

STARMER'S LABOUR BACKS BOSSSES

Fight for jobs, homes and services for all



OSCAR PARRY
CAMDEN AND HARINGEY SOCIALIST PARTY

Keir Starmer's Labour government is like a broken record, repeating the need for "ruthless" cuts to public services at every opportunity.

Labour have just announced the cancellation of 18 new hospitals, in the same week as scrapping their planned taxation of the mega-rich international 'non-doms' who pay almost no tax on their millions! This shows whose interests they serve (see page 3).

It's not like there's no money around. The biggest companies are making massive profits and paying out billions to shareholders. The net worth of Britain's 20 richest individuals has more than doubled in the past decade.

There is growing rage against Starmer's government, and the profit system it defends. The capitalists, seeing that their position at the top could be threatened, turn to the tactics of divide and rule. As Malcolm X said: "You can't have capitalism without racism." For them, racism and other forms of oppression are means to scapegoat others for attacks on working-class living standards. Starmer's Labour is in lockstep with the rhetoric of the Tories and Reform.

We need an alternative that

represents the interests of the working class. The election of five Reform MPs, who have fanned the flames of racism, is a warning of what is to come if the workers' movement does not fulfil the task of creating a political alternative.

The Socialist Party fights for the trade union movement to spearhead the fight against Starmer's attacks, fighting for jobs, homes and services for all, not racism. By uniting working-class people to struggle for what we all need, support for reactionary ideas of the populist right

can be undermined.

A new mass party for the working class with socialist policies, to answer the lies of the racist far right, would be a huge step forward. It would build confidence that we can fight back and put an end to this rotten system, and the racism and division it breeds, with a new socialist world.

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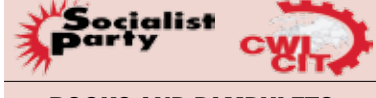
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"The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it."
Karl Marx

Gaza ceasefire holds Fight for socialist change to end Palestinian oppression

JOE FATHALLAH
CARDIFF WEST SOCIALIST PARTY

Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in Gaza have walked miles, allowed to return to the site of their homes in the north of the Strip, where much of what remains is rubble. The gates were opened as part of negotiations from the ceasefire that finally took effect on 19 January, after over 15 months of devastating war, during which around 65,000 Palestinians have been killed.

The move came hours after US President Donald Trump told reporters the whole population of Gaza could be "cleaned out", and relocated to neighbouring Egypt and Jordan. The threat of a new Nakba - the forced evacuation of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their land in 1948 - will provoke fury among millions across the Middle East.

The timing of the ceasefire agreement to coincide with Trump's inauguration meant he was able to try to take some credit. It is abundantly clear his interests have nothing in common with ordinary Palestinians. Among his first executive orders was to lift sanctions on violent Israeli settlers in the West Bank, albeit token sanctions introduced by the Biden administration. In fact it appears likely that the ceasefire agreement included the US giving Israeli President Benjamin Netanyahu the green light to step up military operations in the West Bank.

Trump's inflammatory remarks are yet another striking example of the volatility of his presidency. If a strategic aim of his administration is to normalise relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia, that will be made harder. The Saudi regime will



PAUL MATTSSON

We demand an immediate end to the war and a complete withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza and other occupied territories. This means keeping up the international pressure

feel the pressure from its population, sympathetic with the Palestinian cause, not to be seen as complicit with the crimes of Israeli and US capitalism.

Since the ceasefire began, Israeli forces have raided the refugee camp in Jenin, in the West Bank, where at least 12 Palestinians have been killed to date. In Gaza itself, at least two Palestinians have been shot and killed by Israeli tanks too. And the Israeli government has voted to block the United Nations aid programme UN-RWA from operating in Gaza, where the population remains in desperate need.

The Palestinians are still denied the right to their own state. Almost the whole population of Gaza is now homeless and hungry. These people cannot wait to see if the ceasefire agreement plays out as planned, and then there is the question of what future for Gaza, the West Bank and the Palestinians. We demand an immediate end to the war and a complete withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza and other occupied

territories. This means keeping up the international pressure, especially against governments and companies supplying weapons to the Israeli forces.

On the basis of capitalism, there can be no lasting solution which guarantees peace and the national rights of the Palestinians. This will require mass struggle, and the development of independent working-class parties in Palestine, Israel, and all countries in the region. The first intifada, a mass uprising lasting from 1987 until 1993, showed how ordinary Palestinians could organise independently of their ruling elites and effectively resist the repression of the Israeli state. These traditions can be built on in the coming period, towards achieving an independent socialist Palestine, alongside a socialist Israel, laying the ground for an end to national conflict, war and poverty.

MPs' freebies

It must be great to be an MP. Instead of watching the exciting World Darts Championship on the telly over Christmas, MPs snagged themselves VIP tickets for the sold-out event at Ally Pally.

Labour MP James Frith, who has ironically campaigned for safer gambling, and Tory MP Caroline Nokes, deputy speaker of the House of Commons, were given 'platinum' hospitality tickets by Paddy Power worth up to £1,000 each. They apparently include Michelin-star meals, complimentary booze and table service, avoiding the big queues and even bigger prices at the bar that normal punters used.

If darts isn't your sport, you could become the leader of your party and prime minister and get a box at your football club paid for you to watch Premier League football for free while prices rise for ordinary

supporters. And if you're not into sport at all then maybe free tickets to the hottest gigs in town are of interest, how about Taylor Swift? No Cruel Summer for Starmer as it was for all the Swifties who missed out.

And if you're worried about what to wear in all these salubrious surroundings, then donors will supply designer clothes too. You could keep them in the wardrobe of your subsidised housing, nice and warm from your subsidised energy and utility bills. Wouldn't want to eat into your £91,000 pay would you?

As Jim Bowen used to say, you can't beat a bit of Bully! The rest of us are simply throwing from a different oche.

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KAAN BAUER/CC

Labour backing the bosses, consumers and workers will pay the price

SAM WARD
LEICESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

Labour chancellor Rachel Reeves, after admitting to gossiping parliamentary insiders that she's "running out of ideas", has come up with some new schemes to get the economy growing. And unsurprisingly, she wants to move the dial more towards companies and the super-rich at the expense of workers and consumers.

Labour plan to go on the offensive against the powers of regulators and consumer protections. Former Amazon executive Doug Gurr has been appointed as the new head of the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) - a slap in the face to workers. How can he be expected to fairly oversee big business and monopolisation? Amazon is notorious for harbouring poor and exploitative working conditions and brutal union busting. It has built an eCommerce monopoly that has destroyed the high street.

Riskier regulations

Attacks on workers don't stop there. Reeves recently visited Davos to speak at the World Economic Forum, an annual meeting of capitalists. She went on the offensive against both workers and consumers, advocating for the creation of a "riskier regulatory environment". Fewer regulations, like health and safety or looser planning restrictions, will mean the capitalists can make higher profits while working-class people have to accept the consequences - unsafe products, financial products with dodgy clauses, or environmental damage.

