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FIGHT LABOUR AUSTERITY

SARAH SACHS ELDRIDGE
SOCIALIST PARTY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

How can you tell when a Blairite is lying? Their lips are moving... It's an oldie, but Rachel Reeves has shown why it's still a goodie. In the days before the Budget on 26 November, she pledged not to "return Britain back to austerity".

But austerity is very much alive. It stalks our public services, in the NHS embodied in stressed-out, underpaid staff treating patients in corridors, with draughty windows, crumbling ceilings, and queuing ambulances.

Labour's Budget changed none of this. Far from killing austerity, it contains cuts "equivalent to 88% of the average annual cuts made during the peak austerity years", according to the Resolution Foundation.

By 2030-31, the £6 billion in cuts to non-protected government departments set out in the Budget will leave real per-person spending 22% below where it was in 2009-10.

Starmer and Reeves are forced to deny their austerity plans because of the huge anger among workers and young people. How

can we turn that anger into action that can stop the austerity juggernaut destroying more lives?

Collective action is needed. In 2022-23 we saw how strike action pushed the Tory austerity plans back.

Trade union members should again demand action from their leaders. They need to demand that the vote at the Trades Union Congress in September for a national trade union-led demo against austerity is not left on a piece of paper. Set the date and launch the campaign to mobilise the over six million trade unionists and their families.

Members can move motions in their branches for discussion on how their unions can develop a political alternative to Labour

that actually reflects the union's interests. (See <https://tinyurl.com/TUMotions> for model motions in ten different unions.)

Students must also get organised on campus to fight the fee hike promised by Reeves.

And if you want to fight for this strategy, join the Socialist Party.

• Turn to page three to read the editorial: 'An austerity budget by any other name would cut as deep'

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WHERE DOES YOUR PARTY CONFERENCE PUT US ON THE COURSE TOWARDS A NEW MASS WORKERS' PARTY? >>> p6-7

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

Starmers waters down employment rights pledges once again!

Trade unions must fight for real political representation

IAIN DALTON
SOCIALIST PARTY USDAW CAUCUS CONVENOR

Following opposition led by the Tories and Lib-Dems in the unelected House of Lords, Keir Starmer has signalled a further retreat on the Employment Rights Bill he had pledged to 'deliver in full'. Instead of introducing protections against dismissal from day one of employment, workers will have to go six months without those protections (down from the current two years). This makes it easier for employers to unjustly sack workers.

This is the latest U-turn on the package of workers' rights that many trade union leaders gave as the main reason to back Labour at the last general election. But since its initial outing as the 'New Deal for Workers', provisions on fire and rehire and zero-hour contracts have also been watered down. This led to Unite the Union refusing to sign off the proposals.

My union Usdaw, which represents retail workers, is affiliated to the Labour Party. General secretary Joanne Thomas issued an open letter to Green Party leader, Zack Polanski, after two Green Party Lords - former leader Natalie Bennett, and former London Assembly member Jenny Jones - voted with the Tories and Liberals in favour of limiting protection from dismissal until after six months. This, as Thomas pointed out, sharply contrasts with Polanski's pro-worker rhetoric.

Some Green Party members attempted to defend Polanski by saying

that Green representatives aren't whipped - which highlights the issue. What's the point of a party with pro-worker policies if elected (and unelected) representatives can simply decide to ignore them? All representatives of a genuine workers' party would need to be held to account by the membership.

We need our own party

While right-wing trade union leaders like the TUC's Paul Novak welcomed the news, Unite's Sharon Graham described the amended bill as a "shell of its former self". Usdaw's leadership has so far remained silent on Starmer's U-turn. It is a betrayal that shows yet again that the Labour Party is far more concerned with the interests of big business than those of workers and the trade unions they collectively organise in.

Working-class people and trade unionists need a political voice that stands firm in their interests, rather than being prepared to sacrifice them under the pressure of big business. This would go beyond the welcome, but limited, measures in the Employment Rights Bill and would scrap all Tory anti-union legislation. In light of this latest Labour betrayal, we will continue to campaign in Usdaw so that instead of funding candidates who break their meagre promises to workers, they can instead ensure they fund candidates that are prepared to stand firm in defence of union policies on this and other issues.



Spray foam insulation being installed COPWEB161/CC

Home insulation scandal

CLIVE WALDER
BIRMINGHAM SOCIALIST PARTY

I had a financial plan for my retirement. The modest income from my state and occupational pensions was enough for day-to-day spending and what savings I had would be used for 'luxuries' like holidays. Once my savings had run out there was always equity release on my home as I had no outstanding mortgage. Or so I thought.

Before I did anything rash I decided to google 'grounds for refusing equity release'. As well as the usual things like poor state of repair or inaccessible location, spray foam loft insulation was added.

I had this done in 2020 and it was regarded as the last word in home insulation. Having this done, however, has meant that the surveyor, who decides whether a bank will lend you money against a property, couldn't inspect the roof timbers for damage.

The product was endorsed by the government, and they even financed its installation for some homeowners. All this changed in March 2024, when the Health and Safety Executive produced a report saying that spray foam insulation could cause 25% of roof timbers to rot within five years if applied to certain materials. This made lenders uneasy and, erring on the side of caution, effectively issued a blanket refusal to mortgage any properties with it. This wasn't heavily publicised and no consultation took place. The only way you can now get a loan is to have the insulation removed. For me

that would cost in the region of £4,000, on top of the £5,500 I had already paid to have it installed in the first place!

Not surprisingly, homeowners regarded government finance as an endorsement. Many homeowners think the government have washed their hands of their responsibility. Private contractors are working in a completely unregulated industry; spray foam insulation is not banned. The government says that it is the homeowner's decision whether or not to have the work done and mortgaging such properties is the lenders' decision. The lenders are making sure that it is ordinary homeowners and not themselves that take the financial risk. Lenders put conditions on loans all the time, there is nothing stopping them adding the cost of removal to any loan, and making it a condition of remortgage or equity release.

The Tory and New Labour governments' mania for giving business a free hand has potentially left 300,000 homeowners with houses they can't sell or take any equity from. In many cases, this will only become apparent after the owner's death. If the government really wanted to stand up for working-class people there should be full reimbursement of removal costs, and the big-business building trade, including insulation manufacturers, should pay the costs.

This scandal shows the need for democratic regulation of all industries. The safety of our homes and retirements requires the public ownership of the building and banking industry by workers ourselves.

WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?

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AN AUSTERITY BUDGET BY ANY OTHER NAME WOULD CUT AS DEEP

WHAT WE THINK

The Observer newspaper quotes a Labour grandee lamenting that the autumn Budget was "all tacticalism, transactionalism, no overall plan or purpose other than survival." They weren't wrong. It was a 'tactical' but doomed attempt to mask continued austerity, soothe the markets, and cling on.

In the months running up to the Budget, amid intense lobbying and threats from the bond markets, and opposing pressure from Labour backbenchers too, speculation on the future of prime minister Keir Starmer and chancellor Rachel Reeves was rife.

