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# the Socialist

Issue 1308

6-13 February 2025

formerly **Militant**

# NO COUNCIL TAX RISES NO CUTS

## 'We won't pay more'



## MAKE THE SUPER-RICH PAY

**D**oes anyone still believe anything Keir Starmer's Labour government says?

Sir "we won't raise taxes on working people" Keir has handpicked local authorities to be given special permission to accelerate council tax hikes. Almost everyone will pay an extra 4.99% for crumbling, privatised and ever-shrinking council services.

People face an increase of 10% in Bradford; 9% in Ne-w-ham, Windsor and Maiden-head; and 7.5% in Birmingham, Somerset and Trafford. These councils will be exempt from the requirement for a referendum if council tax increases exceed 5%.

This Labour government is telling councils to cut services and telling working-class people we have to pay more. But people are already fighting back, in dozens of campaigns in defence of services (see pages 10-11).

But there is no excuse for councils passing on cuts and tax rises. After all, Britain's super-rich are only getting richer by ripping us off - like the bosses of the privatised water companies hiking our bills and polluting our water.

Councils could resist New Labour austerity now by setting budgets that make no cuts, provide services to meet the needs of our communities and refuse to make workers pay. Such a stance would be hugely popular and could help mobilise a movement of working-class communities and trade unions to demand funding from the Labour government.

Faced with working-class pressure, this government for the rich can be made to cough up. Just look at how it paid out pay rises to try to avoid strikes in its first weeks.

The workers' movement and trade unions have to give a lead in building the socialist opposition to Starmer. Part of that is taking steps towards building a new mass party of the working class. The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition stand in May's local elections is an important part of that process (see pages 8-9). The working class needs its own voice, fighting for socialist change. Help us fight for it.

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

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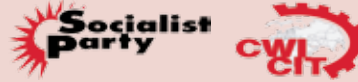
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"The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it."  
**Karl Marx**

# Heathrow's third runway and Labour's obsession with 'growth'

ADAM HARMSWORTH  
COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

Bats or great crested newts? "Neither", Chancellor Rachel Reeves told The Times, "because I want growth". Its a bizarre answer, referring to her announcement that Labour will start ripping up red tape and planning law protections and endorse a third runway at Heathrow airport.

There is plenty of long-standing opposition. There are those concerned about the threat to local wildlife, residents angry at being thrown out or facing more noise and traffic, and wider anger at how the runway will contribute to the climate crisis. All have been cast aside in the name of 'growth'.

While government departments and local councils are told to make more cuts, Labour is preparing to throw billions of pounds at projects they assure us will bring 'growth'. The runway plans were due to cost £14 billion, but this figure will be updated and can only go up. And how much of the bill is the Labour government prepared to foot, after which the airport owners will reap the rewards?

The Labour government ditched its £28 billion climate fund pledge, and

now faces pressure from big business to subsidise infrastructure directly contributing to climate change.

### Tech corridor

The third runway announcement was one of several infrastructure projects announced, alongside linking Oxford and Cambridge to create 'Europe's Silicon Valley'.

Reeves made wild promises of 100,000 jobs and a £17 billion boost to the economy from the third runway, plus £78 billion from the 'Oxbridge Corridor'. Let's be clear, there is no guarantee of economic growth. And no guarantee that workers will feel the benefits of it.

The sluggish economy we have now has come after £895 billion of quantitative easing, corporation tax being cut from 28% to 19% for 13 years, and plenty more pro-business measures.

The relative weakness of British capitalism is plain to see - the economy has barely grown, and most of that wealth has been hoovered up by the super-rich. 'Trickle-down economics' has never worked, but Labour is pretending it will work this time. They're taking billions more pounds of money that could be used to restore public services and pay, to throw at a pipe dream.



Chancellor Rachel Reeves UK TREASURY/CC

Trade unions in the sectors being promised this 'growth' should not accept Reeves's promise of jam tomorrow - or rather jam at some point between 2035 and 2050, according to reports on when we may see benefits of the projects. Workers are struggling now. Services are overstretched now.

It should be the working class that democratically decides what

infrastructure and investment we actually need. Using the wealth and resources of society we could democratically plan to create socially useful jobs like those cut from councils over the last decade and a half, and transition away from being reliant on polluting fossil fuels. That way we could 'grow' our living standards, not the bursting bank accounts of the bosses.

# Trump blames diversity for deadly aviation disaster Trump's tariffs

EMILY LYNDON  
TOWER HAMLETS SOCIALIST PARTY

Two deadly plane crashes took place in the United States within a week, sparking fears over aviation safety. The first took place in Washington DC when an American Airlines passenger jet and army helicopter collided mid-air. Officials stated that there were no expected survivors, with over 60 passengers and crew onboard, making it the deadliest US air tragedy since 2001.

A second crash took place days later when a mid-size air ambulance plane crashed after taking off from Northeast Philadelphia Airport, carrying a child who had been receiving life-saving hospital treatment and five others, all of whom have been confirmed dead. The plane crashed into a residential area causing at least six house fires. Witnesses described the dystopian scenes of the plane 'falling from the sky'.

Days into his presidency, Donald Trump addressed the first crash in a press conference. He claimed that diversity initiatives are to blame for a lowered standard of hiring for air traffic controllers, claiming "this was a job that had to be superior intelligence and uh, we didn't really have that". Following this statement he of course provided no evidence and, when questioned, replied that his 'common sense' was reason for his speculation. Trump's comments illustrate what we already know, that accountability will not come from those responsible, and we are seeing time and time again how the tragic

loss of human life is used to whip up hate and division within society.

While the cause of the second crash has not yet been confirmed, there is wide speculation that the crash in DC was avoidable, following concerns over congested airspace. As shareholders attempt to squeeze out as much profit as possible, we see a decrease in public safety and the conditions of society get worse. Congested areas, whether aviation, traffic or housing, are more likely to suffer the consequences of tragedy, and the capitalist class is willing to make that sacrifice. There is also a chronic shortage of trained air traffic control staff in the US and some reports have pointed to low staffing levels on the night of the crash.

These horrific incidents have not happened in isolation from the range of unfathomable events we are witnessing across the US. From the California wildfires to the authoritarian use of immigration enforcement ICE and increased deportations, all are consequences of profits over human life. While capitalist greed dominates society, the elite hold press conferences to blame diversity hiring, namely targeting migrant workers of the global majority as cover for public sector cuts.

The Independent Socialist Group, the sister organisation of the Socialist Party, is organising movements to unite workers in the United States to take a stand against Trump and right-wing populism and build a workers' alternative.



"Donald Trump has fired the first shots in what threatens to become a devastating trade war... they imperil decades of progress towards economic integration that has boosted US and global prosperity." The arch-capitalist Financial Times editorial on 2 February takes a dim view of what Trump's tariffs will mean for capitalism's stability and for most bosses' profits.

After he announced a 25% import tax on goods from Canada and Mexico, and 10% on goods from China to come into force on 4 February, stock markets fell across Europe and Asia on opening on 3 February. Last minute, tariffs on Canada and Mexico have been postponed. China has retaliated with its own set.

The whole episode further reveals how Trump's presidency has amped up global political and economic volatility. What will it mean for workers' struggle in the US and in Britain?

This and other questions are analysed in the editorial of the February edition of Socialism Today: 'Maganomics and its consequences', and will be a feature of further material published in the Socialist and online.

● Read: 'Editorial: The consequences of Maganomics' at [socialistparty.org.uk/maganomics](http://socialistparty.org.uk/maganomics)

## SOCIALISM TODAY

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February issue includes...

- Maganomics and its global effects
- Higher education crisis - crunch time approaches
- When there were Marxist MPs - Pat Wall's legacy

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# MILLIONS WANT 'REVOLUTION', BUT HOW?

JOSH ASKER  
EDITOR OF THE SOCIALIST

**47%** of people aged 13-27 think: "The entire way our society is organised must be radically changed through revolution", according to a Channel 4 report 'Gen Z: Trends, Truth and Trust'. Other reported findings reveal a deep mistrust in establishment institutions and a sense that 'the system is rigged against us'.

Any wonder? What has this generation experienced but what the report calls "polycrisis"? British capitalism is unable to offer any prospect of a decent future for young people. The world today is more volatile than it has been for the vast majority of the last century - epitomised by Donald Trump's second presidency and the wars in the Middle East and Ukraine. And any attempts to avert climate crisis are hamstrung by competing capitalist profit interests.

Any survey is only ever a snapshot or series of snapshots of what is a dynamic and constantly changing world. The report doesn't give much insight into the changing outlook of young people, but it does compare some figures with survey results from those aged 45-65. Even more of that group - 69% - agree there is 'one rule for them and another for us', and 33% want 'revolution' too.

In fact, an erosion of trust in establishment institutions is a feature for all age groups - that includes a hollowing out and erosion of support for the establishment capitalist political parties. Most of the electorate didn't vote for either of the two main parties at the 2024 general election. Labour was elected with the votes of just 20.1% of the electorate, the lowest of any government since 1918.

### Generation what?

Under the patronising heading "A confused generation", the report correctly observes that young people's views, in any generation, can be fluid and everchanging owing to developing and changing life circumstances. But young people being more likely

to change their minds about things doesn't mean older generations don't change their minds on things too, they do!

Huge numbers of Muslim voters switched from backing Labour at the general election, for example. In the 92 constituencies where Muslim voters made up more than 10% of the electorate, Labour's vote fell by 34% - such was the anger at Labour's support for the actions of the Israeli state against Palestinians.

The experience of a Labour government acting in the interests of the capitalist class - attacking pensioners' winter fuel allowances and promising continued austerity - has undoubtedly already changed the minds of many about what this Labour government represents.

Increasingly, workers and young people will be brought into struggle with this government and it is in the experience of class struggle that people's outlook can be radically transformed. The experience, first-hand or otherwise, of the strike wave has left its imprint on working-class and young people with the overwhelming lesson that striking works.