To show big business that the new Labour government is firmly on their side, Reeves recently intervened in

a car financing Supreme Court case. She urged the court not to hand out compensation, potentially over £30 billion, to consumers harmed in the motor finance commission scandal protecting the interests of motor lenders and car dealerships. Dealerships were incentivised to offer loans with higher interest rates that earned them more commission.

Non-dom nonstarter?

One of the few promises Labour made during the election campaign that could hit the super-rich was abolishing the non-dom tax status. Non-dom status enables people who live in the UK to avoid paying UK tax on money made abroad because their permanent home (for tax purposes) is outside the country. Promising to scrap this status, a loophole created for the ultra-wealthy, in their manifesto was one of the few policies workers and unions welcomed. Now, rather than scrapping the status entirely, Labour are set to water this promise down after "listening to the concerns of the 'non-dom community'".

It's been six months and the Labour government has already revealed its cards. The Labour Party no longer has the interests of the working class at heart. That is why we need a new party, built from 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-bial business parties.

As part of this socialist alternative, the Socialist Party fights for demands that would put working-class people in the driving seat, not bosses and scammers.



Reeves and Starmer meeting representatives of a multinational investment firm NUMBER 10/CC



GAGE SKIDMORE/CC

Trump's 'Maganomics' and its consequences

After being inaugurated and signing a flurry of executive orders, Donald Trump has already added to the increasing chaos of the world capitalist system. The editorial of the February edition of Socialism Today magazine looks at the effects and roots of Trump's economic policy - promising to "Make America great again", how far he can go, and the consequences in Britain and across the world:

Trump is back in the White House. Much of the world is gripped by fear about what his second term will mean, as are millions in America - particularly migrants, LGBTQ+ people, and others likely to be on the sharp end of his attacks. In Britain one opinion poll reported that 54% of British people think Trump will be bad for their country, compared to only 15% who think he will be good. An even greater majority of Britons think he will be bad for world peace.

Meanwhile Britain's prime minister, Keir Starmer, has publicly emphasised his "constructive" relationship with Trump, expressing how grateful he was to Trump for having dinner with him in New York last year, and pleading for a US-UK trade deal. Such warm words for new US presidents are the norm for capitalist governments, as they try to get close to the leader of what is still the world's strongest power. No amount of sickening sucking up, however, will make Trump prioritise a trade deal with Britain.

More fundamentally, nothing can prevent British capitalism being particularly vulnerable to the negative consequences of 'maganomics'; as a result of being a weaker power, extremely reliant on foreign capital, and outside any of the major trading blocs. The January bond market jitters, and the fall in sterling are a foretaste of what is ahead. Nor will the consequences of Trump for Britain be simply economic. Starmer's

the US stock markets, and led to the further inflation of huge speculative bubbles. In particular, he is actively fuelling crypto-mania. His actions will increase the size of the inevitable financial crash when it comes. At the same time his attempt to abolish the US debt ceiling is an indication of his reckless approach to US government finance, even from a completely capitalist viewpoint, at a time when markets are extremely nervous about the huge scale of government debt in the US and globally. And on his threat to ratchet up tariffs the IMF has weighed in to warn that Trump "could make trade tensions worse, lower investment, and disrupt supply chains across the world".

Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to see the era we have entered as being the consequence of one reckless individual. On the contrary, Trump's election both reflects and accelerates the increasingly unstable multipolar character of global capitalism today. The world we are now living in has more in common with the first half of the twentieth century than anything that has been experienced since.

● Read this article in full at socialistparty.org.uk/maganomics

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NO TO 'PARTNERSHIP' BETWEEN UNIONS AND EMPLOYERS

New 'Improving Education Together' agreement must be opposed

ROB WILLIAMS

SOCIALIST PARTY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

It was apt that Sir Keir Starmer staged his New Labour government's December 'relaunch' at Pinewood Studios, where the 'Carry On' movies were filmed. Starmer was hoping to breathe new life into his fledgling administration after finding the first period of office to be, to say the least, pretty challenging.

But it is clear that what isn't going to change is his 'partnership' agenda, aiming to bring together the unions with the employers and Starmer's government. This was the big idea that Starmer announced at September's Trades Union Congress (TUC). The 'P' word littered his speech to delegates, alongside warnings of difficult choices that he and his chancellor Rachel Reeves would have to make. These were soon outlined in Labour's first Budget at the end of October, which set the scene for the continuation of Tory austerity.

This is the context of Starmer's appeal for partnership. As The Socialist warned after the TUC: "Starmer is clear: he accepts the limitations of the sick state of British capitalism, including Tory spending plans, and is trying to neuter the workers' movement by advocating partnership between unions and rabid big-business bosses."

Strike wave

After 14 years of brutal Tory austerity and the escalation of anti-union legislation, the gap between rich and poor has soared to historic levels. This was one of the spurs of the 2022-24 strike wave, the highest level of sustained industrial action over three decades. Yet Starmer and his supporting union leaders talk about 'shared interests' with so-called 'reasonable employers'.

The first sign of this partnership agenda is the 'Improving Education Together' (IET) joint agreement between education unions and employers, which includes academy trusts. The first meeting of the IET 'board' was publicly announced on 20 January.

Socialist Party members on the National Education Union (NEU) Executive and our allies were alone in voting against this proposal at the November meeting (see article opposite).

This wasn't because we are opposed to collective bargaining procedures and meetings. Quite the contrary, we fight for the ability of unions to bargain and negotiate with the employers, as long as they retain their independence.

The NEU leadership has hailed the IET as restoring collective bargaining to education. However, in fact it enshrines partnership, embroiling unions in the developing and recommending of proposals. A point made very clear in a statement published by the leadership of the NASUWT teaching union, welcoming the IET and describing it as "a milestone in developing an approach to improving education that is based on government, employers and trade unions working together in partnership".

Not bargaining but partnership

In the very first part, it says: "We will come together to agree policy proposals that will draw on all of our disparate perspectives to improve education for all." This principle is spelled out further in the document:

- Maintain privacy and confidentiality of what is shared under the terms of the agreement, while supporting transparency and engagement,
- Take collaborative, constructive, and consensual approach to co-determine goals that all members of their IET board can support and promote,
- Achieve consensus wherever possible in making recommendations and implementing policies that further those goals in order that all members of their IET board can support and promote the outcomes,
- Take responsibility for ensuring that consensus positions have regard to empirical evidence wherever possible, and
- Agree to disagree where necessary and seek to resolve tensions without undermining the work of their IET board(s).

No shared interest

But how is it possible to have shared interests or 'resolve tensions' with employers who have a diametrically opposed view of education and how workers are treated - such as the vicious academy trusts, which sit outside of any democratic accountability and control?

Teachers and education staff have far more in common with their students, yet they aren't represented in the IET. They face the prospect of increased tuition fees from Starmer's government.

While union leaders will argue that the IET doesn't include - at this stage at least - pay, pensions and contracts, it is nonetheless designed to develop a collaborative relationship with employers, losing a big part of union independence to shared responsibility. The government wants the IET to



NEU's strike action in 2023 forced both Tory and Labour governments to offer more than they intended. Photo: strikers marching in Manchester. MARTIN POWELL-DAVIES

set the precedent for other sectors. There have already been examples of attempts to form partnership agreements, both historic and current.

