversee production and distribution democratically, and to improve productivity. This should be linked to improving wages and working conditions.

### Socialism

Of course, none of these measures will be implemented by the Gotabaya government or any capitalist government. Hence taking such decisive action is linked to reorganising society.

Unless the workers who produce all the commodities democratically control state affairs, such a plan cannot be implemented. We cannot get there by parliamentary means alone. Workers, farmers, and students should start forming their own committees and, in the local communities, to mobilise mass opposition.

As a first step, a national assembly can be organised to bring together rank-and-file trade union activists and socialist organisations, and other activists, to prepare for further struggle. Democratically organised assemblies can begin to take

measures to refuse to pay debt, and organise production and distribution. This will create an alternative power base that can challenge all the capitalist institutions.

The trade unions can bring together their members to form a national body that can organise strike action, including a general strike, along with other mass protests, and open the way to the implementation of an alternative programme.

Unfortunately, trade unions that are linked to the political parties have so far refused to take any decisive action. In this political vacuum, the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB, United People's Power) has begun to be seen as the main platform for struggle.

However the SJB campaign mirrors that of the notorious right-wing UNP leader J R Jayawardena in the mid-1970s. He used the mood against the then government to mobilise support by scaremongering about the 'red danger', together with anti-Tamil rhetoric.

Significant forces within the main left party at that time, the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), were, to an extent, able to counter some of this chauvinist propaganda. No such party exists today.

The main opposition's call for a general election to be held now is wishful thinking. The Rajapaksa family will not give up power voluntarily. Instead, they will use further repressive measures and Sinhala nationalist and racist propaganda to keep themselves in power.

The Rajapaksa family still maintains its base among Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists. It's only the development of an organised mass movement that can bring down this government.

The inability of union leaders to lead the struggle, and the fragmentation of the left, leaves an enormous vacuum. This, and increased repression, means the task of getting rid of 'Gota' and establishing a workers-led government can seem an impossible task. But recent events have proven otherwise. Mass actions, at times spontaneous, emerging across the country are showing the way forward.

### Programme

But mass action alone will not be enough. It needs to take an organisational form. Unity can be forged with the far-sighted programme and perspective that guides concrete steps. Democratically organised committees across the country can come forward in a national body to deal with the emergency situation that exists and go forward to establish a government representing working people.

This should also be linked with an appeal made to the working class in south Asia to take the same road by building movements that can form workers-led governments and be the basis for going forward to the establishment of a voluntary socialist confederation of South Asia.

● The full version of this article can be read on [socialistworld.net](http://socialistworld.net)



● See also 'Thousands of protesters besiege residence of Sri Lanka's president, Gotabaya Rajapaksa' by Siritunga Jayasuriya (above), Secretary of the United Socialist Party (CWI, Sri Lanka)



# “The working class has nothing to gain from war”

## - NIPSA statement on the war in Ukraine

The following statement on the war in Ukraine was issued on 28 March by the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA), the largest trade union in Northern Ireland.

The statement approaches the war in Ukraine from the standpoint of the interests of the working class in society. It calls for workers' unity to cut across divisions on ethnic and national lines.

This echoes the situation in the north of Ireland, which for many years was blighted by sectarian killings, armed conflict, militarisation, and oppression. Nearly a quarter of a century after the formal end of the conflict, known as the 'Troubles', the working class still faces sectarian divisions and poverty.

The CWI in Ireland, Militant Left, is active in NIPSA, and the union's general secretary Carmel Gates is a member. Supporters in that union, and other unions, call for workers' unity against the bigots and the bosses, and for a new party of the working class to oppose the main sectarian-based parties and to struggle for socialist change.

“NIPSA opposes and condemns the Russian invasion of Ukraine. We call for an immediate ceasefire and for all Russian armed forces to immediately withdraw from Ukraine.

The war in Ukraine is an extremely dangerous development. Implicit in the situation is the risk that it may spread and escalate, drawing other countries into a growing international conflict. The working class has nothing to gain from war and will pay the biggest price, both in Russia and Ukraine.

