

## TUSC CONFERENCE

# LAUNCHING A POLITICAL ALTERNATIVE



# TO CUTS, POVERTY AND JOB LOSSES

**NICK CHAFFEY**  
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

**C**ouncils are facing a new, Covid-driven cash crisis - a financial 'black hole' of up to £2.2 billion, along with an average 5% increase in council tax and other increased service charges.

Working-class communities, hard hit by more than a decade of austerity, are now facing additional cuts that threaten a 1930s-style nightmare of mass poverty.

It's vital that mass resistance is urgently mobilised to cuts, demanding full government funding to local councils. A clear socialist alternative to the Tories' Covid-accelerated capitalist crisis is needed, which can force an immediate U-turn on Johnson's weak and divided government.

Under the pandemic, council income has fallen while demand for services has risen. The Tories have failed to meet these costs, despite

the £280 billion extra borrowing that has provided a huge corporate bailout for the super-rich. Clearly we are not 'all in it together'.

This funding crisis comes on top of a decade of austerity, where local councils have experienced 40% cuts - often, treacherously, carried out by right-wing Labour councils.

Working-class communities have also been hit by severe pay cuts under furlough and a sharp rise in unemployment. Consequently, Universal Credit claims have increased to six million and are rising.

Some schools have reported a sharp rise in demand for free school meals over the last three months; with families forced to turn to insufficient food banks. Many households are now officially destitute, unable to feed themselves and their families.

Even feeble opposition leader Keir Starmer has been forced to criticise the 5% increase in council tax, but more through fear of the political

consequences facing Labour candidates in the May elections than any desire to fight back in defence of working-class communities.

With council budgets due to be set, Labour councillors should refuse to carry out any further cuts, and instead set emergency 'no-cuts, needs budgets', providing immediate support to hard-hit families.

Alongside dealing with the immediate impact of Covid, needs budgets could restore funding to vital youth services and provide proper support for the elderly and vulnerable. Councils should also launch a mass house-building programme, creating jobs and apprenticeships, like the 5,000 new homes socialist Liverpool council built in the mid-1980s, led by Militant (Socialist Party).

Building a mass campaign with council trade unions and local communities, along with using council reserves and borrowing powers to support their needs budgets,

Starmer should demand immediate funding from Johnson and commit an incoming Labour government to restore council funding.

But throughout this crisis he has failed to seriously oppose Johnson or offer any real alternative. His shameful collaborationist policy of 'national unity' - alongside a majority of trade union leaders who have absented themselves from

any working-class struggle - offers nothing to those looking to resist cuts.

The Socialist Party opposes all cuts to council jobs and services. We will challenge all those councils agreeing cuts budgets, and stand alongside others fighting back in the May elections as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition. Join us in that fightback today.

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the Socialist formerly Militant

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

Karl Marx

Workers' rights and safety: Trade union mobilisation could force more Tory U-turns



The Tories have made yet another U-turn. This time over their proposed review of employment laws and regulations post-Brexit.

The 12 Labour Party-affiliated unions had issued a statement on 'the Tory threat to our workplace rights'. This was produced ahead of a Labour-sponsored parliamentary debate on 24 January in opposition to business secretary Kwasi Kwarteng's plans.

The unions' statement had promised to 'fight tooth and nail to protect and extend our rights'. But the statement didn't spell out a real intent to mobilise workers around a fighting programme.

The fact that this limited statement - which even right-wing trade union leaders like Christina McAnea from Unison, Paddy Lillis from USDAW, Warren Kenny from GMB and Roy Rickhuss from Community could sign up to - forced the government to retreat, gives an indication of what could be achieved if the leaders of the trade unions were to build a fighting movement to 'protect and extend our rights.'

Bosses opt out

The statement wrongly created the impression that the European Union (EU) has been the great defender of workers' rights. This conveniently forgets the anti-worker basis of many EU rules such as the posted-workers' directive, which targets national union-negotiated collective agreements, freeing up a 'race to the bottom' on pay and conditions. It also ignored the fact that some workers' rights, such as the maximum 48-hour week under the working-time directive, have long had an opt-out in the UK, delivered for the bosses by the New Labour government.

The Covid-19 pandemic has shown the huge potential to build a movement that could oppose and defeat any Tory plans to attack workers' rights. The fact that the Tories have retreated so quickly on these initial proposals, without such a mobilisation being developed, is a sign of their weakness. That should now be built upon to face down the offensive that the Tories and bosses are raining down on workers.

The onset of the pandemic put all trends in the labour and trade union movement to the test. In the initial phase of lockdown last March, there was an almost total collapse of the union leaderships into national unity with the Tory government and the bosses. Disputes were suspended and strikes called off. While, predictably, the right-wing of the unions led the way in this, those leaders



Council workers in Tower Hamlets strike against 'fire and rehire' HUGO PIERRE

considered to be on the left, such as Mark Serwotka in the PCS, also capitulated to this pressure. He 'parked' the union's full pay claim before the national executive committee had even had a chance to discuss it.

In September, TUC leader Frances O'Grady appeared in Downing Street alongside Tory Chancellor Rishi Sunak and the head of the CBI bosses' federation to approve the government's plans to water down the furlough scheme. However, as one of its 20-plus Covid U-turns, the Tories were forced to extend the Job Retention Scheme until the end of this March.

Actually, it is these Tory retreats that expose the weaknesses of the government. Often it has been forced back by mobilised opposition, such as that of A-level students over exam results last summer.

But the massive mobilisation of teachers, school support staff and education workers over the New Year over schools reopening inflicted the

biggest retreat to date. It also points the way forward for an explicit union-organised movement, which would have the economic and industrial weight to not only push the Tories back but to put the unions centre stage in this crisis. In this way they could become a pole of attraction for the millions of workers fighting 'tooth and nail' for their lives and livelihoods.

Workers are facing a barrage of attacks in both the public and private sectors. Already, Johnson has announced a pay freeze for public sector workers, on the back of a lost decade which has seen their incomes plummet. But the response from the unions has been virtually non-existent since this intention was announced in November last year.

While there are real obstacles due to the new Covid restrictions, the NEU education union attracted 400,000 to its online meeting against the unsafe reopening of schools. There needs to be a serious mass

campaign that ties together the need to defend workers' rights with a fight against the pay freeze in the public sector and the increasing use by bullying bosses of 'fire and rehire' (see opposite).

Outrageously, before its use in companies such as British Gas and British Airways, it was rolled out by the Labour council of Tower Hamlets in east London. There was the condemnation of this by the Starmerite Labour MPs who took part in the parliamentary debate?

There are also likely to be further local authority cuts. In a public online meeting organised in the face of brutal cuts from deficit-stricken Labour-led Croydon Council, the Unison regional secretary said: "Central government has given councils no option but to cut."

It is vital that the unions, particularly those on the left, demand that the Starmer-led Labour Party nationally, and its councils, refuse to pass on any more Tory cuts. A central element of building this pressure will be united industrial action by council unions - all Labour-affiliated.

But another weapon is for them and the Labour left to refuse to be constrained by pro-cuts Labour politicians and instead support anti-cuts candidates, such as those standing under the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition banner, in the May local elections (see page 11).

Councillors have a choice

Unfortunately, in the same meeting, Labour MP John McDonnell's video contribution clouded the issues, letting the right-wing Labour councillors off the hook by defining the main task as "campaigning to expose what the Tories are doing to our local councils." In contrast, Onay Kasab, Unite regional officer with responsibility for council workers in the London and Eastern region, said: "We call on every single councillor, no more cuts. No more wielding the axe on behalf of the Tory government... Instead fix budgets based on need."

The mood of workers during the second pandemic wave and the return to severe lockdown has been very different to the first. The total incompetence of the Tories, their personal flouting of strict Covid rules, the cronyism of the corona contracts and the vicious bosses' offensive, increasingly including the victimisation of union reps, have totally cut across any idea that there is a common cause.

There has been a rash of disputes, from British Gas to DHL, with strike ballots in BT and an increasing number of companies. In some of these, workers have forced the bosses back, such as at Rolls-Royce in Lancashire and, in British Airways. A collective fight against the offensive of the bosses and their Tory government will draw the millions of unionised and non-unionised workers to the trade unions. This is the best way to build on this Tory retreat and defend workers' rights, their safety and living conditions.



Leicester STEVE SCORE



Liverpool NEIL DUNNE

British Gas workers fight 'fire-and-rehire' plans

CONTINUED FROM BACK PAGE

Around 50 British Gas engineers took part in a socially distanced strike protest in Liverpool against unfair and unreasonable 'fire-and-rehire' intentions from British Gas execs, who hypocritically are on six-figure salaries.

A minute's silence was taken by all in attendance to remember the life of an engineer who had taken his life during these past few months.

These engineers are committed and aim to see this through to the very end, with more strikes announced.

NEIL DUNNE MERSEYSIDE SOCIALIST PARTY

Leicester Socialist Party members are regularly supporting the British Gas engineers picket lines on Aylestone Road. GMB members have been very visible there throughout the strike days, with banners and placards, and get constant support from passers-by, motorists and even joggers stopping to offer their support!

One picket, Rob Greenhalgh, told the Socialist: "We are getting a lot of support from the public and from some MPs. Even our customers understand why we are on strike and fully support us. There's strength and unity within the engineers. We will continue to stand firm together as we believe it's important to stand up

against this immoral use of fire and rehire."

"We don't want to be in this position we would rather be serving our customers. But the business has been totally immoral in the way it has approached things. So, we now have to step it up. During February we are taking four-day actions every weekend from Friday to Monday.

"Any support and solidarity from other trade unions is welcome because unity is strength, and it could be your workplace tomorrow. We all need to come together to stop fire and rehire and make it illegal."

STEVE SCORE LEICESTER SOCIALIST PARTY



WHAT WE STAND FOR

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

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

Our demands include...

PUBLIC SERVICES

- No to ALL cuts in jobs, public services and benefits. Defend our pensions.
• No to privatisation and the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). Renationalise all privatised utilities and services, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need.
• Fully fund all services and run them under accountable, democratic committees that include representatives of service workers and users.
• Free, publicly run, good quality education, available to all at any age. Abolish university tuition fees now and introduce a living grant. No to academies and 'free schools'!

- A socialist NHS to provide for everyone's health needs - free at the point of use and under democratic control. Kick out private contractors!
• Keep council housing publicly owned. For a massive building programme of publicly owned housing, on an environmentally sustainable basis, to provide good quality homes with low rents.

WORK AND INCOME

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

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

ENVIRONMENT

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

RIGHTS

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

MASS WORKERS' PARTY

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

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

- No to imperialist wars and occupations.
• Tax the super-rich! For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and the banking system that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working-class control and management. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need.
• A democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, and in a way that safeguards the environment.
• No to the bosses' neoliberal European Union and single market. For a socialist Europe and a socialist world!