Starmer's agenda follows on from the social partnership model that was brought in by the Welsh Labour government. And the Labour government of 1974-79 instituted the 'Social Contract' in agreement with the TUC.

Also, during the Covid pandemic, a whole number of union leaders, including some who claimed to be on the left, capitulated to the idea that there was a 'national unity' of interest with the bosses and Boris Johnson's Tory government. Socialist Party members on union national executives stood out, often alone, against this pressure.

Limits

But the 1970s Social Contract also showed the limitations of partnership, as the 'incomes policy' of wage restraint at a time of high inflation couldn't maintain industrial peace. It was challenged and ultimately defeated by workers' struggle, including in the 'Winter of Discontent' of 1978-79. And in Wales, notwithstanding social partnership, workers took action during the recent strike wave.

In reality, both these instances didn't involve legally binding procedures and agreements or no-strike limitations, but they were used by

the union leaders to subordinate themselves, in order to engender and justify a partnership approach, at the expense of workers.

Labour try to neuter unions

And the bases for these agreements show what Starmer's objectives are now. Social partnership in Wales is an attempt to sign up unions to Labour-imposed austerity, rather than challenging the cuts of Tory and now Starmer's Labour from Westminster. The 1970s Social Contract was designed to make workers pay for the first major post-war economic crisis.

Just days after the NEU exec agreed to partnership, the Labour government announced an insulting 2.8% pay increase for teachers. So much for 'shared interests'.

Starmer and Reeves have set out the spending straitjacket for their government, dutifully adhering to the limits afforded by crisis-ridden British capitalism. They want to neuter the independence of the unions and their power to take action, which has been shown so effectively over the last three years.

Therefore, any attempt to build such partnership must be opposed and fought, defending the right of unions to act independently of the employers and the government.

However, as the workers have shown historically, while social partnership would represent an

unnecessary barrier for workers to overcome, it will not stop workers' struggle, particularly at a time of crisis. That is why it is vital that union members fight for the leadership of their respective unions, making the upcoming elections across a number of unions even more important.

NEU executive elections

To help win the fighting leadership NEU members deserve, the following Socialist Party members are seeking nomination in the National Executive elections for 2025-27:

- **Sheila Caffrey**
District 12 standing for re-election
- **Louise Cuffaro**
District 16 standing for re-election
- **Sean McCauley**
District 8
- **Dan Warrington**
District 11

Why we opposed 'Improving Education Together' at the NEU executive

SHEILA CAFFREY
NEU EXECUTIVE MEMBER, PERSONAL CAPACITY

The NEU National Executive was given less than two weeks to consider the 'Improving Education Together' partnership deal between education unions, government and employers, while being told to not discuss with members - making the union discussions rather reminiscent of the whole deal.

At the November exec meeting, general secretary Daniel Kebede repeatedly said it wasn't a partnership deal, and accused those who opposed it of being against negotiations.

Muzzle

But this is not a seat at the table for negotiations. Socialist Party members would agree with a real negotiating body. But any forum with an agenda set only once a year, that says we can disagree but if an issue is agreed by the secretary of state the union cannot then fight on it, is not 'negotiations'. It's an aim to muzzle union democracy and campaigns.

Meetings aiming to reach 'consensus' with CEOs of academy chains would skew any discussions around privatisation and the need to bring all schools back under local authority control. The secrecy elements would mean that the NEU wouldn't be able to consult its own members.

In the executive sub-committee discussions, many members raised concerns, including Wales members who explained how social partnership in Wales was of no benefit to unions. But in the final vote there were only four members who voted against the proposal - the two Socialist Party exec members and two of our allies - with all others in favour.

In the January national executive meeting, Daniel Kebede reported that he understood there was little enthusiasm for the deal in the NEU.

This was a far cry from his speeches in November, where he had said that the perception of members was that education is being treated favourably by Labour. A long list of executive members had spoken about how important it was to take part.

This included the members of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). Their report for South West NEU members said: "We were clear from the outset that we would accept nothing like the social partnership arrangement that existed under New Labour 20 years ago. That has been achieved. This is not the collective bargaining we want, but is a step forward. It is not a social partnership and has none of the terrible elements of the arrangements of 20 years ago."

Members know the reality

So, what changed between November and January? Members in local authority sixth forms haven't felt that education has been treated favourably, with pay deals that give them less than their colleagues in academies.

School teacher members haven't liked being told that their 2025 pay award would be totally unfunded. The 18 schools in the Harris Federation currently balloting for strike action haven't felt that their CEO - who made two large donations to Rachel Reeves's election campaign - is someone they can be in partnership with.

Labour's new education bill, published in December, shows they will not end academisation or provide full funding for education without a fight. Yet already, under pressure from the Tories and academy bosses, they have moved an amendment to water down their own plans on pay in academies.

This shows the importance of union leaders being transparent, as well as thinking about the implications of signing deals with political parties and academy leaders who clearly do not have the interests of children, education or workers at the heart of their decisions.

It is the workers and the communities in which we live and work who should be making these decisions. Socialist Party members of the NEU will continue to campaign for transparent negotiations, as well as for adequate education funding.

• This is a shortened version of Sheila's full article, which can be found at socialistparty.org.uk



NEU's members in sixth forms know the reality. They took action again on 29 January. Photo: lobbying Labour's Department for Education. JAMES IVENS

Academy funding scandal - return all schools to local authority control!



'Show us the money' - NEU members on the picket line in Hastings. James front row centre

JAMES IVENS

LEAD NEU REP, PERSONAL CAPACITY

Schools and colleges have faced over a decade of cuts. Next year, schools budgets will hit a 15-year low in real terms, forcing further cuts to staffing and resources.

This crisis is made even worse by the academies programme. The top 50 multi-academy trusts (MATs) spend an average of £68 million a year on executive salaries, according to the analysis by Warwick Mansell and the Campaign for State Education (CASE) - seven times as much on salaries over £130,000 as local authority-controlled schools. Every penny spent on executive salaries is money that isn't spent on frontline services.

National Education Union (NEU) members who work for schools in the University of Brighton Academy Trust (UBAT) have seen this firsthand. We have been in a dispute over the way UBAT has managed its finances, and the impact that has had on jobs and workload. On average, MATs retain between 5-7% of a school's budget to pay for their central services. UBAT has been withholding an average of 14%, with some schools losing over 25% in some years!

Devastating impact

This has had a devastating impact on frontline services. We've seen increasing workload, cuts to budgets and essential services, and damaging restructures and redundancies. And where has the money gone? Towards a bloated central academy budget, with huge amounts spent on a large executive team, corporate marketing and outside consultants. This is public money that should be going towards the education of our students!

We held a very successful campaign. We won strike ballots in eight

schools and have taken five days of coordinated strike action. We have won workload charters, halted redundancies, saved essential services, forced UBAT to agree to completely change its funding model, and contributed to some significant changes in trust leadership.

However, it was revealed last week that the Department for Education has decided to step in and dissolve the trust and re-broker all of the schools, handing them to other MATs. NEU members are not surprised by this decision.