Despite the terrible situation, we support the building of unity among workers across national boundaries. The workers of Ukraine and Russia, like all workers, have common interests - as do the international

oligarchs (including global arms dealers) who, over decades at home and abroad, have grown rich plundering the wealth they had no part in creating.

We stand in solidarity with those in Russia who have protested against the invasion, despite police repression. We support the building of a mass anti-war movement, including among Russian troops.

Similarly, we support workers in Ukraine acting independently of the Zelensky government, building their own organisations, and taking independent action. This includes attempts to build dialogue and links with rank-and-file troops in the invading Russian forces.

We condemn any far-right or



The statement calls for workers' unity to cut across divisions on ethnic and national lines PHOTO: SP

fascist groups, on either side of this conflict, seeking to take advantage of the war to build their own organisation and activity by further provoking national and ethnic tensions.

### Solidarity

We send our solidarity to those workers in Ukraine who are risking their lives delivering emergency services and humanitarian aid in the most appalling and dangerous conditions. We will seek to build support and send practical solidarity where possible, including through the trade union movement.

This war is also a longstanding proxy conflict between Russia, the EU and Nato prompted by Nato expansion into central and Eastern Europe, despite previous commitments from them not to do so. We oppose this expansion and any intervention in this conflict by Nato forces.

We support the rights of ethnic minorities in Ukraine to determine their own affairs.

We note that economic sanctions will disproportionately hit working people, which may be seen as an aggressive measure by the west and which could strengthen support for

Putin.

We oppose the UK government's disgraceful restriction on the right of refugees fleeing wars to enter the UK. Recent actions do not go far enough. The plight of the Ukrainian refugees should act as a watershed in the treatment of all refugees, and we call for refugees from this and other conflicts to be welcomed and supported.

Workers in Ukraine and Russia - and across the world - have common interests. In this appalling situation, it is essential that we and the rest of the trade union movement stand for workers' unity and internationalism."

## US Amazon workers in New York vote to unionise

Workers at an Amazon warehouse in Staten Island, New York, have voted by a clear majority to unionise. The vote in favour of establishing the 'Amazon Labor Union' was by a margin of 2,654 votes to 2,131, on a 58% turnout.

This is an historic vote, as it is the first US Amazon site to unionise. It is highly significant, not least because Amazon is the second largest private employer in the country, after Walmart stores.

Last year, Amazon workers in Bessemer, Alabama, narrowly lost an attempt to unionise their workplace due to a vicious anti-union campaign waged by Amazon chiefs, set against a political-legal climate in the US which militates against trade unions. However, the vote at Bessemer could still be overturned on appeal in favour of unionisation in the coming weeks.

As the Socialist pointed out at the time, "conditions determine consciousness, and bad working conditions and terms of employment will push workers at some stage, both in Amazon and at other workplaces, to collectively organise."

Amazon bosses, along with the US



Last year's unionisation drive defeat at Amazon in Alabama did not deter victory for the union in New York PHOTO: JOE PIETTE/CC

Chamber of Commerce and the National Retail Federation, are clearly angered by the result. Instead of recognising that the move to unionise flows from poor working conditions and abusive management, they sourly blamed the result on "undue

interference" by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), the government body which administered the vote.

Having won union recognition the workers now have to fight to win a contract that will realise



**It is highly significant, not least because Amazon is the second largest private employer in the country**

higher wages and improved working conditions.

Although deindustrialisation, union busting practices, and conservative trade union leaders have led to an overall decline in unionisation in the US over the last 40 years - to just 10.5% of the total workforce - a majority of Americans view unions favourably.

In a recent survey by the Pew Research Center, 58% of US adults say union decline has been 'somewhat or very bad for the country', while 61% say 'this has been bad for working people'.

● See 'Trade unionists in the USA fighting back' at [socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk)

## Historic ten-month strike by St Vincent nurses concludes

The longest strike in the US in 2021, and also the longest nurses' strike in Massachusetts history, recently ended when union nurses voted to ratify a new contract.

700 members of the Massachusetts Nurses Association (MNA) were on strike for ten months against Tenet Corporation, owners of St. Vincent Hospital in Worcester, Massachusetts, over chronic understaffing and poor working conditions. The courage and tenacity of the nurses in this strike needs to be publicly acknowledged and remembered.