Do you agree? Join the fightback!

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# Socialist Students open letter to Rent Strike network

## Building the fightback for free education

The Rent Strike network has links to rent strikes happening at over 45 universities across the country. There are Socialist Students members on both its national coordinating committee and its national reps group, as well as leading rent strikes in different areas.

Below we carry edited extracts from an open letter from the Socialist Students steering committee to the Rent Strike network's national coordinating committee, requesting a meeting to discuss what the next steps for building a national student fightback for free education should be.

We are writing to you today in the hope of initiating a discussion on how our organisations can work together to build the fight for rent and fee refunds for students, as well as the fight for free education.

This year, universities across the country have been thrown into financial crisis as a result of decades of cuts to funding. The market model of education has meant that students have been lied to by university management, just so they could gain access to our tuition fee and rent payments.

In response to the lies, as well as the complete lack of support given to us by our universities, students have begun to organise rent strikes on campus. We have demonstrated that by getting organised students can win: millions of pounds in rent refunds have been won by students so far.

The recent announcements by some universities that there will be no face-to-face teaching for the rest of the year will rightly fuel the demands of students for further rent rebates for unused accommodation, as well as tuition fee refunds for the year - both of which Socialist Students supports and has campaigned for.

Without government funding to make up for these refunds, however, universities face deep financial crisis. This means the threat of further cut-backs and erosion of the quality of education students receive.

There is also the threat of divisions

between staff and students. This would only benefit university management. Socialist Students has a history of campaigning alongside members of the University and College Union to mobilise student support and solidarity with striking campus staff fighting against cuts and job losses.

We think that there is a burning need to discuss how we can build a national student movement which will fight the Tories for the funding which our universities need.

Since the start of the pandemic, the Tories have spent a massive £280 billion, largely towards propping up the profits of big business. The Welsh government has announced £40 million emergency funding towards Welsh universities' hardship funds.

While still an inadequate level of funding, we nonetheless think this represents a victory for students. In addition to this, a cross-party parliamentary group has called on the Tory government to release £700 million towards the hardship funds of universities in England. The lid is being lifted on what is possible regarding fighting for fully funded and free education.

### Bold demands

Now is the time for the student movement to go on the offensive and boldly demand free education; for the scrapping of tuition fees, the introduction of living grants for students and the cancellation of student debt, linked to a programme of democratic public ownership.

We believe that capitalism has completely failed our education system and young people. That is why we fight for socialist policies to provide every young person with a decent future which includes access to free and high quality education.

We would like to invite a representative or representatives from your national coordinating committee to attend a national steering committee of Socialist Students to discuss how we can broaden the current rent strike movement in the fight for free education.

We would also like to invite local rent strike organisers to speak at local public Socialist Students meetings,

as well as rent strike organisers to speak at our national conference on Sunday 28 February.

We look forward to hearing your response,

**SOCIALIST STUDENTS STEERING COMMITTEE**

### ● Tories' 'emergency' funding is peanuts

**THEO SHARIEFF**  
SOCIALIST STUDENTS NATIONAL ORGANISER

The Tories have announced £50 million of emergency funding towards English universities for student support during the pandemic.

This latest development shows that when students organise and fight, we can make gains. The rent strikes have won concrete victories.

But the levels of emergency funding which have been granted by the government so far are peanuts compared to both what is needed and what it has spent to prop up big business profits during the pandemic.

The Welsh government forked out £40 million, roughly £300 per student in Wales. This goes nowhere near addressing the needs for funding for student support or reversing the cuts universities have suffered over the last ten years, let alone the rent and fee refunds Socialist Students is currently demanding. But it makes the £50 million released by the Tories - a laughable £25 a student studying in England - look generous!

### ● VCs' fee interest freeze is nowhere near enough

**BEA GARDNER**  
SOUTHAMPTON SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Vice-chancellors (VCs) are under pressure to give tuition fee refunds which they (mostly) can't afford. But they don't want to give further legitimacy to the free education movement by lobbying the government to pay outright for fee refunds.

The VCs think they've found



a compromise by calling for a 15-month freeze on the interest on tuition fee debt. It would ensure they still get the maximum tuition fees this year.

Scrapping interest rates only benefits those in high-earning jobs that pay off their loans. The majority of students do not expect to ever pay back their loans, because of low-earning and insecure work. An interest fee freeze makes absolutely no difference to what they will pay.

And it doesn't benefit any international students either. They have to pay up front and are charged way over the £9,250 fees of home students. Many have been locked down in university halls due to university decision making.

An interest fee freeze is not enough, neither is fee compensation.

### Socialist Students calls for:

- Rent refunds for students. 100% rent refunds for any student unable to move into their halls for any reason, with the money for those refunds made up by the government
- The right of students in third-party accommodation or the private rented sector to be released from their contracts. Compensation to the landlords only on the basis of proven need
- Rent controls. Bring all third-party halls into the ownership and

- **Come to Socialist Students online conference, Sunday 28 February, to discuss with us about how we can build a movement to achieve this. To register see 'Socialist Students national conference 2021' at [eventbrite.co.uk](http://eventbrite.co.uk).**

Children over 16 can go into the unregulated sector, often called semi-independent accommodation. They have been known to be placed in boats and caravans.

And these placements do not come cheap. One placement can easily cost several thousand pounds a week.

80,000 children were in residential care in March 2020. The costs of such placements can cause huge financial difficulties to underfunded local authorities.

In addition, many children are placed far from home, requiring the added upheaval of changing school

control of the universities, as a step towards democratically set rents, decided on by elected committees including students

- Refund our tuition fees - this year and every year! Fight for free education and make the 1% pay for it
- A no-detriment policy to be introduced for assessments affected by the lockdown
- End all cuts. No attacks on jobs, wages and conditions on campus to pay for refunds - make the government pay. Student and staff unity against all cuts on campus
- Democratic trade union and student oversight of all health and safety measures taken on campus to stop the spread of the virus. No trust in vice-chancellors, management or the Tories to handle this crisis in our interests
- The building of a national student movement to fight for the funding our universities need. Scrap tuition fees, cancel student debt and introduce genuine living grants for students. Fight for fully funded, high-quality and free education

mortgage holidays. The government compelled councils to pull all the homeless off the streets. Tenant evictions were suspended. What possible justification is there for this claim?

Some rental firms may imagine migrant and asylum-seeker tenants more pliable due to their isolation and legal status. But despite her poverty, Lawanya is not alone.

Lawanya is an organiser for the Refugee Rights and Tamil Solidarity campaigns, and a member of the Socialist Party. The working class has an important tradition of defending its organisers from bullying and persecution, to prevent the boss class decapitating our movement.

We are therefore asking trade union branches to pass resolutions joining Lawanya's defence. We will also be contacting City Rooms tenants to get organised to fight their own problems - which appear numerous according to online complaints.

And the Socialist Party will stand as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) in this May's elections on a programme to solve the housing crisis (see page 11). For mass building of council homes and democratic rent caps. Secure tenancies for all, and the right to leave without extortionate debt claims!

And all this during the pandemic! The Financial Conduct Authority granted property owners the right to

meanwhile, Lawanya is penniless and couch surfing. She has offered her security deposit in full - but has nothing else to her name. City Rooms should face facts and set the balance aside.

And the workers should be paid a real living wage of at least £12 an hour.



Lawanya speaking at the conference of the National Shop Stewards Network MARY FINCH

## Multimillion-pound rental firm demands thousands from homeless asylum seeker

**JAMES IVENS**  
EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

A property firm with turnover in the millions is pursuing a campaigning asylum seeker for thousands through the courts. We say: Defend Lawanya - fight for tenants' rights!

Last August, Latha Lawanya Ramajeyam found herself unable to make rent on her room due to the legal costs of her asylum case. She duly informed her property management, City Rooms, that she couldn't continue her contract and would leave.

Unfortunately, tenancy laws are weighted in landlords' and letting agents' favour. Because her contract had no 'break clause', City Rooms is demanding several months of unpaid rent. With interest and costs, that's £2,850 - and rising.

City Rooms - the trading name of Oliver Walton Ltd - last year filed a turnover of almost £21 million for 2019, with reserves above £978,000. Its total profit was just shy of £895,000, with shareholders receiving £850,000 dividends.

### Penniless

And all this during the pandemic! The Financial Conduct Authority granted property owners the right to

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And the workers should be paid a real living wage of at least £12 an hour.

## Covid outbreak at Kent asylum detention centre: Napier is not fit for purpose



Eric speaking at a Kent protest in solidarity with refugees in September NICK CHAFFEY

**ERIC SEGAL**  
KENT SOCIALIST PARTY

The dilapidated Napier army barracks in Folkestone became the home of 400 asylum seekers five months ago. They are desperate people in fear for their lives. Many have still not even had their asylum claims processed.

Jennifer Blair of human rights charity, Helen Bamber Foundation, said: "Doctors from our charity have assessed camp residents and are seeing a deterioration in people's health and welfare. The longer people are kept in these conditions, the more desperate they are becoming."

With news of a Covid outbreak at the camp, 100 asylum seekers who tested negative were removed. But 180 who tested positive were left behind together, and told to isolate for a further ten days.

Those remaining fear that they are unable to self-isolate, because they are forced to remain in close proximity to each other in the barracks.

The despair and anger at the camp erupted on Friday, causing a major incident. Three fire engines were called to put out a fire in one of the dilapidated blocks.

Police in huge numbers blocked the roads leading to and from the barracks. I was threatened with a Covid fine by the police, while I was trying to report for the Socialist on the desperate situation developing.

The asylum crisis was compounded by recent government plans to end the Dubs agreement to take unaccompanied child asylum seekers. This is undoubtedly due to pressure from local councils like Kent.

The Socialist Party says take the contract for housing asylum seekers out of the hands of private profiteering landlords. Home secretary Priti Patel must resign.

Socialists and trade unionists must counter attempts of racists and the far right to exploit the issue of asylum seekers, and raise the demand for jobs, homes and services for all, not racism. Defend the right to asylum.

## New anti-protest law: State forces want more power to crush the protests that are coming

**ROSS SAUNDERS**  
SOCIALIST PARTY WALES

The Tories are widening their attack on our democratic right to protest. Before Christmas, the Socialist Party reported that Tory home secretary Priti Patel will make protesting outside parliament and courts illegal, and ban protests that prevent newspapers and 'critical infrastructure' from functioning (see 'no to Tories' new anti-protest law' at [socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk)).

The new law would give the capitalist state sweeping powers to crack down on protests and picket lines, which are already limited by several undemocratic restrictions. Now Patel has also announced plans to turn a populist attack on travellers into an attempt to make 'intentional trespass' a criminal offence, giving police powers to arrest anyone who protests on private land.