Post-Budget, their 'survival' remains far from guaranteed. The working class must organise to fight the continued driving down of our living standards promised by this Budget, and to see that Starmer's government is replaced by one that represents our interests, with a socialist programme.

Nationalising the 150 top banks and corporations under democratic working-class control and management would lay the basis for starting to plan how society's wealth and capacity are used to meet the needs of all.

The urgency of this task was bolded and underlined by Labour's retreat on the Employment Rights Bill the day after the Budget (see opposite). Like the Budget, this proves that Starmer and Reeves do have an 'overall purpose'. They seek to serve the interests of the capitalist class which demands that our living standards are driven down.

Since the Budget, Starmer is trying to quiet his noisy critics among



Starmer and Reeves have chosen to refill the coffers out of workers' pockets

the bond vigilantes and big business bosses, who are never satisfied, by showing an even greater commitment to continuing benefit cuts.

The start of the Budget was shameful, with the Office for Budget Responsibility accidentally publishing its analysis before Chancellor Rachel Reeves had presented it to parliament. However, the aftermath has been even messier, with Reeves accused of exaggerating the scale of the 'black hole' in the economy in an effort to 'roll the pitch' for attacks on living standards.

Taxes

Reeves announced £26 billion worth of tax rises, the overwhelming majority of which fall on working people. £8 billion in the form of a 'stealth tax' - maintaining tax thresholds so that lower earners start paying tax, or go up a tax bracket, when they get a pay rise. £4.7 billion will be raised from capping tax breaks on salary-sacrificed pension contributions.

Ruth Curtis of the Resolution Foundation, writing in the Financial Times, described it as the chancellor playing for time with "a 'tax and save' rather than a 'tax and spend' Budget. Only in 2027 will we know how far and how darkly the ghost of this week will cast its shadow".

Reeves's decisions are expected to give her a £22 billion margin for error against her fiscal target. In other words, in the context of a cost-of-living crisis, Starmer and Reeves have chosen to refill the coffers out of workers' pockets.

They have no plans to spend on the actual black holes of local government funding, schools funding,



Rachel Reeves on her way to deliver the Budget UK GOVERNMENT/CC

university funding, or NHS funding. This is a bid for their own survival - so they can carry on attacking us! Curtis estimates they have raised £6 billion "to compensate for forecast changes" and £12 billion "was used to increase her rainy-day fund".

Hated Labour

But this remains the second-worst period for living standards being squeezed since the 1950s. That's why Labour has been languishing at about 18% in public opinion polls, on a par with the hated Tories. Both are on track to make significant losses at next May's elections and have a tiny social base of support.

Only 3% say the economy is in a good state, with 67% saying it will get worse over the next year. The freeze on already unaffordable energy bills and train fares can't cut through that. And almost half of those polled consider the Budget unfair compared to one in five who thought it fair.

That's why thoughts of their own survival will also have been a factor motivating Labour backbenchers to demand a Budget containing positive commitments to living standards. They face fury in their constituencies from people at the sharp end of Starmer's continuation of Tory austerity.

Two-child benefit cap

Backbenchers were cheering as they pointed to the abolition of the two-child benefit cap, cruelly kept in place since Labour's victory in July 2024, and the introduction of a 'mansion' tax. While removing the abhorrent limit on support for families with more than two children is to be welcomed, it does not transform the situation facing working-class families.

The cap will be lifted from April

at a cost of £3 billion. It is estimated that this will lift 450,000 children out of poverty. But it is estimated that in Britain, the sixth richest country in the world, four and a half million children are living in poverty. And the overall Budget will not transform that situation.

Yes, Labour will exact a bit more from those living in the most expensive homes, but not as much as it is taking from people on the other end of the housing spectrum. The so-called 'mansion' tax is expected to raise £400 million - a token 'rounding error' cosplaying as a wealth tax.

True to Tory form, Nigel Farage has sought to present this as a tax on "alarm clock Britain," the "small businesses and hard-working taxpayers who keep this country running", to pay for benefits. He doesn't let the fact that 70% of families hit by the two-child benefit cap have a parent in work get in the way of his attempts to whip up division. The low-paying Scrooge bosses responsible are let off the hook by Reform UK.

Trade unions

Unfortunately, he was not challenged by the leader of the TUC (Trades Union Congress) Paul Novak. Instead of cutting across Farage's attempts at division with a call for workers to unite against Labour's attacks, he said: "The Chancellor has delivered urgent relief to millions of hard-pressed households up and down the country and helped to rebuild our public services."

Novak is out of touch with workers' sentiments in saying: "The policy decisions announced today will disproportionately benefit those low and middle-income households at the sharp end - and tax increases will fall on the wealthiest."

What he should be doing is using

his position of authority with the over five million members of TUC-affiliated unions to drive forward the motion agreed at the TUC Congress in September for a mass trade union-led demonstration against Labour's austerity. It is a mistake to allow Farage to pose as the opposition to Starmer and Reeves's Budget.

Sharon Graham, general secretary of Unite the Union, was correct to say that: "On the fundamental issues of who pays for the crisis and the investment required to back British industry, the wrong decisions are being made..." The chancellor has picked a side. Health workers, engineers, and tanker drivers will pay through stealth taxes, while city bankers and billionaires go largely unscathed.

Unite's analysis shows that the decision to freeze income tax thresholds will result in ten million workers paying the higher rate of income tax. The number of workers paying the higher rate will have gone from one in ten in 2019-20 to one in four by 2030.

The Budget shows the urgency of acting on the decision made at Unite's policy conference in the summer to re-examine the union's relationship with Labour. That motion was motivated by the experience of Birmingham Labour council using fire and rehire policies to cut bin workers' wages by up to £8,000.

The opportunity of next May's elections is to challenge the austere defenders of capitalism with socialist no-cuts candidates. That must start now with campaigns to prepare local no-cuts needs budgets.

NSSN lobby of the TUC in September MARY FINCH



Anti-cuts protesters outside parliament during the Budget ISM

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'A wave of disputes in PCS workplaces' - coordinated action needed

As Labour delivered its Budget inside parliament, security staff were on picket lines outside

PCS MEMBER

Security staff in the Houses of Parliament who are members of the PCS took strike action on Budget Day. These members do essential work keeping parliament and everyone in it safe, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Yet they face vicious attacks on their pay, conditions and rights from the same institution they keep safe.

Budget Day was their fourth day of industrial action, demanding the restoration of their original eight-hour shifts, and the return of six days of annual leave lost when management imposed 12-hour shifts without consultation. They are also fighting for a fair pay rise after years of stagnation, and for action to tackle a widening ethnicity pay gap.

Members were forced into industrial action because the employer refused to come to the table or engage in serious talks with the union.

This comes at a time when the cost of living is through the roof, while pay stagnates. Meanwhile, MPs' pay has risen much faster than the average public-sector wage (many also with extremely lucrative second jobs), exposing the glaring inequality between those making the decisions and those keeping parliament running.

The strike on Budget Day sent a

clear message. Workers refuse to stay quiet while governments of all parties push through austerity, cut pay, and attack public services. As the Labour government stood in parliament announcing its budget, workers were out on the picket line, taking industrial action.