The strike ended as a victory with gains in staffing and working conditions, and getting jobs back for strikers whom Tenet was trying to victimise. However, limitations in the new contract were acknowledged, even by union leaders. Also, because of the number of scabs that got into the hospital during the strike and management's use of them now, there is an attempt to decertify the union. The decertification attempt must be defeated, the contract enforced, and the struggle for safer staffing levels continued.

● This article by Jeff Booth, Massachusetts, AFSCME Local 3650 (personal capacity) can be read in full on [independentsocialistgroup.org](http://independentsocialistgroup.org)



# Yemen: the ‘forgotten war’

Western leaders hypocritically downplay Saudi Arabian atrocities in Yemen while condemning Putin’s invasion of Ukraine

ELAINE BRUNSKILL  
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

For weeks, the horror of Putin’s brutal invasion of Ukraine has dominated the news. Alongside this carnage, there has also been the ongoing civil war in Yemen. However, this merciless war in Yemen, and all the hypocrisy surrounding it, has been sidelined. Yemen is the forgotten war.

Bordered by Saudi Arabia and Oman, Yemen is strategically important as it is located on the strait which links the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden, through which most of the world’s oil shipments pass. The crucial nature of such routes was highlighted by the chaos caused, and billions of dollars lost each day, by just one container ship blocking the Suez Canal last March.

Yemen had been under Saudi Arabia’s sphere of influence. However, the Arab Spring of 2011 lit up the sky, for a while giving working people and those living in dire poverty a glimpse of an alternative to the rotten authoritarian regimes in north Africa and the Middle East.

Inspired by these uprisings, mass pressure from people in Yemen forced the country’s Saudi-backed President Ali Abdullah Saleh to hand power over to his deputy, Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi.

Both these regimes had been mired in corruption, but the lack of a workers’ alternative left a political vacuum, which led to the Iranian-backed northern Yemen Shia Houthis ousting the Saudi-backed Hadi. This prompted the formation of a Saudi-led coalition, which included the UAE and other North African and West Asian countries, moving against the Houthis. This has fuelled an ongoing civil war and triggered a major humanitarian crisis in Yemen.

## Double standards

In recent weeks Joe Biden has called Putin a “murderous dictator” and “pure thug”, who is “waging an immoral war against the people of Ukraine”. He has even gone off-script and seemingly urged those around Putin to oust him from the Kremlin, while at the same time enabling the Saudi regime to wage a terrible war in Yemen.

Biden, as a candidate in the 2020 presidential election, spoke out against the dire situation in Yemen. He criticised former US president Donald Trump for giving Saudi Arabia a blank cheque, and promised to end all American support for offensive operations in Yemen, including relevant arms deals. In his first address as president, he underlined: “This war has to end”.

But like Boris Johnson, criticism of the brutal Saudi regime of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud by Biden has been tempered by the needs of the West to increase Saudi oil production, having imposed sanctions on Russian oil exports, which have increased inflationary price pressures.



Over 150,000 people, among them tens of thousands of civilians, have been killed in the Yemen war, including the Saudi-led bombing campaign PHOTO WIKIPEDIA/CC

Since the conflict escalated in March 2015, life in Yemen has been described as a daily struggle for survival. The UN estimates around 30 million people, nearly 80% of the population, are in need of humanitarian aid.

The economy has been crippled, and escalating food prices have left more than 13 million people in danger of starvation. Moreover, the war in Ukraine, which is a major exporter of wheat (collectively Russia and Ukraine account for 29% of the global wheat trade) will further impact on Yemen. Although it is a wheat exporter, Yemen gets around a third of its wheat from Ukraine.

From the onset of the conflict, Yemen has been subjected to a ‘dirty war’. Similar to Putin’s attacks on Ukraine, the Saudi regime has been castigated for killing civilians in air strikes. According to the United Nations agency Unicef, 10,000 children have been killed or maimed since fighting began. That’s equates to four children, every day.

In office, Biden’s pledges on Yemen were quickly and quietly dropped. Sales of weapons, alongside the servicing of planes used to attack Yemeni targets, have continued to Saudi Arabia.