Capitalist governments are scrambling to gather powers to try and crush the protests that they can see

coming, as a result of the discrediting of their system. Big business politicians have been exposed as willing to sacrifice our safety and lives for profit in the pandemic, and will be helpless to prevent the economic collapse that is coming in its wake.

Under cover of the pandemic, state forces have already begun to crack down on protests. Police even used Covid powers to force students in Plymouth to abandon plans to display a banner demanding rent refunds (see 'Plymouth rent strike continues despite police harassment').

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Capitalist governments are scrambling to gather powers to try and crush the protests that they can see

### ● Emergency motion

Here is an edited version of an emergency motion Eric has proposed to South East Kent Trades Union Council. Please pass it in your union too.

We call upon the Home Office to immediately close down the Napier barracks in Folkestone - the detention centre housing four hundred asylum-seeking men - due to an outbreak of Covid-19. The Napier barracks is not fit for purpose.

These vulnerable people, who have fled war and torture, must now be moved to safe accommodation where self-isolation and appropriate social distancing is facilitated.

They must have access to medical treatment for their mental and physical health.

Their asylum claims must be processed within an acceptable time frame, and they should have full access to good quality legal advice and representation via legal aid solicitors.

We call on the Trades Union Congress (TUC), and its affiliated unions, to support the campaign to close Napier barracks, and other military sites, where asylum seekers are currently accommodated.

## Children in care: Privatisation is not working

**SOCIAL WORKER AND UNISON UNION MEMBER**

Many people would think that children, who are in the care of a local authority, would be safe, well cared for and free from the risks of sexual or criminal exploitation. Sadly that is not always the case.

Some of the children who were involved in the Rochdale sexual abuse scandal were living in a children's residential home that was run by

a private equity company. Following the Rochdale scandal, a review of private children's residential care provision revealed that one in three of the homes run by the two largest providers were classed by Ofsted as either "inadequate" or "requiring improvement".

In a task this important, requiring a high level of safeguarding skills, it is shocking that most of this care is provided by the private or charitable

sector, and not directly by local authorities. Private care will always have the need to make profit high on its agenda.

The six biggest providers of children's residential care made £219 million profit last year. Some made over 20% profit.

75% of children in residential care are cared for in the private sector, and one third of children in foster care are placed with private agencies.

# Usdaw union conference stripped of democracy by the leadership

RYAN ALDRED

USDRAW SOUTH WALES AND WESTERN EC CANDIDATE



The executive council (EC) of Usdaw, the retail and distribution workers' union, agreed at its January meeting to strip back its 2021 conference, the annual delegate meeting (ADM), into a two-day event, with union democracy being the main casualty. The left minority on the EC opposed these proposals. A circular issued to branches gives no justification or explanation for shortening the ADM in this manner.

The ADM in 2020 was cancelled with no online equivalent offered. No provision has been made for the propositions put forward for that ADM, and with branches only able to submit three propositions, the issues that members can raise are severely limited.

With the number of propositions likely to be resubmitted from last year, as well as a whole swathe of issues thrown up by the coronavirus crisis, a full union conference is needed to face up and respond to serious challenges in the retail, distribution and allied sectors.

Plans set out by General Secretary Paddy Lillis in the circular are an attempt to turn the ADM from being the 'parliament' of the union into a rubber stamp for proposals emanating from the EC. So ADM will be able to debate EC statements, which can't be amended, as well as rule changes, including the EC's controversial delayed proposal from last year to close to new entrants the lower subs rate for part-time workers.

But motions submitted from branches face a huge curtailment of debate, instead of being moved by the branch and then debated by delegates. Lillis' proposals graciously still allow delegates to vote, but the only things delegates will have to go on as to how to vote will be the text of propositions and an accompanying document setting out the stance of the EC with an explanatory note.

Emergency propositions (which usually can be submitted up to a week before ADM) are

banned altogether. The last date for initial submission of propositions was 9 November 2020. There have been thousands of redundancies since then, the collapse of the Arcadia Group the threat of job cuts in Sainsbury's, the firing and rehiring tactics employed by a Tesco distribution centre in Livingston, to name but a few issues that have arisen.

## Debate and amendments

Lillis' proposals also include plans to issue a revised temporary code of standing orders (the rules by which the ADM is conducted). Any such proposals should be put to a vote, with the opportunity for branches to debate and amend, at the beginning of the ADM.

Given the rapidly spreading new variant of Covid, the only way an ADM could take place when scheduled in April would be online.

But the proposals of how to conduct such

an online ADM, especially given it will be first meeting of the union's delegate body in two years, should prioritise the voice of the membership.

There has been a concerning trend of undermining union democracy under Paddy Lillis' leadership, which underlines the importance of building the Usdaw Broad Left to challenge the current leadership of Usdaw.

Branches should pass resolutions condemning the proposed changes to the ADM, and call on the EC to restore the ADM back to the full four days in line with the rules.

Members should also use their votes in the ongoing union elections to elect a fighting, democratic leadership that is prepared to face the bosses, while remaining accountable to the membership.

● See [socialistparty.org.uk](https://socialistparty.org.uk) for full article and a motion for branches to use

## Usdaw Broad Left rally brings together those campaigning for a fighting union

JOE WATERS

USDRAW MEMBER  
AND GLOUCESTERSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY

Members and supporters of the Usdaw Broad Left came together for a Zoom rally on 2 February in support of the Broad Left's candidates in the upcoming Usdaw shop and distribution workers' union elections for the executive committee (EC) and president.

Socialist Party member Amy Murphy, current president of Usdaw and the first speaker, gave an overview of the situation. She criticised the lack of support from the government, retail companies and the Usdaw leadership for workers during the pandemic and placed the blame on them for allowing retail workers to act as vectors of Covid-19 transmission in their own communities.

Amy proceeded to lay out a programme of action, supported by the

Usdaw Broad Left, to improve conditions for workers and save jobs.

The necessity to move away from Usdaw's 'tripartite' approach of primarily seeking good relationships with companies, rather than fighting for the interests of workers, was raised by Amy and many others over the course of the meeting.

Martin Powell-Davis, a candidate for deputy general secretary of the National Education Union (NEU) and Socialist Party member, spoke next on the experience of teachers, who recently used collective action to force the closure of schools during the current wave of Covid-19 cases.

The importance of a fighting union leadership to lead workers into struggle against their bosses was referred to repeatedly, and Martin identified this as a vital component in the NEU's recent successes, leading NEU membership to grow as Usdaw's membership numbers continue to drop.

Next to speak was Brian, a former worker at Debenhams in Ireland. Brian was made redundant by the company last year and is now involved in protests to win fair treatment for the discarded workers.

At 300 days, the protest of Debenhams workers in Ireland is the longest in the history of the state. However, Brian relayed frustrations among the protesters that the Irish government, and even Mandate, the union representing these workers, had offered little support.

Ryan Aldred, candidate for Usdaw EC in the South Wales and Western division, and Socialist Party member, spoke last. He decried the treatment of workers, many now classed as 'essential', at a time when many big employers are taking increased profits, and while those workers whose employers weren't able to cash in on the pandemic are facing unemployment.

Ryan made it clear that, if elected,

he would continue to stand alongside workers in their struggles against employers, and push for industrial action where companies continue to prioritise the interests of their shareholders over the safety and living conditions of their staff.

The attempts of the Usdaw leadership to suppress the role of internal democracy in running the union were also condemned.

Following the main speakers, the rally moved on to contributions from other attendees, who largely expressed frustration with Usdaw for reasons ranging from lack of support over redundancies or mistreatment by companies, to repeated failures to advance rep training for certain members. Among those speaking was Lynn Goodwin, Usdaw EC candidate in the North-West.

All in all, the experiences shared by those at this rally pointed clearly to the need for a fighting leadership



**Ryan Aldred... decried the treatment of essential workers, when many big employers are taking increased profits**

in Usdaw, willing to lead workers in collective action to secure decent pay and conditions, and to ensure that no company is able to sacrifice the health of their employees for profit during this pandemic or after.

In pursuit of this change of leadership, attendees were encouraged to vote for any Broad Left EC candidates in their region, and to vote for Andrea Watts, the Broad Left's candidate for union president.

# Strong union lead needed to stop DVLA Covid spread

DAVE WARREN  
SWANSEA AND WEST WALES SOCIALIST PARTY

535 Covid cases have been reported at the DVLA in Swansea, including one death. The vast bulk of the Covid-19 cases have happened more recently in the second wave as staff are made to attend work in person.

While many are working from home, most of the operational staff in the lower grades are having to attend work because management say outdated IT systems cannot be adapted for homeworking. Attending work involves using buses in many cases.

As in any large office building, everyone knows how easily even ordinary viruses like the cold can spread, but Covid puts a new and deadly slant on an old problem. There is even more risk now with the new variants of Covid-19, which spread even faster, and the lack of proper ventilation in workplaces. Call-centre work poses a real risk of spreading Covid-19 as workers are speaking all day for their jobs.

The overriding ethos of DVLA is to maintain output and productivity and their attitude towards everything else including health and safety is coloured by this.

The safety of workers cannot be entrusted to DVLA or any other government Department or Agency. PCS General Secretary Mark Serwotka says he has intervened with ministers regarding DVLA, but more is needed. PCS must give a lead now and take collective action to get workers out of an unsafe environment.

## Broad Left Network

The Broad Left Network is the socialist group inside PCS and our immediate concerns are the employment and workplace issues that face members, particularly health and safety at this time.

## During this pandemic, we say:

- All staff should work from home unless they are key workers and their work can only be delivered from the workplace. The definition of a key worker must be agreed with the union, not just imposed by management
- Special leave with pay for all those who cannot work from home and are not key workers
- All sick leave related to Covid-19 to be written off, including conditions related to long Covid
- Additional compensation for

extra expenses incurred through working at home, eg fuel bills

The current Left Unity-led national executive committee has failed to organise members to respond collectively to achieve a national collective agreement from the employer. From the start of the outbreak, members meetings should have been called to make it clear that they have a legal right to refuse to work in an unsafe environment.

Workers have the right not to go into a work area where they face serious and imminent danger and should immediately proceed to a place of safety.

Union safety reps should assist individuals in expressing and reporting fears about the serious and imminent danger they face and why they need to invoke their rights to proceed to a place of safety and stay at home.

There are protection and legal rights under both Section 8 of The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 and Section 44 of the Employment Rights Act 1996.

The union must throw its full weight behind members' rights to be safe, tackle DVLA management to negotiate what needs to be done to protect the whole workforce from the risk of contracting Covid-19, and take a lead in organising members to act collectively if management fails to respond.

Members working together with a lead from the top of PCS, we can keep members and the wider community safe during this pandemic.