Future employers taking over UBAT schools will have a great deal of damage to repair. They must have an open, fair and transparent funding model that gives schools the resources they need. They will need to provide cast-iron assurances on members' pay, terms and conditions, including retaining recent workload agreements, and formally recognising the NEU for collective bargaining. Any failure to honour such terms would make a further industrial action ballot likely.

Democratic control

However, it is deeply frustrating that after having achieved so much in our strike campaign we might just be handed to a different MAT, facing potentially similar problems. We want all UBAT schools to be returned to local authority control and for the wider school community, including all unions, to be included in the discussions about the future direction of these schools.

The long-term solution does not lie with any academy trust. The problems faced in UBAT reflect deeper problems with academisation. Academies lack local accountability, spend huge amounts of public money on their central teams and executive pay, and treat education like a business. Our members are all too aware that there are many more

'UBATs' out there that haven't yet been exposed.

The NEU wants all schools to return to local authority control. The government must fully fund local councils to allow them to provide the kind of education services that our students deserve.

Our campaign has had an impact. The leader of Hastings Borough Council has come out in support of the NEU's demands, and the local Labour MP Helena Dollimore has been handing out leaflets on school gates criticising UBAT and seeking parental views - although not going as far as to support our call to return schools to the local authority. We will be campaigning on these issues in Sussex, including public meetings and demonstrations.

Labour's education bill

Labour's new Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill proposes that new schools should not have to be academies - so why does the same logic not apply to a failed academy trust?

It is imperative that, as a minimum, amendments are made to the bill to allow a route for academies to return to local authority control, and for greater oversight and regulation of academy executive pay and the amounts trusts take from school budgets to fund central services. The NEU should contact MPs - including Jeremy Corbyn, the Independents and suspended Labour MPs - to ask them to move such an amendment.

Ultimately, we need all schools to be returned to local authorities, under the democratic control of the school community. To make this a reality we need more than just slogans; the NEU needs to launch a bold national campaign to demand that the Labour government rationalises education. This campaign should be linked to wider issues of pay, funding and workload, as academisation plays a central role in all these.

WHAT DO SOCIALISTS SAY ABOUT IMMIGRATION?

Isai Marjerla, Socialist Party Executive Committee, responds to questions about immigration, including those that have been raised with Socialist Party members campaigning on the streets.

Is immigration as big an issue as the media portrays?

There has always been migration as long as humanity existed, but we are also in a period of multiple capitalist crises with poverty, war and destruction dominating many countries. Increasingly it is impossible to find a stable country. War and conflicts are a feature in many countries. It is estimated that at least 50 countries worldwide experiencing active conflict, an increase by 25% in a year alone. 1 in 8 people across the world have been exposed to conflicts in 2024. The UN estimates that 305 million people will require humanitarian assistance in 2025.

In such a case, we are seeing an increase in the number of people forced to flee their home country. No one chooses to be in that situation where they are forced to leave everything they have known and go and start their lives elsewhere.

Most working-class and young people have an instinct of solidarity

with those being forced to flee. Most understand that ordinary people are not responsible for the wars, repression and poverty that exist. In fact, it is the capitalist system to blame, a system based on nation states and exploitation.

In Britain, we have seen all the capitalist parties - Reform, Tories and Labour - trying to blame migrants for the multiple crises caused by their system.

We say, stop blaming migrants for the crisis in Britain - a crisis created by the ruthlessness of capitalism and what it breeds, like privatisation, low pay, housing crisis and unemployment.

We blame the system for the cost-of-living crisis. We know there is huge wealth in the economy that, if in public hands and under the democratic control of the working class, could be put to use as part of a plan to improve the lives of all.



Protesting against the far right in Walthamstow summer 2024
PHOTO: WALTHAM FOREST SOCIALIST PARTY

Immigrants are willing to work for less pay and for longer hours, surely that just drives down my pay and conditions?

The capitalist class tries to use migration as a source of cheap labour that is often unorganised and seen as easy to bully and intimidate. Bosses looking to undermine workers' organising collectively try to use social and language differences to try to set sections of workers against each other as a tool to divide and rule.

And it isn't just migrant workers; agency workers and young people are also used by the bosses to drive down wages through lower pay rates and zero-hour contracts. It's not exploited workers who gain from this 'race to the bottom', it's the bosses!

It's in the interest of all workers for there to be a united struggle for rights, pay and conditions for all. That's why it is essential for the trade union movement to organise to bring in migrant workers, just as it is essential to organise agency workers and the new generation of workers too.

We, as workers of all backgrounds,

have more in common with each other than the bosses and the capitalist system that seeks to divide us.

We demand that every worker gets the rate for the job. An immediate increase in the minimum wage to at least £15 an hour now with no exemptions, and above-inflation pay rises for all. We also defend the right of asylum seekers to work, to stop further exploitation of labour.

There have been plenty of examples of the capitalists using immigration as a tool for divide and rule. Capitalist politicians made it a high-profile issue during the EU referendum, and anti-migrant, anti-refugee rhetoric resurfaces again and again in times of crisis.

The capitalist establishment wants cheap labour, but it doesn't want to pay to provide decent homes, services and jobs for all. We instead campaign for 'Jobs, homes and services for all - not racism'.

£4 billion

The Asylum Accommodation and Support Contract (AASC) is set to cost the government an estimated £4 billion over its ten-year duration. Three companies - Serco, Mears and Clearsprings - are getting huge sums from government to cram asylum seekers

into substandard accommodation. All have recorded rising profits.

How many council houses could £4 billion build?

Meanwhile, waiting lists for asylum application assessments are huge. Tens of thousands wait for months in limbo. The Labour government threatens further cuts to civil service jobs. And the pound signs keep rolling in the bosses' eyes.



PHOTO: SENAN

Is it fair that asylum seekers are being put up in hotels while thousands are homeless and my family are sofa-surfing unable to get on the council house waiting list?

No one should be homeless, sofa-surfing or forced to wait for years on council housing waiting lists. Decades of privatisation, underfunding, and a lack of investment have left housing services at breaking point. Council housing has been systematically sold off, with the stock not replaced.

The Socialist Party says take over the empty properties, bring them into public ownership and under democratic control of working-class communities so they can be used to house all those in need. We fight for a mass building programme of high-quality, affordable council housing.

It is not only on the issue of housing that immigration is being used by establishment politicians to distract us from the consequences of their policies.

Our public services including the NHS, social care, education system

are crumbling and in crisis. But this is the direct result of cutbacks and privatisations by the Tories, now being carried on by Labour. Meanwhile, private energy and water companies are hiking up bills for private profits.

Faced with working-class anger about the consequences of their policies, capitalist politicians point the finger at immigration, attempting to divide the working class.

We are fighting urgently for a mass united struggle, of all working-class people - against austerity and for fully funded public services, and decent jobs and housing for all.

We call on councillors up and down the country to use all the powers at their disposal to resist austerity from Starmer's Labour - funding services and building council homes, and rallying the support of communities and trade unions to demand money from central government.

£400mn

Rwanda policy an expensive, dangerous flop

Had the last Tory government's Rwanda plan to deport migrants to the African country gone ahead it could have cost up to £400 million.