In November 2021 the State Department notified Congress of a further \$650 million arms deal to Saudi Arabia. The Biden administration claims that the arms being sold are ‘defensive’ in nature. However, Dr Natalie Goldring, who is the Acronym Institute for Disarmament Diplomacy’s UN representative for conventional weapons and arms



**Biden’s pledges on Yemen were quickly and quietly dropped... and sales of weapons to Saudi Arabia have continued**

trade issues, argues that the weapons have both defensive and offensive capabilities.

While, in his presidential election campaign, Biden stated that Saudi Arabia was a “pariah state” that would pay the price for barbaric human rights violations, (including the brutal murder and dismemberment of the Saudi Arabian journalist Jamal Khashoggi), his administration has now softened its approach, calling for a “recalibration” with a blood-soaked Saudi regime.

## Shameful role

The British government has also played an utterly shameful role in supplying arms to Saudi Arabia. The Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT) reports that UK sales of weaponry and military equipment over the past six years, during the course of Yemen’s bloody civil war, is three times higher than previously thought. Companies such as BAE systems have the blood of Yemeni people on their hands.

CAAT has outlined an opaque ‘Open Licence’ system which has obscured the true figure. So, instead of the £6.7 billion worth of arms sales published by the Department for International Trade, it is now estimated that more than £20 billion worth of military equipment and services have been sold to the Saudis since 2015.

These exports were being signed off while Boris Johnson was Foreign Secretary. Johnson, the self-proclaimed defender of freedom, who recently visited Mohammed

bin Salman, seemed unperturbed by the recent execution of 81 people, despite promises from the Crown Prince to ‘modernise’ its justice system.

In retaliation to Russia’s brutal war in Ukraine, Johnson has seized some assets of Russian oligarchs, including Chelsea’s Roman Abramovich. However, in response to the sale of Newcastle United to the Saudi Public Investment Fund, amidst their blood-stained involvement in Yemen, the then UK trade secretary Liz Truss dismissed concerns over the sale, saying it was purely a “commercial matter”.

Prior to the £300 million sale of Newcastle United it has been revealed that Saudi’s Crown Prince had personally texted Johnson, asking him to intervene and “correct” the Premier League’s “wrong decision” not to allow the takeover to go ahead.

World leaders such as Biden and Johnson have also been complicit in ‘sports washing’, by remaining silent as the Saudi regime hosted Formula 1 in an attempt to obscure the regime’s tarnished reputation.

In Ukraine, Yemen, and other war-torn regions of the world, there can be no trust in capitalist politicians and institutions. Their allegiances and foreign policies are tightly bound to their own imperialist interests and profits.

In Yemen and beyond, the embers of the Arab Spring can be re-ignited, with valuable lessons from the revolutions of 2011 preparing the masses for future struggles; most importantly, the necessity of building independent workers’ parties with a programme for ending the exploitative system of capitalism. Ultimately, for workers and those living in poverty, only a socialist programme can begin to unite workers and cut across ethnic divides.



**In Yemen and beyond, the embers of the Arab Spring can be re-ignited, with valuable lessons from the revolutions of 2011 preparing the masses for future struggles**

# Babi Yar: A Document in the Form of a Novel

## Anatoli Kuznetsov’s harrowing depiction of a Nazi mass murder, that echoes down to this day

ERIC SEGAL  
KENT SOCIALIST PARTY

I own a copy of a powerful book titled ‘Babi Yar’. I have read this book so many times that it now has a broken spine. But it is not a comfortable read.

It was written by Anatoli Kuznetsov from notes written as a 14-year-old teenager from scenes he witnessed and heard of at Babi Yar, in Kyiv, Ukraine.

Babi Yar was the site in Kyiv where the occupying Nazis murdered nearly 34,000 Jewish Ukrainian people over two days in September 1941.

His mother discovered and read his notes. She cried and advised him to save them for a book he might write someday. The book was first published in censored form in 1966 as seen through the eyes of Anatoli who was half-Russian, half-Ukrainian.

Under the Stalinist dictatorship of the countries constituting the USSR, artists and writers had to glorify the military/police state. This book exposed the fear that Stalinists had of any opposition to their version of the truth.

