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# the Socialist

Issue 1350 | 8-14 January 2026 | formerly Militant

# NO TO TRUMP'S VENEZUELA OIL PLUNDER



**US President Donald Trump's kidnap of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro is a naked and brutal attempt to pursue US capitalist interests. It is also a futile attempt to shore up his own unstable position.**

Trump has proclaimed that the 'US now runs Venezuela', the nation with the world's largest oil reserves. He is attempting to do this by leaving elements of the Venezuelan state in power and bullying them to do the bidding of US imperialism.

The threat to the world's masses and the environment posed by this action can only be answered by mass workers' action.

In carrying out the 'strike', Trump struck another blow against the capitalist so-called 'rules-based order' made up of bodies such as the United Nations, and others.

But to hope that these institutions will act decisively against atrocities has no basis in experience.

Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu has acted with impunity while the Israeli state has slaughtered tens of thousands of innocent Palestinians, despite a warrant for his arrest from the International Criminal Court since November 2024.

Presenting himself as all-powerful, in fact Trump is record-breakingly unpopular at home, with net approval ratings of minus 17%. He has faced the two biggest ever single days of protest in US history in the first year of his second term. US workers still face the grinding price rises that led to the demise of the last president Joe Biden. Trump's Venezuela gambit won't fix that.

However, Trump is also increasingly at odds with whole sections of the capitalist class internationally and at home, including in his own Republican Party. Their biggest concern isn't workers' living standards, but that by smashing up their 'rules' he is revealing in stark relief the brutality of their capitalist system, based on ruthless exploitation and competition.

What the defenders of capitalism fear is the political and economic instability he is amplifying. But above all, it is fear of the struggles that his brand of naked class rule will provoke.

To be successful, those struggles, which will come, will need a socialist programme based on democratic public ownership and planning, which puts the working class at the centre of running society.

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**the Socialist**
*formerly Militant*

Issue 1350
8-14 January 2026

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

# Housing crisis: fight for council homes and rent control for all

**RACHEL COX**
OXFORD SOCIALIST PARTY

This winter, the housing crisis has reached new lows. A recent Crisis report uncovered the number of over-55s applying for homelessness has risen by 50% in the past five years. The same report also said that "nearly half (47%) of older people with low incomes said that they would have nowhere to go if they lost their home". Young and older workers alike are feeling the brunt of the crisis.

This situation isn't set to dramatically improve. Private rents still take up 44% of average wages, despite the recent slowing of housing price rises to 1.8% over 2025. This was driven by fears around Trump's tariffs and property tax changes. Uncertainty around property bubbles and speculation points to the dodgy state of the economy. The UK and global economies are ticking time bombs, and when they go off, the capitalist class will try to make the working class pay for their crisis, which will exacerbate sky-high rents and lack of investment already seen.

It's more profitable for the bosses in many instances to squeeze value out of existing stock than to build more housing. Their solution? Slash regulations, destroy green zones, and lower quality to maximise profits instead of providing us all with places to live.

There is another way – a socialist way. Liverpool council in the 80s, led by the Socialist Party's predecessor Militant, took on Margaret Thatcher and built thousands of council houses. Today we need council housing that is affordable, safe, and eco-friendly. Standing pro-working class candidates in this May's elections is an important part of the campaign for decent affordable housing. Such candidates could make much greater ground than in previous years, and find support for a programme of mass council house building and demanding the funds required for this and all the services lost to austerity from central government. These campaigns, fought for alongside trade unions and community groups, could win the resources we need from this weak Labour government.

Workers and young people are looking for an alternative to the capitalist system which leaves us with dangerous and decaying housing, low pay and high rents. A socialist society, in which the wealth and resources could be democratically used to provide for all, would end the housing crisis. Join the Socialist Party's fight for a better future and an end to poverty.



ACABASHI/CC

# Youth unemployment: fight for high-quality jobs, apprenticeships and education for all

**ADAM GILLMAN**
SOUTH EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Young people across the country are desperate to find decent jobs with pay they can live on. They are being forced to pay the price for the weakness of British capitalism and face the brunt of companies slowing down hiring and getting rid of some jobs altogether. The overall unemployment rate is now 5.1% and one in seven young people are unemployed.

