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# the Socialist

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formerly **Militant**

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# TUC must coordinate strikes for pay and workers' rights

**Socialist Party**

## WHAT WE THINK

Tens of thousands will take to the streets of London on Saturday 18 June as part of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) demonstration on the cost-of-living crisis; the first mass trade union demonstration for many years. Workers from across the country will be marching because they can't afford to live.

The working class in Britain is facing the biggest fall in our living standards since 1956. But while many struggle to work out how they can afford to live, Chancellor Sunak has joined the 'rich list' of Britain's richest few.

The TUC demo is an important start, but we need to it be the launch of a mass struggle to defend workers' living standards. That means fighting for RPI inflation-protected pay rises, a £15-an-hour minimum wage, nationalisation of the energy companies, and to get the Tories out!

P&O's brutal illegal sacking of their workforce is a sign of how far the bosses will go to protect their profits. But the mighty seven-month all-out strike by Coventry bin workers, the various local strikes that have won victories on pay, and now the planned national rail strike, all show growing numbers of workers are fighting back: demonstrating that when you fight and strike you can win.

The divided Tory government, led by 'one rule for you, another rule for me' Boris, is on the ropes: 148 of his own MPs tried to boot him out. Clearly, replacing one Tory toff with another wouldn't make much difference but the crisis in the Tory government shows just how weak they are. That should give the workers' movement confidence that we can build a movement to kick them all out.

Right now the frontline is the national rail strike. Alongside a TFL tube strike on 21 June, it will show, on a scale not seen since the 24-hour public sector general strike on 30 November 2011, the power of workers' collective action, and offer a glimpse of how workers keep society running.

To the horror of the ruling class, if the RMT can bring sections of society and the economy to a halt, it will show workers across the country, who are desperate to stop falling living standards, something of the huge potential power of the organised workers' movement.

The whole workers' movement needs to stand in solidarity with the RMT, and be prepared to fight any attempts to use existing anti-trade union laws or to bring in new 'minimum service legislation' against the strikes.

The rail action could also be a starting point to coordinate strike action. Workers already engaged in strikes and those balloting could aim to strike at the same time as rail workers. It could play an important



role in raising further the need for workers across every industry and sector to organise and mobilise to strike together.

While local action and action by individual trade unions cannot be delayed, the trade union leaders should also begin to discuss how existing action could be built on to call a 24-hour general strike as a powerful show of strength, to raise workers' confidence, and to terrify the Tories and the bosses.

If the TUC fails to step up, then those trade union leaders who are willing to fight should come together to mobilise for mass coordinated strike action. The CWU is balloting in Royal Mail and BT, and Unite is engaged in widespread strikes. With the RMT, they and others could form the basis of a 'coalition of the willing'.

Many trade union leaders will refuse to even talk about building towards a 24-hour general strike because of the fear of what it would mean in Britain. The obstacle of the anti-trade union laws is also used to discount the possibility of generalised strike action.

These laws were already some of the most repressive in the advanced capitalist world - introduced by Tory governments and left intact by New

Labour - even prior to the vicious legislation introduced by the Tories in 2016. Unfortunately, the trade union leaders did not organise serious opposition to the 2016 laws.

Lessons must be learnt. We need a mass campaign by the whole trade union movement against the further anti-union laws now being threatened in a desperate attempt to try and further hamper workers' ability to take effective action.

Nor can we allow the existing laws to prevent effective action. Ballots and strike action can be coordinated even within the existing repressive laws, and disaggregated ballots can be used to maximise the number of workplaces that pass the legal thresholds. But, as the court ruling against the CWU showed in 2019, the courts are a tool that the bosses and the government can use to try and block action even when every legal hoop has been jumped through.

By contrast, the government is happy to stand aside when employers break the law: the Tories took no legal action against P&O!

We do not lightly support breaking the anti-union laws and thereby risking trade union funds, but the struggle - to earn enough of a wage in order to live - is too important to

allow individual trade unions to fight alone.

In the next period coordinated action will play a vital role, even if it means confronting the anti-union laws. It's why the Socialist Party fights to transform our trade unions into fighting democratic organisations that can fight tooth and nail in the interests of the working class.

In reality, even if just a few of those big unions took simultaneous strike action, refusing to accept the constraints of the anti-union laws, the government would be powerless to stop them and, in the process, the power of the anti-trade union laws to prevent struggle would be smashed.

While kicking out the Tories would be rightly cheered by millions, replacing them with a Blair 2.0 New Labour government would offer no solution. Starmer's Labour is no alternative to the Tories; he hasn't even come out in support of the RMT. And locally, Labour councillors continue to implement the cuts demanded by the Tories, willingly using 'fire and rehire'.

Coventry Labour council has spent more than £3 million on an attempted strike-breaking operation against the Unite refuse workers' strike, many times more than it would have cost to meet the workers' demands.

Even if Starmer goes as a result of 'beergate', there is no chance it would reverse the Blairite consolidation of Labour as an out-and-out bosses' party. We need a new mass workers' party that stands up for us. Mélenchon's left-wing coalition in France - currently neck and neck with Macron's party in the elections - is an indication of the potential support for a new party.

In the last year the bakers' union BFAWU voted to disaffiliate from the Labour Party, while in other unions - like the CWU, TSSA, Aslef and FBU - debates have been reignited on Labour affiliation. Unite general secretary Sharon Graham has made important statements challenging Labour councils' abusive treatment of their workforces organised in Unite, and taken concrete steps to challenge that, including withdrawing all support and funding in the Midlands.

Those trade union leaders prepared to make a stand against Starmer's Labour should urgently convene a conference of all trade unionists who want to discuss the building of a new party. The Socialist Party believes this should provide the foundation for trade unionists to stand as widely as possible in future elections on a socialist, anti-austerity programme.

In the meantime, the Socialist Party campaigns for steps in that direction as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), alongside the RMT and other trade unionists. With working-class people facing impending recession and plummeting living standards, there is no time to wait. There is the potential for thousands of trade unionist and anti-austerity fighters standing in the local elections next May and in the next general election, reflecting the rising anger of the working class and taking its increasing trade union militancy to the struggle at the ballot box.

# Marching because we can't afford to live

## Unite the action!

In addition to the rail and tube strike, bus drivers, bin workers, manufacturing and more are also taking strike action (see pages 10 and 11).

Many thousands more are preparing to strike or demanding of their union leaders that action is taken. Trade unionists from different sectors told the Socialist why they are marching on 18 June and what they expect from their leaders.

## CWU: preparing for battle

**SHAUN BARBER**  
WELFARE OFFICER CWU, MOUNT PLEASANT DEPOT (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

The main issues that are affecting Communication Workers Union (CWU) members at Mount Pleasant depot in London are the cost-of-living crisis and the conditions of our work shift patterns.

Our union has launched a national campaign for a decent pay rise, with strike action if necessary. As part of this campaign, our branch has started sending out leaflets, talking to our members and putting out news on social media. We organised a very successful gate meeting with over 100 of our members attending.

The TUC demo is a great meeting place for unions and socialist groups and will be important in getting our voice and feelings across to the Tory government.

But we also need a political voice for the working class. The campaign for a new workers' party is a great grassroots way of getting working-class people involved in politics and fighting back.

## Local government workers struggling before the crisis

**MARK EVANS**  
BRANCH SECRETARY, CARMARTHENSHIRE COUNTY UNION AND UNISON LOCAL GOVERNMENT SERVICE GROUP EXECUTIVE (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

Many local government workers in Wales and across the UK were struggling to keep a roof over their head and pay the bills before the cost-of-living crisis hit. It was not unusual for council workers to have two, three, four or even five jobs as wages declined in value by nearly 25% since 2010.

After a decade of relentless austerity cuts to council services, it is essential now that the new leadership of Unison leads a fight against cuts and for decent pay. (see report of Unison local government conference page 11)

We need the TUC to understand which side its bread is buttered. The demo on 18 June needs to be the first step in organising and coordinating mass industrial action for a minimum wage of £15 an hour and for pay rises above inflation. Anything less and workers and their families will continue to suffer.

We don't need to hear how bad it is we need to hear what the TUC is going to do about it!

The demo should be about cranking up the pressure on this weak, crisis-ridden anti-working class Tory government to capitulate to our demands. But it shouldn't stop there. We need to be rid of this Tory government.

This of course raises the issue of who replaces them. We need a new mass workers' party with a socialist programme that acts in our interests.