I am a member of the sister PCS branch in parliament and stood on the picket line in solidarity.

Coordinate

The challenges faced by parliamentary security staff are not unique. PCS members across the civil service and public sector are facing the same attacks on pay, conditions, and rights. Parliamentary security staff are part of a wider wave of industrial disputes across PCS. Civilian staff at the Met Police, workers at Tate galleries, the British Library and others are taking strike action.

The mood to fight is there! PCS needs a fighting, coordinated approach that links the many disputes into a coordinated national campaign, capable of fighting against austerity, real-terms pay cuts, and attacks on conditions. Members are showing, and telling us, that they are ready to organise and take action: we need leadership who can harness and build that mood rather than hold it back!



Parliament on Budget Day ROB WILLIAMS



Marco speaking at Tate Britain picket STEVE NALLY

Tate galleries workers on lively picket lines

STEVE NALLY

SOUTH WEST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Bumper bonuses for the bosses of up to £28,000, but a measly 2% offer and closure of their popular canteen for staff.

That's why workers at Tate Britain, members of PCS union, are striking for a week, part of action at Tate galleries nationally. Pensions are also being downgraded, while many staff survive on pay that does not cover the costs of living in London.

The closure of their staff restaurant in May means that some workers living in bedsits or flat-shares are missing out on affordable and nutritious hot food. Some staff have been forced to resort to food banks.

The fluffy, family image of the Tate galleries is not the reality, which is why so many have taken action and joined the lively PCS picket line. Socialist Party member Marco Tesi, from the National Executive Committee of the University and College Union, gave solidarity greetings, explaining that college staff were facing similar treatment and that everyone was in the same boat these days. Battling the cost-of-living crisis while working flat out for little reward

The Tate Britain picket line has successfully persuaded some visitors to turn away while others demanded refunds on exhibition tickets. This strike has certainly taken management back and further strengthened the workers' resolve.

Notts nurses strike against fire and rehire: 'They didn't think we'd strike'

JON DALE

UNITE NOTTS HEALTH BRANCH SECRETARY

Intensive care nurses at Bassetlaw Hospital have gone on strike. Their employer, Doncaster and Bassetlaw NHS Trust, is trying to use 'fire and rehire' to force through changes to their contracts.

That could end with the eventual closure of the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) in Worksop, North Nottinghamshire.

Trust management wants to force the nurses to regularly rotate to Doncaster for eight-week periods. They claim this is to keep nurses fully skilled in their highly specialised roles. Picketing nurses told the 'Socialist' this was not the case and have presented alternative plans which keep their skills up to date.

Unite's regional officer, Chris Rawlinson, said: "The Trust's rejection of this exposes what really lies behind its plans - the decommissioning by stealth of Bassetlaw's ICU."

Not only would this mean a half-hour ambulance journey for patients,



JON DALE

but their families could face an hour and a half journey on public transport. Nurses and families often know each other in their local community, reassuring at such an anxious time.

Travel would be even worse for the nurses on 13-hour shifts. Some live just a few minutes from Bassetlaw Hospital and could not get to Doncaster on public transport at shift-change times. Management countered that they could start later and miss the crucial patient handover between shifts. That risks patient care.

The long journey also risks nurses' safety. Leaving the Doncaster site after 13 hours working through the night last winter, a picket told us how she'd fallen asleep at the wheel,

waking as she clipped the kerb. Luckily, that time no damage was done.

The 29 nurses are angry. On a 96% turnout, 100% voted to strike - the first strike most have ever been on.

After two days on the picket line, the nurses are working to rule, with the prospect of further strikes if management doesn't back down. "They didn't think we'd come out, but now they know we're serious," said pickets.

Eighteen months into this Labour government, workers still face 'fire and rehire' by employers in the NHS trying to make inadequate funding cover increasing needs. Unite and all trade unions need political representatives fighting to end this.

Bus workers win victory against First Cymru

ALEC THRIVES

SWANSEA TRADES COUNCIL AND SOCIALIST PARTY

After eight days of strike action over several weeks, bus workers across South West Wales in Unite the Union have voted to accept an improved pay offer from First Cymru. Their pay and conditions are among the worst in the transport industry.

Whilst still short of the pay parity members were seeking, the strength and numbers turning out on the early morning picket lines and the massive disruption to travel have forced First Cymru to not just improve the pay offer, but also backdate the pay award,

which was a major sticking point in reaching an agreement.

In addressing a meeting of Swansea Trades Council, the Unite branch secretary and his colleagues were adamant that, without the determined and solid strike action taken, this improved deal would not have been reached. It has strengthened the union branch, with some non-members also signing up to the union in preparation for the inevitable future struggles to get pay and conditions parity from First Cymru.

The union reps thanked Trades Council members for their support on every picket line during the dispute.



SWANSEA TRADES COUNCIL

Agency workers join Birmingham bin strike

REFAT

BIRMINGHAM SOCIALIST PARTY

On 1 December, a historic moment took place in the Birmingham strike, as agency workers, brought in by the Labour council to try to break the action, joined the strike. Unite the Union marked the strike day with a rally.

Bin workers are facing huge emotional and financial stress caused by a pay cut of up to £8,000 a year, when the cost of living is already sky-high. It has a drastic effect on families.

The council is doing everything it can to make industrial action ineffective so they can get away with fire and rehire, using union-busting tactics and the courts to fight against workers' rights.

The bin workers are still standing strong after almost a year.

But agency workers joining the strike is a huge boost. Those who the council intended to replace the workers are tired of being treated badly. The agency workers are recognising the common struggle.

In the run-up to the busy Christmas period, more agency workers joining the picket lines can help build up pressure on the council, as rubbish builds up on the doorsteps. Added to this is the possibility of more blockades of scab bin depots by supporters, as Socialist Party members have helped organise.

Despite the lies and bluster of Labour's Birmingham City Council bosses over the last year, support for the strike stays strong among



BIRMINGHAM SOCIALIST PARTY

working-class Brummies and the trade union movement.

This can be turned into more than just words. Unite bin reps going and making an appeal in person to other union workers in bus garages, mail depots, railway stations etc for all practical support possible can help build the momentum that is going in the bin workers' direction again.

Birmingham is the blueprint that other councils will use against public

sector workers. No one is safe from exploitation. Unite has been looking to set up a 'combine' of bin workers across different employers, and a national meeting could be an important forum to build solidarity.

On top of that, bringing together workers from other departments and unions of the council can be the best possible preparation for the attacks on other workers, and stop them in their tracks.

Bin workers march through Birmingham

ALLEGRA KEFFORD REPORTS

Monday 1 December saw a mass rally of picketing bin workers, joined by the newly striking agency workers. Socialists, including the Socialist Party, and speakers such as MP Zarah Sultana showed support for the movement.

Before marching from the Smithfield Depot to the Council House, we heard a few words from these speakers emphasising the importance of unions like Unite to prevent the stripping of workers' rights.