# HMRC: We demand a pay rise without cuts to terms and conditions



## HMRC WORKER

On 1 February, a multi-year pay offer was made to union members in HMRC. After years of austerity pay, it may well be welcomed by some members in the PCS union. However, the offer comes with a worsening of terms and conditions including:

- All staff to be moved onto working patterns including Saturday working; some staff already have this in their contracts
- All alternative working-pattern arrangements to end on 30 June 2022
- AA grade to be abolished
- Reduction in unsocial hours pay
- A significant reduction in flexible working for many staff, although some will be gaining flexible working rights
- Changes to what is considered reasonable daily travel for office closures

After years of pay freezes and caps, it's outrageous to expect us to fund our own pay increases. And given the magnitude of these changes, the offer is actually not very good - 13% over three years (3%, 5% and 5%).

When the PCS national pay campaign was launched in 2018 we had already lost at least 10% of our pay in real terms. Inflation has continued to be 2% a year since then. This offer won't be sufficient to bring HMRC staff back up to their 2010 real-terms level of pay.

Some HMRC staff rely on overtime and unsocial pay. If the offer is accepted, this will no longer be paid for Saturday working. It is highly unlikely that pay increases will replace the losses incurred by these staff.

HMRC's offer isn't being funded by the Treasury. In fact, the money for the offer already exists in HMRC's budget. This means that HMRC could afford to pay the 13% pay rise without any changes to terms and conditions.

HMRC knew that the PCS national pay campaign had stalled and that the government was threatening staff with a pay freeze in 2021. HMRC has negotiated a deal that works for it at the cost of the needs of members.

Yet during the 2019 national pay campaign ballot, over 50% of PCS members in HMRC voted. There is a clear mandate to fight on pay that the negotiators should have used. By agreeing to have the talks in confidence, the negotiators voluntarily tied one arm behind their backs.

## Reject the offer

Socialist Party members in PCS are recommending that members reject this HMRC offer. The national pay claim is for a 10% pay rise without detrimental changes to terms and conditions. The group executive committee (GEC) needs to continue to support this claim and put pressure on the national leadership to build a real campaign on pay. The GEC will also need to develop its own group campaign to address the existing issue of a two-tier workforce, but by raising everyone up, not through HMRC's race to the bottom.

We will need a national leadership with a strategy to win on pay. That's why we're asking members to nominate and vote for the Broad Left Network (BLN) slate for the national executive committee.



## PCS Broad Left Network election candidates - vote for the following

|                                     |  |                                |
|-------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| <b>President</b>                    | Lloyd Marion: (BEIS) (pictured left)                                     |                                |
| <b>Vice presidents</b>              | Brittle Fiona: (Scot Gov), Brown Sarah: (Met Police), Semple Dave: (DWP) |                                |
| <b>National executive committee</b> | Bartlett Dave: MOJ   | Borland Rebecca: Home Office   |
| <b>Brittle Fiona:</b> Scot Gov      | <b>Brown Alex:</b> Health  | <b>Brown Sarah:</b> Met Police |
| <b>Denman Kevin:</b> Met Police     | <b>Dennis Alan:</b> DSG  | <b>Foxton Gill:</b> DfE        |
| <b>Francis Sue:</b> BEIS            | <b>Guinnane Paul:</b> DfE  | <b>Heemskerk Rachel:</b> DWP   |
| <b>Lloyd Marion:</b> BEIS           | <b>Lowry Tom:</b> DWP  | <b>Parker Nick:</b> BEIS       |
| <b>Rees Dave:</b> DWP               | <b>Ritchie Rob:</b> Met Police   | <b>Semple Dave:</b> DWP        |
| <b>Suter Paul:</b> DWP              | <b>Tweedale Saorsa-Amatheia:</b> DWP                                     | <b>Williams Katrine:</b> DWP   |
| <b>Worswick Craig:</b> DWP          | <b>Young Colin:</b> DfE  |                                |



The barricades during the Paris Commune, 1871

MARTIN POWELL-DAVIES  
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

“A spectre is haunting Europe - the spectre of communism”. In 1848, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels chose these famous words as the opening line of their ‘Communist Manifesto’.

Today, it’s not just the rich and powerful of Europe that fear a mass movement rising in anger against them, the same is true the world over. 173 years on, those who criticise the obscene gulf between rich and poor are still attacked as being ‘communists’ - or perhaps nowadays ‘socialists’. Yet genuine socialists are rarely given the

opportunity to properly explain their programme and to answer the distortions of their critics.

Marx and Engels, both still under 30 at the time, wrote their manifesto in order to “meet this nursery tale of the spectre of communism” and, succinctly but boldly, set out their analysis of society and their programme to change the world. Since then, it has been printed and read by workers across the world and translated into dozens of languages.

The Communist Manifesto remains a brilliant summary of many of the key ideas of Marxism, and provides valuable insights into how socialists should organise within the workers’ movement today.

## The Communist Manifesto today

In his 1888 preface to the English edition, Engels answers in advance a question that anyone picking up a book first written so long ago is bound to ask - ‘isn’t this going to be out of date?’

Marx and Engels understood that the workers’ movement must learn and adapt its ideas from experience. The preface makes clear that, even in the 40 years since it had been written, a lot had already changed. Industrial production and trade union organisation had both grown considerably.

### Paris Commune

Engels emphasised that the experience of the Paris Commune of 1871, when the working class had held power for two months, had been the greatest teacher of all. The original manifesto had spelt out how “the executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie”. In other words: the courts, the police, the army and the civil service, don’t act as a neutral arbiter, but are there to defend the interests of capitalism.

The bloody defeat of the Paris Commune had been a harsh lesson in how “the working class cannot simply lay hold of ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes”. Instead, a workers’ government would need to create its own organisations. They would be vital to combat attempts by reaction to overthrow it. Sadly, as the bloody coup against the Popular Unity government of Chile in 1973 demonstrated, this lesson still has to be learned (see ‘Chile 1973: The other ‘9/11’ at [socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk)).

In further writings, Marx and Engels also explained in detail how the Paris Commune had developed new forms of democratic organisation to

guard against bureaucracy. All posts were filled by election subject to recall at any time by their electors. All officials received only the same wage as other workers. These facts distinguish the ideas of Marx and Engels from the bureaucratic degeneration that took place under Stalin in Russia, calling itself ‘communism’.

Of course, the meaning of words can change over time. Today ‘communism’ has been tarnished by the crimes of Stalinism. But Engels explains in the preface how he and Marx decided to call themselves ‘communist’ rather than ‘socialist’ in 1848. The main reason was that socialism was then seen as being a middle-class movement, and they were looking to the working class instead - the class that they saw as being “the really revolutionary class”.

Given all that had been learned over 40 years, Engels was therefore at pains to point out that many of the specific demands listed at the end of the second chapter, the ‘What we stand for’ of the Communist League in 1848, already needed to be worded differently.

So, nobody should read the Communist Manifesto looking for a set of instructions. Specific formulations used in 1848 will certainly be outdated. The timing of events and processes is also hard to judge. Marx and Engels would not have expected capitalism to sustain itself as long as it has.

However, Engels was confident that “the general principles in the manifesto are, on the whole, as correct today as ever”. What was required was to adapt “the practical application of the principles” to match the changed conditions of later times. So long as that approach is taken, the Communist Manifesto has a lot still to offer anyone reading it today.



they were looking to the working class instead - the class that they saw as being “the really revolutionary class”

# THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO

## A guide to understanding society, and how to change it



MATT RE WEBB/CC

## A history of class struggle

The first chapter begins by explaining how Marxism analyses history, summed up in its opening sentence: “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles”.

It explains how, in the first pre-class, hunter-gatherer societies, sparse resources were held in common for the benefit of all. But as society advanced economically, a series of class struggles took place for control of the surplus wealth created, between exploiter and exploited.

### Capitalists vs workers

Under capitalism, that struggle boils down increasingly to a battle between “two great hostile camps”. In one corner stands the capitalist class, the bourgeoisie, the owners of the factories, offices and other means of production - the employers. In the other stands the mass of the population - the working class - people who don’t own those productive forces, but instead have to earn a living by selling their labour power to a capitalist employer to earn wages.

The bourgeoisie grew as a class during the preceding economic era of mediaeval feudalism. Trade grew

from the developing towns, then further again into new markets as the Americas and other parts of the world were conquered by the European powers. Steam power and the industrial revolution provided the ability to produce even more goods and world trade expanded yet further.

Marx and Engels explained how those small traders, owning a few workshops, had developed into the new ruling bourgeois class, owning huge factories, building ships and railways, further concentrating property in their own hands.

This hadn’t come about without the capitalists having to mount revolutionary struggles of their own. A civil war took place in England. The old order had been decisively defeated by a revolution in France.

But now another stage in history was being prepared. The working class, by defeating the property-owning capitalist class, could return society to a system of common ownership, without class distinction and oppression, and now with the benefit of a high level of production, one that would allow needs to be fully met.



The working class, by defeating the property-owning capitalist class, could return society to a system of common ownership

## Capitalism’s profit-driven contradictions

The manifesto goes on to explain the processes driving society towards that next revolutionary change - and the end of capitalism. Above all, it outlines one of capitalism’s insoluble contradictions - something Marx would then write about in much greater detail in ‘Capital’ and elsewhere.

He explains how capitalists make profit from the “unpaid labour of the working class”, or as the old Labour Party ‘Clause 4’ put it, by not paying the working class “the full fruits of their industry”. Workers are paid less in wages than the value of the goods they have produced.

In order to maximise profit, and keep up with their competitors, capitalists are driven to try and cut costs by keeping the costs of wages down and the length of the working week up. The manifesto describes how, at the time it was being written, women were being brought into the workforce - not in the interests of ‘equality’, but as another way to pay less for labour power.

But the working class also provides

the main market for the goods made by capitalism. So, if workers can’t afford to buy them, the capitalists aren’t able to sell their goods.

To find a way out of this crisis factories close, workers lose their jobs, goods go to waste, and competitors go bust. Then, those that remain in business can start up again, with wealth now concentrated in even fewer hands.

A capitalist system built on making a profit, rather than the rational planned development of society, can’t resolve this fundamental problem of ‘overproduction’. Capitalism is a system that has crisis wired into its workings, and in the declining capitalism of the twenty-first century those crises will get worse.

That’s why the world is overripe for a socialist transformation of society, one that will make sure that production is no longer held back by private ownership. Instead it will be taken into public ownership, run under democratic working-class control and management.



Capitalism is a system that has crisis wired into its workings, and in the declining capitalism of the twenty-first century those crises will get worse



South African mine workers on strike in 2012

## The working class - capitalism’s grave diggers

The manifesto outlines a range of other important ideas that were then developed further by Marx and Engels themselves, and by other Marxists that followed them.

In the 1882 preface to the Russian edition, Marx and Engels suggest an idea that was later fleshed out in more detail by the Bolsheviks. They wrote that a revolution in a less economically developed country like Russia could become “the signal for a proletarian revolution in the West, so that both complement each other”.