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**“**

**Society is in meltdown but workers are fighting back. Look at what the RMT has achieved**

## NHS under enormous strain

**HOLLY JOHNSTON**  
NHS NURSE

Privatisation is speeding up. Staff are leaving at a high rate. The cost-of-living crisis impacts massively on the NHS. The health of the nation is suffering.

NHS staff, like other key workers, kept this country going during the pandemic and should not have to choose between heating our homes or feeding our families.

We need to organise in the NHS to fight for fair pay and conditions, bring back outsourced workers, kick out the private profiteers and kick the Tories out. That means we need clear demands from our union leaders and a plan to mobilise for action.

NHS staff are waiting for the Pay Review Body to make their announcement. It's a real chance for the NHS unions to fight for their members. We must vote to reject the inevitable inadequate pay offer, and then to vote to strike.

NHS staff, campaigns and unions will be marching on the 18 June to defend the NHS. However, we need to see action and strategy after from the TUC and the health unions, planning for coordinated strikes to win pay rises for all.

## Civil service: Tories thank us then sack us

**MARION LLOYD**  
PCS BEIS GROUP PRESIDENT (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

I am marching as I am sick and tired of being taken for granted by a government who treats public sector workers, and civil servants in particular, as second-class citizens.

The latest missive from Prime Minister Boris Johnson states that he believes: "The public service you provide is a great and noble calling". He thanks us for the invaluable work we do - then tells us he's going to cut 91,000 civil servants! What a kick in the teeth!

Society is in meltdown but workers are fighting back. Look at what the RMT has achieved.

The trade union leaders have a responsibility. They must now draw up a plan of action, coordinated throughout the trade union movement, linking together local communities and young people. A plan of action that builds the biggest campaign of industrial action to fight back. The 18 June should be the launchpad for this. We did it in November 2011, we can do it again, but bigger and better.

We must ensure the trade union leaders do their job and stand with us - or move aside and let us get on with it!

## Universities: balloting for coordinated strikes

**LLUIS BERTOLINI**  
POSTGRADUATE UCU MEMBER

I joined the University and College Union (UCU) and its recent strikes because the situation in Higher Education could not be dire. Staff are seeing their pensions slashed and work conditions downgraded. Lecturers are increasingly overworked and casualised, while the fat cat vice-chancellors drain universities' coffers on massive infrastructure projects instead of the bread and butter of universities: teaching and research.

Managements have gaslighted their workers, claiming the pension fund was in more dire straits than it really was. Even worse, some have taken anti-trade union action: threatening to deduct up to full pay for engaging in action short of strike.

The future of the sector is at stake. We must continue to fight resolutely, starting by building the turnout in the next ballot. For the first time in four years, university branches will be balloted on an aggregated basis.

If the 50% turnout is achieved it will be the first time in nearly a decade that every UCU branch has been out together. This would be a major development not only for our union but for the possibility of coordinated national action in the workers' movement as a whole.

## Schools: demo must be a building block for NEU action

**SHEILA CAFFREY**  
NEU NEC MEMBER (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

Media headlines have you think that teachers live in the lap of luxury, being offered an 8% pay rise. Nothing could be further than the truth!

The government's own figures show the number entering teaching is lower than in every year but one since 2012. Almost a third leave within five years. What a damning indictment!

Parents don't want a revolving door of staff either. They want their local schools to have dedicated, qualified staff who stay, and who know the communities where they work.

With real-terms pay cuts of 2% for experienced teachers, pay certainly isn't keeping up with 11% inflation, or doing anything to counter the decade of real-terms cuts we've already had.

That's why education workers are marching on 18 June. And this demo must be a building block to action.

The National Education Union is balloting teachers on pay in schools, further education and sixth forms in the autumn. The leaders aren't confident that teachers will vote 'yes', or that support staff are also desperate to fight on pay. We need to show them wrong!



# HISTORIC RMT STRIKES SHOW THE WAY

## Long strike on the underground continues

### For a decent work-life balance

#### RMT NIGHT TUBE WORKER

For the last six months, the RMT transport union has carried out the longest period of industrial action on London Underground. That action is because of the imposition of night tube duties on the full-time driver roster.

The employer has cut 300 night tube part-time jobs, which is the equivalent of 180 full-time positions. There is a previous agreement which meant that full-time drivers were not required to work night tube shifts. However, during negotiations arising from the Covid-19 pandemic, part-time night tube positions have been abolished and the workload has been absorbed by the full-time roster.

The RMT attempted to negotiate a fair deal for drivers, however the night tube leaders of the Aslef union agreed to force compulsory nights on the drivers' grade. They did not consult their members as they knew this would be unpopular. These officials will most likely never have to work these shifts, because of the association's structure.

These shift patterns are anti-social and are a degradation of drivers' work-life balance. They are unpopular with the Aslef drivers; however, they have not had a say. The RMT drivers

have had a say and have consistently voted for strike action!

Aslef's hierarchy have narrated this dispute as them against the RMT. However the real narrative is not what union you're in but what side you're on: the side of the worker or the side of the employer, who is enforcing inferior working practices on the cheap.

The RMT position is simple insofar that we simply want the night tube shifts to be voluntary. In some cases, representatives of Aslef have volunteered to cross picket lines and have actively sought to cover shifts. The workload at the moment for the night tube is negligible as the successful RMT dispute has meant that no driver need work a night tube shift.

The choice is clear for any driver: stand with your class, your own long-term interest and the next generation of employees so that we do not hand their inferior working conditions. Aslef members have not had a say but benefit from the duties being voluntary. In fact, most of them observe the picket lines.

On the 7 June the RMT received ballot results for the night tube rebalot. The result was 86% 'yes' vote to continue the strikes.

In solidarity with the continuing working-class struggle!



## Unity is strength

#### LONDON UNDERGROUND TUBE DRIVER

In March 2020, the UK went into a Covid lockdown. London Underground has a 'self-financing' model, the only major metro system not to be subsidised by government. But under the Covid crisis, the Tories had to step in to help support the system.

Fully aided by the London Labour mayor, the Tory government drip fed Transport for London with money, under the condition that TfL tear up our terms and conditions, reduce our workforce, and end our final salary pension scheme.

The government spending review laid this out in stark terms:

- a reduction of 600 station jobs
- more flexibility and more unsociable hours
- £730 million of savings year on year
- a reduction of drivers and services on trains
- the removal of our final salary pension scheme, replaced with a model that could see on average a loss of £3,000 per year.

RMT members have said enough is enough. We have kept the transport system running during the pandemic, with the sad loss of many of our members in doing this.

In March we took action altogether on the tube, which showed our collective power in shutting London down. This was followed by our station members taking action on 6 June, which was a huge success.

We fundamentally believe that the Underground system is a service and should be publicly owned and funded, and not used as a profit-making tool for the capitalist system. It should be a cheap and fully integrated transport system, democratically run, for the benefit of Londoners and visitors to London, whether for work, leisure or tourism.

We also recognise that this could be a long battle. On 21 June we will take action again, and will be proud to stand with our national rail colleagues.

We need to stand together in unity to maximise pressure on the Tory government and its austerity ideology, because unity is indeed strength.

#### SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN THE RMT

During the Covid crisis the combined wealth of the billionaires in the UK rose 21.7% to £597 billion. Yet the Tory government and capitalist media complain about workers on the railways fighting for an increase in pay and to save jobs!

Our members will not stand by and watch our conditions, won by years of struggle, be smashed by a government that represents the interests of the capitalists. The cabinet is made up of millionaires including Rishi Sunak and his billionaire tax-dodging family.

The workers in the rail industry worked during the Covid crisis, like all workers are struggling with the cost of living, and are now threatened with job losses and attacks on pensions and wages.

Enough is enough. 50,000 rail workers are now striking to fight back. Other unions are balloting for action.

Polls suggest the vast majority of workers support us. This is a historic strike that must be supported by the whole trade union movement, not least because of the threats of new anti-trade union measures, such as setting minimum service requirements and legalising the use of agency workers to do the work of strikers.

But this strike could also be the start of mass working-class struggle the length and breadth of Britain, as workers facing similar attacks gain in confidence and push their trade union leaders to coordinate action.



## United in one struggle

#### TRAIN GUARD

We only finished our last dispute with West Midlands Trains in 2019 and now we are having to fight for the future of our jobs again.

I am 100% in support of the strike action and if we all stick together we can force management back.

Most of us come from industries where the terms and conditions are nowhere near as good as what we get on the railway. We want to keep it that way, but you have to be prepared to fight for them once in a while. That can encourage other workers to fight for better too.

Shift work can be a killer but we are on a four-day week and get an above-average amount of annual leave. They can't force you to change your hours just to suit them. This is the benefit of having a strong trade union, but you have to be prepared to take strike action when necessary, otherwise management will try to take advantage.