What's the response from the Labour government? Pat McFadden, work and pensions secretary, announced before Christmas that a scheme will be launched that will take benefits off young people who don't have a "good reason" to take a six-month job placement funded by the state.

The government fully subsidising a job for 25 hours a week at minimum wage would be great for the bosses. They get effectively free labour for six months, with workers that are forced to be there otherwise they lose their benefits, and with no guarantee of a permanent full-time job at the end of it! It gives employers a more exploitable workforce, which can allow them to drive down the pay and conditions of all workers.

This would be a return to the 'workfare' policies of Tory prime minister David Cameron. As then, the current Labour government is attempting to force young people into jobs with inadequate pay and terrible conditions.

We should point the finger at those who are really responsible for the unemployment crisis – the big bosses! There's no end of productive work that could be done if the work was shared out, and jobs were created with decent pay, training and conditions.

## We demand:

- High-quality jobs and apprenticeships with democratic trade union oversight and trade union rates of pay
- Abolish zero-hour contracts with a right to flexible working
- 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
- The right of all workers, including apprentices, to join a trade union
- The TUC (Trades Union Congress) should follow up on its conference decision and call a national demonstration for high-quality jobs, homes and services for all




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# DECLINE, DECAY, AND ANGER - STARMER'S BRITAIN IN 2026

## WHAT WE THINK

For anyone still wondering whether the capitalist system can provide a secure and stable world, the start of 2026 has been a brutal reality check. Trump's kidnapping of Venezuela President Nicolás Maduro, and his to-the-point honesty in declaring his actions a defence of the economic and strategic interests of American imperialism – in this case including access to oil – illustrates the dangerous and volatile world that capitalism in its era of decay and decline has created.

And the response of the Labour government in Britain? Keir Starmer simply welcomed the toppling of Maduro while Darren Jones, the chief secretary to the prime minister, urged for a 'quick' transition of power after Trump declared the US would now be 'running' Venezuela. If the start of 2026 is a glimpse into the future of the kind of world capitalism in crisis is creating, then it also shows the role British capitalism – a desperate, puny player on the world stage – is fated to play in the world economic and political storms which are developing.

In his New Year's message, which will have rung laughably hollow for anyone who bothered to listen to it, Starmer attempted to take aim at the cost-of-living crisis engulfing the vast majority of people living in Britain.

Following the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as the start of the war in Ukraine in 2022, the cost of living soared as bosses in Britain and internationally moved to protect their profit margins. Out of this crisis facing the working class emerged the 2022-23 strike wave in Britain, which forced increased pay offers out of the then Tory government and contributed to the political fracturing and eventual sinking of that hated government in the general election.

But this crisis hasn't disappeared for the vast majority. Data from Retail Economics found that in the least affluent households, cash left over for spending after essentials has fallen 2.1% since Labour was elected in July 2024. For the bottom 40% of households, incomes remain below 2019 levels.

Neither has this crisis appeared out of the clear blue sky for working-class people. Since the beginning of the world economic crisis 19 years ago, continuous austerity and squeezed living standards have rained down. Any government representing the capitalist system and the interests of the bosses – as this Labour government does – is bound to preside over further falls in living standards, making it widely unpopular and hated.

Starmer in his New Year's message bragged "rail fares, prescription charges, fuel duty – all frozen. £150 cut from your energy bills."

But working-class and young people living in the real world are experiencing an ongoing, years-long crisis. Waiting lists in the NHS remain well above pre-pandemic levels; councils face financial crisis after years of cuts, meaning further attacks posed to social care, education and other vital public services locally; rising unemployment; to name just a few symptoms.

### Industrial struggle

As 2026 kicks off, the working class is gearing up for a fightback. Just before Christmas, resident doctors across England took five days of strike action. Meanwhile, industrial action is set to hit 33 further education colleges this January as members of the University and College Union walk out on strike. This isn't to mention countless local disputes taking place, including Unite the Union's ongoing Birmingham bin strike against the Labour council's fire-and-rehire operation, which has now achieved the historic step of bringing agency workers into the struggle.

Industrial action might not yet be at the level of the 2022 strike wave, which itself was a 30-year high point, but it remains for now higher than during the pre-Covid period, with the real potential for more action in the future.