### Reaction and revolution

If people's outlook is dynamic and based on the experience of a changing society with all its contradictions, then it is also contradictory. 52% of young people think "the UK would be a better place if a strong leader was in charge, who does not have to bother with parliament and elections". But also, 73% think democracy is a 'very' or 'fairly good' way of governing the UK, for example.

Coexisting with the increasingly widespread desire for 'change' are all kinds of reactionary ideas that are used and perpetuated by the capitalist class to try to cut across working-class unity. The report points to divergent views between young men and women on women's rights, for example. However, it is still a small minority of young men and women who think "feminism has done more harm to society than good". And on almost all social issues studies



show views becoming more socially progressive.

That there is such a widespread desire to 'radically change the way society is organised' is extremely positive. A desire to change things has to be part of the process of organising a force capable of affecting change.

### Who can change society?

The experience of the strike wave gave a glimpse of the potential power of the working class and its central role in all aspects of the functioning of society. It is the force that will bring about change.

Over six million workers are already organised in the trade unions. The leaders of two trade unions, RMT and CWU, created 'Enough is Enough' at the beginning of the strike wave, drawing the support of half a million people to sign up, many of them young people wanting a new left-wing party. Unfortunately, the RMT and CWU leaders mothballed it and instead called for a vote for Starmer's Labour at the general election. But the huge swell of support 'Enough is Enough' received is an indication of the political authority trade unions can have.

That's why the Socialist Party argues for the trade unions to spearhead the fight against Keir Starmer's attacks, and as part of that to take steps towards developing a new mass workers' party.

By engaging in the struggles of workers and young people, including participating in the process of the working class developing its own political voice, socialists have a vital role to play in pointing to what kind of 'revolution' is needed and how it can be achieved.

The Socialist Party fights for the

## Join the fightback

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### SCAN:



working-class majority to take into its hands the levers of power and ownership of the commanding heights of the economy. With big business and the banks nationalised under democratic workers' control and management, a democratic plan of production could be drawn up to meet the needs of all, while protecting the environment. Internationally, working-class collaboration could replace conflicts and wars between competing capitalist states.

We have absolute confidence in the ability of the working class to transform society, with young people playing the most courageous and tenacious role in that struggle. If you have a desire for radical change in society and are looking for an organisation serious about fighting for it, then join the Socialist Party.



# Labour's benefit attacks will cause more misery

ROBERTA PARSONS  
SHROPSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY

**H**indsight is a wonderful thing. Looking back, I now see how naïve I was to expect that the system I paid into over the course of my working life would be there as a safety net. I found myself, through a series of circumstances outside my control, temporarily incapacitated and unable to work, navigating CPTSD (complex post-traumatic stress disorder), a hidden disability and chronic burnout as a single mother of three. Throughout my professional life as a probation officer, I endeavoured to treat my service users with the dignity, respect and compassion I believe should be afforded to all humans, no matter their circumstances.

Instead, I found myself completely powerless and dependent on an organisation, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), described in a recent academic research paper as perpetuating widespread "institutional violence" against claimants (and by extension, their dependents).

After battling through the humiliation and re-traumatisation of the Personal Independent Payment application process, the judge

dismissed my claim at a tribunal. He admitted that he hadn't actually read any of my evidence, having only read the submissions put forward by the DWP which, as I had painstakingly pointed out in the evidence he couldn't be bothered to read, were littered with lies, inaccuracies and errors. Just before Christmas I received a sanction of £300 for failing to attend an appointment which clashed with the school run, despite having previously informed my work coach of my dependent commitments.

I can categorically say that the dehumanisation I have experienced at the hands of the DWP has been deeply harmful, compounding the abuse I endure as a survivor of domestic abuse and post-separation abuse. I am one of the lucky ones though. I have just about survived my ordeal - others have not.

Many thousands of people are suffering severe hardship and more lives will be needlessly lost. Ministers have known about the links between benefit sanctions and claimant deaths for years; researchers from the University of Liverpool published a study in 2015 which concluded that the work capability assessment process was linked to an additional 590 suicides in three years. In 2016, the United Nations



PHOTO: BENTRETT/CC

Committee for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities found the UK guilty of "grave and systemic violations of the UN disability convention" and concluded in a subsequent review in 2022 that the UK government had made "no signs of significant progress", and that there were "signs of regression" in upholding the rights of disabled people. In a separate report, the committee's chair highlighted failures in the social security system and said: "There is a pervasive framework that devalues disabled people and undermines their human dignity".

The Labour government is continuing and expanding the Tories' attacks on benefits (see below). It has moved far from its socialist roots as a party founded to promote and advance the rights of the working class. Hardly surprising, given the £4 million donation made to it (the sixth largest donation in British political history) by Quadrature Capital, a hedge fund based in the Cayman Islands with shares in arms companies amongst others.

The Labour government is leading an assault on the rights and dignity of the most vulnerable in our communities while refusing to tax the most wealthy, as increasing numbers of children are dragged into poverty and living standards continue to decline. We need a party that actually represents our needs instead of perpetuating the current trajectory of more systemic inequality.

# Where's the real budget black hole - benefit fraud or uncollected tax?



The tax gap, the difference between the amount of tax owed and what the government collects, has increased to £40 billion in 2024. The vast majority of this comes from the richest, not the rest of us! Not included in this figure are offshore accounts.

Despite this, the Labour government would rather focus its efforts on cracking down on benefit fraud, which would return very little money back to the taxpayer. Labour's rhetoric is another attempt to demonise those struggling due to government failures. It's not just attacking the fraudsters, but sneakily encourages bad attitudes towards all people on benefits, while almost completely ignoring the billionaires that contribute to incomparably more woe!

On another note, in 2024, £1.1 billion was underpaid in benefit expenditure. This might not seem much to the ultra-rich, but even just

**£23bn** of benefits went unclaimed by those entitled to them last year

£10 underpaid to an individual can make a huge difference. £23 billion of benefits people are entitled to went unclaimed last year too!

As part of measures which include snooping in people's bank accounts, the Labour government will punish benefit cheats with a driving ban up to two years, as if that will help people into full-time employment! All of this focus on benefit fraud makes it seem as if its a huge issue. Well, with increasing efforts to crack down on benefit fraud, we could be looking at £1.5 billion being saved for the taxpayers over five years! This is a drop in the ocean compared to the amount of tax avoided, evaded and unpaid by the super-rich. Or the massive frauds perpetrated by the bosses during Covid. Or the money siphoned off every day as profit in privatised services.

**ELLIE ARMSTRONG**  
CARLISLE SOCIALIST PARTY

## Letter: Remembering Remploy

The government is unhappy about the 4.5 million people of working age on sickness benefits making no contribution to the nation's GDP.

In the 1990s I saw an employment advisor at Remploy, a government-funded employment scheme. It had its own factories and workplaces for people who were not 100% fit and well. The Tories shut them down to save costs.

If the Labour government wants sick and disabled people to work then it must assess people and

provide accessible employment. The capitalist system is not able to provide employment for those unemployed who are 100% fit, let alone those who are not.

Remploy produced goods that were sold in commercial markets. Are any MPs old enough to remember when the UK made goods? The neoliberalism much loved by Thatcher and Reagan was not and is not the answer.

**ADRIAN RIMINGTON**  
CHESTERFIELD

**WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?**  
editors@socialistparty.org.uk

## The Socialist Party fights for:

- A massive expansion of public services, including free, flexible childcare and social care. Reverse all cuts, kick out the privateers and bring services back into public ownership under democratic workers' and community control
- To replace Universal Credit and the punitive benefit system with living benefits for all who need them
- A new mass workers' party to provide an alternative to Labour austerity. Take the wealth off the super-rich and make the bosses pay

Socialist Party members are encouraging trade union branches to pass a motion that includes the demand



for the trade unions and TUC disabled workers' committee to organise a demonstration to lobby parliament against disability benefit cuts. To see this motion scan the QR code.



# Cardiff uni: fight all cuts and job losses

## Fight for funding not fees!



ARIS PREVOST  
CARDIFF SOCIALIST STUDENTS

**C**ardiff University has announced a massive slate of cuts, with up to 400 jobs at risk, along with entire courses facing closure. The School of Music, Nursing, Modern Languages, and the School of Religion and Theology are set to be completely cut. And other courses are being combined into new schools, a cover for more cuts.

I'm a final-year philosophy undergraduate. The 'school of English, communications, and philosophy' I am part of is getting merged with five other schools to form the 'school

of global humanities' - set to cut the number of lecturers in half from 240 to 120. Effectively every department, including my own, will see a halving in their staff members.

For me, this is especially devastating. I want to continue at Cardiff University and do a Master's philosophy degree. I've asked our Master's Lead if she knows if the degree is still on, and she cannot explicitly confirm if it is. This puts my life on hold. I have not signed a house contract for the next academic year, and because of these cuts I have to wait until I can get a guarantee of my degree still running before signing anything.

I am just one student, but this is the reality thousands will be facing.

Cardiff Socialist Party and Socialist Students campaigning against the cuts  
PHOTO: DAVE REID

Students whose courses are being cut completely still have no clear answers on what will happen to their degree. Staff members only found out about these cuts a week after the Welsh government knew the plans. Students, including myself, were emailed the day after cuts were announced in the media.

There is a financial crisis in higher education, and the cuts at Cardiff University are the result of accepting a broken funding model for years. The university has relied on exploiting the higher fees they can charge international students, whose numbers have fallen. Money has been poured into buildings that haven't improved the lives of students and staff.

Cardiff uni has reserves of £188 million. It says it can't use these to stop the cuts "easily". Their 'easy' decisions are forcing thousands of impossible situations onto staff and students. We say use the money and fight the Labour governments in Cardiff and London for the funding.

## Students ready to fight back

In response to these attacks, students are angry and Cardiff Socialist Students has seen this energy first-hand while we have been out campaigning. We have organised campaign stalls around the campus and a meeting with other societies against the cuts.

One stall was the best we have ever had in terms of response. We ran out of Socialist newspapers and raised over £45 to help us campaign. Many students stopped to talk about how their or their friend's course had been cut, with many expressing outrage at the university and how devastating this will be on campus and in Cardiff as a whole.