Anatoli documents the occupation of Kiev by the Nazis, the subsequent liberation by the Red Army, and the attempt to erase all memory of the mass murders.

He does this through the lives of his mother, grandmother, grandfather (‘Gramps’) and his cat, Titus, throughout the occupation. Anatoli describes his family: “That’s the sort of people we were before the arrival of the Nazis and of the war in general: quite unimportant, not liable

for military service, elderly people, a woman and a little boy - the sort of people, in short, who want the war least of all and who nevertheless seem to suffer most from it.”

Anatoli writes that on Sunday 28 September 1941, nine days after conquering Kyiv, the Nazis ordered every Jew in the city to collect their belongings and march to the cemetery at the edge of Babi Yar, a ravine. They were told that any Jews who refused would be killed. They believed that they were to be deported.



**Anatoli documents the occupation of Kiev by the Nazis, the subsequent liberation by the Red Army, and the attempt to erase all memory of the mass murders**

The following day on arriving at the entrance to the Babi Yar area, tens of thousands of Jewish men, women and children were ordered by German soldiers and Ukrainian police to undress, to leave their belongings and documents.

They were led in small groups to the edge of the ravine, shot and thrown into the ravine.

Russians, Ukrainians, and other people, who had come to see their

relatives and friends “off to the train,” were murdered. They didn’t shoot children but buried them alive, and didn’t finish off the wounded. The fresh earth over the mass graves was alive with movement. 33,771 of Kyiv’s Jews were killed.

Throughout 1941 an additional 15,000 were killed in a similar fashion. In total, more than 100,000 people were killed over two years by the Nazis. Among those were 50,000 Jews, the others being socialists, gypsies, homosexuals, the mentally ill, prisoners of war, and citizens accused of ‘rioting’.

An old woman, Maria Lutsenko, who lived in the cemetery house overlooking the ravine, told Anatoli of the atrocity that she saw. She describes how the hair of those ordered to take their clothes off quickly turned grey before being sent to their death.

In the pages of Babi Yar, the writer describes the ravine as a site of destruction and extermination, but also documents the attempt in 1957 by the Ukrainian central committee of the Communist Party to erase the memory, as it ran counter to their narrative.

A dam was built across the end of Babi Yar and a mixture of water and mud from the neighbouring quarries of the brickworks was pumped into the ravine. But on 13 March 1961 the dam collapsed and a wall of liquid mud swallowed up crowds of people, homes, cars and trams.

The attempts to clear the disaster went on for two years and resembled the excavation of Pompeii with bodies recovered from their homes and



The children’s memorial at Babi Yar, near Kyiv, Ukraine PHOTO ADAM JONES/CC

beds. He writes: “At the train terminus they dug out a group of conductors who had just gathered to hand over their takings, along with the cashier who was taking the money over. The number of people who had perished was never stated...”

The uncensored work included materials highly critical of the Soviet regime, so working on it was not easy. Kuznetsov recalled: “For a whole month in Kyiv I had nightmares, which wore me out so much that I had to leave without finishing my work and temporarily switch to other tasks in order to regain my senses.” He wrote: “I could no longer write, no longer sleep, no longer breathe”.

## Censorship

The book was heavily censored on its first publication in ‘Yunost’ (Russian literary youth magazine) in 1966. The uncensored and expanded version was first published in 1970 in Britain.

The text of the book is divided into three different sections with the ordinary type representing the heavily censored material published in Yunost.

The heavier type is material cut out by the censor at that time, and material added between 1967 and 1969 is in square brackets. Kuznetsov, defected to Britain in 1969, smuggling out his complete text on film.

The poet, Yevgeny Aleksandrovich Yevtushenko, met Kuznetsov who told him the story of Babi Yar, and took him to the site. Yevtushenko said: “I knew there was no monument at Babi Yar, but I was expecting to see some sign of respect. But what I saw was absolutely terrible - there were lots of trucks and they were unloading stinking garbage on the tens of thousands of people who were killed. I did not expect that.