The cheques to the Rwandan government were already written. And for every one of the first 300 refugees and asylum seekers to be deported would have cost an extra £1.8 million.

The Tories were prepared to pay hundreds of millions of pounds to posture as being 'serious' about immigration and to try to make Britain a 'hostile environment' for migrants.

They were hoping to shore up votes. It didn't work. Their vote collapsed.

I understand that people are fleeing for their safety, but surely the situation needs to be brought under control. Who decides who get to claim asylum and who doesn't?

The scenes on our screens of deadly crossing of the English Channel show that people will risk their lives to find safety and with the hope of a better future, feeling that they have nothing to lose.

There are those who are desperate and will risk everything, no matter how high the wall or how strong and dangerous the obstacles or fences.

Would you put yourself and your children in a small boat in the sea knowing that people have died on the journey? The answer will be no - unless you felt you had no other choice.

The vast majority of people's natural instinct is one of solidarity with those affected by war and poverty. We have seen how people come together in unity when tragedy strikes. For example, in the aftermath of the Grenfell fire, or when thousands opened their homes for Ukrainian refugees in the aftermath of Russia's invasion,

or in the outpouring of grief when the body of small Syrian boy, Alan Kurdi, was washed up on Mediterranean shores in 2015.

We defend the rights of workers to move to and work in the country of their choice. We fight for a genuine right to asylum, which does not exist for many people who are fleeing war and dictatorship under our current racist immigration laws. Those laws are created and enforced in the interests of big business not the working class and poor, either in Britain or internationally.

The trade union and workers' movement should fight against every injustice of the racist immigration laws. Control of decisions about whether or not to grant asylum cannot be left in the hands of a capitalist government. We demand that elected committees of working-class people, including from the trade unions and migrants' organisations, have the right to review asylum cases and grant asylum.

What is the solution to immigration crisis?

The 'immigration crisis' is a crisis of capitalism. We live in a world full of war, poverty and inequality in which the working class and poor are made to suffer. There are no obstacles for a million-dollar migrant investor to enter the UK, for example, as a so-called 'high-value migrant'.

The richest 10% of the global population currently take home 52% of the income. The poorest half of the global population earns just 8%.

The immigration crisis cannot be dealt with on its own. It has to be part of an overall fight to deal with the cost-of-living crisis and the conditions facing all working-class people in Britain - building council homes, funding services, fighting for decent pay rises, and more.

By building a united fightback for these demands, and against racist division, the workers' movement can cut across support for the anti-migrant propaganda from right-wing capitalist media and politicians.

As part of that, we need a mass party of the working class and young people. One which can give an expression to the working-class anger that is bubbling below the surface, and which far-right forces are trying to tap into.

By fighting for socialist change, taking wealth and power out of the hands of the capitalist class and putting it into the hands of the working class, a democratic plan can be developed to meet the needs of all in society. The working class could have a democratic say over all aspects of life and society, including over borders and immigration control.

A socialist government acting in the interests of the working class would not be one competing with other capitalist states to maximise profits, taking part in capitalist wars, and backing up repressive regimes for strategic profit interests. Instead, it would reach out for collaborating with the working class internationally.

The only permanent way to end the immigration crisis is to fight for a democratic socialist world free from war, poverty and oppression. Join the Socialist Party and the Committee for a Workers' International to fight for it.

Join the fightback

JOIN THE SOCIALISTS

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

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

Fightback against Labour disability attacks

DAVID MAPLES

BRIGHTON AND CRAWLEY SOCIALIST PARTY

Since 2010, life has become more difficult for disabled people. Then Tory chancellor George Osborne saw us as an easy target and, in announcing £4 billion of benefit cuts, claimed: "A welfare cheat" was "no different to a mugger who robs you in the street."

Now with a Labour government in power, we are in the frontline of the quest for 'savings', again. The House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee, a committee of the rich and powerful, has identified us as poor and weak. That is a big mistake.

'Parasite'

Right-wing journalist Isabel Oakeshott, Talk TV's International Editor, believes we are parasites "who frankly can't be bothered to get out of bed and get themselves out... to... any kind of job and prefer to just sit on the sofa and order their Deliveroo and drive their Motability free vehicle and take everything the state can offer."

When capitalist establishment politicians make us a target, there is an inevitable rise in disability hate crimes.

Disabled people died in disproportionate numbers during the Covid-19 pandemic, six in ten of all deaths were disabled people. Disabled activism has reduced because of the continuing impact of the pandemic, but the cost-of-living crisis and strike wave have demonstrated that trade unions are key for defending living standards.

The RMT victory in keeping rail ticket offices open also showed the role trade unions can play in defending the services we need.

The Socialist Party disability caucus met on 19 January. We are campaigning for the motion below, which provides a programme for a more supportive benefits system and a call for action by unions, to be discussed at trade union conferences this year.

Model motion: Oppose disability benefit cuts

- This conference opposes all the cuts to the welfare system and recognises:
- The failings and unpopularity of Work Capability and Personal Independence Payment assessments
- The failings of the private sector involvement in welfare delivery
- The cuts to the Disability Employment Adviser role
- Backlogs and inadequate resources to deliver Access to Work
- The need to improve support for disabled claimants
- The biggest category for DWP losing tribunals is Disability discrimination

This conference notes the new Labour government's intent to continue the Tory attacks on the social security system and their threats of attacks on disability benefits in 2025. The Tory plans predicted nearly half a million

disabled claimants would face lower benefits or increased conditionality to save £3bn by 2028-29.

This conference recognises that trade unions are the largest democratic organisations of disabled people and instructs the National Executive Committee to:

- Work with democratic disabled people's organisations and other trade unions to promote demands for a social security system that meets the needs of disabled people
- Campaign for assessments to be taken out of the hands of fat cat providers and returned to public sector delivery in the DWP with a complete overhaul of the system to support claimants
- Oppose the Government plans to merge the PIP and working age assessments which are based on cost cutting, reducing benefits to individuals and a harsher benefit regime for disabled people
- Campaign for an end to the target driven regime within the DWP which damages the quality of services to the public
- Put the emphasis on getting a quality decision right at the outset to reduce the need for claimants to go through the hardship and time consuming process of disputing and appealing decisions

Conference further instructs the National Executive Committee to call for the TUC Disabled Workers' Committee to organise a demonstration and lobby of Parliament in support of these demands.



Southampton anti-racist protest NICK CHAFFEY

Southampton sees off racists

DECLAN CLUNE
SOUTHAMPTON TRADES UNION COUNCIL SECRETARY
AND SOCIALIST PARTY

400 anti-racist and anti-fascist activists successfully rallied and marched in the centre of Southampton to counter a mobilisation called by the new extreme-right leader of Ukip, Nick Tenconi.

Tenconi attempted to hold a meeting and rally inside a popular venue in Southampton in December. Local trade unionists and anti-racists responded by announcing a counter-demonstration, and contacted the venue.

'Christmas party'

The venue had no idea about the details, as the booking had been made under the title 'Christmas party'. Once the truth was known, they cancelled the event.

Suffering a blow to his campaign, Tenconi took to social media, calling Southampton a "cesspool".