This anger and energy for change that we found in the stall was shown

at the campaign meeting on Monday 3 January. Over 80 students attended our meeting and there was a mood to do something to fight back. We had over 13 societies attend our meeting, from political groups to nursing, and even the Talyor Swift society!

We heard from many different voices about the impact of the cuts. An IT worker reported that their job may be at risk down the line, from either cuts or automation from AI. The meeting also heard from two University and College Union (UCU) members.

By the end of the meeting, a wide range of tactics had been discussed, including more rallies, protest walk-outs and more. A central part of the discussion was supporting trade unions and their actions. It's clear that the student body is angry and wants to change course.

Socialist Students members made the point that Cardiff is a battleground other university bosses will be watching. Many universities are preparing and have announced rounds of cuts. If Cardiff can go through cuts with no pushback, then other universities will use that as a green flag to proceed with their own cuts.

Now more than ever, it is time for a unified student movement to fight back against the cuts and for an education system that works, for funding not fees!

**Socialist Students fights for**

- Fully fund our education system. For Cardiff uni to use its reserves to stop cuts and demand the money needed from the Labour Welsh government and Labour in power in Westminster
- No job cuts or course closures! Open the books to democratic workers and student oversight. Let's see where the money has gone
- For free education, take the wealth off the super-rich to fund our education system including a living grant for all students. Cancel the debt

# University cuts: 'We need to get serious'

Duncan Moore, UCU National Executive Committee (NEC) member, and Marco Tesei, standing for UCU NEC UK-elected FE seat - both Socialist Party members - respond to the announcement of 400 job losses and course closures at Cardiff University.

This attack on our members must be met with the full resources of our union. We fully support the strike ballot planned by Cardiff University staff, and we're certain they will be joined on their picket lines by enraged students and other trade unionists if Cardiff UCU put the call out.

Socialist Party members in UCU demand that Cardiff University uses its £180 million reserves to plug the

funding gap, rather than laying off loyal workers and devastating young people's education. Our union must mobilise members now for a fight against course closures and redundancies; Cardiff is an extreme example of what's happening to our universities across England and Wales.

The current funding model is broken and needs to be scrapped. Just a 4.3% increase in corporation tax could replace tuition fees. Universities should be run by committees of staff, students and the local community in the interests of society as a whole, not to make profit for wealthy investors and pay vice chancellors' bloated salaries.

What is the result of our union

leadership's attempt at 'social partnership' with the Labour government? Is Welsh Labour now going to step in to save these jobs? We need to get serious.

We must start putting the Labour governments in both Wales and the UK under pressure to deliver the goods: full funding to save jobs and abolish fees.

The planned strike action and national demonstration is a good start. But we also need our union to have a political strategy beyond going begging to Labour.

This means putting our resources behind an alternative, trade union-based political party that will fight for what we need.

**Vote Marco Tesei**  
Standing for UK-elected FE seat on the UCU NEC  
Ballot runs till 3 March



The UCU and student nurses in the RCN protesting against the cuts outside the Senedd on 4 February PHOTO: DAVE REID

# London bus drivers demand safety



National Shop Stewards Network and Socialist Party members support London bus drivers MARTIN REYNOLDS

ANDY BEADLE  
RETIRED BUS DRIVER

London bus drivers are getting restless. On 29 January, bus workers marched through midweek traffic, creating gridlock in Piccadilly and Whitehall, continuing to Parliament. Anger and frustration has spilled out.

In the Covid pandemic, dozens of London bus drivers died. At that time, they were called 'key workers' and were praised. Even so, it took direct action by drivers themselves to make buses safer for drivers - not the employers or Labour mayor of London Sadiq 'son of a bus driver' Khan.

Since then, things have only got worse. Cuts from central government - agreed with Sadiq Khan and now continuing under Starmer's Labour government - have been trickling through. Buses are getting busier.

Drivers' demands centre on fatigue. Drivers want clean toilets at the end of their routes. They need warm buses in winter and cooled buses in summer. They do not need controllers calling up and making demands while they are driving. They do not need forced overtime.

The protest assembled near Victoria bus station, site of the death of Kathleen Finnegan, who was hit by a bus exactly a year before. Some drivers met with her family and expressed condolences before the march departed.

Weeks after Kathleen's death, Transport for London (TfL) had still not contacted her family. TfL's neglect is familiar to bus workers. Deaths are now averaging 12 per year; and there are 1,200 hospital casualties annually as a result of bus collisions.

## Unite

Drivers are increasingly frustrated by our Unite leaders on London buses too. Why have they agreed with TfL that it is okay to drive for 150 minutes without access to a toilet?

This demo wasn't called by Unite bus convenors and officers, but it was largely composed of Unite members. That was shown by the domination of Unite flags and placards. Drivers want our union to highlight fatigue and to fight it. More Unite shop stewards and the union's regional officers should have joined their members to show their support. If they genuinely believe the union, across the London bus companies, has already secured these rights, why aren't they on the protests to listen to members and help us enforce them?

Every union branch needs to give its members confidence to demand decent conditions and safe buses, not just in writing, but always in real life. If new drivers can be bullied when they're unsure, that undermines the strength of our trade union solidarity for every worker. The demand for workplace safety is ultimately a question of industrial strength: strong union branches in every workplace with active participation of the membership.

TfL only reflects the collective interests of the powerful private bus firms: the managing director of Surface Transport at TfL always comes from one of those firms, never a bus workers' leader or safety campaigner. The mayor of London, as head of TfL, writes endless promises about safer streets but, for the companies, profit is the priority.

## Renationalise

Without nationalisation with democratic workers' control and

management, big private companies' priorities will always be profit.

Elections for shop stewards and officers are imminent in every Unite branch. Make sure the people representing our garages are really getting through the opinions of your local membership to the wider union. If they are, help them. If not, don't waste time, elect new ones. Not just one person - a supporting team of active members is best.

More members on London buses are demanding change and working out how to achieve it. Get involved!

## Join the fightback

Socialist Party members campaign for fighting, democratic trade unions, wherever possible working alongside others, to campaign for the industrial and political strategies workers need

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# Southwark housing strikers demand better conditions from the Labour council

BERKAV KARTAV  
LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Southwark council housing repair workers began a three-day strike on 28 January. Unite the Union members picketed the two depots in the South London borough on all three days.

Disgracefully, workers who day in, day out perform essential work on council homes and council properties, get 12 days less annual leave than management grades. Strikers told us that over two years this can

mean that managers get almost a month more annual leave than new starters and apprentices.

One of the strikers told us how much the council pays the consultants who tell them to make cuts. Labour-led Southwark council is planning to implement a further £5 million worth of cuts this year attacking working-class people in the borough, including giving contracts to private property developers.

On the first day of the strike, Southwark Unison branch secretary April Ashley and the National Shop Stewards Network chair Rob Williams brought solidarity. Strikers marched from the picket line to the council offices in Tooley Street.

A mass meeting of members is planned where housing repair workers will make a decision on the next steps for the dispute, including organising further action.

Solidarity from April Ashley, Southwark Unison and Unison NEC (right), and from Unite housing workers branch LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY



# Reading traffic wardens strike: Labour council should bring them back in-house!

MELANIE DENT  
READING SOCIALIST PARTY

Huge multinationals with billions in revenue treat their employees with contempt, particularly in terms of pay.

That is certainly true of Modaxo, the transport-focused division of Constellation Software Inc. It employs civil enforcement officers - traffic wardens - several of whom took industrial action during December and January.

Labour-run Reading Borough Council outsourced traffic enforcement duties to Modaxo, which won't pay them a decent wage - just £12 an hour.

I and other Reading Socialist Party members visited the Unite the Union picket line to bring our solidarity. Strikers told us that council employees who do the same job are significantly better paid for the same work.

Modaxo is resisting attempts to bring parking enforcement back in-house. A day of action at Modaxo headquarters in Chippenham, Wiltshire is planned.

Unite's general secretary Sharon Graham said: "Modaxo is a huge multinational conglomerate making billions in revenue, and yet sees fit to penny-pinch and pay poverty wages to our members in Reading."



Members of the RMT transport union on Avanti West Coast resumed weekend strike action as part of their dispute over decent pay for rest-day working PHOTO: ROB WILLIAMS

# NOMINATE MARION LLOYD FOR PCS PRESIDENT

## Nominate National Executive Committee candidates who will stand up to government to defend jobs, pay and pensions



PCS outsourced workers are back on strike this month ROB WILLIAMS

Last year, members of the PCS union (which organises workers in the civil service and outsourced government contracts) voted for change. In the 2024 National Executive Committee (NEC) elections, the former 'Left Unity' leadership was defeated. Socialist Party members participate in the PCS Broad Left Network (BLN), which stood in the elections as part

of a broader alliance for a fighting, democratic union, and won a 19-16 majority on the NEC.

## The PCS Broad Left Network says:

Effectively, those who lost their majority have ignored the will of the members. Having retained the presidency and already occupying the post of general secretary, the Left Unity group has used these

positions, ruling by presidential decree, to block the NEC from making decisions - including, most importantly, our conference mandate for a national campaign on pay, jobs and pensions.

Despite this, in January, the NEC was finally able to agree to rebuild the national campaign - overcoming the last eight months of obstruction.

We welcomed the defeat of the

Tories but, as we warned, within days Labour launched austerity. The 2024 pay remit was underfunded, 10,000 job cuts have been announced, and a pay limit of 2.8% is likely in 2025.

Labour's plans must be defeated. The national campaign must be rebuilt. We must build up our strike fund for the fight against UK and devolved nation austerity governments.

We will not be alone. Other public

sector unions will be in the same boat - the National Education Union (NEU) has announced an indicative ballot of teachers. PCS needs a strong leadership, serious about building a campaign capable of winning.

Help us win an increased majority on the NEC and the president position.