We know that guards on trains make the railway better and safer for passengers but management see us as an unnecessary expense and want to get rid of us eventually.

This dispute is fantastic because finally all grades can be united in one struggle. I truly believe that if we stick to our guns we can win a decent pay rise and keep our terms and conditions.

## Enough is enough

#### NETWORK RAIL MAINTENANCE WORKER

Infrastructure maintenance workers are now more than ready for the largest nationwide industrial action in generations, and prepared to fight against the company's proposed attacks on their jobs, pay and conditions.

These attacks on our infrastructure workers include the threat of compulsory redundancies with thousands of job cuts in maintenance, including the removal of a whole grade of workers. They include tearing up long-standing terms and conditions, such as removal or reduction of protections on unsociable hours and weekend working.

The bosses want to change the current grading structures and duties, including the requirement to cover other areas and departments. This will ultimately result in the closure of depots and the loss of more jobs. The company has also stated that in order to fund a pay rise, even more 'efficiency' savings would need to be found.

The company is also pushing through with a 50% reduction in signalling maintenance inspections and a reduction to the frequency of many

other safety-critical maintenance tasks. It seems that the company and this Tory government have forgotten the lessons of the past. Do we really need to return to the dark old days where underfunded and inadequate maintenance regimes resulted in serious derailments such as at Potters Bar?

But these proposals, under the guise of 'Modernising Maintenance', are nothing new. The massive mandate for industrial action is a result of years of threats. The company is now using the drop in passenger numbers during the pandemic and government underfunding as an excuse to try to push through their long-term plans, and more.

But our infrastructure maintenance members have clearly stated that enough is enough. We are more than ready to come out fighting and demand a decent pay rise reflecting the cost-of-living increases, and a halt to the constant attempts to attack our terms and conditions at every opportunity.

## Building on the spirit of 1994

#### SIGNALLER

It's been 28 years since our grade took industrial action, and we were hoping that those bad old days were firmly in the past.

But with this particular Tory government, nothing at all comes as a surprise. Boris has had a bee in his bonnet with the RMT since long before he was prime minister, and I don't think he ever got over the bloody nose he was given by Bob Crow when he was London mayor. Having been praised as

key workers during the pandemic, we have been ignored in the aftermath. Our traditional inflation-linked pay rises have not happened in three years, with no prospect of any deal, and the cost of everything spiralling.

Our industry is changing, with many signal boxes now gone and replaced by computerised Operating Centres.

The younger members who weren't around in 1994 do not know how hard we fought that summer to get the terms and conditions and decent wages we have all enjoyed since.

But if this government gets its way, we could soon return to the dark old days pre-1994, with attacks on pensions as well as everything else.

That is why I am proud of the turnout in the ballot, which sends a message to Boris and his cronies that this generation of members are prepared to carry the baton and build on the spirit of 1994.

We will strike alongside 50,000 other rail and tube workers to fight to defend our hard-won terms and conditions.



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#### Speakers include:

Sharon Graham, Unite general secretary  
Steve Gillan, POA general secretary  
Sarah Woolley, BFAWU general secretary  
Terry Pullinger,  
CWU deputy general secretary, postal  
Unite Coventry bin striker

*Having been part of a determined struggle of HGV bin workers in Coventry, I am attending the NSSN conference because I think it is essential to bring workers together. It will be good to have an exchange of ideas. We need to learn from each other. We need to fight back together. We need to learn how to win victories!*

Pete Randle, Unite Coventry bin striker



# Peckham mass resistance stops immigration raid



Residents stopped the police van from leaving the estate, despite police violence DEJJI OLAYINKA

DEJJI OLAYINKA  
SOUTH WEST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

The people of Peckham, South London, scored a victory of defiance against immigration raids on Saturday 11 June, forcing the release of their neighbour held by immigration officials.

After receiving a message on my trade union branch group chat, me and fellow Socialist Party member Andy Tullis (with his fractured foot!) made the journey from our campaign stall in Stockwell over to Peckham.

We joined a diverse group of people from the local area who were determined to stay in the road until the man was freed from the immigration van.

The protest began peacefully with regular chants of "let him go" and the occasional boos to drown out the police megaphone warning us that we were obstructing the arrest. As if we didn't know!

But this peace was broken when a new group of police marched from the main road through to the van and launched an attack. Kicking, punching and pushing the peaceful protesters as many of us fell to the ground.

In response, the crowd bunched closer to the front, holding each other to stop the police breaking through. Chants of "there's no need for violence" emerged from the back and this was joined with a wave of people sitting down.

This wave moved to the frontlines, we didn't want the police to make

it look like we were instigating the violence. We understood that we still held the power with our peaceful protest and the police couldn't drag all of us away to arrest us.

Ten people stopping an immigration van from leaving a neighbourhood eventually grew to a crowd of 200. The police were forced to accept defeat.



**Beyond demonstrating in reaction to immigration raids, we need to build a mass campaign against the racist immigration laws**

The Lewisham section of the national Anti-raids network played a key role in organising the resistance through WhatsApp and Twitter. Details of how events unfolded can be read on their Twitter feed. The final victorious tweet announced: "After four hours of resistance and a crowd of 200 people they're letting our neighbour go! People power wins. We're shouting: 'Don't come back to Peckham!'"

The 2020 Black Lives Matter movement was a clear sign of the broad anti-racist consciousness among the working class. It birthed a new generation of activists and groups ready to fight against the racism capitalism

creates. It wasn't just a "moment", as Labour leader Keir Starmer dismissed it.

And the crowd in Peckham wasn't just 'your typical activists'. One man described how he was asking strangers from the high street to join the resistance and they did!

This isn't the first time a community has come together and forced the police to release an immigrant; similar events have been seen in Glasgow and Edinburgh. And this certainly won't be the last!

But beyond demonstrating in reaction to immigration raids, we need to build a mass campaign against the racist immigration laws.

The Tories are ramping up their racism to distract from the cost-of-living crisis, 'partygate' and cronyism. All capitalist parties promote division in the absence of real solutions to people's deprivation, including Labour.

We need a new mass workers' party to unite the working class with a fighting socialist programme against the racism, poverty and imperialism that capitalism breeds.

**We say**

- End the hostile environment.
- End all racist immigration laws. No deportations
- Justice for the Windrush generation and all other victims of the state
- End stop and search
- Rebuild the police to be under democratic control of communities and trade unions



PHOTO: LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

# Protests oppose Rwanda deportation flight

ISAI MARJERLA  
WALTHAM FOREST SOCIALIST PARTY AND REFUGEE RIGHTS CAMPAIGN

More than 1,500 angry protesters gathered outside the Home Office on 13 June. Despite many legal challenges, state institutions, including the Home Office and the courts, are backing Tory policies of sending asylum seekers to Rwanda.

The expulsion of desperate people is the new tactic of the government to attempt to deter migrants fleeing war and oppression. Faced with growing anger at the rising cost of living, the Tories will hope to use migrants as a scapegoat. But the sight of Tory MPs cheering as they hear of asylum seekers' legal appeals getting rejected will turn many workers' stomachs.

The scheme has faced widespread opposition from more than 160 charities and campaign groups (as well as church leaders and a prince!), a small number of which launched a legal challenge. On Monday 12 June, the Court of Appeal supported the High Court's decision that it was in

the "public interest" for the government to carry out its policies. But individual legal appeals have seen the number of people set to board the initial flight dwindle to single figures at the time of writing.

This is the latest of the government's hostile racist immigration policies. It is on top of the Nationality and Borders Act, passed by parliament on 28 April. Because of these measures, the method of travel will be the key determinant of how refugees and asylum seekers are treated.

We defend the right of refugees and asylum seekers to asylum and the right to work. We oppose deportation and the running of detention centres by private companies which further exploit detainees.

Socialist Party members, along with the Refugee Rights Campaign, have attended protests against this hostile policy. We gave out leaflets with demands to stop deportations, to take the wealth off the 1% and invest in jobs, homes and services for all.

# Grenfell five years on: The fight goes on for safe homes

PAUL KERSHAW  
ENFIELD AND LEA VALLEY SOCIALIST PARTY AND CHAIR, UNITE HOUSING WORKERS' BRANCH

**"T**he true face of the Tories, as representatives of the profit-seeking capitalist class, has been laid bare. Theresa May's own empathy-free response is just one element. People are sharing widely the video of Boris Johnson sat in City Hall scoffing at complaints about fire service cuts". These words were published in the Socialist in the aftermath of the Grenfell fire. The absence of progress in the five years since underlines the ruling capitalist class's contempt.