He announced his new rally and march for 25 January, to "take Southampton back from the far left". Southampton Trades Union Council and others immediately started organising the counter-protest.

Tenconi managed to gather around 60 people. But when he addressed his

crowd, shouting "Who here is from Southampton?" it was followed by silence. The anti-racist counter-protesters were from our city, showing that his call to mobilise Sotonians had been ignored.

'Jobs, homes, and services for all'

Socialist Party members play a leading role in the local trades union council, and helped organise the day, with positive messages of 'jobs, homes and services for all, not racism'. We were hugely successful in keeping everyone from many different organisations together through organised and effective stewarding to maintain a safe environment for everyone.

Following this, we are pushing for a campaign to tackle racism and fascism on a more permanent basis. An effective campaign to tackle racism cannot only involve mobilising in the face of threats like this.

A meeting has been arranged to follow up, where we will push forward this demand, and take it into the trade unions. There is a void that people like Tenconi are trying to occupy.

Socialist Party members are committed to a campaign to prevent this, and to push the Trades Union Congress to organise an anti-racist 'jobs, homes, and services' national demonstration.

Lambeth unions tell Labour council... 'We won't take these cuts lying down'

ANDY TULLIS
LAMBETH UNION CHILDREN'S SERVICES CONVENOR
(PERSONAL CAPACITY)

"Isn't this just like old times," said one of the speakers at Lambeth Town Hall steps, as a crowd of 60 protesters gathered to oppose the council's cuts.

Lambeth Council in south London has announced at least £50 million worth of 'budget savings'. The cuts will affect children's services, like youth and play and children's centres, again, and also housing, including services for the homeless. The council's 'financial strategy' includes vague plans to utilise AI to get them out of their budgetary black hole, go figure.

Hated Tories, hated Labour

The same speaker also said this is not 'old times'. We're not fighting austerity under the hated Tories. We're now under a Labour government, so there should be no excuse for Labour councils, like Lambeth, to attack local services and jobs.

The old excuse from Labour councils, that there nothing they can do about underfunding and cuts passed down from central government, has gone. Labour councils should join with trade unions and community groups in a national campaign for proper funding of local government services.

Councils should use their borrowing powers, and unallocated reserves, to not make cuts, and keep services running, while such a campaign mobilises.

We've won before

One of the speakers at the lobby reminded the crowd of the successful campaign to save children's centres back in 2019, where staff won a ballot for strike action, and the Labour council had to make major concessions.

Socialist Party member Theo Shari-ef spoke from the platform about a political programme against the cuts - including the workers' movement breaking with Labour, standing independent anti-cuts candidates in local elections, and building a new mass party of the working class to fight austerity, poverty, and war. There was an enormous wave of enthusiasm, especially from younger members of the crowd.

This lobby was just a warning shot to the Labour council. Trade unions and the community won't take these cuts lying down.

The full budget-setting meeting is in March. So a broad anti-cuts campaign now needs to be rebuilt in the borough. Council unions need to formulate a joint programme of industrial action to protect services and members' jobs.

Coventry Labour council targets disabled people for cuts

JANE NELLIST

COVENTRY TRADES UNION COUNCIL, PRESIDENT

During the 14 years of austerity for ordinary working people, the number of billionaires in the UK has more than tripled. The rich are getting richer, whilst the poor are getting poorer.

This year it should have been different, with the election of a Labour government to replace the Tories. But instead of promised change, as far as austerity is concerned, we have continuity.

Labour dashes hope

Instead of our public services being given the necessary support to rebuild communities, all we are seeing is cuts and more cuts. People's hope that Labour would bring change has been dashed very quickly. Yet again, cuts to our local libraries are on the table.

I attended the Labour council's budget consultation meeting. The

presentation was met with anger from the large attendance of people. But not one councillor attended to explain and defend their position. How despicable is that?

£1.5 billion stolen

The Tories have significantly reduced local government funding since 2010. For Coventry, this was an average real-term reduction of £100 million per year - £1.5 billion in total. We want that money back!

Last year saw huge cuts to Coventry Rape and Sexual Advice Centre (Crasac), a specialist support service for adults and children who have been impacted by sexual violence or abuse at any time in their lives.

This year, 12 voluntary organisations that provide adult social care are losing £560,000, and a further £1.5 million over the next two years. This includes Grapevine, a charity that supports all people with learning disabilities who do not qualify for council support.

Last year, over 10,000 of the city's poorest families had cuts to their council tax support. This year, over 15,000 families face further such cuts.

Noisy and angry

The 200-strong anti-cuts lobby outside the Labour council was noisy and angry, with lots of young people. One young man in the consultation meeting made it absolutely clear what he wanted: "Stop these cuts!"

We need a new mass party that's prepared to be ruthless with the super-rich and their rigged economic system, rather than attacking the charities in Coventry that try to shield vulnerable people from cuts to their essential services. These crucial services need to be funded properly.

After all these cuts, the council predicts it will have shortfalls of £18 and £21 million for the next two years. All that pain will be on us again, unless we mobilise and fight back!



Hundreds oppose Coventry Labour cuts ADAM HARMSWORTH



PAUL MATTSSON

Tower Hamlets – we will save Solace domestic-violence service

SAMANTHA ERIN AND ROBBIE DAVIDSON
TOWER HAMLETS SOCIALIST PARTY

Dozens and dozens of people packed into the basement of United Voices of the World HQ to hear from Solace domestic violence advisors. They announced that they are facing 33% workforce cuts.

Many people in Tower Hamlets in east London will be left without a vital support service for survivors. This

brutal attack comes in one of the most deprived areas of the UK, which faces the second highest rate of domestic violence.

While the council and Solace CEO point their blame at each other, we know this is another step in the war-path of accepting Tory, now Labour, austerity.

Tower Hamlets council is run by the independent Aspire party. They were elected because local

people were sick of Labour and Tory austerity.

They have introduced popular policies - a form of Winter Fuel Allowance, cut by Labour; EMA grants for poorer college students, cut by the Tories; and extended free school meals to all students up to age 16.

But unless the Aspire council mobilises the local community and trades unions - in a mass campaign to demand the money from the Labour

government to fully fund services - then the council will be cutting vital services, like domestic violence advisors.

The workers are not taking this lying down. Crowds of people showed up from different branches of Solace, other domestic violence charities, and support workers.

All showed their solidarity, putting together a fighting plan to protect our jobs and services. The Socialist Party

is now working with the campaign to pressure the council to provide the finances that Solace needs.

● Read more - 'Tower Hamlets Aspire: voters reject Labour cuts' at socialistparty.org.uk

- Tower Hamlets Socialist Party public meeting
- Fight back against council cuts
- 11 February, 7pm, United Voices of the World, Cambridge Heath Road

Syria in tumult

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham rule and outside influence

NIALL MULHOLLAND

COMMITTEE FOR A WORKERS' INTERNATIONAL

Jubilation among big sections of the population of Syria followed the quick demise of the Basha al-Assad regime in early December 2024. After twelve years of civil war that ebbed and flowed, the regime was finally ousted after a short military operation led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), from its base in Idlib province. Assad's support base had dwindled to almost nothing and his impoverished army fled or refused to fight for a bankrupt regime.