Unite Lead Officer and Socialist Party member Onay Kasab said that he would "expect nothing less from a government and a council that's crapping on workers. They promised they'd ban fire and rehire but it's happening here."

Furthermore, the strike action led the council to suspend operations across Birmingham depots for the day while still paying the agency workers, ultimately making the rally a success.

UCU national strike ballot shows members want to fight

But are defeated by anti-union laws kept in place by Starmer

BEA GARDNER

UCU MEMBER

Workers across the university sector have sent a strong message that they are prepared to take strike action for pay and improved working conditions. In the University and College Union (UCU) 69.69% of members voted in favour of industrial action consisting of strike action, and 82.89% in favour of action short of a strike.

However, the turnout was not enough to overcome the 50% thresholds shamefully still in place despite the Labour government pledging to scrap these within their first 100 days in office. The results of the parallel ballots in other higher education unions, Unison, Unite, and EIS in Scotland, have not been released at the time of writing.

Since the Labour government came into office 18 months ago, the onslaught of course closures and redundancies has intensified across the sector. The number of branches in local disputes has rocketed. Labour has done nothing to resolve the crisis of university funding, which is

exacerbated by a market model resting on exploitative student fees.

It was in this context that the UCU Higher Education conference in May voted overwhelmingly to return to a strategy of national strike action. It was very significant that for the first time, the four main UK campus unions coordinated their industrial action ballots. These were organised on a disaggregated basis in Unite and Unison.

With 32 Further Education colleges also voting to take strike action, and dates set for January, Starmer faced the prospect of an unprecedented post-16 education strike.

Not the final word

The UCU result is therefore disappointing, and at this stage, a sector-wide strike is on hold. However, this will not be the final word. University workers are being made to pay the price for a failed marketised funding system, which is also having a big impact on student experiences. Local branches continue to boldly fight against imposed attacks and redundancies. More university workers are drawing the conclusion that we need to have a collective fightback.

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Why we voted for action

IVAN PETKOV

PHD STUDENT AND UCU MEMBER AT UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

UK-wide university strike ballots for University and College Union (UCU) members closed on 28 November. Over 65,000 members across 137 universities were balloted after the UCU and other education unions rejected a derisory 1.4% pay offer from the University and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA).

The reality is that, over the last ten years, workers have seen a real-terms pay loss of 25%, which cannot be rectified under the status-quo education system and will require strike action to push for fairer pay. Further to this, but equally important, are the threats of programme cuts and redundancies across the sector; university employers have tried to axe over 15,000 jobs.

At the University of Manchester, there is a state of perpetual review and cancellation of degree programmes in the School of Arts, Languages and Culture, which will eventually reduce

student recruitment and lead to redundancies.

Socialist Students has organised a joint meeting of students and staff for 5 December on collective organisation. Students and workers ultimately face the same crisis: the underfunding and commercialisation of our universities. Staff keep the education unions running, and students fund it - our interests are fundamentally aligned.

When we organise together, and when students support the action of union members, we are better able to resist redundancies, pay cuts and to fight back against student poverty and exploitation. The Socialist Students meeting follows a UCU staff-student meeting on making the university sustainable.

Members hoped this ballot could be the start of a serious national fight - and we must still campaign. What is clear is that university workers cannot be expected to pay for the huge university funding crisis with insulting well-below-inflation pay rises. We fight for full funding and an end to the marketisation of post-16 education.

JOSH ASKER, EDITOR OF THE SOCIALIST, REPORTS

about chancellor Rachel Reeves's Budget on 27 November re-emphasised the burning need for mass working-class opposition to Labour austerity. That need, increasingly acutely felt, was at the root of the explosion of enthusiasm for Jeremy Corbyn and Zarah Sultana's Your Party announcement this summer, with over 800,000 signing up in support.

Just a few months later, Your Party's founding conference has taken place. Unfortunately, on its formal creation, at this stage of the developing process, Your Party falls short of being the new mass workers' party with a socialist programme that is needed.

However, despite this, and despite the attempts of the capitalist media to cast the event in the worst possible light, many of those leaving Your Party's founding conference in Liverpool on 30 November will do so feeling more positive than they will have done on arrival. Around 2,500 individuals who had been 'sorted' by an online lottery attended the event.

A similar number watched online from their homes at any one time, all able to participate in voting. But none of these were delegates who had been democratically elected by branches, let alone by trade union bodies, and therefore able to represent the collective organised voice of those fighting on the ground.

A total of 22,000 were eligible to vote, less than half of the 55,000 reported as having signed up as members; suggesting many had not been motivated to click to register for voting rights. That the numbers were much lower than what could have been achieved is inevitably a result of the sapping away of enthusiasm following the damaging public disagreements at the top, including between Corbyn and Sultana.

Several contributors to the discussions spoke of their desire to "unite the left". In fact the conference itself was made up largely of those existing left-wing activists, many of whom will

WHERE DOES YOUR PARTY CONFERENCE PUT US ON THE COURSE TOWARDS A NEW MASS WORKERS' PARTY?

have engaged in similar projects in the past. As the Socialist Party conference bulletin said, "It's time to turn to the working class".

Socialist

Such is the desire for a political alternative to the left of Starmer's Labour that, even at this stage, 12% would consider voting for Your Party, a YouGov survey in advance of conference found. The Tory Telegraph laughingly described this as 'dire', despite it being better than the 11% Labour achieved in the recent Caerphilly Senedd by-election, because it has fallen from a high of 18% in the summer. But 12% after the problems of recent months gives a hint of the objective potential for a new party.

This was a conference which did succeed in creating a new left-wing political party, with those who voted overwhelmingly supporting its description as "socialist", and for 'strengthening the trade union relationship'. Overwhelmingly, the mood of participants was to be in favour of amendments that pointed towards a more inclusive party and were more positive in tone.

A clear example of the desire of many Your Party members to turn to the working class was the overwhelming support for an amendment, put in by members of the Socialist Party, calling for Your Party to bring together conferences of trade unions, community groups and others to draw up needs-based council budgets, to

be fought for in council chambers by future Your Party councillors and others. 90% voted in favour.

Tom Baldwin, Socialist Party National Committee member and an organiser in Bristol, spoke in support, explaining how a no-cuts stand could "make anti-austerity real... To match the fine things agreed, not just in words but in deeds... Linking what we do in elections to the struggles of our class".

Support for that amendment is an opportunity to fight for Your Party to orientate towards the working class and trade unions. It can be an important lever to try to ensure that the May elections are used as an opportunity to reach and win support among the working class.

Where Your Party councillors, or those aligned or endorsed by Your Party, are in office, it can be used as a tool to try to ensure they take a fighting stance.

Opportunity for wide stand missed

Unfortunately, the conference did not vote for the option that would have given the opportunity for the widest possible stand in May. Instead, members, including self-selected online voters, narrowly agreed to restrict backing for candidates to those deemed "in a position to meaningfully contest for their seat". The process will be overseen by the Independent Alliance MPs, together with



PHOTO: MADDIE ROONEY

a Members' Oversight Committee "consisting of five ordinary members selected by sortition from the whole membership".