The manifesto discusses education, the family, religion, morality, nationality and more, explaining that “the ruling ideas of each age” the ideology that dominates society, are always the “ideas of its ruling class”.

The manifesto raises important tactical considerations about how Marxists organise alongside other workers. It explains how Marxists should fight “for the attainment of immediate aims” but, in every movement, “bring to the front, as the leading question” - in other words, the need to change society. This is an approach later developed more fully by Leon Trotsky as formulating ‘transitional demands’.

Above all, the manifesto explains how, by increasing the size of the working-class, and by bringing workers together in the workplace, capitalism “produces its own grave diggers”.

Marx and Engels’ confidence in the ability of the working class to change society jumps out of the pages. Then, as today, many middle-class intellectuals wrote off workers as being too stupid, or too ignorant to change society.

In contrast, Marx and Engels asserted that a combination of theory and practice, of “combined action and mutual discussion ... the defeats even more than the victories”, would teach the workers’ movement to ignore the false promises of the reformists and

reactionaries, and instead learn what they needed to do to change society.

The manifesto explains that the working class will not become just another in the long line of ruling classes grabbing hold of society’s resources for the benefit of their small number, at the expense of everyone else. No, for the first time in history, the working class will be changing society as the overwhelming majority of society. As a present day slogan puts it: “For the billions, not the billionaires”.



Above all, the manifesto explains how, by increasing the size of the working-class, and by bringing workers together in the workplace, capitalism “produces its own grave diggers”

To do so, they also need to build a party that is “practically, the most advanced and resolute section of the working-class parties of every country, that section which pushes forward all others” and, at the same time, has “theoretically ... the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement”.

So, find a copy of the Communist Manifesto, read and discuss it. But, when you have, then put theory into practice and help build the clear, determined working-class leadership we need today. Join the Socialist Party and the Committee for a Workers’ International for fight for socialist change in England and Wales, and internationally.

Join the fightback

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# Why I rejoined the Socialist Party



KIERAN BARLOW GRIMSBY AND SCUNTHORPE SOCIALIST PARTY

18 months ago, I left the Socialist Party following a political dispute which led to a small opposition group splitting off.

After careful consideration and reflection over the last few months, I now know this was the wrong decision for me, and the wrong direction for working-class people in Britain and internationally. I came to this conclusion as I realised that the arguments used in the dispute contradicted what was taking place on the ground.

So I watched from the sidelines as the Socialist Party intervened in my local area and across the country on the Black Lives Matter demonstrations, climate strike protests, and campaigned alongside NHS workers fighting for a 15% pay rise. These experiences concretely contradicted the accusations that the Socialist Party did not intervene in, or consider the urgency and importance of, social movements.

As a revolutionary organisation we have to acknowledge and adapt to social movements due to how quickly they can rise and fall. Although with a correct orientation, perspectives, and programme, these movements can be drawn towards the workers' organisations, and activists can be won to a revolutionary party like the Socialist Party.

During the dispute, the Socialist Party was critiqued as wanting to

be just a propagandist organisation. However, it is the critics of the Socialist Party who have a wait-and-see attitude, rather than taking a pro-active role in trying to promote a new workers' party.

As someone who had previously stood as a candidate for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) in North East Lincolnshire, and gained over 20% of the vote in the 2018 local elections, I'm really pleased that the Socialist Party, along with the RMT trade union, has re-launched TUSC's electoral challenge against Starmer's Labour.

The decision to write this statement has not been forced upon me, nor was I approached by any member of the Socialist Party to rejoin or write this statement. The reasons I approached the Socialist Party to rejoin four months ago are outlined above. They stem from reading both organisations' material and contrast them against what each were really doing on the ground.

I made a conscious, but personally difficult, decision to approach the Socialist Party again. After several discussions and attending branch meetings for three months, I have rejoined. I would recommend anyone else looking for a fighting, working-class, socialist organisation to do the same.

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

# New members meeting in the South West

## Preparing for the battles to come

ROBIN CLAPP SOUTH WEST SOCIALIST PARTY

The Socialist Party in the South West held a very successful online meeting with new members who joined us in the last two months. Its purpose was to offer a question and answer session, with a couple of more experienced members taking up the issues raised.

Eight new members attended from Bristol, Gloucestershire, Devon and Dorset. Following introductions where everyone explained why they joined, the meeting fielded the first question from Cole about nationalisation and what we mean by it. Another member asked where we stood on the role of the police in society, and how that would change under socialism. Jane asked: "Where does the Socialist Party stand on the monarchy?" That one didn't take much time to answer!

Mark wanted to know about the role of cooperatives and social enterprises, a discussion then unfolded about the electoral system and our attitude towards lowering the voting age and proportional representation.

Questions were asked about how we counteract the danger of hierarchical structures developing within our party. This gave us the opportunity to explain how we operate, and the vital role of political education, as well as every member's general rights and responsibilities.



PAUL MATTESSON

Our answers were kept short, further reading was signposted, and the topics discussed were all agreed to be good subjects for future discussions in our weekly branch meetings.

Our five new members in Plymouth were unable to attend as they were engaged in student rent strike meetings, but we will follow up this very successful initiative with a

subsequent meeting geared towards them. Political education can be challenging for all new members, but less formal formats like this encourage member participation. There's nothing better than hearing young members say, after they've heard us briefly sketch out our ideas, "that's great, that's what I hoped, and that's what I think too."



I have been at work putting up the Socialist Party's variety of A2 posters with some of our demands around the Covid crisis. They are now on the four bus stops outside West Middlesex Hospital in Isleworth, outside Richmond station, and at Richmond Bus station. If the majority of them stay up for at least three days, thousands of people will see our demands, that's a result!

WEST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBER

# South Yorks TUSC ready for electoral fight

CHRIS BINGHAM ROTHERHAM SOCIALIST PARTY

On 27 January South Yorkshire Socialist Party members attended a public meeting of South Yorkshire Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) - an anti-cuts and socialist electoral alliance involving the RMT transport union, the Socialist Party and others.

The online meeting was attended by around 63 people, who heard Dave Nellist (TUSC Chair), Gaz Jackson (RMT national executive member), Chris Williamson (ex-Labour MP, now representing the Resist movement, affiliated to TUSC), and the thoughts and contributions of trade unionists, socialists and community activists.

Gaz Jackson, a guard on Trans-Pennine trains, opened the discussion, commenting that "it is an honour to have an association with an organisation that wants to fight cuts". He went on to say that the RMT is prepared and willing to support TUSC candidates, and he encouraged appeals for financial support from the union, indicating that it would be forthcoming if approved at the national executive level.

Reporting on the specific problems facing RMT members, he warned of a "tsunami" of situations where bosses plan to force workers to pay for the mess made by Covid with their jobs, including the recent announcement about ferry routes from Hull being scrapped.

Chris Williamson commented that



if the Labour left had strongly fought the smears and backstabbing against Corbyn and other left MPs (such as himself), then in the winter of 2019 we could have had a Corbyn premiership and a left Labour government.

He went on to suggest that with these actions and others, such as the undermining of the grassroots membership at the national conference, Labour had lost its chance to change itself into a party of its membership, that is, of the working class. TUSC could act as a "lifeboat", he said, for all the disgruntled, and now politically homeless, ex-Labour Party members.

Dave Nellist explained that in the coming period the government would be seeking to recoup its Covid

spending, and that cuts would inevitably materialise. Opposing these planned cuts will be the backbone of our May election campaigns.

Dave proposed that the unions should call a general conference to discuss working-class political representation, including socialists from both inside and outside the Labour Party.

It was reported that the TUSC steering committee has agreed to promote policies from Corbyn's 2019 election manifesto that could be immediately implemented by councils if they want to (see tusc.org.uk). No councillor from any branch of the establishment, who is committed to cuts, should go unopposed in May's local elections.

# Save our square: we need social housing and public services

Waltham Forest Labour council in East London approved plans to build a block of unaffordable, private housing on Walthamstow town square (see 'Save our Square from New Labour gentrification'). The Socialist Party has been campaigning against the proposals as part of the campaign group 'Save our Square'. At the council's planning meeting on 27 January, four Socialist Party members spoke to oppose the plans. We print what Socialist Party member Rachel Lyon had to say to the councillors.

"I'm a local resident and key worker in a primary school and I am opposed to any housing that isn't affordable or social housing that is needed to alleviate the 9,000 people currently waiting on the housing list in our area.

I feel it's a mockery, an eyesore, and a disregard for what Walthamstow is: a community.

We don't just need a reminder of what we can't afford. These plans would be a removal of what we need; communal spaces and affordable housing.

I privately rent a bedroom and can't afford £1,500 - £2,000 a month for a flat, and neither can my peers. You have only allocated 20% to affordable housing, but even that's a joke! 80% of the market rent, I still can't afford that! Do you think that's enough?

Our lives will be disrupted and over crowded, especially at the local station. These flats will tower over all surrounding buildings and

dominate the local area. 1,000 more people in the square. You want to optimise the view for these new private residents, who will most likely be from out of the area, at the cost of our square.

One more piece of land in London that makes money for private organisations but doesn't improve lives. I see losses not gains. I thought our council would invest in our square as a place for our young people to come together in a sports hub, a proper children's playground, an outside cinema, but instead we get a loss of our market square, and overcrowding caused by flats we can't afford, and a loss of opportunities. When, as a council, are you going to listen to what we need?"

# Stop Labour council's eviction of Stratford Circus arts centre

FERDY LYONS EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Newham's Labour council has evicted Stratford Circus arts centre. On 30 January members of East London Socialist Party joined a protest, socially distanced and wearing masks, against the eviction of the centre for its current location in Stratford. For young and working-class people in the borough, the Circus has played a vital role giving us access to the arts; whether it be performing, backstage work, or just watching a show. Socialist Party member James

Ivens, secretary of the local branch of performing arts union Equity, said: "Stratford Circus is an essential facility for both professional arts workers and local youth drama. For a Labour council to be evicting it - in the shadow of the great socialist theatre maker Joan Littlewood - is a disgrace. The council should use its billion-pound reserves to subsidise local culture, not destroy it"

With the local trades council and socialists from East Ham Labour Party also in attendance, it is clear the local community will fight the council to protect the centre. Outrageously,

the eviction process seems to have been rushed through by the council with little to no consultation with the users and local community. What does the Labour council have planned to take its place?

East London Socialist Party will campaign to reinstate the lease so that the vital service can continue. But we need access to the arts and other public services to be expanded, not restricted. We say Labour councils should use their spending powers to subsidise community arts centres and other services to meet the needs of the community.