“As soon as I got back to my hotel, I sat down and I began to write. It took probably four or five hours, no more,” he wrote:

Yevtushenko continued: “When I recited Babi Yar for the first time in public, there was an avalanche of silence. I was absolutely shocked,

paralysed. And afterwards a very, very little old woman with grey hair and a cane - her cane had just knocking against the stage - she came to me in the dead silence. She said just one sentence, ‘I was in Babi Yar’. She was one of the survivors who crawled from under the mountain of dead bodies.”

## Shostakovich

The Russian-Soviet composer Dmitri Shostakovich called Yevtushenko, and he said: “You gave words to my thoughts. I have a dream to write music to your poem. Would you be so kind as to give me your permission?”

It is said that the music of Shostakovich made the poem ten-times stronger, and that it was the ‘first hole in the Iron Curtain’ (the political boundary dividing Europe between the capitalist West and the Stalinist East).

The book inspired Yevgeny Yevtushenko, poet; Shostakovich, composer, Vasily Grossman, author; DM Thomas, author; and Dennis Potter, playwright, to ensure that the mass murder of Babi Yar was not sent to oblivion. They turned atrocity and terror into something tangible, something that can be read, watched, listened to and understood.

Once again we see a tragedy unfolding with Putin’s brutal invasion of Ukraine. We demand workers’ unity to end the horror of war, to fight for a socialist alternative to the brutality of capitalism.

We need to listen to the history of the past and bring to life to the words of Rosa Luxemburg: “I want to burden the conscience of the affluent with all the suffering and all the hidden, bitter tears.”

● Eric’s paternal grandparents were refugees from Kyiv in the early 1900s. Research shows that at least 44 people named Segal were murdered in Babi Yar and a further 100 or so were relocated to Russia.

● ‘Babi Yar: A Document in the Form of a Novel’, is published by Macmillan



In just two years of occupying Ukraine, the Nazis slaughtered over 100,000 people - mainly Jews, but also socialists, gypsies, homosexuals, mentally ill people, and others



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# the Socialist

Issue 1174

7-13 April 2022

formerly **Militant**

# CAPITALISM MEANS WAR

# FIGHT FOR SOCIALISM

**MARK BEST**  
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

**T**he horror of the war in Ukraine - dead bodies, homes reduced to rubble and millions of people forced to flee the destruction - has filled the news.

Ukraine and the many conflicts taking place across the world drive home the message that under capitalism, war and wanton destruction is inevitable.

Capitalism means there will be conflicts over markets, profits and spheres of influence. So to end war we need a new system - a socialist system.

War exposes in whose interests society is run - the rich. Newspapers supporting capitalism, like the Financial Times, have joined the campaign to track down luxury yachts, and other assets, owned by sanctioned Russian oligarchs. These yachts, two of which are worth 38 and 20 million dollars respectively, could be seized by Western governments.

Similar calls have been made for the government to take over empty properties in London linked to Russian oligarchs. But these houses won't be taken over and put to the use of ordinary working-class people - turned into high quality affordable council housing to deal with the massive waiting lists. Instead, they will be used as a tool to continue the war by sanctions.

Disrupting supply chains and energy supplies across the world, sanctions are another example of the illogic of capitalism, with workers and poor people across the world paying the price.

US President Joe Biden is begging for oil companies to up their extraction of fossil fuels to bring down the price of petrol. So far this has had the same effect as begging them to transition to renewable energy - the bosses will only take action when they can make a profit.

Daily we are shown pictures on our television screens, of burnt-out tanks and rockets being fired - millions of pounds worth of equipment being destroyed. They represent thousands of hours of research, skill and labour.

Only on the basis of socialism across the world could the resources and work ploughed into the production of weapons (and luxury yachts!) be used to tackle the problems of climate change, pollution, pandemics, poverty and the other crises facing us.

We could produce, in a sustainable way, what we need across the planet instead of what makes a profit for competing blocs of bosses.

A socialist world, based on cooperation and democratic planning internationally, with the working class at its head, would be able to put to use science and advances in new technology to improve the lives of us all. The choice facing us is capitalism which means war, austerity and environmental destruction, or fighting for the socialist transformation of society.



LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

WHAT WE STAND FOR: THE SOCIALIST PARTY'S MAIN DEMANDS >>> see column on page 3



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ISSN 1366-9621