Not to offer millions a working-class, anti-austerity alternative under a common banner in May's elections is a mistake, and misses the chance to cut across electoral support for Reform UK, a desire expressed by a large proportion of those in attendance. Like, for example, how Jeremy Corbyn's 2017 general election stand was able to win the votes of a million 2015 UKIP voters.

The working class faces a profound crisis of political representation, more acutely felt now with a capitalist Labour government carrying out attacks on workers - given cover at this stage, in different ways, by the leaders of the trade unions. Leaders who will find themselves under increasing pressure from their members, and from wider working-class discontent.

Responsibility for the fact that the working class is without its own political voice lies squarely with the trade union leaders.

Trade unions

Just over three years ago, in the beginning period of the strike wave, 400,000+ signed up to Enough is Enough, headed by Mick Lynch and Dave Ward - then leaders of striking

trade unions RMT and CWU - including with the involvement of Zarah Sultana, hoping for the creation of a new workers' party. But they did not take the opportunity to begin the process of building a party, instead using their authority to back Starmer's capitalist Labour Party.

Later, in 2024, there was the potential, as the Socialist Party campaigned for, to draw up a union-backed workers' list of candidates, including Jeremy Corbyn as an independent, to contest the general election. Under pressure from members, the RMT and its general secretary Mick Lynch backed Corbyn. Such a workers' list could have established what would have been looked to as a workers' bloc of MPs to challenge Starmer's Labour government from day one.

The trade unions represent over six million workers in Britain - already organised in workplaces to defend workers from bosses' attacks. The Socialist Party is helping to organise pressure on the leaderships of those unions to take steps towards independent working-class political representation, coordinating groups of activists to fight inside the unions' democratic structures.

Unfortunately, Your Party has been formed with no involvement of the democratic structures of the trade unions. Its founding constitution points to a 12-month strategic plan to consider affiliations, including trade

unions. The Socialist Party-initiated amendment to make that an immediate priority was ruled out of order.

As it stands, a union affiliating to Your Party would do so with even less democratic say than it would have as an affiliate to Starmer's Labour Party. At Your Party conference, it was only Socialist Party members who were arguing for the organised working class to have a democratic say in the party's structures.

Speaking to a pre-conference rally of her supporters, Zarah Sultana said she does not favour trade union affiliation, citing the potential influence of right-wing trade union leaders. In fact, that approach lets the trade union leaders off the hook, making it easier for them to use their authority to hold back struggle against this Labour government, including through the development of a new workers' party.

From the rostrum, Socialist Party member Paul Couchman, secretary of Surrey County Union with over 6,000 members, spoke in a personal capacity.

Nationally, Unison is led by right-wing, Labour-supporting Christina McAnea. Socialist Party members are supporting her opponent Andrea Egan in the general secretary election, who has said "she will launch a comprehensive review of the union's relationship with the Labour Party".

Paul explained how his "branch

committee would have proudly sent delegates, if allowed", arguing in favour of trade union affiliation.

The amendment 'strengthening the trade union relationships' was strongly supported, 83% in favour, reflecting an acknowledgement of the power of the organised working class. But its call for a special commission "consisting of senior trade union movement figures, for the Party's first two years", does not point to what is needed.

Instead, Your Party should be approaching trade union executive bodies, asking to meet to discuss how its elected representatives can best act on behalf of the trade union's members and the wider working class.

Democratic deficit

The 'strengthening the trade union relationships' amendment was one of many demonstrating the severe democratic deficit of the conference and of the whole process. As a 'roadmap amendment', it was added to the original documents, themselves drafted by anonymous unknown individuals, based on a 'black box' online crowd-editing tool and feedback from the regional assemblies. It was not allowed to be amended.

Those unknown, unelected, behind-the-scenes figures organising the process decided what was and wasn't up for a Roadmap Amendment

'debate', with just two or three speakers for each option. What would be discussed and how was not known until days before the event. The media was given a timetable for discussion less than 24 hours before the start of conference, and that was before attendees were shown an agenda.

Unfortunately, the 'standing orders' established for party democracy do not set the basis for future decisions to be based on maximum discussion in branches, and voted on by a conference of accountable elected delegates. Instead, future conferences will maintain an element of sortition, and have motions decided by an online vote of all members. As the Socialist Party warned, this will mean a highly centralised leadership being able to set the agenda and exactly what questions are up for discussion.

Your Party's founding basis does not establish it as member-led or democratic. Socialist Party members looked for every opportunity to speak in favour of amendments that argued for more member democracy, including against expulsions.

Dual membership

On the eve of conference, before the question of dual membership had even been debated, it was widely reported that three leading members of the Socialist Workers Party had been expelled for their membership of another party, and others were denied entry. The Socialist Party opposed this

and other provocative measures.

This was also clearly the mood of Your Party members, with a clear majority voting for the only option that allowed dual membership - although who is eligible will still be decided by the Central Executive Committee to be elected by the end of February.

Socialist Party National Committee member Alex Smith spoke in favour of dual membership, receiving huge applause. Alex is an organiser in Liverpool where, in the 1980s, the Socialist Party's predecessor Militant led the Labour council.

"In the 1980s in this city, the Labour council built more council houses than the rest of the country put together, new parks, sports centres, that are still serving the community today... Margaret Thatcher could not send in the commissioners... The reason for that was because in this city, the local trade union movement - not the leaders, who always opposed what we did, but the local trade union branches, shop stewards and so on - supported the campaign. That's why Your Party needs to turn towards the working class and its organisations..."

"When one of the leaders of that campaign Tony Mulhearn's expulsion from the Labour Party was upheld... Tony turned round and said: 'You can expel us from the Labour Party, but you can't expel us from the working class!'"

"The way you build a mass socialist party with a working-class base, is not to expel socialists from the very outset. Socialists and Marxists are a part

of the working class and we should be allowed to organise in this party. Socialist organisations should be allowed to affiliate... Let's not do to this party what the Labour Party did to Militant!"

Socialist Party fringe meeting

Our history of leading mass struggles of the working class was a feature of the discussion at the Socialist Party fringe meeting of 150 on Saturday evening. Around half of those in attendance were Socialist Party members who had been selected through sortition.

In total, members of the Socialist Party were able to contribute to the discussion from the conference floor eleven times - arguing for our key demands for Your Party to turn to the working class and to allow trade unions to affiliate with a collective democratic say, and for a wide, anti-austerity stand in the May elections. A struggle for those ideas is still necessary.

Your Party now exists, and so still do the differences between those at the top. Neither side is fighting for what is necessary in a new mass workers' party.

What drove the summer enthusiasm for Your Party - a burning desire for a new party to the left of Labour and the objective need for the working class to have its own party - remains.

The struggle for a mass workers' party, and every concrete step towards one, remains vital for socialists. As a means by which to raise the confidence and cohesion of the working class engaging in the struggle against Starmer's austerity and for socialist change.

Socialist Party members will continue to take part in Your Party, arguing for it to take steps towards building the mass workers' party we need, while also continuing to campaign in the trade unions for independent working-class political representation.