Assad's main outside backers, Iran and Russia, were not prepared to militarily try to save his collapsing regime, nor were they in a position to do so. Vladimir Putin is absorbed by war in Ukraine while the Iranian regime has been engaged in an exchange of missiles with Israel and undermined by the significant blows to its Lebanese ally, Hezbollah, which had also previously intervened in Syria to prop up Assad.

Since the mass uprising against the Assad regime in 2012, which was part of the 'Arab Spring' across the Middle East and north Africa, the Damascus government survived largely by severe state oppression. New US sanctions, which came into effect in 2020 and reportedly doubled the number of Syrians without enough to eat, worsened already appalling living conditions, and further reduced Assad's negligible support.

On assuming power, HTS quickly moved to impose a curfew and to bring in its fighters and police forces from Idlib province to the capital. HTS is mainly made up of former Al-Qaeda figures and veterans of the jihadist forces in the civil war in Syria. The leader of HTS, Ahmed Hussein al-Sharaa, also known as Abu Mohammad al-Julani, grew up in a well-off district of Damascus and turned to religious fundamentalism in his youth. In 2003, he travelled to fight US forces occupying Iraq. Sharaa joined Al-Qaeda and then was imprisoned by the US. He was released in 2011 and returned to Syria to create an Al-Qaeda affiliate, a forerunner to HTS.

In 2016, Sharaa announced he had broken with Al-Qaeda and was focusing on the domestic armed opposition to Assad rather than international jihad. Having conquered an area in Idlib, HTS reputedly provided basic services and collected taxes, while imposing reactionary Islamist

social rules and violently dispatching any rivals. HTS has been condemned for carrying out massacres in Alawite and Druze villages.

Since HTS took Damascus it has been keen to appear to accommodate other religious and sectarian groupings. Alawites living on the coast have been allowed, so far, to retain their arms. But will this toleration and relative peace, at least in parts of Syria, last?

The vanquishing of Assad's regime by HTS led to the killings of Alawite judges and also sectarian torching of Christmas trees that provoked demonstrations of thousands of Christians. Many Syrians' fear that HTS could step by step revert to hardline Sunni rule, just as the Taliban moved to reintroduce theocratic rule in Afghanistan following the departure of Western troops. "Many Syrians are keeping their bags packed in anticipation of a hurried departure. The first boatload of secular Alawites is already washed up in Cyprus, according to an observer of theirs", commented the Economist magazine.

As Al-Qaeda's representative in Syria ten years ago, Sharaa expelled thousands of Christians from Idlib, seized their property and shut the city's bars and clubs. No doubt keenly aware of the need to court the Western powers in order to economically stabilise Syria and to see off any outside threats to his fledgling regime, Sharaa now says that his rule in Idlib is "not suitable for all Syria". This did not stop his new education ministry ordering the curriculum to be brought in line with conservative Sunni Islamist teachings – although it was subsequently forced to back down after protests erupted. Sharaa has yet to appoint any known Shias to senior ranks in his government. The top military and security posts are held by followers of a puritanical brand of Sunni Islam.

Yet Sharaa is under pressure from the West to create a more inclusive regime. Given their courting of the oil-rich Gulf states, it is clear that the Western powers have no problem dealing with puritanical Sunni regimes, as such, as long as they do not pose a threat to essential Western interests. The 'optics' for Western powers are important however, given that they have spent decades decrying 'Islamist terror'.

Economy

The HTS regime faces enormous economic problems. Foreign reserves are estimated to have fallen to just \$200 million; the central bank remains under Western sanctions, as does the largest commercial bank. Since the start of the civil war in 2011, the Syrian pound has lost 99% of its value.



PHOTO: PUBLIC DOMAIN

The HTS regime aims to overcome sanctions and to boost remittances from its large diaspora to survive. State officials have been instructed to try to secure central bank deposits from friendly Arab states, including Saudi Arabia. Post-war reconstruction, after 14 years of conflict, will act as an impetus to parts of the economy. In the city of Aleppo alone, it is estimated by the World Bank that 137,000 of its 660,000 homes have been damaged, 35% of hospitals, and 25% of its bridges destroyed. The country's largest power plant, also in Aleppo, is not functioning.

The labour involved in repairing all this damage could potentially provide jobs for hundreds of thousands of Syrians. Raw materials and expertise is expected to come from Turkey, which has relatively good relations with the new HTS regime. However, Turkey alone does not have the funds to pay for reconstruction, which is estimated could cost anything between \$250 billion and \$400 billion. This probably means that the HTS

regime will seek financial assistance from the Gulf states. But this will be attached to Gulf states sending money to their favoured reconstruction projects and client sectarian factions.

The pro-capitalist policies of HTS are clearly spelt out by the new Syrian foreign minister, Asaad al-Shaibani who, speaking ahead of attending the World Economic Forum in Davos, said the HTS regime plans to privatise state-owned ports and factories, and oils, cotton and furniture factories. He reassured regional states, including the United Arab Emirates and Egypt, which are fearful of the domestic growth of the Muslim Brotherhood on the back of HTS successes, that Syria was not intending to "export the revolution and start getting involved in other states' affairs".

Sanctions

Western powers are under pressure to remove sanctions now that they have a more amenable regime to deal with in Damascus. In 2019, the US

Congress passed the Caesar Act that targeted energy and construction. Syria's main mobile phone operator and its biggest airline have faced US sanctions since 2011. Reflecting the interests of big business, the Economist magazine declares, "Those measures made sense at the time. Today they may be a drag on needed investment".

Now that the Western powers have discovered a potentially 'friendly' Islamist force, the White House and European officials said they are prepared to reconsider many of the sanctions, including a \$10 million bounty on Sharaa. However, the Western powers are nonetheless treading carefully, concerned that HTS rule could still unleash sectarian and ethnic strife throughout the country. President Biden signed a military spending bill, two weeks after Assad fled the country, that extended the Caesar Act until 2029.

Sharaa indicates that he intends to create a new national army, which will involve merging many of the

current militias. This will be a daunting task given the deep animosities involved and fears of the domination of HTS forces. Moreover, ongoing Turkish army attacks against Kurdish forces in Syria indicate the fragility of the situation.

HTS has had a complex relationship with the local regional power, Turkey. Its hardliners once referred to Turkey's "infidel army". However, since 2017, Turkey has provided protection for the HTS statelet in Idlib, regarding it as a useful, if somewhat unpredictable, ally.

President Erdogan in Turkey has taken advantage of the new situation in Syria to launch military attacks against Kurdish 'Syrian Defence Forces' (SDF) that control large parts of territory in the north-east. The Turkish government has long regarded the Kurdish-controlled areas in Syria as a threat to Turkey's territorial status, given its large restive Kurdish population. The Syrian National Army (SNA), which battles Kurdish forces, is regarded as a Turkish proxy.

Syria's new foreign minister recently met President Erdogan and reassured him of Syria's "territorial integrity".