● To get involved and to see more, go to [bln.org.uk](http://bln.org.uk)

# Royal Mail service attacks threaten jobs - Nationalise!

GARY CLARK  
RECENTLY RETIRED SECRETARY OF CWU SCOTLAND  
NO.2 BRANCH

Ofcom, the postal industry regulator, has announced the expected consultation on the future of the Universal Service Obligation (USO), which means postal workers deliver to every door in the country six days a week, whether in urban or rural areas.

Ofcom proposes maintaining first class and parcel post six days a week, but the bulk of letters being second class (taking up to three days or more) delivered on either five or three weekdays, not Saturdays.

This would mean major job losses. In the last few years, all postal workers have seen a complete change in how people use the postal service. There has been a major reduction in the number of letters due to changes in the way people communicate, but at the same time a huge increase in the number of packets that are being posted because of online shopping.

Royal Mail wanted to move all letter traffic to Monday to Friday as they did during the pandemic, which is something we warned about at the time. The Communication Workers

Union (CWU) leadership is positioning the climbdown in the current proposal as a victory: it is "the strength and support of our members that has defended the service". But while they haven't accepted the new USO proposals, they are going along with pilots.

It is true that it is the strength of workers' action that can push employers and the government back. That is why the CWU should not now be going along with trials of these new proposals.

The announcement comes as Royal Mail is sold off to Czech billionaire Daniel Kretinsky.

Since Royal Mail was privatised in 2013, the company and public service has been run into the ground while hundreds of millions has been paid out in dividends to shareholders and bonuses to directors.

During the pandemic, the CWU correctly said that the postal service was a fourth emergency service. Postal workers were delivering and collecting Covid test kits, and going every day to every single door - the only person some people saw day in, day out. The CWU said the role of postal workers should be developed, for example delivering prescriptions and other medical equipment

amongst other services. With a building in every community, the postal service could be developed as an important public resource.

Instead, we have seen major attacks on terms and conditions in Royal Mail, including newer recruits on worse terms and conditions, as well as changes to sick pay and redundancy and ill-health retirement terms.

Many CWU members are extremely disappointed with the failure of the leadership, during the general election and since, to demand that the Labour government brings Royal Mail back into public ownership - despite a resolution from the CWU calling for renationalisation being passed at Labour Party conference in 2022.

This disappointment will be repeated when they read the CWU response to the Ofcom announcement. It finishes with this paragraph:

"This moment is a real test for many groups. Ofcom needs to step up and allow Royal Mail to build innovation into this proposal that would include bespoke and advanced letter delivery services. Our members also want to see the Labour government take a real oversight and involvement to ensure that a key part of the UK infrastructure is protected.

The prospective owners of Royal Mail - EP Group - have committed to restoring faith in the UK postal service - we will hold them to this."

This is a major mistake from the leadership. They should be calling for Royal Mail to be brought back into

public ownership under democratic workers' and community control and management, with no compensation for fat-cat owners and shareholders.

That is what will save jobs and working conditions, and ensure an improvement of the service.



It was action that pushed Royal Mail bosses back PAUL MATTESSON

## CALLUM JOYCE

SOCIALIST PARTY SOUTHERN REGIONAL ORGANISER

**F**ighting for a new party under the Starmer government. And what role for TUSC? was the heading for this year's conference of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), held over Zoom on 2 February. TUSC was formed in 2010 by the late Bob Crow, then general secretary of the transport union the RMT, along with the Socialist Party and others, to provide a banner for trade unionists, community campaigners, and socialists to stand candidates against the pro-austerity politicians of the establishment parties.

Nearly 200 trade unionists, socialists, student activists, and community campaigners joined the conference to discuss and debate the key tasks for those fighting for a new party of the working class in this period and the strategy needed to achieve it.

Dave Nellist, TUSC national chair and previous socialist MP, opened the conference by setting out what the new Labour government has already meant for working people in just six months - immediate attacks on pensions and benefits, continued support for the slaughter in Gaza, and the threat of more spending cuts to come. As Dave put it, there is seamless continuity with the Tories in terms of Starmer's policies.

Unfortunately, as Dave explained, even the left-led trade unions have not yet taken steps towards combating these attacks with a clear political strategy. This leaves open a political vacuum which Reform is trying to step in to - albeit on a temporary, unstable basis - through their right populist, 'anti-establishment' politics. The key task therefore is the formation of a new party rooted in the organisations and communities of the working class.

Dave Semple, national vice-president of the civil service union PCS (speaking in a personal capacity), outlined the attacks that have been carried out against civil servants' pay and conditions over the last 15 years. While many civil servants were thrilled to see the back of the hated Tory government, those with experience of the previous New Labour administration of Blair and Brown had warned that Starmer would not provide any serious positive change. This has been borne out, with major job cuts already threatened across numerous departments and another below-inflation pay rise being offered. All of this, Dave said, posed sharply the question of how civil service workers could get a political alternative to represent their interests going forwards.

Hannah Sell, Socialist Party general secretary, began by reviewing the history of TUSC and its record in the 15 years since its inception. The structure of TUSC has successfully allowed candidates from different groups and trends to unite around a common anti-austerity programme while still maintaining the freedom to put forward their own demands and campaign issues beyond that.

Hannah emphasised that TUSC has always been realistic about its role and that, rather than proclaiming to be a new mass workers' party, it is meant as a lever to fight for steps in that direction, and has always welcomed

# FIGHTING FOR A NEW PARTY UNDER THE STARMER GOVERNMENT, AND WHAT ROLE FOR TUSC?



TUSC stood widely in the 2024 general election PHOTO: JAMES IVENS



The formation of a genuine mass workers' party would require serious sections of the working class entering the political arena

collaboration with others pushing in the same direction. Hannah therefore welcomed the attendance of Andrew Jordan from the Collective. This has taken on new importance now, given that for the first time in TUSC's history it is fighting under a Labour government.

Although many unions are still affiliated to Labour, they no longer have any means to put pressure on the government through the party's structures. This was shown clearly by the motions passed at recent Labour conferences supporting the re-nationalisation of Royal Mail and the reinstatement of the winter fuel allowance, which were both ignored by the party leadership. Hannah explained that putting pressure on this government - like with the Tories before them - is going to require mass protests and strike action.

Hannah also emphasised the significance of Britain experiencing the biggest strike wave since the 1980s, showing that the working class is back and resurgent. Workers will not accept a new era of austerity and pay restraint just because it is delivered by politicians wearing red rosettes. This government was voted in by only

20.1% of the electorate and has become even less popular since.

Steps towards a new mass workers' party could also have been taken before the general election and Hannah outlined the important experience of 'Enough is Enough', the campaign launched by trade union leaders at the peak of the strike wave. This attracted half a million supporters in months - more than the membership of Labour or of the Tories and Reform combined. Many of those who joined were looking for a new party that would fight for the interests of the workers' movement in parliament. Unfortunately, as Hannah explained, that was not how founders of the campaign saw it and so it melted away. Despite that missed opportunity, the election of Corbyn and the four anti-war independents, along with the suspension of the seven Labour MPs who voted against the two-child benefit cap, shows the outline of a potential workers' bloc in parliament that already could be the fourth biggest parliamentary group, ahead of the SNP and Reform.

A key factor in the election of those independents was the voters from a Muslim background who rebelled

against Labour in outrage at Starmer's backing of the slaughter of Palestinians. Hannah explained that, while that particular section of the working class was ahead of others, it was clear from the anger at Starmer after only six months in power that many other sections of the working class would follow their lead if a new party existed.

That is not to say that a new party can just be willed into existence - the example of 'Enough is Enough' was only possible because those trade union leaders involved had gained significant authority from being at the forefront of the strike wave. The formation of a genuine mass workers' party would require serious sections of the working class entering the political arena.

Hannah ended by explaining the need to be confident that the experience of struggling against capitalism and the new government will lead to more and more workers drawing these conclusions. The Socialist Party and its members would see the formation of a new party as a serious step forward, but that would only be the beginning in terms of the struggle to change the world and overthrow this rotten capitalist system. The task

of building a new society based on socialism, able to provide peace and plenty for all, would be posed more sharply and our class having its own party - where sharp discussions on how to achieve that change would inevitably take place - is a very important first step in that direction.

Suzanne Muna, Executive Council member of the general union Unite (speaking in a personal capacity), spoke about how since the election of Sharon Graham as Unite general secretary the union has been one of the most outspoken against Labour, leading successful strikes against Labour-run local authorities and campaigning for the reinstatement of the winter fuel allowance.

Suzanne explained that while these steps have been positive, Unite is still limited by its continued affiliation to Labour without any clear alternative on offer. A motion at Unite's last rules conference to support backing any individual candidates who support Unite's policies - regardless of what party they belong to - was defeated, but Suzanne argued that the debate over this key issue would continue now that the union is faced with a hostile Labour government.

Andrew Jordan, representing the Collective - a network of Jeremy Corbyn supporters, including various ex-Labour activists, independent councillors and candidates exploring the idea of establishing a new party - outlined the discussions it has organised so far.

Andrew acknowledged the role TUSC has already played in collaborating in these discussions and mentioned how the Collective endorsed a number of the TUSC candidates that stood in the general election last year. Andrew said that in his view the main task now for establishing a new party was to develop credibility in the eyes of workers so that any new formation can be seen as a serious vehicle that can be used to fight in their interests.

Tom Allen, who represents individual independent members on the TUSC steering committee, who aren't otherwise members of the constituent organisations, outlined the statistics regarding the millions of people who didn't bother to vote in the general election, no doubt feeling completely alienated from all of the main parties and the potential to win them over to a clear socialist programme.

Tom also cautioned against those on the left who might dismiss workers who mistakenly look towards the likes of Reform for solutions and explained how a number of them can be won over to the idea of class politics by engaging in their communities and exposing how the problems in society



Socialist Party members will be taking part in the TUSC election stand this May, as well as campaigning in our local areas against plans for more budget cuts and service closures

Protesting against the cuts in Coventry in January 2025 PHOTO: JANE NELLIST



are due to the rampant profiteering of big business rather than scapegoated migrants. This was shown by the estimated over 1 million of those who voted for Corbyn in 2017 who had previously voted for UKIP in 2015.