640,000 people still live in 345,000 unsafe flats, according to the Sunday Times. Just 6% of flats with

flammable cladding have been fixed. Cladding manufacturers Arconic, Celotex and Kingspan all made misleading statements on the panels that spread the fire. Together they have made £6.5 billion in profit since the fire but paid nothing to compensate survivors or to strip their products from unsafe homes. They deny liability and no one has been charged with a crime. The privatised Building Research Establishment failed to hold them to account. The case for nationalisation is clear.

The Grenfell Tower Inquiry has documented both the cynicism of construction firms and decision making by politicians. The Tories cut services and mounted a war on health and safety regulation before the fire and in its aftermath. Local politicians and ministers were



PHOTO: MARY FINCH



PHOTO: PAUL MATTSOON

kept to cover up the lack of support for survivors.

Survivors and the bereaved were left without support or information. Some, searching for loved ones, were threatened with arrest. Working-class people from across London offered support as did trade unions, including Unite.



**The absence of progress in the five years since underlines the ruling capitalist class's contempt**

The inquiry has found that Kensington and Chelsea council treated survivors as "would-be leaders of revolt" in official meetings. As the lack of support and levels of neglect became clear, outrage only grew. Jeremy Corbyn's call, supported by the Socialist Party, for empty homes in the area to be requisitioned for those made homeless, gained a powerful echo.

The government recently rejected an important recommendation from the inquiry, that landlords should be mandated to have Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPs) for disabled tenants. Disabled people were disproportionately likely to die in the fire, and legal action against the government has been launched by disabled tenants organised in the Claddag group. Housing associations and local authorities should publicly commit to prepare PEEPs and not wait for the courts.

After the fire, the Socialist Party called for councils to immediately inspect safety on every housing estate and invest

urgently, with no excuses about cuts, in ensuring safe materials, adequate exits and space. We said Labour councils should refuse to pass on further cuts, and London mayor Sadiq Khan should reverse cuts to London's fire service.

Unfortunately, Jeremy Corbyn's radical call for requisitioning empty homes was not developed as a concerted campaign and right-wing Labour councils have continued with austerity policies rather than fighting the Tories. Corbyn raised the idea of an alternative, but it was not translated into action by Labour councils.

The Fire Brigades Union leader, Matt Wrack, is right to warn that little has changed despite the inquiry. Unions should support tenant and resident groups fighting for safety; this can develop into a powerful force. Such a movement could be one of the strands that come together to form the basis of a new mass workers' party, a vital part of the fight for safe affordable homes for all.



# Housing benefit claimant's 'right-to-buy' Another mad idea from desperate Tories

NICK AUVACHE  
BRANCH ORGANISER, UNITE HOUSING WORKERS' BRANCH

Boris Johnson has announced that millions of recipients of housing benefit will be able to use this as income to obtain a mortgage. This is a further sign of how desperate the Tories are to deflect attention away from the cost-of-living crisis, which is decimating the income of the low paid and those on benefits.

People in receipt of benefits are already on the breadline, so the idea of them paying a mortgage where they would be responsible for repairs and maintenance is mad.

Although many tenants may not be happy with their rented accommodation, which is often run-down and poorly maintained by landlords,

the solution is not to place tenants in a more vulnerable position. The solution lies in rent control and mass council house building of decent affordable accommodation.

**Aping Thatcher**

This ill-thought out initiative by Johnson was designed to ape former Tory PM Margaret Thatcher's famous 'right to buy' law. However, even this landmark piece of legislation is now opposed by many Tories who concede that more affordable accommodation for rent is required - although they do precious little about it!

Even bankers seemed to question how Johnson's scheme would work. One remarked in the Financial Times: "The reality is it sounds a lot more positive than it would be in practice."

Even if Johnson did manage to implement these changes it would just be storing up problems for the future. Homeowners on benefits would struggle even more to cope with repairs, and if interest rates rise further they would be at risk of defaulting, which could lead to eviction.

Quite apart from this, with average house prices now at £289,000 in the UK, and nearly double that figure in London, how on earth do the Tories think someone on a subsistence income could afford the repayments on mortgages that would cover these sums!

Even workers on average incomes can't afford homes at these prices. This mad idea has to go, as does the Tory government that conjured it up.



# A FIGHTING SOCIALIST PROGRAMME FOR WORKERS AND YOUTH IN STRUGGLE

SARAH SACHS-ELDRIDGE  
SOCIALIST PARTY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The working class faces attacks and challenges on every front. The Socialist's 'What We Stand For' column is a summary of the main demands that the Socialist Party puts forward for the fightback that's needed. An updated column, produced through party-wide discussion and debate, is launched this week (see opposite).

The editorial of the first issue of the Militant in 1964, the predecessor of the Socialist, set out our paper's purpose, including that: "We wish to tell the truth to the working class against the lies and exaggerations of the capitalist class and the half-truths of Labour's officialdom".

Telling the truth means saying that there's an alternative to the working class paying the price of the crisis of the profit-driven capitalist system. As we emerge from the pandemic, workers paying is exactly what the bosses want. A new period of struggle between the classes is opening up. So sharpening the ideas of how workers resist is necessary.

So far, the cost-of-living crisis is the clearest expression of this new period. It has quickly become a ubiquitous phrase, because it is a constant presence in millions of lives: when we do the weekly food shop, when we fill up the car, even when we fill the kettle, when the bills land, when the kids need clothes and shoes, and so on and on.

## 'Cost-of-living crisis'

'Cost-of-living crisis' comprises rising prices and falling wages, pensions and benefits. In April, 7.3 million adults lived in households that had gone without food or could not physically get it in the previous month. Those households include 2.6 million children. But Britain remains one of the richest countries in the world. The Sunday Times Rich List reports that Britain now boasts more billionaires than ever with more wealth than ever.

In tandem with the rise in prices, a wave of strike action has been developing. The historic action now called by the RMT across Network Rail and 13 train operating companies involving 40,000 members is a step towards national action. Another 10,000 workers from London Underground will coordinate action on 21 June, the first of the three days. This strike will reveal the potential power of the working class organised in collective action in a way that hasn't been seen for years.

The anger reflected in the high votes for strike action is the real background of the divisions within the Tory party. Ultimately the Tory crisis reflects the growing unpopularity of the system based on the maximisation of private profits that their party defends. It is increasingly clear that capitalism is a

system that only works for a tiny few at the top. The socialist way out of this crisis includes the demand to take the wealth off the super-rich.

Our starting point, therefore, remains what it has been in all previous iterations: the need for mass working-class struggle to fight for a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and the banking system that dominate the British economy. They could then be run under democratic working-class control and management, with no compensation for the fat-cats.

This is not the only update of the What We Stand For column since the launch of the Socialist in 1997. It has been regularly reviewed and discussed within the Socialist Party to assess if it is the best summary of what is needed at each stage.

The last major update was in the aftermath of the mass eruptions in 2011: the Arab Spring, the indignados movements in southern Europe, and millions-strong public sector strike action in Britain. This was the anger at the working class being made to pay for the 2007-08 crisis finding expression, and marked then a new period of the crisis of capitalism and new tasks for the working class.

## Minimum wage

But there are times when only specific demands were changed. In 2021, the minimum wage demand was amended to call for a £15-an-hour minimum wage. It is obviously necessary to combine that now with the demand for the minimum wage to automatically increase linked to average earnings or inflation, whichever is higher.

In March 2014, when the Tory minimum wage increased from £6.31 to £6.50, the minimum wage demand was raised to £10 an hour, without exemptions for young workers, apprentices and internships. This was a demand that arose from workers struggling against low pay. It became official TUC policy in September 2014 - but it was clear that it needed a struggle to make it a reality.

At the 2015 general election, only the programme of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), the electoral platform in which the Socialist Party collaborates with the RMT and other trade unionists and socialists, included this necessary demand.

That demand for £10, however, became an important part of Jeremy Corbyn's programme in the 2017 general election. Alongside the call for council homes, the abolition of university fees, and nationalisation of the utilities, that programme gave workers and young people a glimpse of an alternative to austerity. Thousands attended mass rallies. Students queued to vote for Corbyn. He even won back a million Labour voters that Blairism had lost to Ukip.



In the Corbyn era, the What We Stand For demand on how workers can achieve a political voice therefore also changed. To the demand: "For a mass workers' party drawing together workers, young people and activists from workplace, community, environmental and anti-cuts campaigns, to provide a fighting, political alternative to the pro-big business parties", was added: "Fight for Labour to be transformed into such a party: deselect the Blairites."