# Why I am attending the TUSC local elections online conference

## "We need a working-class socialist alternative"

I am attending the TUSC local elections conference to support the decision to once again stand candidates under the TUSC banner. Since the Labour Party has come under the leadership and influence of Starmer and his ilk, it has moved further and further away from socialist ideas, supporting trade unions, and being a party that will fight for the working class. I believe we need an alternative to the established political parties, but

especially to the current Labour Party. We need a working-class socialist alternative, with its roots in the local communities, to get behind and campaign for. I believe TUSC is the best vehicle for this at this time, and will do whatever I can to help to get as many TUSC councillors elected locally. DAVE REES ASSISTANT REGIONAL SECRETARY, PCS DWP GROUP (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

## "We are in desperate need of change"

I am interested in standing in the election as a TUSC candidate because we are in desperate need of change. The mainstream parties are not interested in the working class, and we need an alternative, a party that stands for the workers and is united in its plans for change.

only solution is to listen to the working class, and unite behind a common goal for better pay and living conditions. The other parties have had their chance and failed miserably. We need change and we need it now. ROB LOVELL SECRETARY RMT SOUTHAMPTON DISTRICT BUS AND COACH (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

## "Workers deserve a real platform for anti-austerity and socialist politics"

I'm excited about the TUSC conference. I want to be part of building the sincere voice for workers that Labour has failed to be. Corbyn showed that socialist ideas are popular. But he was constantly undermined by the likes of Coventry's Labour council, which passed disgraceful cuts and closures with no attempt at opposition. And now, Starmer's Labour won't even commit to a 40-hour working week. So many workers, including some

Napo members, exhaust themselves working well over 40 hours. Starmer's gang shows them utter disrespect and contempt by ripping apart the policies that would improve so many lives, and suspending anyone on the left who speaks out. Workers deserve a real platform for anti-austerity and socialist politics; on Sunday 7 February, TUSC will help build that platform. ADAM HARNSWORTH NAPO NEC (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

● Come to the TUSC local elections conference to be held on Zoom on Sunday 7 February, 11:00 - 13:00, to help organise a fightback at the ballot box this May - or whenever the elections take place

● Meeting ID: 828 9659 5909  
● Passcode: 645766



# Help us raise the funds to fuel the working-class fightback

Despite the restrictions placed on our campaigning activity, Socialist Party members and supporters have responded to the challenge by doing what they can to raise much needed fighting fund. The election appeal will be a significant part of what we raise this quarter, but our members are planning lots of different ways to help us smash the fighting fund target.

Stoke branch are writing up a list of all those who have shown an interest in the Socialist Party, but have not yet joined, to send them an appeal letter asking for a donation. While we can't

visit car boot sales, many members are looking to sell items on eBay or, like Birmingham North branch, on Facebook Marketplace.

Over the course of the last year, many areas have held successful quiz nights. More are being planned, as well as other types of online events such as the gaming night being planned by Coventry branch and a poetry reading event by members in Brighton.

These are just a few of the many plans we have heard about. We urge every member and supporter to

do what they can to help us break through our fighting fund target, and make sure we have the resources to help fund the Socialist Party's election campaign as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition. Donate to help us produce the leaflets, posters and all the other campaigning material that is urgently needed to build the working-class fightback.

Help fund the fightback DONATE socialistparty.org.uk/donate

| AREA          | £ RECEIVED | £ TARGET | Q1: JANUARY-MARCH 2021 | DEADLINE: 31 MARCH 2021 |
|---------------|------------|----------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| South West    | 1,684      | 1,800    |                        | 94%                     |
| Wales         | 2,012      | 2,300    |                        | 87%                     |
| North West    | 586        | 1,150    |                        | 51%                     |
| Southern & SE | 1,128      | 2,350    |                        |                         |
| London        | 1,656      | 4,600    |                        |                         |
| Northern      | 263        | 750      |                        |                         |
| East Midlands | 511        | 1,850    |                        |                         |
| Eastern       | 305        | 1,200    |                        |                         |
| West Midlands | 607        | 2,600    |                        |                         |
| Yorkshire     | 538        | 2,550    |                        |                         |
| Other         | 5,760      | 3,850    |                        | 150%                    |
| TOTAL         | 15,051     | 25,000   |                        | 60%                     |

## EU and UK ministers scrap over vaccine supplies

# Covid 'vaccine wars' underline failure of capitalist nation states to deal with the global pandemic

NIALL MULHOLLAND  
COMMITTEE FOR A WORKERS' INTERNATIONAL (CWI)

The European Commission has been forced into a humiliating climbdown following its attempts to control exports of the AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine, which threatened a 'vaccine hard border' in Ireland.

The EU's threat to stop vaccines crossing freely from the EU to Northern Ireland, which remains in the EU's single market, sparked a diplomatic crisis between the UK, Ireland and the EU. The World Health Organisation became embroiled, warning that "vaccine nationalism" would seriously disrupt the vaccine roll out across Europe.

The row began when the Anglo-Swedish-owned pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca said that manufacturing problems at one of its European factories meant it would deliver only 25% of planned doses to the EU in the first quarter of 2021.

The EU Commission demanded that some of the shortfall to the EU should be made up from the 100 million vaccine doses allotted for Britain. The UK government said that could breach AstraZeneca's contractual obligations with them, made three months before the EU deal with AstraZeneca.

Having presided over the UK government's disastrous Covid policies that have left over 100,000 dead - a much higher figure than any other European country - Boris Johnson is desperately driving on the UK vaccination programme, dismissing concerns about effectiveness. However, the EU commission threatened that if AstraZeneca did not agree to its terms, other contracted vaccine supplies to the UK that are made in the EU, in particular the 40 million doses of the BioNTech/Pfizer vaccine manufactured in Belgium, may be affected.

The EU Commission and its president, Ursula von der Leyen, have come under growing criticism

within the EU for its failure to roll out a vaccination programme across all the member states. This follows the decision last year to allow the EU Commission to coordinate the EU's 27 member-states' vaccine programmes, which was used to promote the EU's single market.

However, prolonged bartering with vaccine producers followed, compounded by poorer EU states' suspicions that vaccine contracts could be diverted to companies in richer France and Germany. This left the EU significantly lagging behind the US, UK and Israeli governments' vaccination roll out.

As tensions mounted, the EU Commission stated it would impose emergency border controls on vaccines entering Northern Ireland ('back door' to Britain) from the EU. The EU commission said it would invoke Article 16 of the Northern Ireland Protocol to impose vaccine export controls on Northern Ireland.

### 'Hard border' fears

The 'Northern Ireland Protocol' was agreed after years of painstaking Brexit negotiations between the EU and UK, and sees an 'open border' in Ireland. This is partly due to fears that a hard border would be a potent symbol of the partition of Ireland, becoming a target for armed dissident republicans and broader nationalist opposition, marking a return to a militarised border and dangerously inflaming sectarian tensions in the North.

Article 16 has a 'safeguard' clause to override the Protocol but few commentators would have expected it to be invoked a mere month after the implementation of the Brexit agreement. The EU Commission referred to the risk of "serious societal difficulties" in the EU if it could not deploy enough vaccines to justify invoking Article 16.

The EU Commission's actions led to a severe backlash from London and Dublin. Irish government ministers, Sinn Féin and even



PHOTO US SECRETARY OF DEFENSE/CC

arch-pro-EU nationalist politicians in the North warned that the Good Friday Agreement and 'peace' were being undermined.

Arlene Foster, the Democratic Unionist Party leader and First Minister of the Northern Ireland Executive, called the EU's actions a "hostile" act.

The EU Commission's plans raised hackles internationally, as capitalist governments scramble to obtain adequate vaccinations.

Canada, Japan and South Korea all raised objections to the EU's requirement that manufacturers get permission before despatching Covid-19 vaccines outside the EU. The International Chamber of Commerce warned that export restrictions could lead to retaliation from other countries and "have a devastating impact on global vaccine supplies".

Facing such an intense international backlash, the EU Commission

did a quick about-turn and republished its vaccine shipment control measures with Article 16 removed. But the Commission warned that it will take measures needed to ensure vaccine supplies are not going to 'third countries'. Separately, France and Germany have threatened AstraZeneca with legal action over shortages of vaccines.

The DUP and hard-line Brexiteer Tory MPs have used the crisis to push the Boris Johnson government to demand scrapping of the Protocol and a renegotiation of the Brexit agreement with the EU.

### Tory Brexit bite-back

Arlene Foster and the DUP are under pressure from their support base after having supported Tory Brexit plans, only to find their 'red lines' crossed in the eventual deal. This has resulted in an 'east-west border' created in the Irish Sea, with checks on goods coming into Northern Ireland from Britain.

Red tape and bureaucracy has led to delays and shortages of some foodstuffs and goods to Northern Ireland, with conspicuously empty shelves in shops. Graffiti opposing the 'Irish Sea border' has appeared in loyalist areas and loyalist paramilitaries are believed to be behind threats against goods inspectors, leading to a suspension of checks on animal and food products at Larne and Belfast ports.

The vaccination rows reveal the callousness of the ruling classes

across Europe. The insanity of the profit system sees capitalist nation states, within and outside the bosses EU, at each other's throats. The scale of genuine cooperation, coordination and pooling of resources and know-how needed to deal effectively with the pandemic is impossible on the basis of the system of capitalist competition.

In contrast, a socialist internationalist approach would see big pharma taken into public ownership and run democratically by working class people in the interests of people's health, as part of a socialist reorganisation of society.

• Myanmar military coup  
See [socialistworld.net](http://socialistworld.net) for forthcoming article and also background material



PHOTO OLAF KOSINSKI/CC



PHOTO OPCW/CC



PHOTO RICHTER FRANK-JURGEN/CC

Ursula Van Der Leyen, Boris Johnson and Arlene Foster have engaged in a diplomatic scrap over Covid vaccine supplies





## DO YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?

- Send your news, views and criticism, in not more than 150 words, to [editors@socialistparty.org.uk](mailto:editors@socialistparty.org.uk) - or if you're not online, PO Box 1398, Enfield EN1 9GT
- We reserve the right to shorten and edit letters. For legal reasons, we need your full name, address and phone number - but confidentiality will be respected if requested

# THE SOCIALIST INBOX

## ● Capitalist governments turned blind eye to Holocaust

On 27 January 1945, Auschwitz was liberated by the Red Army. The Nazi 'final solution' encompassed ghettoisation, murder and, finally, systematic extermination in death camps.

It followed in the tradition of centuries of clerically sanctioned discrimination and repression of Jews throughout Europe. It's important not to forget the hypocritical role of the 'democratic' capitalist countries in closing the door to the desperate refugees.

Switzerland threatened the German regime with revoking the no-visa rule in the face of Jewish emigration. After negotiation, the Nazis agreed to mark all Jewish passports. Free movement was maintained on the basis of selectively excluding Jews.

Those seeking an escape route were often doomed by their passports. The United States had strict quotas on the basis of nationality, with Polish migrants being 'oversubscribed'. Jews were allowed to settle in Palestine, which was under British control, with discriminatory admittance imposing quotas on poorer Jews.