### Political representation

Less than two years ago, the Tories were smashed by working-class opposition. This Labour government ultimately faces the same fate. Already there is speculation about a replacement for Starmer following what will be a disastrous performance for Labour in the May elections. But this begs the questions – what political alternative does the organised working class have to hand to fight to replace pro-austerity Labour with?

Overwhelmingly, the leaders of the trade union movement have tried to dodge this question. Some will attempt to place hopes in a new Labour leader replacing Starmer.

But no matter who leads the Labour Party in the future, committed to defending the interests of capitalism in crisis as it is, Labour will not offer an alternative to the poverty, war, and vicious daily attacks which capitalism means for the working class.

### Unison

Meanwhile, in the trade union movement itself, the debate around working-class political representation rages on. December saw a historic victory for the left in Unison, with Andrea Egan winning the general secretary election. Her pledge to review and strengthen the union's capacity to take effective national strike action is a potentially huge threat to Starmer's Labour, as the biggest union organising workers in the public sector.

As important was her pledge to launch a review of Unison's relationship with the Labour Party. This, along with the motion passed at Unite policy conference in summer 2025 condemning the Birmingham Labour council for its attacks on the bin workers, and 'discussing the union's relationship with Labour,' should be used as the basis for the convening of a trade union conference to discuss steps towards political representation for the working class. It is urgently needed in both unions and beyond, to turn those words on paper into action by the union leaders.

The working class will have the opportunity to express its anger with Starmer's Labour at the polls in May, but without a tool to do so effectively being offered by the trade unions. As a result, Nigel Farage's right-populist Reform UK will benefit – presenting itself as anti-establishment and on the side of workers.

### Your Party

Jeremy Corbyn and Zarah Sultana's Your Party summer 2025 launch received over 800,000 sign-ups – an indication of the huge enthusiasm for a left-wing alternative, and a consequence of the huge absence of working-class political representation.

The overwhelming support at its autumn founding conference for "local People's Budget conferences, bringing together representatives from the local trade union movement, as well as local anti-cuts groups, socialist organisations, and other working-class organisations, to coordinate a no-cuts stand", as well as to "support all independent socialist candidates of good standing", should be taken as a green light for all those trade unionists, activists, and Your Party supporters wanting to fight for a working-class socialist alternative to prepare to stand and fight austerity.

The elections in May 2026 will be a watershed moment for Starmer's hated Labour government. The elections will see the working-class finding different ways to express its anger at the polls. There is an opportunity to give an expression to that anger in the form of an anti-austerity, working-class stand – pointing in the direction of the mass workers' party that is desperately needed.

Working to help seize that opportunity, as well as fighting for the trade unions to take the lead in developing a new mass workers' party in opposition to Starmer's Labour, will be key tasks facing socialists in 2026.


NUMBER 10/CC

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**JOIN THE SOCIALISTS**
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# Mental health crisis:
# Overdiagnosis, underfunding, or the capitalist race to the bottom?

**JON DALE**
MANSFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

'Too many people are being diagnosed with mental health conditions, driving up the benefits bill when people could be in work.' That's what Labour health secretary Wes Streeting was claiming last March. Now, after the government was forced into a disability benefit cuts U-turn and strong criticism from doctors, teachers, disability charities and others, he has partially rowed back from his ignorant comments. Instead, he's setting up an inquiry into the apparent growth of mental health problems, particularly for those of working age.

There have certainly been big increases in measurements of mental ill-health and psychological conditions, affecting all ages. In England:

- In 2011, 3,840 prospective students declared an existing mental health condition in their application for university; in 2020, there were 21,105
- Autism diagnoses went up 787% between 1998 and 2018
- Children and young people identified with special educational needs and disabilities up from 1.3 million in 2014 to 1.7 million in 2024-25
- Adults on prescribed drugs for ADHD rose 24.3% to 190,000 in the year to 2024-25

Streeting's comment aped his Tory predecessors. "There is a real risk now that we are labelling the normal ups and downs of human life as medical conditions," said former Tory minister Mel Stride in March 2024, "which then actually serve to hold people back and, ultimately, drive up the benefit bill."

In April 2024, then prime minister Rishi Sunak attacked a "sick-note culture", where people supposedly choose to get signed off work as unfit and claim lavish benefits. He and his wife's personal wealth grew over £2.3 million each week in 2024. He should try living on £118.75 a week statutory sick pay!