In the 2017 and 2019 general elections the Socialist Party argued that the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition should not stand candidates but fight for a Corbyn-led government. But as the What We Stand For demand summarised, that required a fight to transform the Labour Party.

When Corbyn was elected Labour became two parties in one - the Blairite defenders of capitalism on one side and on the other, the potential for an anti-austerity party around the thousands who flocked in to fight for Corbyn's programme. But that was untenable. A fight was needed to remove the Blairite saboteurs.

## Programme for battle

The Socialist Party put forward a programme for this battle: mandatory deselection of the defenders of capitalism; readmit the expelled socialists as part of the building of a mass federal socialist party; return the trade unions to their central role in the party, under the control of their members; and a socialist programme.

Unfortunately, such bold measures were not carried out by Jeremy Corbyn and his supporters. Jeremy has been removed from the Labour whip and Sir Keir Starmer has carried through changes that have reclaimed the Labour Party for capitalism, a Tony Blair-style New Labour Mark Two. Conclusions must be drawn from this for the struggle in the new period.

The cost-of-living crisis poses the question of working-class political representation sharply. At the end of May, RMT general secretary Mick Lynch correctly said that the upcoming national strike action is a test for Keir Starmer. Once the RMT had voted on dates for the action, the response came. Starmer's spokesperson said: "We've been clear in the position that the strikes shouldn't go ahead," he said. "Nobody wants to see industrial action that is disruptive."

Industrial struggle needs to be combined with beginning to build a political voice for the workers' movement. Working-class people need a party which will fight for our interests in parliament and in the council chambers. Otherwise, we fight with one hand tied behind our backs.

As the column and the pages of the Socialist show, the Socialist Party fights for a new workers' party to be built, including our participation in TUSC as an initial step. But the trade union leaders have the real power to solve the problem of working-class political representation - as could Jeremy - by taking steps to initiate a new workers' party.

The Socialist Party fights for a new mass workers' party. But as the column summarises, for that party to liberate humanity from the misery of capitalist crisis, it means fighting for a "democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, and in a way that safeguards the environment".



## WHAT WE STAND FOR

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

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

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

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

### WORK, PENSIONS AND BENEFITS

- A £15-an-hour minimum wage for all, without exemptions. For the minimum wage to automatically increase linked to average earnings or inflation, whichever is higher.
- Share out the work. A maximum 32-hour working week with no loss of pay or worsening of conditions. The right to flexible working, under the control of workers not employers. An end to insecure working, for the right to full-time work for all who want it; ban zero-hour contracts.

- All workers to have trade union rates of pay, employment protection, and sickness, parental and holiday rights from day one of employment. End bosses using bogus 'self-employment' as a means to avoid giving workers rights.
- No to austerity through inflation. For all wage rates to be automatically increased at least in line with price rises.

- Open the books of all companies cutting jobs or claiming they can't afford to pay a real living wage. State subsidies, where genuinely needed, for socially-useful small businesses.
- For trade unions independent of the capitalist state, with members having democratic control over their own policies, constitutions and democratic procedures. For all trade union officials to be regularly elected, subject to recall by their members and paid a worker's wage.
- Reduce the state retirement and pension age to 55. For decent living pensions.
- Replace universal credit and the punitive benefit system with living benefits for all who need them.

### PUBLIC SERVICES

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

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

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

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### Do you agree? Join the fightback!

## JOIN THE SOCIALISTS

- Visit [socialistparty.org.uk/join](http://socialistparty.org.uk/join)
- or call 020 8988 8777
- or text your name and postcode to 07761 818 206

to find out more today!

### Help fund the fightback!

## DONATE TODAY

[socialistparty.org.uk/donate](http://socialistparty.org.uk/donate)

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

### DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

- For united working-class struggle to end discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, disability, sexuality, age, and all other forms of prejudice and oppression.
- Repeal the anti-trade union laws and all others that trample over civil liberties. For the right to protest and to strike! End police harassment. For the police to be accountable to local committees, made up of democratically elected representatives of trade unions, local community organisations and local authorities.
- For the right to choose when and whether to have children - for the right to access abortion, contraception and fertility treatment for all who need it.
- For the right to asylum - with democratic community control and oversight of emergency funding resources. No to racist immigration laws.
- Expand democracy. For the abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords. For all MPs to be subject to the right of recall by their constituents at any time, and to only receive a worker's wage.
- For proportional representation and the right to vote at 16.
- For the right of nations to self-determination. For an independent socialist Scotland and for a socialist Wales, both part of a voluntary socialist confederation of Wales, England, Scotland and Ireland.
- Oppose the dictatorship of the billionaire owners of the media. For the nationalisation of newspaper printing facilities, radio, TV and social media platforms. Access to these facilities should be under democratic control, with political parties' coverage being allocated in proportion to the popular vote at elections.
- For a new mass workers' party, based on the trade unions, and drawing together workers, young people and activists from workplaces, and community, environmental, anti-racist and anti-cuts campaigns, to provide a fighting, socialist political alternative to the pro-big business parties.

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# Lincolnshire town councillor: Why I left Labour and joined the Socialist Party

## 'We're trade unionists and socialists, because there's enough for everybody'

Lynne Cooney was a Labour town councillor for Louth in Lincolnshire until she resigned from the Labour Party in March, and declared as a Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) councillor, and then joined the Socialist Party. TUSC is the electoral coalition in which the Socialist Party participates, alongside transport union RMT and others. In a leaflet to residents, Lynne explained:

I joined Labour under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership because I identified with the need for compassion and empathy, and to support those who needed someone to hear them and help them. As a town councillor for Trinity ward, I spoke at the council precept meeting in favour of keeping the council tax down. I campaigned against the stealth tax for recycling bins. I've also written to the MP regarding do-not-resuscitate (DNR) orders for disabled patients during Covid, sexual assaults in educational settings, housing standards for homes owned by housing associations, and rent rises. I am very visible and vocal in my

community, and passionate about disability rights. I've also written two reports on access around the town for people with mobility issues, speaking out on the latest active travel plan in Louth, which disadvantages disabled and vulnerable groups. Keir Starmer has betrayed the fundamental principles of Labour, and failed to hold the Tories to account. Increasingly, I found it harder and harder to hold on in the faint hope that the socialists within Labour would find a way back. As a Send (special educational needs and disability) parent, I've seen funding for social care, NHS paediatrics and assessments fall. I've



PHOTO: WALTHAM FOREST TUSC

seen children failed by an education system unable to support their needs. People have been plunged into poverty, and zero-hour contracts have thrown workers into uncertain futures. It's them and us. Prices and profits rocketing, but wages, pensions and benefits held down. There's never been so much inequality. Yet there's hardly any

difference between the three main parties. Boris Johnson and the Tories are always for the super-rich. 'Sir' Keir "I agree with the government" Starmer is no opposition. Under Labour I had no voice, which is why I chose to resign, and align myself to TUSC. I can now raise my voice. I can, with others, take the fight to the council and Westminster,

and start trying to change austerity and privatisation made by both Tories and Labour. TUSC gives a voice to working-class people. We're trade unionists because we fight for workers' rights, against low pay and zero-hour contracts. We're socialists because there's enough wealth and resources for everybody to enjoy a decent standard of living.

# Tories wreck Derbyshire care services



Socialist Party member Jon Dale speaking PHOTO: DAVE GORTON

## Stand against care home closures

SEAN VICKERS  
CHESTERFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

Tory Derbyshire County Council is pushing ahead with its plans to close seven care homes. The vast majority of 500 respondents to the council's consultation opposed the closures without building like-for-like replacements. The council claims that in a survey "of clients supported by our adult care service, almost 70% said they did not want to go into a care home". This isn't surprising!

round-the-clock care, which will not be available with home care. Service users will have to rely on a few hours a week specialist care, with the rest made up by unpaid family carers. **Previous win** A previous threat to shut the same seven homes was overturned in 2020. The Tories clearly recognised that to press ahead during those early months of the pandemic would have been political suicide. But with Keir Starmer's ineffective Labour offering no real electoral alternative in 2021, the Tories in

Derbyshire increased their majority and reintroduced their plans. The closures - a third of the council-run stock - threaten the jobs of 240 workers. 68 long-term residents now face the upset and danger of being physically moved to alternative accommodation. Campaigners are afraid some are too frail, and have called the decision a "death sentence". We are calling for all those involved or interested in fighting such cuts to consider standing as Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidates in next year's local elections.