Since taking power, HTS has attempted to negotiate the SDF into disbanding and to integrate its fighters into the state, calling for "national unity". The HTS regime claims that a new constitution will guarantee Kurdish rights and ensure Kurdish representation in government. The SDF leaders, no doubt mindful of many previous unkept promises from regional despots, notwithstanding their reliance on US imperialism, have so far not bended to HTS.

Turkey is only one of several regional countries taking an active interest in Syria and threatening to destabilise it to the point of tearing it apart. Following the fall of Assad, Israeli armed forces crossed into the demilitarised zone in the Golan Heights, destroying the greater part of Syria's military infrastructure, and expanding its occupation of Syrian territory.

The Israeli government viewed the Assad regime as a relatively predictable enemy, but now fears the unpredictable Islamist HTS in power in Damascus. An 'Iranian-Shiite axis' has been replaced by a 'Sunni-Turkish axis', in the eyes of Israel's Netanyahu government. In turn, Turkey is incensed at Israel grabbing territory in Syria. In recent months, Erdogan has warned of a possible war between Israel and Turkey.

The Israeli government has also raised the prospect of a future war between the two countries.

Turkish insistence on the ending of 'autonomous' Kurdish-run areas and the SDF subordinating itself to the new HTS regime on pain of a Turkish military intervention, is creating friction with other NATO allies, like France and the US. Both the US and France used the Kurdish forces of the SDF as allies against Assad and have forces stationed in the region (mainly an estimated 2,000 American troops).

While welcoming the overthrow of the Assad regime and the significant setbacks to Iranian and Russian influence, the Biden administration was also very concerned about the fallout. The US military carried out dozens of air strikes on Islamic State (IS) targets in Syria in the chaotic days after the HTS swept into Damascus. In a nod to US concerns, the HTS regime claims it is ready to take over the running of SDF-controlled prisons that hold thousands of IS fighters.

Perhaps the greatest obstacle to an outright return to full civil war is the mood of the mass of people in Syria, who have suffered decades of dictatorship, poverty and bloody conflict. War-weary working people from all religious and ethnic backgrounds want peace and decent living standards. They will not achieve any of these goals under HTS or any 'unity' government of reactionary, pro-market economy forces. Outside powers' interference only results in renewed rounds of bloodshed and division.

Building class organisations on an independent basis, such as trade unions and parties of the working class, and campaigning for democratic rights, is the starting point of ensuring real, lasting peace and prosperity for all. This needs to be linked up with socialist policies to contest the sectarian forces and bosses and to transform society.

History

Under Baathist party rule in the 1960s the majority of the Syrian economy was nationalised, which for a period allowed the regime to take measures that saw a rise in living standards. Nonetheless, this was nothing at all like genuine democratic socialism, or a move towards it, as the brutal, undemocratic character of the Assad family-dominated regime testified.

In November 1970, Hafez al-Assad seized power from rival factions of the ruling Baath Party in the so-called "corrective revolution". Assad's coup d'état was a big blow to the Baathist 'leftist faction'. During the 1970s, the economy tentatively made steps towards the market economy. After the collapse of the Stalinist planned economy of the Soviet Union, the Syrian regime speeded up the opening up of the economy to global capitalism. This led to privatisations, welfare and subsidy cuts, mass joblessness and big inequalities, fuelling mass unrest and, along with the suppression of democratic rights, helped spark the March 2011 revolt.

Alongside the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, and huge protests elsewhere in the region, the mass revolt against Assad opened up the possibility of a real

alternative to imperialism and Arab despots. These events showed that it is the mass united movement of working people and youth that can remove tyrants, resist imperialism, and fight for real social and political change.

Unfortunately in the absence of a farsighted, socialist leadership of the masses in the Middle East and north Africa, the Arab Spring stalled and in many cases resulted in counter-revolution and the bloody suppression of mass movements.

The mass revolt against Assad's rule in Syria degenerated into a civil war from 2011 onwards. This involved Assad playing a divide-and-rule policy, with Russian and Iranian military backing, and outside powers, like the US, backing various militias against Assad.

The years of civil war compounded the economic misery. The Economist magazine lists the grim statistics: Gross domestic product fell from \$60 billion in 2010 to less than \$9 billion today. It is estimated by the World Bank that 69% of Syrians live on less than \$3.65 a day. Oil was once the biggest economic lifeline for Syria and until 2011 Syria produced around 400,000 barrels per day, exceeding domestic demand. However since the civil war began, production has dropped below 100,000 barrels per day. Moreover, the largest oil fields are controlled by Kurdish militias. Agriculture has also plummeted. Syria was once a net exporter of wheat but harvests have now shrunk by nearly half since 2010.

The tourist sector, which brought in around \$40 billion annually, has vanished.



Hafez al-Assad with Romanian leader Nicolae Ceausescu during Syria's move towards the Soviet Union and Eastern bloc in the 1970s PHOTO: PUBLIC DOMAIN

£1/£2 solidarity price

socialistparty.org.uk



the Socialist

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formerly **Militant**

Students get organised

BUILD THE SOCIALIST OPPOSITION



ADAM GILLMAN
SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Today young people and students face massive attacks, from the raising of tuition fees affecting both returning and new university students in next academic year, but even simple things like the bus fare cap increase in England.

There have been massive cuts to our public services over the past 14 years and the new Labour government has made it clear that it won't solve the crisis, and will only be giving a fraction of what local authorities need to fund public services.

There are also the issues of climate change and devastating wars making it seem like we face a bleak future. Over a hundred thousand people have been killed in Gaza, not to mention the wars in Ukraine, Syria, Yemen, Sudan, Myanmar and elsewhere.

We now have a Labour government that has made it clear it is going to make the working

class continue to pay for the crisis it faces. Labour have attacked working-class and young people since day one, from the refusal to scrap the two-child benefit cap, to the cuts to public services and to the university funding crisis, letting universities cut and close courses while simultaneously raising tuition fees.

This is all the consequence of capitalist crisis. Capitalism is a profit system driven primarily by a desire for short-term profits. This is why we are seeing our services getting cut, our tuition fees being raised, and division sowed.

This is why Socialist Students calls for students and trade unions to form a new mass workers' party that's democratic and fights for young and working-class people. A party that fights not only to reverse the fee hike but to abolish tuition fees, a party that fights for grants not loans, and a party where students, workers and young people could discuss the way forward.

But why stop there? We need to take water, energy, mail and rail

into full public ownership under democratic workers' control, in addition to the banks and the big monopolies.

If you agree then you should come to the Socialist Students conference where this and more is all being discussed by university and college students and young workers from across the country.

If you agree we need to fight-back against attacks on young people and fight for socialist ideas on and off campus, then you should join Socialist Students and get organised in the fightback.

Join the student fightback: join...



- Visit socialiststudents.org.uk/join
- or call **020 8988 8761**
- or text your name and school, college or uni to **07749 379 010**

SOCIALIST STUDENTS CONFERENCE 2025



A day of discussion on how students and young people get organised against Labour and the capitalist system it defends

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BUILD THE SOCIALIST OPPOSITION TO LABOUR**

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WHAT WE STAND FOR: THE SOCIALIST PARTY'S MAIN DEMANDS >>> see column on page 12



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