Nigel Farage joined in the attack on people suffering mental ill-health, saying in April 2025: "I think we are massively overdiagnosing those with mental illness problems and those with other general behavioural disabilities."

Being an MP or minister, writing newspaper columns and making highly paid speeches, gives very different 'satisfaction' to rushing round a huge warehouse picking orders, driving hours in crawling traffic or standing on a packing line all day long with bullying management on one's back. Neither the Tories, Farage nor Wes Streeting have ever done jobs like these.

**39%**

**of children referred to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services had their referrals closed before being able to access any services**

## Overwork and ill-health

A 2019 study showed women working over 55 hours a week were more likely to become depressed than those working 35-40 hours. Regular weekend working was associated with more depression among men and women than in those who did not work weekends. Many low-paid workers are forced to work long hours, often two or three jobs, to make enough to live on. And many workers have to work weekends, not just those in essential services.

However, hard unpleasant work is nothing new for millions of workers, so what else explains the apparent big increase in mental health problems? Far from this being 'overdiagnosis' by GPs, evidence shows massive underdiagnosis.

Recent research published in the Lancet medical journal analysed 9 million GP records and found just 0.32% of patients have a diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). That's less than 1 in 10 of the 4% of all adults estimated to have ADHD.

Another study estimated there were between 435,700 and 1,197,300 people in England in 2018 who may be autistic and undiagnosed.

A large recent study found 12 times as many people with severe mental ill-health symptoms but no diagnosis, compared to people who had been given a diagnosis but did not have symptoms (although they might have done when originally diagnosed).



**Protest in Leicester against SEND cuts** LEICESTER SP

## Child mental health

For children, too, there's underdiagnosis. Years of local authority cuts have stripped out hundreds of education psychologist posts. It's harder to get a child diagnosed with neurodivergent conditions like autism or ADHD. Parents and schools need to follow exhausting lengthy processes. Huge workloads and loss of support services have led to burnt-out education psychologists leaving the profession.

In September: the Association of Education Psychologists stated, "The Government's current commitment to fund training places for education psychologists is nowhere near sufficient to meet rising demand. Without additional, long-term funding and a national workforce plan, there will simply not be enough ... in the years ahead."

In 2022-23, nearly one million children and young people were referred to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), 8% of the 11.9 million children in England. 305,000 started treatment. 270,300 were still waiting by the end of the year. And 372,800 (39%) had their referrals closed before accessing CAMHS.

Government Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) funding has risen at a rate far below rising demand and costs. The many children not getting their special needs recognised or provided for at school are more likely to experience mental ill-health in adult life and lack of work opportunities, addiction and risk of falling into the criminal justice system.


**Wes Streeting meeting NHS CEO and a top pharmaceutical industry representative** DEPARTMENT FOR SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY/CC

As well as underdiagnosis, there has been widespread misdiagnosis of neurodivergent conditions, especially for girls and women. The male:female ratio of those with these conditions was used to be thought to be around 10:1. More recent studies have shown how girls in particular learn to mask their conditions. Masking tends to break down during other stressful events. More adult women are now recognising their underlying neurodivergence, bringing the gender ratio down to 3:1. It may fall further.

## Fighting the stigma

There has been wider discussion about mental health over recent decades. Trade unions have campaigned for mental health support for members and their families. There's been less secrecy and shame suffered by those with mental ill-health, although it's still a taboo subject for many. 'Victim-blaming' by politicians and their big business backers threatens to turn the clock back.

Growth in anti-depressant prescriptions has boosted pharmaceutical industry profits, while NHS talking therapies remain severely under-resourced. A six-session course is not enough for most people to overcome mild anxiety or depression, let alone longstanding and deeper problems. A comprehensive course of talking therapy has been shown to be equally effective, if not more so, than medication.

But neither talking nor pharmaceutical therapies, though needed, ultimately change life's conditions. Money and housing insecurity, bullying bosses and harassment, long hours and insufficient leisure time or facilities contribute to mental stress. Racism, homophobia and attacks on disabled people add to anxiety and depression.

Employers demanding more and more at faster speeds, and without adjustments for neurodivergence or disability, make it harder to remain at work.

Trade unions should campaign for workers to have democratic control over their working conditions, a real living minimum wage, a maximum 32-hour week without loss of pay, work adjustments for health and disabilities and to root out all forms of bullying.