## Build a movement to save day centres

ELAINE EVANS  
CHESTERFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

Derbyshire County Council is seeking to close eight day centres for adults with a learning disability or who are autistic. The Socialist Party has launched a petition and newsletter. These have been well received by concerned residents at our weekly campaign stalls in Chesterfield, Shirebrook and Bolsover. The Tory council has used Covid as a shield to stop service users attending, and then claim there is no longer a demand for the centres! Many fear the remaining four day centres would also be under immediate threat of closure or privatisation should the council successfully close the first eight. Public sector union Unison - which organises most of the staff - is organising public meetings to campaign against the closures. The first of these, in Chesterfield, heard from local campaigners how the centres provide users' only real contact with the outside world. Jon Dale brought solidarity greetings from the Socialist Party and Unite union. He warned the

petition and the council's consultation alone would not be enough to stop this. The council are to shut seven care homes despite a majority opposing closure in a consultation. Jon described how Chatsworth Ward at Mansfield Community Hospital was saved from closure by a campaign involving staff, patients and their families, with huge community support that forced NHS directors to retreat. It is not just Tory cuts we need to challenge. Labour councils have also cut jobs and services, in Derbyshire and throughout the country. A similar campaign to Chatsworth Ward, led by Unison, could give confidence to all those who would be affected if this vital service were to be lost. It would also empower communities to understand how they aren't powerless in the face of such attacks.

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# the Socialist



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Len Hockey, leader of successful strike against low pay and privatisation at Barts NHS trust

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# Ten years on from the historic bus strike that shut down London

With transport workers striking up and down the country, including in the historic RMT rail strike starting on 21 June, **Andy Beadle**, a former London bus driver and union rep, looks back at the huge London bus strike that hit the city ten years ago this month.

It is a decade since the great bus strike of 2012 - the first all-London one since privatisation in the mid-1990s.

Bus bosses were astonished when workers decided enough was enough and brought the capital to a standstill.

In September 2011, Unite the union officers gave Transport for London (TfL) 12 months' notice that bus workers were demanding a £500 bonus for the extra work and stress we would be under during the 2012 London Olympic Games. We were not the only transport union to put in such a demand. But in the course of the next few months it did feel that we were the only ones to get a flat 'no' in response.

More exactly, we didn't really get an answer. We were just ignored. TfL, the government regulator which allocated bus routes to the competing private operators, claimed it had nothing to do with them. It advised Unite to go and speak to the 20 private companies individually. Months went by and nothing was heard.

The following summer, at Battersea Depot where I worked, a letter was attached to the company notice board. It was from the managing director of Abellio. It was an expression of deep regret, but there'd be no bonus.

No doubt drivers in other firms got similar messages. It was a deliberate snub that firms didn't reply directly to Unite, but it was the first sign that Unite's decision to ballot its drivers might be causing some concern.

A big majority of bus drivers were in the union, but there was widespread scepticism that a strike would really happen. But alongside this doubt, born out of long experience, was a growing sense of frustration at the injustice. Why was everyone else getting a bonus but not us? Naturally the tube workers had a good deal: they had a strong union led by Bob Crow. From the Docklands Light Railway, to airport staff, unions had agreed bonuses - some of them more than we were even asking for.

With two weeks to go, Unite's regional secretary, Peter Kavanagh, spoke to a meeting of London bus shop stewards. 94% had voted in favour of action, and an official 24-hour strike was announced to start at 3am on 22 June. Still there was doubt, but that mood was changing rapidly among bus drivers.

A roadside controller knew he'd be expected to drive a bus on strike day, along with other management, "but the first abuse I get, I'll be chucking my passengers off and calling to say I'm bringing my bus back to the

depot on health and safety grounds."

London mayor Boris Johnson, thinking of his future career, did a U-turn (fancy that!). He said £8.3 million was available towards our demands. TfL said that meant every driver at a garage where one or more of its routes was deemed to be affected would receive £500. That was provided they worked throughout the 29 days of the Olympic and Paralympic Games!

This offer showed the desperate haste and panic of Johnson and TfL at this stage. Unite pointed out it wasn't even legal: bus drivers are not allowed to work more than 13 consecutive days before a 24-hour break.

If Johnson hoped that the private operators would contribute to the deal, he was disappointed. They understood this fight wasn't just about a one-off bonus. If they conceded, what other demands would follow? They warned if the strike went ahead, Johnson's £8.3 million could be withdrawn. A High Court judge granted an injunction to three of the 20 bus firms to prevent their workers striking.

Strike day came and it was brilliant! Seventeen bus firms were in the strike. We weren't sure what the turnout on the picket lines would be or how many workers would cross

them. We needn't have worried. London has around 80 bus depots and at the big ones, noisy, excited picket lines of 70, 80 or more were typical.

85% of London's entire fleet was off the road that day. As shift workers, a picket line is the only time we see all our workmates together. At Battersea, seventy drivers joined or rejoined the union, 34 of them on strike day itself.

Peter Hendy, Commissioner for Transport at TfL, pronounced the strike "reprehensible". But one day of strike action was enough to send TfL scurrying around with big bus bosses to concede almost everything that had been 'impossible' the day before. Unite took steps to involve coworkers barred by injunctions next time. Unite had set dates for two follow-up strikes but they became unnecessary. Within days Unite received an offer which was balloted on by members.

The deal meant every full-time driver got at least £500 before tax and part-timers pro rata. 71% voted to accept the deal. This was a clear victory.

This struggle and the strikes three years later, again of a London-wide scale, showed the power of bus workers when they take action together. This is needed again now as London bus drivers, like all workers, face the cost-of-living squeeze at the same time as Labour Mayor Sadiq Khan has shown that he is incapable of standing up to Tory cuts to the TfL budget.

Therefore, it is essential that Unite demands the renationalisation of the London bus companies with drivers on the same but best rates of pay, pensions and terms and conditions as part of a publicly owned transport network in the capital. It is vital that the union joins with the other transport unions, particularly the RMT whose members have already shut down the tubes once this year and are going out again.

## Save Bromsgrove buses!

Bromsgrove Socialist Party, new members and supporters, were out on the High Street on 11 June.

We were campaigning to save bus services in the town and beyond. The 144 has run from Worcester - Bromsgrove - Birmingham for 100 years. It was originally completely cut, with no consultation with passengers. Public anger and concern resulted in a reprieve and a review. The reprieve still means changes to the route, and a reduced service, with serious impacts for all who rely on the 144. Essential workers told us that they face massively increased costs as they now use taxis.

First Bus, which ran the service, is part of a stock market-listed multinational that has rail, bus and tram services in the UK and the USA. Passengers have come second in the hunt for profits. This all results from Tory deregulation in 1986.

We spoke with bus drivers about pressurised working conditions, rural passengers who face cut services, and workers struggling to make ends meet with increased travel and general costs.

Worcestershire County Council asked the government for £86 million to support bus services in the county but the government refused.

People agreed with us that we can have no faith in the Tories at county level securing money from a Tory government, and many agreed that transport should be publicly owned and run, as well as free, as it is in other parts of the world and the UK.

Passengers, unions and campaigners need to unite to pressure the council to ensure the full restoration of the 144 bus service.

KEVIN GREENWAY  
BIRMINGHAM SOCIALIST PARTY

## Ink workers pay walk out

Socialist Party members joined the picket line at one of the sites of the only ink manufacturer in the UK.

Almost 200 Sun Chemical workers commenced an overtime ban on the 6 June followed by a 24-hour strike at seven sites across the country. The strikes would hit big players like the Daily Mail and the Multi-Color Corporation.

Sun Chemical employees, who are members of Unite, took action over an insulting 3% pay offer. The company is part of a global corporation that has reported to have made 2.5 billion in profits in 2021!

As there are relatively small numbers of workers at the Alfreton (Derbyshire) site, they were picketing in twos for two-hour shifts. The pickets were happy to receive the solidarity and support from the Socialist Party.

Workers I spoke to say this is the first time many of them have taken industrial action, but the mood was buoyant. Conversations regarding the cost-of-living crisis were anger-provoking.

Unite general secretary Sharon Graham says: "Unite will not sit by while super-rich companies add to their wealth but tell their workers to swallow what amounts to a pay cut."

Workers are adamant that the strike will escalate if the dispute is not resolved.

TOM HUNT  
MANSFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

# Determined Arriva bus strikers move into week two of strike



Wakefield picket line IAIN DALTON

The first week of indefinite strike action by Unite members working for Arriva Yorkshire, has meant no bus services from the company have run at all, with the strike solid across all five depots. It culminated with the dispute featuring as the opener to a Newsnight special on the potential summer strike wave over pay.