Finally, Tom Porter-Brown from Socialist Students recapped the long list of U-turns that Starmer has carried out since being elected Labour leader in 2019, including his scrapped pledge for free education. The hypocrisy of raising tuition fees again while Starmer and most of his cabinet were able to attend university for free has not been lost on a large number of students today. Tom explained why Socialist Students has taken the initiative to launch the 'Funding Not Fees' campaign to help organise an initial fightback against this attack on campuses across the country. This includes putting demands on MPs in parliament, in particular the five anti-war independents, to take the demand for free, fully funded education in to parliament. Tom also stressed the importance of student activists supporting strikes and picket lines to build links between student activists and the organised working class.

After the main speakers, the conference was opened to contributions from other attendees. Eleanor Donne, Unison member in Basildon, explained the importance of the upcoming county council elections this May as the first electoral test for Labour and potentially a key battleground given the huge funding crisis developing in local government. Rae Cox, Unison rep in Oxford, explained how local TUSC supporters were working with others to organise a lobby of their council's budget-setting meeting to fight for a no-cuts alternative to be implemented instead.

Chris Thomas, previous TUSC candidate in Broxbourne, outlined the positive development of tens of councillors resigning from Labour in protest over Starmer's policies. She also explained the limitation of candidates standing in the election simply as 'independents', as this does not sufficiently distinguish them from those independent candidates who may be standing on a right-wing platform. Part of the benefit of the TUSC description is that it clearly outlines what kind of organisation and programme is needed on the ballot paper.

One such ex-Labour councillor

was Shugufath Quddoos, who spoke to explain how she had been suspended from the party after being the only Labour councillor on Nottingham City Council to vote against plans for tens of millions of pounds worth of cuts last year.

Dave Nellist closed the conference by highlighting the importance of continuing to campaign for trade unionists to stand in elections, independently of the Labour Party - even if their own union is still Labour-affiliated. The hundreds of trade unionists who have previously stood as TUSC candidates has been an extremely important way for them to put forward the ideas for what is needed politically in their workplaces. He also appealed for all those who want to take part in a stand against Starmer's new austerity plans to apply now to become a TUSC candidate this May if there are county council elections in their area.

Overall, this year's TUSC conference showed the continued enthusiasm to fight against war, austerity, and privatisation, and clarified the central importance of doing so now that we are faced with a new pro-capitalist Labour government. Socialist Party members will be taking part in the TUSC election stand this May as well as campaigning in our local areas against plans for more budget cuts and service closures. If you want to take part in that fight beyond the May elections and join the struggle to transform society, then join the Socialist Party today!

Join the fightback  
**JOIN THE SOCIALISTS**

- Visit [socialistparty.org.uk/join](https://socialistparty.org.uk/join)
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**TRADE UNIONIST AND SOCIALIST COALITION**

**TUSC AGAINST CUTS**

TUSC, the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, is the electoral coalition under which the Socialist Party stands in elections. It was set up in 2010, co-founded by the late Bob Crow - then general secretary of the RMT transport workers' union - with the primary goal of enabling trade unionists, community campaigners and socialists to stand candidates against pro-austerity establishment politicians.

• Find out more visit: [tusc.org.uk](https://tusc.org.uk)



# Anti-far right demonstration against Tommy Robinson in London - How can the movement be taken forward?

**THEO SHARIEFF**  
SOCIALIST PARTY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Organised by Stand up to Racism (SUTR), thousands of protesters gathered near Piccadilly in central London on 1 February to protest against a pro-Tommy Robinson demonstration taking place. Members of the Socialist Party took part in this counter-demonstration, calling for the building of a united working-class struggle for jobs, homes and services to smash racism.

**Trump**  
An added impetus for the counter-demo was provided by Donald Trump's 'shock and awe' inauguration the week previously, with him taking aim at some of the most vulnerable in US society and internationally, including migrants. The lively and youthful mobilisation reflected a determination to stand against the divisive poison spread by figures like Tommy Robinson.

Unfortunately though, counter-demonstrators looking for political ideas to build a movement to challenge racism were left unclear about how to build the anti-racist movement, save for the material handed out by Socialist Party members.

Racist figures like Tommy Robinson play on the anger and misery experienced by working-class people who have suffered decades of attacks on public services while the super-rich have continued to rake in billions in profits every year. They exploit the legitimate anger at the capitalist system and disgracefully try to direct it at migrants and ethnic minorities, helping to shore up the rule of the capitalist bosses by playing the game of 'divide and rule'.

While the last 14 years of those

attacks have been carried out on behalf of the super-rich by the Tory Party, the traditional party of British capitalism, Starmer's Labour is now in power and is reliably carrying through those same attacks on working-class people of all backgrounds: NHS privatisation, local government cuts, tuition fee increases, the upholding of the two-child benefit cap, the list goes on. In the run-up to the general election last year, Starmer disgustingly targeted the Bangladeshi community when discussing deportations of migrants. As demonstrated by the polling for Reform UK, this is a government under which the populist right and far-right can gain an echo among some of the most downtrodden and alienated in society.

It is crucial therefore that the working class and the anti-racist movement boldly raises and campaigns for the building of a mass working-class political alternative to all the austerity politicians and parties. This is the only lasting way to undermine the support for figures who seek to divide and weaken the working class. This was a missed opportunity in the speeches made by SUTR organisers. Socialist Party members offered to speak on the platform to put forward these ideas, but that offer was unfortunately refused by SUTR.

### Jobs, homes, and services

Other speakers on the SUTR platform - like the Green Party deputy leader Zack Polanski - did raise the need for a campaign for more jobs, homes and services. But no other speakers challenged the Green Party's role of implementing brutal cuts and attacks in local councils. Max Holloway, the Labour leader of Welwyn Hatfield council, also spoke on the platform - fresh from increasing council tax by the maximum possible amount without

a local referendum in that area - as did other Labour councillors making cuts.

Socialist Party members successfully moved a motion at the Trades Union Congress in 2018, which launched a "jobs, homes not racism" campaign to unite the wider trade union movement and to campaign effectively against the far right. There were trade union delegations from a number of unions on the march, and platform speakers from the trade union movement.

### What next?

But the modest turnout - which roughly equalled the size of the pro-Tommy Robinson mobilisation according to reports - poses the question of how the trade union movement can more effectively mobilise its 6.5 million members in workplaces across the country in a movement to smash racism.

That means not only uniting workers in the workplaces, but mobilising the experience, resources and authority of the trade union movement to help organise anti-racist protests. This includes trade union-organised stewarding to defend anti-racist protesters from far-right attacks and police intimidation.

But as the model trade union motion Socialist Party members handed out on the day raises, such a campaign poses the need for the trade union movement to build its own working-class political voice.

The leadership of the trade union movement needs to urgently open discussions with the five Independent Alliance MPs led by Jeremy Corbyn, as well as suspended Labour MPs, about how they can use their voices to raise a programme capable of uniting the working class against all the attacks of the bosses and racist division.

# Greens get Lib Dem help to cut £51m in Bristol



**TOM BALDWIN**  
BRISTOL SOCIALIST PARTY

Bristol now has a Green-led council, supported by the Lib Dems. Despite being elected claiming to be anti-austerity, the Greens put forward a £51 million cuts package, without public consultation.

Proposals included large-scale sell-offs of council housing, attacks on council tax support for the poorest, and museum and library closures. Bin collections will be cut to every three or even four weeks.

### 'Tough choices'?

In justifying the cuts, with talk of 'tough choices', the Greens sound no different to the other capitalist parties. Some of their proposals were directly recycled from the previous Labour administration, which they claim to be an alternative to.

Those plans were defeated then, and must be fought again now. Under pressure, the Greens have already announced that some of the most headline-grabbing cuts will be deferred for a year.

We cannot be complacent. These proposals will come back, and many

vital services still face losing funding immediately.

Nonetheless, this partial U-turn shows that campaigning can make a difference. That success must be built on.

Over 40 trade unionists and other campaigners came to Bristol Trades Council's public meeting, showing determination to fight the cuts, all the way. People talked about the impact that cuts would have, and their experiences of victorious campaigns in the past.

### Labour

A Labour councillor who came was firmly reminded of his party's record of making cuts in the city, and the role their government is now playing. An anti-cuts campaign was launched from the meeting, with lobbies of council meetings as the next step.

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) has consistently stood in elections with a strategy to fight the cuts, and save jobs and services. We need a council with the bravery to set no-cuts budgets, and launch a mass campaign to challenge the government to return the funding stolen over the last 15 years.



Supporters of the #EndBadGovernance movement protested outside the Nigeria High Commission in London on 29 January. Campaigners in Nigeria have scandalously been put on trial for treason, which carries the death penalty. This includes Michael Lenin, a member of the Democratic Socialist Movement - the Socialist Party's sister party in Nigeria. The trial was due to start that day. But, under pressure, the regime has pushed that back until 26 March.

Dan Smart was the 2024 general election candidate for TUSC in Bristol North East. He is a local government union branch secretary (personal capacity).

He said: "These cuts are disgusting. The Greens have completely betrayed any claim to be an anti-austerity party."

"It's hypocritical of Labour to criticise them. They refused to fight austerity when they ran the council - cutting millions from the budget, and leaving a situation where each successive budget bites deeper."

"After years of blaming the Tories, they're now the ones holding the purse strings in Westminster. Yet Labour has chosen to continue the local government funding crisis."

"None of these parties represents us. The working class needs a political voice, and TUSC was set up to help provide that."

### 'They don't represent us'

Sheila Caffrey is an elected member of the National Education Union (NEU) executive, as well as Bristol Trades Union Council secretary (both personal capacity).

She said: "These cuts must be fought, and the trade union movement can play an important role in this. My union helped launch the Bristol and District Anti-Cuts Alliance (BADACA), which had a long record of fighting for jobs and services."

"The trades council, which brings together trade union branches from across the city, is planning a campaign to continue that work and fight these cuts."

"We also need a political alternative that actually represents the workers' movement, stands 100% against austerity, and puts our members ahead of big business interests."