Councillors should fight for government money to build good-quality council housing, provide youth and community services, and cheap or free leisure facilities.

Government should fully fund local councils and the NHS, including mental health services, increase training of psychologists and other health professionals and nationalise the pharmaceutical companies to bring down the cost of drugs. Schools should be fully funded to meet the needs of all pupils.

Sickness and disability benefits need to be raised to the equivalent of a living minimum wage.

The capitalist system based on brutal exploitation and competition is bad for our mental health. Fight for a socialist society based on cooperation to meet the needs of all.

## WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?

- **editors@socialistparty.org.uk**

*or write to the Socialist Inbox, PO Box 1398, Enfield EN1 9GT*

# Venezuela: No to Trump's oil plunder

## Build mass workers' parties to challenge the capitalist system

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**

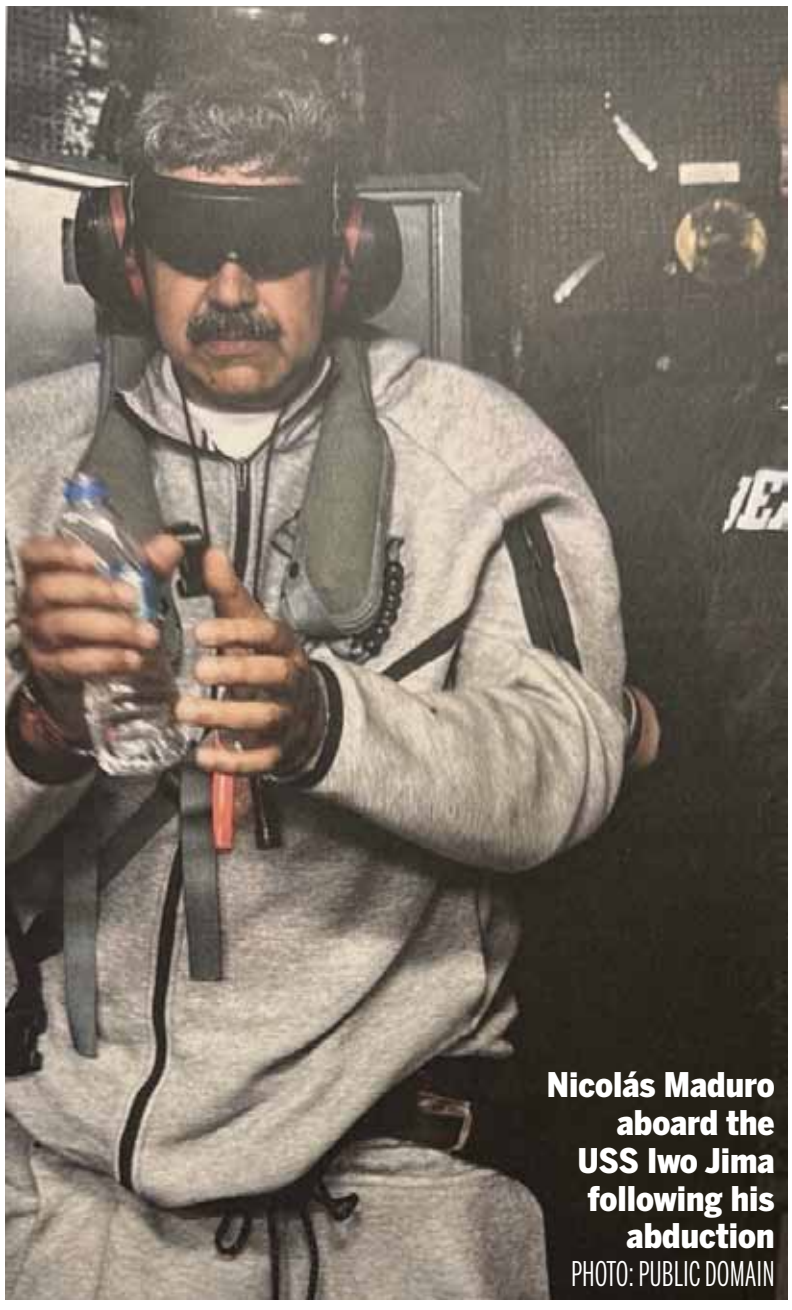
**TEXT OF A SOCIALIST PARTY LEAFLET DISTRIBUTED AT PROTESTS ON 5 JANUARY**

In the days since Trump's abduction and arrest of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro shocked the world, the motivation for and planning of this attack have become clearer. Maduro is being held in New York facing a 'trial' on drug and weapons charges.