French politician Georges Bonnet asked German diplomat Joachim von Ribbentrop to prevent Jews travelling to France. This presented Hitler with an opportunity to maliciously gloat: "It is a shameful example to observe today how the entire democratic world dissolves in tears of pity but then, in spite of its obvious duty to help, closes its heart to the poor, tortured Jewish people."

Even in the face of systematic Nazi murder, 'democratic' governments took a cold, callous, selective approach to the plight of the Jewish refugees, with uncomfortable parallels today.

**DANIEL THORBURN**  
CARLISLE

## ● Council cuts could easily be stopped

Liverpool Council is proposing shutting down every One Stop Shop in the city, part of £23 million cuts and tax hikes planned. Liverpool's Labour councillors justify these horrendous proposals by declaring that they have 'no alternative'. The reality is different.

The council has usable reserves of £47 million - more than double the planned cuts and tax hikes. These reserves can and should be drawn down to avoid cuts and tax rises.

A campaign can then be launched - in collaboration with other councils - demanding that the Tory government reverse cuts in central government funding and provide relief for local authorities to maintain vital public services. Rather



than adopt this fighting strategy, Labour councillors choose to carry out the Tories' dirty work.

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), in contrast, will fight the cuts by whatever means necessary. Its candidates will not hide behind phoney excuses. They will have my support when the next set of local elections are held.

**ALEX SMITH**  
LIVERPOOL

## ● Why we need the Socialist

I congratulate Socialist Party members wholeheartedly for continuing to produce the Socialist during this very difficult period. It is a vital tool in building our party and educating our members, alongside attracting new people to our ideas.

The paper continues to provide brilliant analysis of the key developments around the world and in Britain, alongside great articles written by workers on the front line - fighting the onslaught of the bosses and the capitalist system.

**CHARLIE TAYLOR**  
DERBY

## ● 35-hour week

Regarding the article by Gary Clark concerning Royal Mail (see 'Royal Mail management forced to make concessions' at [socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk)).

Royal Mail was privatised in 2014. Clearly in order to make real progress with terms and conditions, postal workers will have to run a campaign for the hearts and minds of public opinion in the hope that some government will return them to the public sector.

Regarding the 35-hour week, clearly this should be the case. I had a 35-hour week in 1973 in a white-collar occupation.

I was a member of the ASTMS union (now part of Unite). The call at the time was for it to be reduced to 30. We have since had 40 years of neoliberal economics.

I believe that everyone has a right to a work/life balance and that the Trades Union Congress (TUC) should be calling for a 30-hour week.

**ADRIAN B RIMINGTON**  
CHESTERFIELD

# Billionaires hurt at their own game



PHOTO EPIC/CC

**LUKE**  
GLOUCESTERSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY

Recently, users of big online forum Reddit influenced the entire stock market, causing huge hedge funds to go into meltdown. Wall Street is now calling for regulation. These events could lead to a bigger change to market regulation than the financial crisis.

Redditors realised that hedge funds held huge 'short positions' on stocks and that they could view this information online. A short position is betting that the value of a company falls.

Hedge funds are betting billions of dollars that companies like Blackberry, Gamestop and Nokia will decrease in value, because they're companies with big standings but have become outdated and aren't expecting any growth. However, Redditors have influenced

thousands of ordinary people to invest in these companies.

Lots of people buying shares of Gamestop will increase the value of the share, so the people buying them are making massive returns. Meanwhile, hedge funds with short positions are losing billions.

On 26 January, Gamestop opened at \$88 a share on 26 January. It peaked at \$469 a share on 28 January.

So, while the normal people who are investing are taking risks, they have been able to take huge sums of money away from billionaires and Wall Street.

Obviously, the capitalist class isn't happy that ordinary people are playing their game and manipulating the market to make money, the way that the capitalists normally do.

The difference is that they're now on the losing side, and are now arguing the

game is unfair.

Some brokerage apps - which people use to buy shares - ceased trading for these companies. People could no longer invest, and the prices began to fall.

They said that their servers were struggling to cope with the amount of traffic, but it's no coincidence that the capitalist class wanted this. The stock market and capitalist class are being criticised for not allowing a 'free market'.

These events changed people's lives. There are stories online of people thanking Reddit as it allowed them to pay their medical costs or next month's rent.

It has also opened a lot of people's eyes to the system we live in, and how the capitalist class is able to make vast amounts of money with no actual work and producing no value.

## ● Capitalists still in control

The comeuppance of a few greedy hedge funds is hilarious - and welcome! But those left outlets which have suggested that this 'short-squeeze' is in itself a threat to the capitalist system are mistaken, sadly.

Even if every hedge fund in the world were bankrupted at once, which is not on the cards, industry, finance and the economy as a whole remain privately

owned. Just look at how the capitalists shut down trading when small investors went too far. Instead, the whole sector should be nationalised under democratic workers' control and management.

Some small investors will make big money at the hedge funds' expense; others may be left carrying the can, and lose their homes, when the bubble bursts. And the latest move - some small investors trying to short-squeeze big banks' control of silver - seems implausible at best.

Meanwhile, big investors will lose some capital but not control of the

engines which produce it. Hedge fund managers may lose their jobs, but will waltz into other ones.

For the most part this does not seem to be ideological spite against the hedge funds, but small investors trying to make some money off a bubble. Some working and middle-class people in the US are reportedly throwing their college or retirement funds into it, gambling that they can then cover medical bills and so on. This in itself is an indictment of the system.

**JAMES IVENS**  
EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

## ● Mini-revolution in murky world of finance capital

The Wall Street commentator on Newsnight seemed genuinely lost at what had happened. He couldn't

understand how thousands of 'little people' - with a nostalgia for old brands that were about to fall victim to Wall Street - could be rallied against Wall Street to bring a big beast down.

But he only called for reform from above. Yeah right, like Wall Street will ever allow that.

How incredible too that when

thousands of normal people do what Wall Street does, the regulator steps in and closes them down. So much for the free market.

This was a mini-revolution in the murky world of finance, and it may be a harbinger of the actual revolution to come.

**NANCY TAAFFE**  
WALTHAM FOREST SOCIALIST PARTY

# 1971: Rolls-Royce crisis

## When the Tories nationalised in order to secure the interests of British capitalism

ROGER THOMAS  
BRISTOL NORTH SOCIALIST PARTY

**F**ifty years ago, on 4 February 1971, the flagship British engineering company Rolls-Royce collapsed into receivership placing 80,000 workers' jobs at risk. Workers were informed of the collapse over the Tannoy system while at their benches or desks.

The response of one trade union shop steward expressed the shock and anger: "We are fighting the Battle of Britain all over again". In parliament, left-wing Labour MP Tony Benn called it a "major national tragedy, a grave blow to confidence in this country".

Meetings of workers were held at the company's sites, such as the one in Bristol on 7 February, involving local shop stewards and MPs; and frantic lobbying began to save jobs.

The newly elected Tory government of Prime Minister Edward Heath had made a virtue out of not saving what it called 'lame duck' industries, and it had consciously followed a programme of denationalising what it considered fringe assets like Thomas Cook & Son, the travel business, and several hundred pubs.

### Too big to fail

But here it was faced with the potential collapse of one of the international powerhouses of British capitalism. Rolls-Royce played a huge role in national and international defence and in civil aviation.

Rolls-Royce had received substantial government assistance over the years, towards development costs. This had especially been the case in respect of the development of a new generation of engines, the RB211.

A cash squeeze developed as engine costs started to outrun the estimates, and the company considered it wise to develop an advanced version of the engine before recouping costs for the original. In 12 months the costs of development had more than doubled.

The Conservative government agreed to a further £42 million in launching aid, with the banks providing a further £18 million as long as the company's board was restructured with the arrival of Lord Cole, the former head of Unilever, as chair. This money did not arrive as it was contingent on a major audit of the company's finances.

When this report became public all hell broke loose. Production costs per engine had risen to £460,000 - a loss of £110,000 per engine. The more engines they built, the bigger the loss.

On 22 January the board concluded that the RB211 development could not be met, and on the 26 January decided that, subject to



The RB211 engine, whose spiralling development costs bankrupted the aerospace giant PHOTO ASHLEY DACE/CC

consultations with the government and its main customer the US-based aircraft manufacturer Lockheed, the project should be brought to an end.

On 4 February they brought in the receiver. Trading in Rolls-Royce shares ceased on the London stock exchange, and the FT industrial index dropped 8.7 points, with the stocks of companies heavily linked to Rolls-Royce especially hard hit.

The government held two days of cabinet meetings before announcing

that it would step in. Refusing to nationalise Rolls-Royce in its entirety, other sectors, like cars, were left to be disposed of by the receiver.

A government bill to take over Rolls-Royce was prepared and presented to parliament within a week.

Allowing the company to simply collapse was untenable in terms of its effect on the interests of British capitalism in general, and its international standing.

While paying a 'fair price' to the

shareholders and creditors via the receiver, little concern was expressed in respect of the workers whose jobs were threatened by the arrangements, save that 'assistance' would be provided to find new jobs for those made unemployed.

This arrangement also ensured that the government avoided responsibility in respect of commercial liability, whereas full nationalisation of Rolls-Royce would have left them financially exposed.

Nationalisation stabilised the company, which was then privatised by Thatcher in 1987.

The example of 1971 indicates how quickly the ruling class can sanction nationalisation, in this case within days, when its overall interests are threatened. Rolls-Royce was just too important to allow it to go to the wall.

In 1974, faced with mass redundancies by weapons manufacturer Lucas Aerospace, which had large government defence contracts, the combine shop stewards committee appealed to the then Labour government to nationalise the ailing company.

To facilitate this, they drew up a plan of alternative, socially useful production, published in 1976. The Financial Times described it as "one of the most radical alternative plans ever drawn up by workers for their company". However, it was not implemented because the Wilson/Callaghan Labour government didn't nationalise Lucas, although industrial action did save some jobs.

### New crisis

Rolls-Royce is once again suffering a cash flow crisis arising out of the collapse of air travel in the pandemic, and last year announced 3,000 job cuts in the UK.

However, strike action started in November 2020 by Rolls-Royce workers at the Barnoldswick plant in Lancashire secured a ten-year guarantee for the plant, 350 jobs, and a two-year no compulsory redundancies deal (see 'Deal secures Rolls-Royce Barnoldswick factory future following strike action' at socialistparty.org.uk).

During the Covid pandemic, Johnson's Tory government effectively nationalised the private train operating companies to stop them collapsing after passenger numbers fell precipitously. Also, earlier last year, the probation service - which was partially hived off to for-profit companies, disastrously, in 2014 by minister Chris 'failing' Grayling - was renationalised.

These recent examples, along with that of Rolls-Royce in 1971, show that even Tory governments, which are ideologically opposed to nationalised industries and services, can be pressured into making U-turns.