- Socialist Party public meeting to discuss fighting cuts
- Tuesday 11 February, 7.30pm, Broadmead Baptist Church, Union Street, BS1 3HY

# Swansea Council leader comes to lion's den

**MARK EVANS**  
SWANSEA AND DISTRICT TRADES UNION COUNCIL PRESIDENT AND SOCIALIST PARTY

Swansea Trades Council took up the offer by Swansea Labour council leader, Rob Stewart, to come to one of our meetings to explain why the council is proposing further cuts and increased charges. I thanked Rob Stewart for attending, and wondered whether he should change his name to Daniel, because he had come to the lion's den.

Unfortunately, the council leader only attended for 30 minutes, only allowing for five contributions from the floor, after he had spoken.

### 'Extra money'?

The Welsh Labour government has talked up the 'extra money' promised by Keir Starmer's Labour in Westminster. However, as Rob Stewart indicated, the increased funding was only 50% of what the council needed to maintain services. Therefore, the council was consulting the public and trade unions about where to make cuts.

Rob Stewart said that the council was prioritising statutory services, with schools and education getting a third of funding, social care a third, and a third left for all other services. But, he claimed, they were avoiding compulsory redundancies.

It was pointed out, by implementing cuts and freezing vacancies, the council was putting the burden on staff, forcing them to work harder to keep services functioning, with the inevitable cost to employees' mental and physical health.



Rob Stewart claimed that the council was putting extra funding into some statutory services, such as social care getting a 22% increase. But speakers responded by saying that the so-called increase did not meet demand.

### It's only going to get worse

A few speakers pointed out that the budget settlement for the council, and others in Wales, in following years was likely to be a lot worse. And the council was urged to fight the cuts. All councils are travelling on the road to declaring technical bankruptcy, with some already issuing Section 114 notices.

Rob Stewart said that Swansea and other councils had lobbied the Welsh Labour government for extra funding. But he was urged to join with the trade unions and the public in defending council services by implementing a needs-led, no-cuts budget. To use reserves and borrowing to maintain and improve council services, rather than implementing £18 million cuts. This would give the council some breathing space to build a mass campaign, calling on other councils to support.

Rob Stewart said he agreed with all the points made, but could not agree to this. He said it was illegal, without providing any evidence. There is none!

He said that the Welsh Labour government would send in commissioners to run Swansea Council if it attempted to implement an anti-cuts budget. But imagine the uproar if that happened. We would not accept it.

### We will fight for funding

Swansea Trades Council, under the influence of Socialist Party members, has a proud record of supporting trade unionists in struggle and opposing council cuts. We will lobby the council, calling on them to demand and campaign for full funding, rather than implementing Westminster Labour austerity, passed on by Welsh Labour government.



**DARREN GALPIN**  
TRADE UNIONIST AND SOCIALIST COALITION (TUSC) SUPPORTER ON THE ISLE OF WIGHT

Over 200 people gathered at a rally, organised by local union branches, to oppose the proposed closure of five

primary schools. The Isle of Wight has an 'independent' minority-run council trying to close these schools.

Thanks to the work of campaigners, closure plans for a sixth school, Godshill, have been shelved. Campaign pressure impelled the local authority to hold an extraordinary meeting of the full council. Councillors present voted 12-11 against closure, with six abstentions. A separate vote on whether the council was following 'process' with the closures was narrowly carried 16-13.

But only the council cabinet makes the final decision. These votes were merely indicative.

The decisive council cabinet vote takes place on 6 March. So parents, staff, and supporters still have to apply further pressure.

The 'independent' council, supported by Greens, has already stated its long-term aim to close ten of the island's 39 primary schools

### Justification

Councils elsewhere are expected to follow suit, with a brutal closure programme of rural primary schools. The justification given is financial savings.

Schools receive central government funding on the basis of places filled. Due to falling birth rates, councils are having to subsidise rural schools from their own budgets.

Their answer is to make teaching staff redundant, and relocate children into larger class sizes. Socialists advocate a national campaign for increased funding from central government, so that we may preserve these valuable community assets.



## WHAT WE STAND FOR

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

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

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

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

### WORK, PENSIONS AND BENEFITS

- A £15-an-hour minimum wage for all, without exemptions. For the minimum wage to automatically increase linked to average earnings or inflation, whichever is higher.
- Share out the work. A maximum 32-hour working week with no loss of pay or worsening of conditions. The right to flexible working, under the control of workers not employers. An end to insecure working, for the right to full-time work for all who want it; ban zero-hour contracts.
- All workers to have trade union rates of pay, employment protection, and sickness, parental and holiday rights from day one of employment. End bosses using bogus 'self-employment' as a means to avoid giving workers rights.
- No to austerity through inflation. For all wage rates to be automatically increased at least in line with price rises.
- Open the books of all companies cutting jobs or claiming they can't afford to pay a real living wage. State subsidies, where genuinely needed, for socially-useful small businesses.
- For trade unions independent of the capitalist state, with members having democratic control over their own policies, constitutions and democratic procedures. For all trade union officials to be regularly elected, subject to recall by their members and paid a worker's wage.
- Reduce the state retirement and pension age to 55. For decent living pensions.
- Replace universal credit and the punitive benefit system with living benefits for all who need them.

### PUBLIC SERVICES

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

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

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

### ENVIRONMENT

- Prioritising major research and investment into replacing fossil fuels and nuclear power with renewable energy, and ending the problems of early obsolescence – where products are designed to 'wear out' and be replaced – and unrecycled waste.
- Nationalisation of the energy companies, under democratic workers' control and management, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need, in order to carry out a major switch to clean, green energy, without any loss of jobs, pay or conditions.
- A democratically planned, massively expanded, free to use, publicly owned transport system, as part of an overall plan against environmental pollution.
- For a major, publicly funded, insulation and energy transition plan for existing housing stock.
- Agribusiness to be taken into democratic public ownership. For a food processing and retail industry under workers' control to ensure that standards are set by consumers, small farmers, and

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

### DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

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

### SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

- No to imperialist wars and occupations!
- Take the wealth off 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, not to the fat cats.
- 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 EU bosses' club. Organise a campaign with European socialists and workers' organisations to use the talks on post-Brexit relations to tear up the EU pro-capitalist rules. For a real collaboration of the peoples of Europe on a socialist basis as a step towards a socialist world.

Do you agree? Join the fightback!

## JOIN THE SOCIALISTS

- Visit [socialistparty.org.uk/join](https://socialistparty.org.uk/join)
  - or call **020 8988 8777**
  - or text your name and postcode to **07958 032071**
- to find out more today!

Help fund the fightback!

## DONATE TODAY

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



# Austerity is killing our NHS



## WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?

• [editors@socialistparty.org.uk](mailto:editors@socialistparty.org.uk)

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

Today, the NHS finds itself at breaking point, struggling with long waiting lists, chronic staff shortages, and increasing pressure on resources. This system, once a symbol of universal care, is now buckling under the weight of a government unwilling to invest.

The system has been decimated by austerity measures and chronic underfunding. I live with Type-1 diabetes – an autoimmune condition that requires lifelong management, unlike Type-2 which is often linked to lifestyle factors and can often be reversed. It wasn't until I was on the verge of developing serious complications, such as blindness, kidney failure and nerve damage, that I was taken seriously. Until that point, my attempts to get timely intervention were either dismissed or ignored.

For lower income groups, the situation is more dire. Healthy food, crucial for managing conditions like diabetes, is simply too expensive. Instead, people are forced to rely on cheaper, processed alternatives high in glycemic index (GI), which spike blood sugar levels instead of keeping

them stable. This makes it extremely difficult for individuals to manage their condition effectively, leading to long-term health complications that could have been prevented with better access to care and healthier options.

Diabetes-related complications alone cost the NHS £10 billion annually, money that could be spent more effectively if patients had access to proper, preventative care. The case of Type-1 diabetes is just one example of how austerity is undermining the health of the population. From cancer to mental health services, the impact of underfunding is widespread, leaving patients to suffer.

Instead of addressing these issues, the government continues to push forward with more austerity, fewer resources and further privatisation of services. The healthcare system is on the verge of collapse. A radical shift is needed, one that prioritises the health of the population over budget cuts and corporate interests.

LOUISA EAGLE  
WEST LONDON

## Fund the fightback

## DONATE TODAY

- Visit [socialistparty.org.uk/donate](https://socialistparty.org.uk/donate) or call **020 8988 8777**
- or make cheques payable to Socialist Party, PO Box 1398, Enfield EN1 9GT



## SOCIALIST PARTY FIGHTING FUND

AREA	£ RECEIVED	£ TARGET	Q1: JANUARY-MARCH 2025	DEADLINE: 31 MARCH 2025
Northern	626	800		78%
Southern & SE	1,265	2,400	53%	
South West	743	2,100	35%	
Wales	456	2,400	19%	
London	851	5,000	17%	
North West	188	1,200	16%	
Yorkshire	405	2,650	15%	
Eastern	178	1,300	14%	
West Midlands	319	2,700	12%	
East Midlands	80	2,050	4%	
Other	326	2,400	14%	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5,436</b>	<b>25,000</b>	<b>22%</b>	

## Selling the Socialist

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

## Bradford Labour hike council tax 15%

### 'Where are we supposed to get the money?'

IAIN DALTON  
LEEDS AND WEST YORKSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY

It took us five minutes to pack down our Socialist Party campaign stall opposing the council's proposal to increase council tax by 15%, such were the numbers of working-class people locally wanting to sign our petition.

Over the hour and a half we'd been campaigning before this, sheet after sheet had been filled in, with people telling us: "Where are we supposed to get the money for it? Water is going up, gas is going up as well".

Others commented on the Labour government watering down its plans to clampdown on non-dom tax dodgers. "The rich are getting richer", was a common refrain.

We explained how the council's response to decades of cuts shouldn't be piling the cost of it on workers, with service cuts and tax rises. Instead, the Labour council should demand the funding the city needs from the Labour government nationally.

We also raised nationalising the energy and water companies, and making the super-rich pay, not workers.