All the rhetoric about 'narco-terrorism' won't cover up the fact that Trump is seeking US access to the world's biggest oil reserves in the hope that the promise of cheap fuel can cut across his rising unpopularity at home.

On 5 January, less than a year since his inauguration, the US president's net approval rating is minus 17%. Only one US president has had worse polling at this stage in their term - and that was Trump the first time around! Rising unemployment, squeezed living standards, and attacks on democratic rights are the main factors.

This week has seen a 0.8% point rise in his approval ratings, reflecting a tiny hope that things can improve. Trump's actions in Venezuela will not decisively change the situation facing workers, but they will fuel greater anger at his presidency. That will include across Latin America where his invocation of the Monroe Doctrine, US imperialism intervening in its so-called 'backyard' in pursuit of its interests, will arouse the anger and hatred of US imperialism.



**Nicolás Maduro aboard the USS Iwo Jima following his abduction**
PHOTO: PUBLIC DOMAIN

### Drill, baby, drill!

Trump has called for "billions of dollars" to be poured into Venezuelan oil extraction. The Financial Times (FT) has revealed that one energy management company issued a "$2 billion private placement memorandum" for Venezuelan oil projects back in December.

Trump said the US will 'run Venezuela' while accepting the appointment of interim President Delcy Rodríguez, clearly hoping she can be leant on to do US imperialism's bidding. During the Biden administration, Rodríguez is reported to have "impressed executives with her pragmatism and grasp of detail when she led talks with international oil companies, including Chevron, which led to them being granted limited licences to operate in Venezuela".

It is still to be seen what role different sections of the Venezuelan regime play as the situation unfolds, including the impact of pressure from movements of workers and youth that could develop.

An article in the FT says the US assault on Venezuela "marks a potential new era for the [oil] companies" and reminds us that "the last major opening of a country's reserves was in 2009 in Iraq, where auctions for oilfields drew multibillion-dollar bids six years after the US invasion." However, so far many oil bosses are expressing caution given the instability in the situation.

Trump is attempting to act in the interests of sections of US capitalism - as was George Bush in the invasion of Iraq in 2003 when he was supported by his loyal poodle Tony Blair, then Labour Prime Minister. Bush's 2002 attempt to remove Maduro's predecessor Hugo Chávez was thwarted by a mass movement led by sections of the military.

This movement drove Chávez to undertake partial nationalisations and using oil revenue to introduce major social reforms. Unfortunately, despite his enormous popularity, Chávez excluded the masses from leadership. His failure to definitively break with capitalism resulted in the revolution reaching an impasse. Maduro has retreated from Chávez's radical programme. Nonetheless Venezuela, like Cuba, is hated by US imperialism with sanctions a major factor in the crippling poverty. Lessons of those events are crucial for today to build, as Chávez called it, 'socialism in the 21st century'.

Trump has said he expects the Cuban regime to be brought down, and threatened interventions in Colombia and Greenland. The workers and young people in Venezuela and all the threatened countries will not benefit and must build mass movements, not only to resist more coups but to fight for a socialist alternative.

### Build new workers' parties

Across the world protesters are taking to the streets and this movement is likely to grow as the reality of Trump's plunder plan becomes clear. This movement must stand in solidarity with all the workers and young people facing oppression and exploitation as a result of these attacks. But to be effective, these movements need to build a challenge to the capitalist system defended by Trump and all the capitalist world leaders.

The rottenness of the world's capitalist leaders has been confirmed by the rustle of mealy-mouthed responses to the Caracas attack, not least by human rights lawyer Keir Starmer. One after another they have made appeals to international law and failed to condemn Trump.

There can be no hope that capitalist international law and institutions will prevent this or further injustices on the workers and young people across the world, let alone the attacks they are carrying out in the interests of big business profits at home. The lesson of US imperialism's invasion of Iraq in 2003 was that the international laws and bodies such as the UN were unable to prevent the slaughter and plunder of that country. They have always existed to defend capitalist interests.