The Socialist Party at the conference: Our packed fringe meeting, some of the members who were participants, and Alex Smith, one of the numerous Socialist Party speakers
PHOTOS: IAIN DALTON AND SCOTT JONES



“What drove the summer enthusiasm for Your Party - a burning desire for a new party to the left of Labour and the objective need for the working class to have its own party - remains”



PHOTO: MADDIE ROONEY



PAUL HERON
HALDANE SOCIETY OF SOCIALIST LAWYERS
(PERSONAL CAPACITY)

The proposal to scrap jury trials for all but the most serious cases would have, if passed, been a profound shift in the balance of power between the state and the working class. Even though Lord Chancellor David Lammy has stepped back a bit, attacks are still incoming on trial by jury - one of the few remaining democratic footholds in a justice system hollowed out by austerity and organised under the guidance of laws passed in the interests of the capitalist class. Removing it is not a technical fix to long court delays, but the latest authoritarian step to concentrate power even further in the hands of an unrepresentative judiciary, while sidelining ordinary people.

idea of replacing juries with a judge and two magistrates in a wide range of cases. David Lammy, wanted to go even further, removing juries from most trials and abandoning the magistrate element altogether. But he has now endorsed Leveson's proposals. The significance of juries is material, not symbolic. Juries insert ordinary people directly into the machinery of the state and the justice system. Juries have been a barrier to political prosecutions and a defence against systemic prejudice. The 2017 Lammy Review showed that magistrates disproportionately convict Black and minority ethnic defendants, while juries, more diverse, and forced to deliberate collectively, do not show the same bias. Removing juries shifts power back toward the very institutions that reproduce class and racial inequality.

A judiciary under strain and under pressure

Shifting fact-finding to judges will not reduce delays. No evidence supports that claim, and no pilot studies exist. Judges are already overloaded. The upper ranks of the judiciary remain overwhelmingly dominated by those who attended private schools or Oxbridge universities, according to the Sutton Trust. Extending democracy includes the call for the election of judges as well as other measures such as maintaining juries, restoring legal aid and improving the pay and conditions of workers across the justice system.

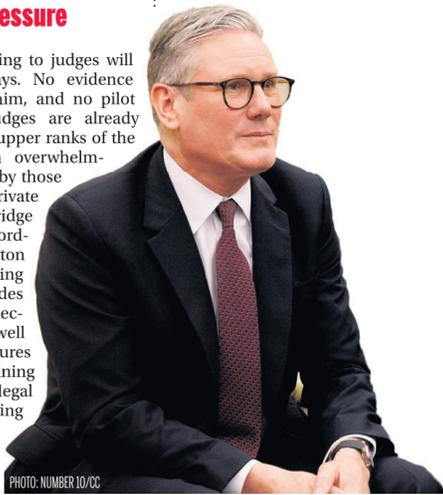


PHOTO: NUMBER 10/CC

It is the work of the current and previous austerity governments. They have shrunk public services while extending coercive state power, like attacks on the right to protest and strike. The crisis now being invoked to justify scrapping juries is the direct result of those choices. Now, instead of reversing cuts, restoring legal aid, or repairing court infrastructure, ministers point to juries as the obstacle to 'efficiency.' Sir Brian Leveson's Review floated the



"The right to trial by jury is an important factor in the delicate balance between the power of the state and the freedom of the individual ... Despite the inevitable increase in costs, the Haldane Society urges that there be a right of trial by jury in all criminal cases"

- Keir Starmer writing in a 1992 edition of Socialist Lawyer, the magazine of the Haldane Society of which he was then secretary

Why judge-only trials now?

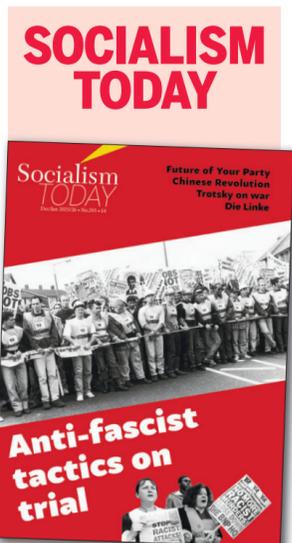
Austerity has exacerbated a justice system in which delays are weaponised against working-class and minority defendants. Long waits push people to plead guilty; lack of representation leaves them exposed; and decaying courts devalue the right to a fair hearing. Removing juries accelerates this dynamic. It allows the state to process cases more quickly and with less public scrutiny. It shifts justice towards a technocratic, bureaucratic model. This is authoritarian neoliberalism: shrinking welfare, expanding policing, and hollowing out democratic oversight.

Every attempt to restrict jury trials historically has been resisted. If we allow this change, it will not be temporary. It will be part of a long-term erosion of public involvement in the administration of justice by representatives of a capitalist class who face growing opposition and are preparing by increasing the powers of the state. Jury trial remains one of the few institutions in which ordinary people collectively exercise influence over the state. To weaken it is to shift the balance towards an increasingly authoritarian model of justice built on the ruins of austerity.

The jury system has been described as the "the lamp that shows that freedom lives." The real long-term threat to justice is not the backlog, it is the state's attempt to extinguish that lamp in the name of 'efficiency.'

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Monthly magazine of the Socialist Party

December-January issue includes...

- **Anti-fascist tactics on trial** In November, Socialist Party members Lois Austin and Hannah Sell appeared before the SpyCops inquiry. In answering the Met Police 'justifications' for their undercover policing, important issues about how to fight the far right were contested. Hannah writes, laying out Marxist tactics to fight the far right.
- **What role now for Your Party in the fight for a new mass workers' party?** The struggle is on for a mass vehicle of working-class political representation.

- **The revival of Die Linke** Tom Hoffman of Sol (CWI Germany) explains why Die Linke has undergone an unexpected electoral and membership growth recently, and what this could mean for the future development of working-class struggle in Germany.

- **China's revolutionary tragedy** Oscar Parry explains why, despite the courage and determination of the masses, the revolution in China that began one hundred years ago this year ended in defeat.

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The Kent and Greenwich 'super-university' merger

ALBIJON KURTOLLI

On 10 September it was announced that, beginning at the start of the 2026-27 academic year, the University of Kent and the University of Greenwich would merge into the UK's first 'super-university'.

It is clear to pretty much everybody that this is not a merger of convenience as the universities are about an hour's drive and a two-hour train journey from each other. The University and College Union (UCU) general secretary Jo

Grady believes it to be a 'takeover by Greenwich' to save Kent from 'the brink of insolvency'. Her comments argue that this merger was a financially motivated one and the evidence to the claim is undeniable. The University of Kent had a £31 million deficit in 2023-24 and was planning to cut jobs in January 2025 in a bid to try and save £19.5 million. Higher education has been in a wretched state since Tony Blair introduced tuition fees, with them trebling under Tory austerity. Calls to raise tuition fees therefore seem

completely asinine considering that the fees-based system hasn't prevented the influx of cuts and redundancies thus far. Higher fees will only ensure that more working-class students will not be afforded the education that every government has blathered on about being so crucial; if they truly believed this, they would've made education free and accessible to everyone a long time ago.