## Birmingham – anger at Labour's bin cuts

NICK HART  
BIRMINGHAM SOCIALIST PARTY

"Why isn't anyone being held accountable", "you can't trust any of them", "time to put some ordinary people who live here in charge of the council".

There was plenty of anger and distrust towards the Labour council on our Socialist Party campaign stall in Kings Heath against bin service cuts.

Until we get councillors willing to stand up to the Labour government for the funds we need, and work with communities and council staff, not against them, things will get worse.

We're preparing to challenge the Labour councillors in next year's elections. How can you help?



Bradford stall YORKSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY

## North east's austerity and privatisation transport chaos

ELAINE BRUNSKILL  
TYNE AND WEAR SOCIALIST PARTY

Our campaign 'local councils – out of service' to demand local councils get their act together to sort out the region's ongoing transport crisis, was well received in Gateshead. Even before we'd set up our Socialist Party campaign stall, someone was wanting to sign our petition.

There's been a groundswell of anger at the closure of the flyover approaching the Tyne Bridge, because of "serious concerns about structural integrity". 40,000 vehicles a day, which used this flyover, are now being rerouted, causing huge traffic snarl-ups.

This chaos has been added to by an abundance of transportation screw-ups. Keir Starmer's Labour government is refusing to commit £6 million, which was previously promised from the Department of Transport. This money is needed to repair

the Tyne Bridge, which is now just two lanes, adding to traffic mayhem.

The Metro runs underneath the flyover. At one stage, the whole of the Metro service south of the Tyne was suspended, including links to Sunderland, until the flyover was propped up to stabilise it.

The recently elected Labour north east mayor, Kim McGuinness, acknowledged the Metro disruption, saying: "People should not be paying more, when they have had less". But don't be fooled by this.

Metro fares are still going up. The increases are only delayed by a few measly months.

Our demands – including full funding for the immediate demolition and replacement of the flyover, and free public transport for all to reduce pressure on congested routes – get a good response.

Our infrastructure across the UK is in terminal decline. Undoubtedly what is happening in Gateshead is being replicated in other towns and cities.

We need to call out Labour's continuation of Tory austerity, and fight for good transport that is publicly owned and democratically controlled by the working class.

# May Day greetings 2025: Back the paper that backs the working class

SCOTT JONES  
MAY DAY GREETINGS CAMPAIGN ORGANISER

Millions of days of strike action have taken place in the last few years as workers fight back. There have been countless demos against war and oppression in the Middle East. And there will be further mass struggles in opposition to Keir Starmer's Labour government attacking workers.

Picket lines and protests are now part of the landscape almost everywhere. A feature of many is the Socialist newspaper, as Socialist Party members join these workers in struggle as supporters, or as workers on strike themselves. These hundreds of struggles, including many victories, are reported every week in the pages of the Socialist.

The Socialist carries reports of strikes and protests, quotes from workers and young people involved, and offers a fighting strategy to take the movement forward and win. For example, opposing Keir Starmer's latest attempt to get education workers to succumb to the bosses' demands for cuts and privatisation, with so-called 'partnership'.

The Socialist says what most people are thinking: "Starmer's Labour backs bosses". We are supporting workers fighting to defend pay, conditions, and services, as we did under the Tories, and now against a Starmer-led government. The best way to prepare for that is to take steps towards the development of a new mass workers' party now.



Some of 2024's greetings

We have been putting forward a socialist programme against the Israeli assault on Gaza at every Palestine demonstration too.

It's clear that the rest of the media does not do this, either repeating misinformation or only putting forward the bosses' side of things. We need organised workers to support the alternative – the Socialist.

### May Day tradition

So celebrate International Workers' Day 2025 in the traditional workers' movement way, by sending May Day greetings to help fund the Socialist. May Day is an annual celebration of workers' struggle against capitalism.

Its origins lie in the general strike for an eight-hour working day. Each year, we ask groups of workers and trade unionists to support the Socialist newspaper and its revolutionary, anti-war, pro-working-class ideas, by financing a May Day greeting.

Can your trade union branch, community campaign, workplace colleagues, trade union council, or student society send us a donation and short message of solidarity? We publish these each year on International Workers' Day to help fund the socialist press.

Help us get that message out there and continue to report and support workers in struggle by backing the paper that backs the working class.

- Send greetings, see prices and make payments: [socialistparty.org.uk/mayday](https://socialistparty.org.uk/mayday)
- Campaign material and enquiries: [scottjones@socialistparty.org.uk](mailto:scottjones@socialistparty.org.uk)

## Trade unionists thank Plymouth socialists



ALEX MOORE  
PLYMOUTH SOCIALIST PARTY

Plymouth Socialist Party annual general meeting opened with messages of support and solidarity from picket lines that we supported in 2024.

One read: "I want to extend deepest gratitude to the Socialist Party for your unwavering support during the recent health care assistants dispute in 2024. Your support was invaluable in helping them achieve the publicity needed to gain a fair resolution, and was appreciated by all."

"It is great to see you continuing the

fight to champion the rights and well-being of all workers. Thank you once again for standing with us. Solidarity and good luck with your AGM."

Guests speaking at our meeting from Unite and RMT unions also thanked us for the support and solidarity we had demonstrated on their picket lines.

This has included carers, who have just won a significant sum in backpay owed to them by Plymouth Council, and rail workers who are determined to ensure that their hard-won defence of terms and conditions will be protected when the train operating

companies are brought back into public ownership, and contracts are standardised. Standardisation must mean levelling up not down.

Plymouth Socialist Party branch secretary Alex Sampson gave an inspiring report of our work over the last 12 months, which was an eye-opener to our guests and visitors. It was an incredible year, starting with the Trades Union Congress (TUC) demo in Cheltenham, standing a Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) general election candidate, and supporting local strikes, including job centre security guards.

## Come to a Socialist Party meeting near you

The Socialist Party has regular meetings in towns and cities across the country.

If you would like to participate:

- [socialistparty.org.uk/events](https://socialistparty.org.uk/events)
- Or text 07958 032071 with your name and postcode.

# Egypt: 6,000 garment workers strike

## Sisi grapples with Trump turmoil

DAVID JOHNSON

6,000 Egyptian T&C Garments workers went on strike on 16 January. They demanded a 50% increase in their annual bonus to cope with rising prices; a raise in meal allowances and their payment during Ramadan, when working hours are extended; implementation of the legal minimum wage; permission for discretionary leave; and paid public holidays.

The workers currently take home between LE4,000 and LE5,000 (£65-£80) per month, substantially below the LE6,000 private sector minimum wage set in May 2024. Inflation in 2024 was 24% with many essentials rising more than that.

Workers who fall ill or are injured on the job have to pay for their own treatment. If they need sick leave, they are paid a quarter of their daily wage.

The company tried to break the strike using 'divide and rule'. It stopped transport into the factories, then restoring it for some, mostly female, departments. This failed and was followed by police arresting 26 workers, with a large group of police and security forces stationed outside the factory. Families gathered outside the police station where they were held. Switching tactics again, the company offered a 17% bonus increase, which the workers rejected.

The strike ended on 28 January. The Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights reported the company offered a 20% rise but with ten days' pay deducted. They also threatened to close the factories and sack the workforce.

The company has also prohibited the formation of an independent workers' union. Instead, the company presents a group of individuals loyal to management as 'worker representatives' during visits from partner brands. The

company management falsely claims that workers receive all their legally entitled benefits.

Hypocritically, T&C claims it has "core values of integrity and honesty. We practice transparency with all our stakeholders, clients and partners. We remain consistently ethical and open to fully disclose information."

T&C Garments, a joint venture between Turkish Tay Group and Egyptian Tolba Group, supplies clothing to global brands, including Levi's, Uniqlo and Tommy Hilfiger. Its factories in El-Obour City, 35 kilometres from Cairo, are in a 'Qualifying Industrial Zone' (QIZ). From here, goods can directly access US markets without tariff or quota restrictions, provided they contain a small portion of Israeli input.

QIZs were established in 1996 after the Oslo Accords signed by the Israeli state and the Palestine Liberation Organisation, backed by the US. As well as six zones in Egypt, QIZs exist in Jordan and the West Bank.

### Trump's 'friends and foes'

With US President Trump now issuing threats of trade tariffs against 'friends' and 'foes', Egypt's President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi may be worrying about the continuation of strong backing he and his regime have had from successive US presidents. Trump's unstable changes of direction mean the \$1.3 billion from the US to Egypt's military in 2024 cannot be taken for granted (although, along with military aid to Israel, it has been confirmed for now despite the freeze of other US foreign aid).

However, Egypt's \$130 million annual US development aid was frozen pending a 90-day review. It is mostly linked to health, education, agriculture, climate and energy projects.

Urging Egypt and Jordan to resettlement a million and a half Palestinians from Gaza, Trump told reporters on 27 January: "I wish [Sisi] would take

some. We helped them a lot, and I'm sure he'd help us. He's a friend of mine. He's in... a rough neighbourhood. But I think he would do it, and I think the king of Jordan would do it too."

Sisi has previously ruled out any such move, even during the humanitarian disaster of the past 15 months of bombing and destruction in Gaza. An area of Sinai desert adjacent to the Rafah crossing between Gaza and Egypt was wired off for possible emergency use by displaced Palestinians. It would have been no more than another prison-like refugee camp.

Sisi fears allowing Palestinians to resettle in Egypt in large numbers would place even greater strain on chronically underfunded health, education and other services. With rising discontent against his regime because of falling living standards, more destabilising factors could spark a new uprising that could lead to his downfall, despite police repression.

Accepting large numbers of Palestinians into Egypt would also be seen as abandoning hope for a Palestinian state, which would greatly increase anger among Arab masses throughout the Middle East and North Africa.

For now, Sisi will hope he can come to an arrangement with Trump that avoids provoking the Egyptian working class into action against the Cairo regime. Sisi's regime is also looking more towards co-operation and support from China, which could in turn lead to new tension with the US government.

But as the T&C Garments strike shows, workers may be starting to see they need to take action themselves to improve their lives and that Sisi will not do it for them. This means laying the foundations for independent trade unions and a mass workers' party, with the socialist programme needed to end poverty, repression and war throughout the region.