Socialist Party members have visited all the depots to support the strike. **Oisín Duncan** said workers in Dewsbury were angry with Arriva's failure to protect drivers from abuse, insulting pay offers, and their lies published in the press.

Solidarity has flooded in with donations of food and drink, including pizzas for strikers at the Wakefield

picket line donated by taxi drivers, who themselves struck just a few months ago. Pickets told **Iain Dalton** that they'd seen lots of NHS workers in uniform tooting in support as they passed by.

Bakers' union BFAWU general secretary Sarah Woolley visited the picket line on her way home from the union's conference. Unite branch chair and Socialist Party member **Tanis Belsham-Wray** reported that after visiting the Castleford picket line, her branch committee had agreed that they would recommend donations to the strike funds of all five depots by the time she'd travelled the 20 minutes to visit the Wakefield picket line.

**Paul Thomas** reported that at Heckmondwike the mood is strong, with anger at the way the company is putting out messages that make it look like they had been offered 12%. As one picket said: "If we'd been offered that we'd probably be back at work."

The workers have rightly been holding out for a pay rise for all workers of at least 10% which would keep up with the rate of inflation. Their determination has led to Arriva agreeing to talks, to take place on 15 June.

Rightly, Unite will be continuing the strike action until they get an offer that meets their members' expectations.

## Rail coach refurbishers' walk out against 'fire-and-rehire' threat

IAIN DALTON  
SOCIALIST PARTY YORKSHIRE SECRETARY

Workers in Unite and the RMT unions at rail coach refurbishers Wabtec in Doncaster began strike action on 10 June over fire-and-rehire plans.

The company is attempting to force workers to sign new contracts, which will remove paid breaks and wash time (to remove grease, rust and other dirt at the end of shifts). In return, workers would get an 8% pay rise over two years, far less than the current rate of inflation, in effect a real-terms pay cut.

The mood among strikers is determined. Around 150 had joined the picket lines in the morning, with the company having to cancel the afternoon shift, and just running a partial day shift with the handful crossing the picket lines.

Further action is planned for a week from 27 June.

# From the frontline to the breadline - get strike ready

UNISON LOCAL GOVERNMENT  
CONFERENCE DELEGATES

Unison local government conference, representing 600,000 workers, met on 12 June. Having lost over 500,000 jobs since 2010, with a £5 billion shortfall in council budgets, and with real wages of council workers having fallen by 25% in the last decade, the debates on council funding, pay and fighting the cuts were key.

With the government already saying that public sector workers should not expect to see inflation level pay awards this year, and many councils only budgeting for 2%-3%, it is clear that there will need to be strike action across the nations to force the government and councils to pay up.

It was welcome to hear the leadership say they want to see a fight, and the general secretary issue the call for branches to "go back from conference and get ready to strike."

Speaking in the debate, Socialist Party Scotland member Jim McFarlane said: "We've been undervalued, overworked and underpaid for too long." Socialist Party member April Ashley said that we must build for, and use the demonstration on 18 June as a springboard for strike action."

Socialist Party member Brian Debus warned: "We must not make the same mistake as before, sitting back waiting for the employer's final offer. If they don't pay up on the pay date, we should ballot."

In the debate on council funding and cuts, there was a clear attempt by the leadership to try and overplay the role that Labour councils are playing in defending services, particularly in Wales. However, Socialist Party members Jean Thorpe and April Ashley rightly exposed this as a fraud. Jean pointed out that "in Nottingham 50 of the 55 councillors (half claiming to be on the left) are Labour, yet they have voted to decimate children's and youth services. The reality is, there is no will by Labour to fight the cuts and we cannot rely on Labour, only our own collective strength."

April Ashley reminded the conference about Tower Hamlets council which sacked its entire workforce in order to force through cuts to pay and conditions. She said: "Labour prides itself on managing cuts but the reality is they are simply passing them on, we should only support those who refuse to vote for cuts."

Support for our socialist ideas was shown by delegates buying 57 copies of the Socialist paper on the first day of conference.



PAUL MATTSOON

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Wabtec picket line IAIN DALTON



## Trades councils conference Debating a way forward for workers' struggles

SOCIALIST PARTY REPORTERS

The first face-to-face TUC trades councils conference since lockdown took place on 11-12 June in Leicester. In many areas during lockdown, trades councils led the way in organising support for workers in essential industries and sectors, such as NHS workers and bus drivers.

The conference discussed and agreed motions on the cost-of-living crisis, the rail disputes, the ongoing crisis of Covid in the workplace, the fight for a pay rise, a 'green industrial revolution', pensions and retirement age, the attack on fundamental democratic rights made under the police crime sentencing bill, and international solidarity issues - including opposition to the Turkish state oppression of Kurds.

Four delegates who are also members of the Socialist Party intervened in many of the debates, linking the need for effective campaigning trade unionism with the need for a fighting programme and a real political alternative for workers.

Many of the motions called for public ownership of energy companies, the railways and other sectors. Niall Mulholland from Newham Trades Council added that we should give this demand more content and call for democratic workers' control and management of nationalised industries, linked to 'green growth' planning.



Jane Nellist NIALL MULHOLLAND

Jane Nellist, from Coventry Trades Council, highlighted the case of the bin workers in the city who are locked in a bitter industrial struggle with the Labour council.

Sheila Caffrey, from Bristol Trades Council, who is also a teacher in the NEU, spoke about how Covid and workplace health and safety conditions remain a major issue in the schools and colleges, affecting staff and students, particularly those from poor, overcrowded communities.

The conference was down in numbers compared to previous years, which is probably linked to concerns over Covid, and several

speakers called for better diversity representation.

Katrine Williams, from Cardiff Trades Council, argued that the most effective way to draw in more workers from ethnic minority backgrounds, women and from the LGBTQ+ community is through concretely fighting against their oppression and linking this to workplace and class issues, which unite us all.

With combative class policies, trades councils have the potential to become focal points of mass struggle in towns, cities and rural areas in the coming period of heightened class conflict.

## Camden Labour and Clarion break promises But Peter the tenant is making a stand

NICK AUVACHE  
UNITE HOUSING WORKERS AND CAMDEN SOCIALIST PARTY

Clarion housing association is trying to evict an elderly tenant. Peter is one of the last residents to inhabit the retirement home in Camden, north London. He has lived there for eight years, and now faces homelessness.

The building was passed on to the council by its original owner for £1 on the condition that it be used as a retirement home in perpetuity, before being sold to Clarion. Neither the council nor Clarion seem concerned about this promise. The building is in a prime position, ripe for development.

Clarion cites fire risk for wanting to empty the building. Despite still being occupied, it has already removed fire-safety equipment!

Peter is the last tenant fighting since Camden Labour council and Clarion announced closure in June 2019. Many other elderly tenants accepted the £6,000 compensation to move as they felt unable to resist the mega-landlord. But Peter is determined to fight.

He believes that the fire-risk story is a red herring, a convenient excuse to empty the building. He claims that

Clarion has managed the decline of the building over years, neglecting its upkeep to make it easier to evict.

Camden council has over 6,000 people on its housing waiting list. So rare homes like this are essential to providing older people in the borough somewhere affordable.

Peter describes Clarion as "property dealers masquerading as a charity". He wants the building to be restored to enable elderly tenants to fill its flats once more.

Clarion has a poor record when it comes to providing convenient excuses to vacate buildings with development potential. Recently, the same dubious arguments were used to evict tenants overlooking Victoria Park in east London at a moment's notice.

The Socialist Party and the Social Housing Action Campaign (SHAC) will campaign alongside Peter to support his stand. We need more genuinely affordable council-run accommodation, not less.

This is just another example of how housing associations are far from tenant-friendly landlords. We need to take back control of these unaccountable property developers, and place them under the democratic control of tenants, workers and locally elected representatives.

## Funding the fight for socialism

We can report the brilliant news that we have already broken through our £25,000 fighting fund target with two weeks still to go until the deadline. But we need to make sure that we keep the donations flooding in. The historic national rail strike and the many reports in the Socialist of workers taking strike action show the willingness of workers to struggle.

The Socialist has a clear

programme and strategy for how these struggles can win and for a socialist alternative to this unequal and rotten capitalist system.

Can you make a donation to the fight for a better future?