Kent and Greenwich will not be the only ones to adopt this method of merging. The Higher Education Statistics Agency forecasts that 43% of UK universities will be in deficit by the end of the financial year.

We must stand with all university workers who are threatened with being laid off and students being exploited in search of profit. We must pressure the Labour government for full funding not fees. We are the future and not an economic burden!



Southampton City Council faces Palestine Solidarity and Trades Council deputations

JAMES GRETTON
SOUTHAMPTON SOCIALIST PARTY

On 26 November, the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC) and Southampton Trades Council's deputations to Southampton Labour City Council critiqued their complicity in Israeli war crimes and continuation of austerity, respectively.

Two years after the Palestinian genocide began, PSC detailed through their research how the council's investment in companies financially contributed to Gaza's destruction, approximately 70,000 killed thus far. With 2,000 constituents signing PSC's petition presented to councillors, the message is clear: Southampton residents oppose the UK government facilitating Israel's mass slaughter, and this council's complacency.

Yet the consequences of the council's failures are not just external; in each aspect of society, Southampton is struggling without a break from austerity. Representing the Trades Council, Carina Smith articulated the impact of cutting essential services predominantly for adult and social care. Nick Davies of Socialist Students spoke about the University of Southampton's 30,000 students



struggling to cover the bare necessities under mounting debt, tuition fees and rent. Nick Chaffey encapsulated this failure of leadership by emphasising that the council is fully equipped to initiate a fightback and utilise its reserve powers.

For every repeat of "difficult decisions" and "no money left", we must collectively refute these myths with "the money is there" and work to uncover what the council obfuscates to its constituents. Labour's

administrations in Southampton and Westminster echo Conservative and Reform dogma. Before entering the Civic Centre, Nick Chaffey proclaimed to the crowd of PSC, Socialist Students and union organisers that "united we are strong, divided we fall". Before next year's local elections, we call for trade unionists, students and workers must collectively stand candidates who fight for the anti-austerity alternative needed to revitalise Southampton.

Why I joined 'Socialist Party meetings have been a breath of fresh air'

ADAM NICHOL
LIVERPOOL SOCIALIST PARTY

I have now spent just over half my life with austerity as government policy, so I have been interested in politics from an early age as it was made evident to me just how much it can impact everyday life.

It means 15 years of my life made harder by a fraudulent economic policy that doesn't even make logical sense.

300,000 people are estimated to have died in relation to this policy, starving to death in their own homes, in one of the richest economies in the world.

Conservative, Lib Dems and Labour have all upheld this, and I do not believe that Reform or the Green Party would be any different. Only a serious change in the way we approach politics is going to work. Anything less than that will unfortunately

just result in more of the same.

Going to Socialist Party meetings has been a breath of fresh air for me. I found myself surrounded by people I could imagine talking to in the street. And that's because they are. Normal people in our society that have the same jobs and the same struggles as the rest of us. These are the people that should represent the nation, the working class.

Join the fightback
JOIN THE SOCIALISTS

- Visit socialistparty.org.uk/join
 - or call 020 8988 8777
 - or text your name and postcode to 07958 032 071
- to find out more today!

Liverpool students' Guild unionisation campaign



NIVEN DAV
LIVERPOOL SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Socialist Students has engaged in a campaign to establish trade union recognition within the Liverpool Guild of Students.

The Guild hires over 200 staff. This includes bar staff, cleaners, baristas, and other roles. Despite having many commercial staff, there is a lack of a recognised trade union to represent the rights of said workers.

This is an issue, given the cuts to universities across the country, from the 100 voluntary redundancies in the University of Liverpool, to the redundancies in many universities, including Cardiff. There is a fear among workers within the Guild that these cuts may affect the Guild and its staff, and without any union representation, the workers will not be able to fight back.

There are issues that staff are facing within the Guild already. For example, many student staff are under zero-hour contracts, meaning that they are not guaranteed shifts every week, and that their pay will not be enough with the ever-increasing prices of food, washing and other necessities. There is also a lack of employer-provided travel for staff who work late nights, and may have to walk home to places like Smithdown Road or Greenbank, which is a safety concern given the distance that they would have to walk on their own.

Socialist Students has been campaigning on this issue with Unite, in order to establish it as the recognised union within the Guild. Other Guilds, such as the University of Birmingham, have Guild staff in Unison, so it can be done. We will continue to fight until the workers are represented not only in Liverpool, but nationally.



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 trade union struggle for the immediate implementation of the TUC demand of a £15-an-hour minimum wage for all as a step towards a real living wage, 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.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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.

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- No to imperialist wars and occupations!

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.

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Socialism 2025 financial appeal - redeem your pledges!



ISAI MARIJERLA
SOCIALIST PARTY TREASURER

The marvellous financial appeal at Socialism 2025 raised £61,895.50, doubling the target of £30,000. It was an appeal that reflected the positive optimism in socialist ideas, and that armed with those ideas, we can change the world. Thank you for all those that have donated towards the appeal and to those that redeemed your pledge. £46,688.75 has already been paid in. A reminder to please pay in your pledge by the end of the year.

Globally, working-class and young people are looking for an alternative. In New York, a self-proclaimed socialist got elected as a Mayor, defeating Donald Trump and the billionaires who campaigned against him. A month before his election, nearly seven million people were out protesting against Trump, the largest single-day protest in US history.

In Italy, we saw a 24-hour general strike against the war in Gaza, and against attacks on pay and pension reform. It involved two million people in 100 cities.

In France, a nationwide mass strike of one million workers against the government budget.

In other parts of the world, a generation of young people are on the streets, demanding an end to corruption, but ultimately demanding a better life. This generation has been brought up in a period of economic crisis, with capitalism unable to provide a way forward.

War and conflicts are a daily feature for too many people in the world.

Capitalism means war, poverty and exploitation. The task of getting rid of it has never been more urgent. 'Socialism' and 'Socialist' are terms that we are hearing in mainstream. All the donations we receive will be used to fund and promote socialist ideas and argue for what is to be done.

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PO Box 1398, Enfield EN1 9GT

AREA	£ RECEIVED	£ TARGET	Q4: OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2025	DEADLINE: 5 JANUARY 2026
South West	1,290	2,100		61%
North West	573	1,200	48%	
Southern & SE	1,136	2,400	47%	
London	2,078	5,000	42%	
Yorkshire	1,021	2,650	39%	
Wales	623	2,400	26%	
West Midlands	696	2,700	26%	
East Midlands	465	2,050	23%	
Eastern	275	1,300	21%	
Northern	126	800	16%	
Other	586	2,400	24%	
TOTAL	8,869	25,000	35%	

Deadly and avoidable Hong Kong fire provokes widespread anger

OSCAR PARRY

A fire that broke out at a Hong Kong apartment building and soon engulfed seven other towers has killed at least 146 people, with hundreds still missing. The scale of destruction has prompted comparisons to London's Grenfell Tower tragedy in 2017, with revelations about safety lapses and possible corruption.