Trump and Sisi PHOTO: TRUMP WHITE HOUSE/CC

Jeans' manufacturers T&C Garments even brag about its employment practises on its website in Egypt, saying: "Egypt's large population serves as a source of productive and inexpensive labor" PHOTO: FAHAD FAISAL/CC



## Online at socialistworld.net



Sahra Wagenknecht PHOTO: STEFFEN PROBDORF/CC

## 'Germany: The 2025 federal elections' and 'Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance - New Party is no alternative'

On 23 February, early elections to the Bundestag (parliament) will take place. The fact that the 'traffic light' government (a coalition of social democrats, Greens and Liberals) failed is an expression of the state of the country: instability and crisis at all possible levels - economic, social, political, climatic. The existing conditions cry out for far-reaching change, but the politically and economically dominant forces are not nearly ready for the necessary changes. Therefore, it is already clear: No matter who will govern - it will not get better! Improvements are not to be expected from those in government, but must be fought for by the masses of working people.

CONTINUE READING AT SOCIALISTWORLD.NET



The Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) is the international socialist organisation which the Socialist Party is affiliated to. The CWI is organised in many countries. We work to unite the working class and oppressed peoples against capitalism, and to fight for a socialist world. socialistworld.net

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# Serbia at boiling point

## Mass student movement and strikes force resignation of prime minister

MIRA GLAVARDANOV

The situation in Serbia has reached boiling point, after three months of student protests demanding justice for the 15 victims of a collapsed roof at the railway station in the city of Novi Sad. The Vucic regime is seriously shaken. The prime minister has resigned, no doubt pushed by president Vucic, after a few previous scapegoat resignations or mock arrests of those 'responsible' for the tragedy. But Vucic himself, the autocrat who has ruled for over a decade, is still standing.

The collapsed roof last November was the last straw after years of profiteering by the mafia-like government. Student protests exploded soon after, blockading universities and colleges throughout the country. Teachers came out in support, in most cases not backed by trade unions. Farmers, who have their own grievances about policies that ruin domestic food production, or the landgrabbing attempts by the mining company Rio Tinto, supported students from the start. They have organised protests in their towns and villages, and visited students on the campuses, bringing farm produce and cooking them dinners.

**“”**  
The student movement has started to reunite ordinary people from the region

### Strikes

Students have been calling on workers to join them in strikes, and a few independent unions have answered. There have been numerous short stoppages which culminated on 24 January in a so-called general strike (more like a 'national strike' as most unions didn't participate officially). Huge masses of workers and students came out on to the streets. Teachers whose unions didn't support the strike formed 'forums' where they decided to walk out. Some postal workers and miners also walked out. There have been discussions among some union leaders and others on how to organise a proper general strike.

In Serbia at the present time, every 'culmination' of events is soon followed by another, bigger one. One week after the strike hundreds of students from Belgrade marched 80 kilometres to Novi Sad, with the aim to occupy the three bridges on the river Danube, marking three months since the collapse of the railway station roof. They walked for two days and were received in towns and villages on the way with an abundance of food and drink, and such jubilation that it was compared to the greetings liberating armies received at the end of both world wars. The welcome in Novi Sad was spectacular with huge masses of people gathered. Farmers accompanied the students on tractors, along with long lines of bikers and cyclists.

The mood in the country has been transformed. Following the collapse of Yugoslavia and three decades that

saw wars, sanctions, NATO bombing and ultra-nationalist governments topped by the Vucic regime, people of Serbia had been demoralised, impoverished, scared and cynical about any possibility of a change. In just three months the student movement has fundamentally changed that. This is an incredible achievement, thanks to their determination and ingenuity, and importantly because people recognise the student self-organisation and inability of the distrusted official opposition to influence them in any way.

Vucic has unsuccessfully tried every trick to corrupt the movement but so far, he has no answer. He has used violence. His thugs have driven cars into protesters, beaten them up, but every new injured student pours more petrol onto the fire. He tried to buy them off with a promise of slashing university fees by 50% (one of the student demands is an increase in state university funding by 20%), but it was seen as a win and only strengthened the determination.

He has managed to buy off some corrupt teacher union leaders who agreed to a moratorium on strikes in exchange for a measly pay rise. There are reports of a mass exodus of members from such unions and joining independent unions. The agreement was signed after the prime minister's resignation, which effectively meant the collapse of the government, so who did the unions sign the agreement with? But in Serbia everybody knows who pulls all the strings. In a similar move to teachers, miners who for years have been angry at the corruption of their union leaders have decided to form a new union.

### Capitalists silent

The silence from the European Union, always eager to back 'democracy' protests when it's in the strategic profit interests of its dominant constituent parts, has been eye-opening. The EU in fact condemned "the violent occupation of institutions", obviously directed at the student blockades of universities, even though there hasn't been any violence. The truth is that the EU wants Vucic in place because he has promised them Serbian lithium reserves and a change of government would risk that. EU capitalism is keen to take the lead in the race with China on electric car manufacturing and lithium is crucial in it. The battle against the mine is far from over. Rio Tinto is at this moment lobbying the EU to officially put its weight behind the project. With such mobilisation of people in Serbia that already exists against the mine and the government, Rio Tinto, the EU and Vucic, know very well that the mine would not be able to proceed without the use of heavy violence. But for the capitalists, profits override human rights and it is not inconceivable that they might resort to that.

The US is also silent. One of the



PHOTO: MASINA/RS

reasons is that Vucic has given Trump's son-in-law a prime location in Belgrade - ironically, a former Yugoslav army headquarters, damaged by the NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999 - to build a 'Trump hotel'. All this illustrates that corruption is at the heart of the profit-driven system of capitalism; Vucic, and Trump, are just blatant manifestations of it. Russia has also urged 'stability' in Serbia as it also has investments. Vucic has managed to unite all opposing capitalist powers in support of him, as a tool to try to strengthen his grip on power.

The student movement, on the other hand, has started to reunite ordinary people in the region. Students from Croatia, Bosnia and Montenegro often organise gatherings in solidarity. In Croatia they have been condemned by the authorities, afraid that they can turn to the corrupt domestic politics. The EU powers must be afraid of the same. Solidarity protests have been organised in many European and other cities by the Serbian diaspora.

Sooner or later the Vucic regime could fall, but what next? The opposition, which had been in power before Vucic, is not seen as an alternative by the masses. The left is very small and fragmented, and some sections of it don't even support the student

movement because 'it lacks a class character', so abandoning the very task of offering a way forward. Others on the left do recognise the fundamentally progressive character of the protests, especially the student assemblies as self-governing bodies that, together with the teachers' forums, offer a glimpse of how a democratic socialist society could function. Some liberal groups are proposing a transitional 'government of experts', but this rests on the illusion that a state can be neutral between the interests of big capital and the working class and all ordinary people. This reveals a further confusion, that it's possible to talk about a 'democratic, free society' without talking about bringing an end to capitalism and struggling for socialism.

Masses of students and workers protested too during the fall of the Milosevic regime in 2000. Then, the western powers wanted Milosevic gone because he didn't open the country to the foreign capital (privatisations benefited domestic tycoons). But with Milosevic gone, equally corrupt forces usurped power. The tasks of developing a political programme and organisations that stand firmly for the interests of workers, farmers and all ordinary people, independent of the capitalist elites, are more than urgent.

£1 / £2 solidarity price

socialistparty.org.uk



# the Socialist

Issue 1308

6-13 February 2025

formerly **Militant**

## Cardiff Uni:

# NO JOB LOSSES NO COURSE CLOSURES

# DEFEND EDUCATION



**70 attend student meeting to oppose cuts**

**'My life is on hold' - students left in limbo by course cuts threats**

Read more on page 5

# FUNDING NOT FEES

**DAVE REID**

SOCIALIST PARTY WALES REGIONAL SECRETARY

**W**orkers and students have reacted with shock at Cardiff University bosses' disgraceful announcement of 400 job cuts and course closures. Many staff have been in tears as whole departments that have existed for decades are being closed and others merged.

The £290,000-a-year vice chancellor has defended the swingeing cuts, claiming that the university was losing £30 million a year and is facing an "existential crisis".

But the University and College Union (UCU) has pointed out that the university has larger financial reserves than most universities - £188 million is available to plug current losses. And incredibly, it is aiming to make between £23 million - £35 million surplus over the next three academic years.

The UCU has condemned the cuts as "cruel and unnecessary", will fight any compulsory redundancies, and is preparing to ballot for strike action.

These cuts come on top of the increase in tuition fees to £9,535 a year that the Welsh Labour government has said the university can charge students from September 2025, following the policy adopted by the Labour government in England.

Now is an opportunity to unite the struggles of university staff facing job losses and students struggling with the cost-of-living crisis, fee rises and now course closures.

Cardiff Socialist Students is demanding that the students' union takes an unequivocal stance opposing all job cuts and course closures, and fights alongside the UCU and other campus unions to defend education at the university. Socialist Students has said it will mobilise students to support any industrial action the UCU and other unions take.

400 job losses will be a blow to the Cardiff economy and the loss of the nursing school will hit the NHS in Wales. So the whole trade union movement and local communities must unite behind the workers and students to oppose these cuts. A mass campaign can force the university to back down.

These cuts expose the effects of privatisation, commercialisation and real-term government cuts to university funding. Socialist Students has launched the Funding Not Fees campaign calling for fully funded, free education and is looking to work alongside all those looking to fight to defend our education.

Socialist Party Wales calls for a mass campaign of university workers, students, trade unions and students to demand:

- No job losses, no course closures
- Use available financial reserves to save jobs and courses, and demand sufficient funding from the Labour governments in Cardiff and London
- Show us where the money has gone - open the books to trade union and student inspection
- For student and workers' democratic control of our universities
- Scrap tuition fees, and introduce living maintenance grants for all
- Make the super-rich pay! Fully fund higher education

WHAT WE STAND FOR: THE SOCIALIST PARTY'S MAIN DEMANDS >>> see column on p12