We urge all our readers to send in their donations, no matter the size - £5, £10, £20, £50 or more - to help us pay for the leaflets, papers and placards to get our socialist message out as widely as possible

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### SOCIALIST PARTY FIGHTING FUND

AREA	£ RECEIVED	£ TARGET	Q2: APRIL-JUNE 2022	DEADLINE: 30 JUNE 2022
Eastern	1,860	1,200		155%
South West	2,623	1,800		146%
East Midlands	2,469	1,850		133%
Northern	764	750		102%
London	4,469	4,600		97%
Southern & SE	2,220	2,350		94%
West Midlands	2,327	2,600		89%
Yorkshire	2,083	2,550		82%
North West	910	1,150		79%
Wales	1,808	2,300		79%
Other	3,775	3,850		98%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>25,308</b>	<b>25,000</b>		<b>101%</b>

## Council declares cost-of-living emergency

### Eastbourne - we don't want words, we want action



Eastbourne Town Hall THE VOICE OF HASSOCKS/CC

JAMES ELLIS  
EAST SUSSEX SOCIALIST PARTY

Eastbourne Liberal Democrat council recently became the first local authority to declare a 'cost-of-living emergency'. This is hardly news to residents, who are all too aware of the bleak economic situation. It is reminiscent of councils declaring 'climate emergencies' - big talk backed up with inadequate action.

The council has announced a £250,000 grant. However, this is not new money.

The council claim the money is available due to "overachieved savings targets" - i.e. previous spending cuts. The money is being split between local foodbanks and grants towards energy bills in the autumn.

While the Socialist Party welcomes any support given to working-class families, it is clear that this grant

will do little to deal with the economic crisis they face. The amount being provided is inadequate, and it shows no longer-term thinking aimed at dealing with the causes of the problem.

If Eastbourne Council was serious about tackling the cost-of-living emergency, they would set much more ambitious plans:

- A massive expansion in genuinely affordable council housing
- Free school meals for all students, including during holidays
- Free publicly owned transport

In addition to this, all privately outsourced services, such as bin collection, should be brought back in-house in order to provide an affordable service and decent wages for the workforce. All this could be achieved by the council setting a budget based on people's needs, funded by using its reserves and borrowing power, and then linking up with other councils nationally to demand additional funding from central government.

The Lib Dems won't draw this conclusion. Instead, local trade unionists need to fight, including standing candidates.

Tokenistic one-off grants will not solve this crisis. We need bold council leaderships, working with local trade unions, implementing socialist policies that can improve the lives of working people in the long term.

## Government social care plans fall £10bn short

GLYNN DOHERTY  
SOCIAL CARE TRADE UNION ORGANISER

Working people this year face a tax increase on top of rocketing prices for energy, transport and food. The health and social care levy is being funded by a 1.25% hike in national insurance contributions which kicked in from April.

The levy was heralded, by the Tory government but almost nobody else, as a breakthrough to provide adequate funding for social care. But of the £12 billion a year due from the levy, only £5.4 billion is reserved for social care over the first three years. The rest goes to the NHS to clear its post-pandemic backlog.

Now, a report from the County Councils Network says authorities are expected to spend more than £25.5 billion funding social care reforms over the next decade - almost £10 billion more than the government estimate of £15.6 billion. From October 2023, councils will cover the cost of ensuring care providers receive adequate payment for their services and fund a person's care above an £86,000 lifetime cap.

County and rural unitary authorities are expected to be hit hardest by the reforms, with an estimated funding gap of £9.4 billion over the next decade, the report said. The South East is faced with a largest potential

shortfall of £3.8 billion, the East of England faces a £1.7 billion gap, the North West £1.6 billion and the South West £1.3 billion.

Councils will need to employ a further 4,300 social workers to complete care assessments and review services as part of the reforms, the report said. This, in addition to filling the existing 1,800 vacancies, is projected to cost councils £1.9 billion over the next decade.

David Fothergill, chair of the Local Government Association Community Wellbeing Board, said: "Potential underfunding of these reforms would only exacerbate pre-existing significant pressures, which the reforms - and the funding for them - do nothing to address."

"These include unmet and undermet need, greater strain on unpaid carers and increased waiting times for assessments and delivery of care packages."

So, despite the extra taxes we're being forced to pay to fund social care and health, we now find out they won't fund social care and health to anywhere near the level we were promised!

This is just one more reason why health and care workers need to be on the streets of London on 18 June. To demand fully funded publicly owned care services, paid for by the super-rich and to bring an end to profiteering from our ill health!



WORLDSKILLSUK/CC

## Pride is political



CALLUM JOYCE  
OXFORD SOCIALIST PARTY

Socialist Party members recently intervened in the Oxford Pride event, running a stall and handing out material. Despite the claims of some that Pride isn't political, we ran out of LGBTQ+ leaflets in 10 minutes!

Over our three-hour period of activity we sold multiple papers as well as raising fighting fund and meeting people interested in joining the party.

This positive sentiment towards our political demands is not just unique to Pride, however. Recently there has been a serious change in mood, both in Oxford and nationally, with more and more people turning towards socialist ideas as the cost-of-living crisis worsens.

Most of the people at the march

were from working-class backgrounds and were concerned about rising prices for food and fuel, plus the reluctance of the Labour city council to take any action to mitigate these problems.

No wonder then that our calls for rent controls and a £15-an-hour minimum wage alongside the fight for LGBTQ+ rights were so popular.

Pride events should always be political. LGBTQ+ people did not suddenly stop thinking about politics during the event just because the organisers had.

The struggle for LGBTQ+ liberation must always be linked with the political and economic struggle for socialism - to end the oppression of minority groups and to ensure that all people have access to high-quality healthcare, safe living conditions, and secure, well-paid employment.

## Fully fund children's mental health services

HANNAH DAVIES  
FORMER STUDENT PASTORAL SUPPORT WORKER

More than 400,000 children and young people are applying for, or are receiving, support for mental illness.

These numbers are shocking. However, this is little surprise to the workers who help and the young people themselves.

Of course, Covid isolation and home-schooling have had an impact, but these numbers were growing long before the pandemic. Tory policies have made things worse.

Mental health services have been cut to the bone, or pushed out to the third sector. Most now have no hope of ever meeting the rapidly growing demand for their services.

In my own experience, working in a school pastoral support team, children referred to mental health services were frequently told they would need to wait 12 months for an appointment. The only children getting support quicker were those with suicidal thoughts or those who had tried to take their own life. It should not have to take a child getting to this point for them to receive help.

All NHS mental health services which have been cut or privatised, need to be re-established, expanded, and nationalised - as part of the wider renationalisation of the NHS. We need investment in more mental health beds, and long-term talking-therapy solutions. Bringing back grants for nursing students, and an increase in pay and better working



conditions for those working in this sector, would help rebuild the depleted numbers of mental health nurses and practitioners.

We need significant investment in preventative services to end the firefighting culture in the mental

health sector. For example, investing in counsellors for schools and youth clubs, and family support services to provide opportunities for children and young people to speak to trained professionals about mental health concerns.



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# the Socialist

Issue 1184

16-22 June 2022

formerly **Militant**

# SOLIDARITY WITH RAIL AND TUBE STRIKERS



## DEFEND THE RIGHT TO STRIKE

**50,000** rail and tube workers in RMT transport union are standing shoulder to shoulder in historic national strike action, joined by other union members in some areas.

Rail workers kept going throughout the pandemic, making sure other key workers could get to work. The least they, and the rest of us, deserve is an inflation-proof pay rise.

Not only that, but hard-won working conditions are under attack and safe services for the public at risk.

Workers struggling with soaring bills will be cheering the strike on. At last, a serious fightback!

No wonder the Tory government of the rich and the

millionaire press are trying to whip up opposition to the strikes. They're terrified more will join in.

This strike, coming straight after the TUC demo on 18 June, can change things.

Pay is going down, bills are going up, and the rich are getting even richer. So many working-class people are struggling and are angry, but haven't felt like they know what to do.

Well, now they will grow in confidence.

The whole trade union movement needs to stand in solidarity with the RMT strike. Not least because of the renewed attempts to curb the right to strike with desperate new anti-trade union measures.

And the best way to be in solidarity is to come out fighting as well! Lots of workers have been taking strike action in recent months, from bins to buses, schools and universities. CWU members in Royal Mail and BT are balloting for action, and public sector workers in universities, schools and the civil service are getting ready for ballots.

Fight for inflation-busting pay rises for all. Defend the right to strike. Build a movement to kick out the Tories and campaign for an independent working-class party that will fight for socialist policies in the interests of all working-class people.

● Train drivers, guards, signallers and maintenance workers speak to the Socialist - see page 4-5

WHAT WE STAND FOR: THE SOCIALIST PARTY'S MAIN DEMANDS >>> see p8-9