The renovation site had been examined numerous times over safety concerns, and the company responsible had a record of prior violations. According to The South China Morning Post, residents have reported that fire alarms had failed to go off even after locals smelled smoke.

Anger has spread quickly through the city, fuelled by the extremely undemocratic nature of the Hong Kong government. After the suppression of pro-democracy protests in 2019, a Beijing-imposed national security law effectively banned anyone who isn't deemed a pro-China 'patriot' from holding political office.

On 1 December, officials said anti-corruption authorities had arrested 13 people over the disaster so far, including the directors and an engineering consultant of a construction

company, and had "immediately begun comprehensive investigation along the lines of manslaughter". In contrast, still no action regarding Grenfell has taken place eight years on. However, this is seen as an attempt by the Hong Kong government to try and cut across protest. But the ferocity of the fire, and how many people were unable to escape it, has raised significant questions and accusations of complacency, negligence, and corruption in the city's government.

At a volunteer donation site, many young people ran various stalls, held cardboard information signs and offered support using collective action not seen at this scale since the 2019 protests. It appeared to be making the government nervous. After dark on 28 November, a squad of armed police officers walked laps of the donation site, and government workers took over from volunteers.

An online petition has listed 'four demands', echoing the 2019 protests' 'five demands' for democratic rights, and calling for guaranteed care of victims and accountability for officials in any corrupt activity. The author of the petition, Miles Kwan, a Hong Kong student, was arrested on Saturday, for 'seditious intention'.

Local media also reported the arrest of Kenneth Cheung, a former district councillor. The arrests followed warnings by national security authorities that they would crack down on anyone deemed to be using the incident to incite 'anti-China' sentiment.

Hong Kong is days away from legislative elections. The vote is only the second to be held since the curbs on the current legislature in the wake of 2019 protests, and the last election had the lowest turnout in the city's history, 30%, after most of the city's formal opposition were in jail, self-imposed exile or out of office.

The simmering anger in society is a powder keg that could erupt in protest at any time. The demands for justice and safe, affordable housing linked to demands for basic democratic rights, like freedom of the press, the right to organise, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, as well as economic demands for the nationalisation of the commanding heights of the economy under democratic workers' control and management, should be fought for by all socialists.



TV review: The Hack

'A treacherous combination of press, police and politicians that hide in plain sight'



PHOTO: ITV

DAVE GORTON

"We'll never win people to the ideas of socialism because they believe what they read in 'The Sun.'" Nowadays, substitute social media for newspapers but many of us recognise such comments. However, history is littered with examples where the forces of capitalism have been powerless to prevent the organised working class from moving into action.

ITV's The Hack relates the story of Britain's phone hacking scandal - one of the most shocking events of recent times. A multinational corporation - Rupert Murdoch's News International - hacked the voicemails of countless victims by resetting codes meaning journalists could listen in to private messages of celebrities, politicians, the royal family, relatives of deceased armed forces members and even murder victims, including those who were killed in the 2007 London bombings.

One journalist and one private investigator were originally 'sacrificed' and imprisoned. Later, the practice was found to be widespread. This exploitation was just to sell newspapers to profit owners and investors.

The series demonstrates the bravery of some journalists and the legal profession and others who put their necks on the line. They faced vicious harassment, breaking up marriages,

threatening careers and livelihoods. But it also shows why, ultimately, unorganised individuals will fail.

It is the workers' movement who can have real influence over multinational corporations and change the course of events. Workers directly make the profits for big business. By withholding labour - or threatening to - private profit accumulation can be affected in a way the actions of journalists in ones and twos cannot hope to match.

Compelling drama

At the beginning of The Hack, journalist Nick Davies, excellently portrayed by David Tennant, struggles to write a scene setter. Yet one attempt - deliberately - gets to the truth: "Imagine a country. Imagine the people in this country believe they are living in a democracy, believe in their own freedom, but they are being abused by a power so 'every day' they don't know how to look for it. A treacherous combination of press, police and politicians that hide in plain sight".

The press, police and politicians - three arms of the state used to try to prevent revolt from below. The following five and a half hours (over seven episodes) make compelling drama.

This review doesn't tell the story. The star-studded cast featuring Robert Carlyle, Rebecca Front, Phil Davis

and countless others, do that ably themselves. Once again, as in ITV's Mr Bates vs The Post Office, Toby Jones shines through, playing Guardian editor, Alan Rusbridger.

Murdoch and Rebekah Brooks, one-time editor of both the News of the World (which was closed down) and The Sun and now CEO of News UK, the renamed News International, may have suffered superficial harm in the scandal but their riches and powerful positions remain. Both escaped prison sentences. Andy Coulson, once deputy editor of The News of the World and former Conservative Party Director of Communications under David Cameron, served just five months of his original 18-month sentence.

The Leveson Inquiry, instituted to investigate the wrongdoings, was abandoned by the Cameron government and Starmer's promises to reinstate it were quietly dropped before the 2024 election.

Real justice over the scandal may never be delivered. But workers' struggles against all oppression, fighting to bring an end to this rotten, corrupt, crisis-ridden capitalist system, will mean such valiant attempts were not in vain. In the meantime, watch The Hack. You won't be disappointed.

• The Hack is available to watch on ITVX now

£1/£2 solidarity price

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the Socialist

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MILES TATCHER
DEVON SOCIALIST PARTY

Many people will be relieved that chancellor Rachel Reeves promised in the Budget a reduction of £150 on average from our energy bills. But to pay for it, she is scrapping an energy efficiency levy which funds things including home insulation – which would bring down our bills!

Due to the sky-high cost of bills, in the sixth-richest country people are forced to ration heat. Families living hand to mouth are pushed further into destitution due to our current crisis, compounded by political betrayal: the Labour leadership chose to uphold the Tory two-child benefit cap for their first year in power. Not only did Labour maintain and defend the policy, they punished MPs who opposed it.

Labour also looked to pick the pockets of pensioners, removing universal Winter Fuel Allowance rather than taking the money from the super-rich. Only after the campaign led by unions and campaigners did Labour reverse its decision. Had the cut stayed, Age UK estimated that 12,000 people would have died prematurely this year.

GB Energy: public con, not public ownership

And now we are being sold 'GB Energy', a government-owned investment vehicle backed by £6 billion, thrown into a private sector worth over £250 billion. It won't even touch the sides. It's not a nationalised energy company, there's no democratic control, no workers' representation, and no structural power to lower bills as it will operate in a huge capitalist market.

To bring down our bills and protect the environment we need real nationalisation, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need. This means seizing the energy giants, and placing them under the democratic control of the working class. It means wrenching the vast profits from the hands of the super-rich shareholders and reinvesting every penny into our grid, for cheaper bills, a greener future, and warmer homes.

Keir Starmer's Labour serves the bosses, we need a party that will fight for this in the interests of the working class. No more bailouts to private profiteers.

Bring down our bills

NATIONALISE

ENERGY

Kick out the profiteers

WHAT WE STAND FOR: THE SOCIALIST PARTY'S MAIN DEMANDS >>> see column on p10



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