Trade unions worth their salt should not tamely accept closures and widespread redundancies in medium and large-sized companies, but fight to nationalise them.

To secure lasting jobs and good working conditions in the overall economy requires nationalisation under democratic workers' control and management of the top 125 or so companies, along with the banks, to underpin a socialist plan of production.



Striking Rolls-Royce workers at the Barnoldswick factory in Lancashire in 2020. Their action secured jobs PHOTO UNITE THE UNION

# The NEU's 'big announcement' - lessons need to be learned



**MARTIN POWELL DAVIES**  
TEACHER AND NEU DEPUTY GENERAL SECRETARY  
ELECTION CANDIDATE

Thousands of National Education Union (NEU) members tuned in on 26 January to listen for the surprise 'big announcement' that they had been told to expect from their union.

Expectations had been raised, not least that this might be another morale-boosting call from the top of the union to build the collective action needed to defend school and community safety. It was, after all, taking place on the grim day when the official UK Covid death toll had exceeded 100,000.

The news that this was actually about a £1 million donation from the NEU to launch the "help a child to learn" appeal, has had quite a mixed reception. Some lessons certainly need to be learned for the future.

Every NEU member will share the union's determination to tackle child poverty, will be angry at the government's failure to support children and families working at home during lockdown, and will want to make sure that those hurt most by those failures are not left without the resources they need.

But a decision to spend £1 million should not be launched on members as if they were just part of an audience to a publicity stunt. Prior consultation should have taken place through our union structures.

Emails asking members to donate to the appeal themselves need to recognise that some recipients will be struggling to pay their rents and bills. Members and their families have also been hit by the pay freeze, job cuts and furlough.

Additional funds could have been prioritised for supporting districts in organising the campaigns and industrial action needed to win both our education recovery plan and NEU demands to defend safety and workload. After all, a union is, first and foremost, an organisation that uses its collective strength to insist the government changes its damaging policies, rather than having to step in to substitute for those failures.

The NEU's education recovery plan's call for internet access, free laptops, additional spaces and staffing to allow education to take place in

safe environments, and for free school meals throughout the holidays are all vital - and should have had far greater billing. But we should go further.

What about demanding free broadband, for the scrapping of Universal Credit and its replacement with benefits that reflect the true cost of living? For investment in the building of council homes, education and the health service? What about pointing out where the real wealth in society is to be found and how it should be used to benefit the majority, not hoarded by a wealthy minority at our expense?

Nevertheless, given the dire circumstances school staff know exist in our communities, many members will recognise that, alongside our main role of demanding change, we may also have to step in and try and meet some of those urgent needs ourselves. However, if that's felt to be necessary, then why would a union do so through a partnership with the Daily Mirror and a major office supplies company, Viking?

This is not how union funds should be allocated. We should be linking up with schools and local authorities, with food banks and other local organisations who understand pressing local needs and who can build a real network of solidarity, rather than funds being managed through an office supplies company!

NEU donations to support emergency social solidarity must be built alongside a clear campaign to demand the government acts to deliver the funding and policies really needed to address inequality - and that is the priority for our union.

Sadly, the 'big announcement' has been packaged more like a PR exercise. Unions don't build mass backing through PR, but, first and foremost, by boldly explaining their demands to their members, to their trade unionists and to the communities they serve. That's how the NEU must build its support - and how we can work together to win real and lasting change.

● *Support the following Socialist Party members standing in the NEU elections: Nicky Downes, Sean McCauley, Alex Moore, Sheila Caffrey, Louise Caffaro and Martin-Powell Davies*

# Yorkshire aerospace workers strike against pay disparity

**IAIN DALTON**  
YORKSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY

Despite the snowy weather, members of union Unite working on a Babcock Aerospace contract in Yorkshire providing operational and engineering service at RAF Leeming were out on the picket lines on 2 February. This was their third day of strike action as part of an ongoing dispute over shift pay disparity.

Babcock is a subcontractor for BAE Systems, which also provides services at RAF Valley for aircraft such as the Hawk trainer jet, doing similar safety-critical work as RAF Leeming. But workers at RAF Valley receive a shift payment, worth up to £5,000, and more to some workers, which RAF Leeming workers currently

don't receive. Such penny-pinching may be part of the reason behind proposals last summer to move depth maintenance of the T1 Hawk to RAF Leeming last summer.

The workers at RAF Leeming are highly skilled, many having worked there for ten to twenty years, with a majority being ex-servicemen who transferred from the RAF side of things, such as logistics, to the civilian side.

But such is the depth of feeling among the workforce that the union has grown in the run-up to this dispute, and strike action has been escalated from selective one-hour strikes during the first two days, combined with an overtime ban, to longer periods and due to go to 48-hour strikes if the company refuses to budge.



## Fight together against the Tories and Bosses Covid offensive

### Sunday 14 February 12-2pm

Zoom Meeting ID: 844 4470 8960 • Passcode: 889162

# Vote Steve Hedley for RMT general secretary

*The Socialist Party is supporting Steve Hedley in the election for RMT general secretary. Below we print extracts from Steve's leaflet*

"I pledge that, when elected, to continue to put jobs, pay, conditions, safety and work-life balance at the forefront of our campaigns. I will campaign to defend against the coming attacks on safety, wages and pensions.

As general secretary I will use all my experience and knowledge to successfully defend and protect all our members. I will continue to promote equality ensuring every RMT member is treated as an equal.

We will modernise our union and embrace technology to empower our members through facilitating participation in our great union.

I have a track record of 32 years union activity always at the forefront of the struggle. The bosses will fear me as general secretary as they know I cannot be bought or intimidated!

I am standing for a members-led union where, as general secretary, I will work closely with the national executive council, officers and reps to defend jobs, safety, terms and conditions, and pay.

I want the RMT leading the trade

union movement industrially and politically. I want our union free from influences in the Trades Union Congress and Labour Party who want to stifle action and instead promote partnership with the very bosses who are attacking us!

The Covid crisis has provided the government with a smokescreen to attack us and the whole union movement. We must build the largest possible coalition of unions, trades councils, community, disabled and passenger groups to defend ourselves against this.

Since becoming senior assistant general secretary I have not taken a pay rise, but have donated around £15,000 a year to our RMT fighting fund instead. If elected general secretary, I again will not take a pay rise and will keep donating to our strike fund.

We as workers are in an unprecedented situation and we need a clear militant industrial strategy to beat off the forthcoming government attacks. We need to call on all forces friendly to the workers' movement to fight by our side. Most of all, we need unity in our own union and someone able to inspire our members and make them believe they can win!"

# ● Hackney education workers strike

Workers in two separate industrial disputes affecting schools in east London will take three days of strike action in February.

Ten teaching support staff at the Colvestone primary school and the Thomas Fairchild community school, part of the Hackney-based Soaring Skies Federation which educates more than 600 children, will strike over potentially more than 18 jobs being at risk out of about 30-strong teaching support staff.

32 drivers and passenger assistants, who take disabled children to and from school in Hackney also voted unanimously to strike over the failure of their employer, the borough council, to make a one-off £500 Covid-19 payment, and other health and safety issues.

Both strikes will begin on 10 February continuing each day up to 12 February.

Unite regional officer Onay Kasab says: "These two long-running disputes are coming home to roost for the respective employers in Hackney when education is at the top of the political agenda.

"The failures of both sets of employers to engage in constructive talks with Unite has left our members with no option but to reluctantly take strike action over three days in February - hopefully, the dovetailing of these two disputes will concentrate minds.

"Our door for meaningful talks remains open 24/7. However, we cannot stand by while jobs, pay and employment conditions are cut - and our members should not pay the price for the Covid-19 pandemic.

"The health crisis has correctly focused on the importance of education from the prime minister downwards. The teaching assistants at Soaring Skies Federation are still working during the current school closures - in many cases, attending school sites to supervise children of key workers, while remote learning takes place.

"The same dedication is also true of the drivers and passenger assistants working for Hackney council. They are continuing to take the children of key workers and vulnerable children to school during the pandemic. We are now asking for a one-off lump-sum payment in recognition of this work."

Unite is liaising with the other unions concerned about the plans in the Soaring Skies Federation dispute - GMB, National Education Union (NEU) and Unison.

# ● Sage care strike

Care workers from Sage Nursing Home in Golders Green, north London, are to strike again from 4 to 8 February. They are striking for parity with their counterparts in the NHS - a pay rise to £12 an hour and the same level of sick pay and annual leave.

They staged a three-day strike in January. The workers are members of the trade union United Voices of the World (UVW).

Although the employer has said that it is unable to meet the strikers' demands, Sage can easily afford to pay up.

In February 2020, Sage boasted that its income had risen to £3.3 million, with another £3.2 million reserves.

# ● Passport walkout

Passport control staff at Heathrow Airport have voted for strike action in a dispute over new rosters.

Members of the PCS union backed industrial action by more than nine to one in a ballot.

The union said new "unworkable" rosters are being imposed without agreement and that more than 400 of its members are involved in the dispute.

£1/£2 solidarity price

socialistparty.org.uk



# the Socialist

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formerly **Militant**

# WORKERS FIGHT BRITISH GAS 'FIRE-AND-REHIRE' PLANS



**IAIN DALTON**  
LEEDS SOCIALIST PARTY

**B**ritish Gas workers, primarily engineers, are currently locked in a battle with company boss Chris O'Shea over his attempts to impose attacks on terms and conditions through firing and rehiring the workforce.

29 January was the 9th day of strikes by the workers, organised in the GMB trade union, ahead of the deadline of 31 March for workers to sign the new contracts.

In Leeds, around 50 workers joined a socially distanced march around the British Gas call centre in Holbeck near the city centre. They marched in groups of no more than six, joined by a delegation from

Leeds Trades Union Council including Socialist Party members.

The workers are determined to see this attack on their conditions defeated, especially when British Gas parent company Centrica reported an operating profit of £901 million in 2019.

As one worker explained, as well as trying to increase the working week from 37 to 40 hours for service

and repair workers, the company is also cutting their holidays and removing premium payments over Christmas and bank holidays. Meanwhile O'Shea himself will take home an annual package worth almost £800,000 this year, twenty times the basic earnings of an engineer!

The recent victory for workers at British Airways Cargo over

fire-and-rehire plans was mentioned by a number of workers and has certainly given a boost to the confidence of workers that this attack can be defeated.

**The Socialist Party says:**

- Stop fire-and-rehire
- Renationalise British Gas under democratic workers' control

▶▶▶ **CONTINUED ON P3**

**A SOCIALIST RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC CRISIS**  
▶▶▶ [socialistparty.org.uk/coronavirus](http://socialistparty.org.uk/coronavirus)

**WHAT WE STAND FOR: THE SOCIALIST PARTY'S MAIN DEMANDS**  
▶▶▶ see column on p3