Today, with the capitalist system in deep crisis, its institutions are also being shredded as governments desperately seek to defend the interests of their national capitalist class, with Trump to the fore. Trump's latest outrage is designed to demonstrate the power of US imperialism to all its rivals. But it will also be another demonstration to the world's working class of the brutal character of capitalism and the need for democratic socialism.

The anti-war movement today has two major tasks. To build the widest support in the trade unions, the six million-strong mass workers' organisations. But also, to build a mass political alternative, a new workers' party, to take on the pro-war, anti-working-class policies of Starmer and New Labour, and take forward the fight for a new socialist society, free from poverty, exploitation and war.




**Socialist Party members at a protest in London against Trump's Venezuela oil plunder on 5 January**
PHOTO: LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

# Victory for left in Unison general secretary election

**PAUL COUCHMAN**
BRANCH SECRETARY, SURREY COUNTY UNISON, PERSONAL CAPACITY

Andrea Egan has won the election for general secretary of Unison, the UK's largest trade union. This is a historic result and a decisive rejection by members of decades of right-wing, 'partnership'-based leadership at the top of the union. It is a defeat for Starmer's New Labour Mark II, as warned by big business journals such as the Financial Times.

Socialist Party members in Unison actively campaigned for Andrea Egan's election because we believe her victory represents an opportunity to transform the union into a fighting force. It also sends a clear message to Keir Starmer's government that the largest public sector union, with around 1.3 million members, is no longer prepared to quietly acquiesce while austerity continues under a Labour banner.

The general secretary is the most powerful position in Unison and plays a huge role in how the union is perceived by members, employers and the government. Andrea's victory will be widely seen as a signal that Unison members want change: a more combative union, prepared to challenge employers and the government, and one that strengthens democratic lay-member control.



Unison members in the NHS have been forced to fight over pay in many areas over the last couple of years, including the longest strike in NHS history - the Gloucestershire phlebotomists SOUTHWEST SOCIALIST PARTY

Andrea Egan, part of the 'Time For Real Change' network within Unison, defeated the incumbent Christina McAnea, whose leadership epitomised the approach of accommodating austerity and avoiding confrontation. For years, Unison has been led by general secretaries who argued for 'partnership' with the bosses and warned against 'rocking the boat.'

Under McAnea's leadership, Unison repeatedly failed to mount serious resistance to cuts and attacks on members' living standards. At this year's Unison conference she infamously told delegates that "there is no magic wand" and defended Labour's U-turn on the winter fuel allowance as a sign of the government "maturing", rather than a retreat under pressure. That outlook has now been rejected by the membership.

Starmer has relied on the support of compliant union leaders to push through cuts and attacks with minimal resistance. Andrea's election should provide the platform to disrupt that cosy relationship. It comes despite sections of the union left, including the North West 'Organised Left', choosing to back Christina McAnea and defend a failed model of leadership.

Andrea's victory reflects a growing mood among members for a fighting alternative. The Socialist Party will play its part on the left in seeking to consolidate this victory. This is essential as the right wing has a majority on Unison's National Executive Council (NEC) until the next elections in 2027, as well as dominating the union's officialdom.

## Starmer and capitalist establishment will try to neuter

Along with Starmer, and behind him the capitalist establishment, the Unison right will be determined to frustrate and neuter this breakthrough. The most effective way to defeat this is to set out a militant industrial and political strategy to members. As part of this, it is vital that a united left challenge is put together in the Unison service group elections that take place in 2026.

On taking office in January, Andrea could call a joint meeting of Unison service group executives to help coordinate the union's fight on public sector pay.

We strongly welcome Andrea's commitment to take only a social worker's wage as general secretary, in line with the long-standing Socialist Party principle that workers' representatives should live on a workers' wage. Her pledge to review and strengthen the union's capacity to take effective national strike action is also a crucial step forward.

Andrea has also pledged to launch a comprehensive review of Unison's relationship with the Labour Party. This must go further than simply seeking "value for money" from Labour, as stated in her manifesto. The task now is to enable a decisive break with a pro-austerity Labour Party and to back only those candidates and parties who support Unison's policies and are prepared to defend jobs, pay and public services.

Key questions remain. Andrea has not yet committed to campaigning for councils to set no-cuts budgets as a way of protecting jobs and services, although this is the policy of Unison's local government service group, nor to ending automatic political support for Labour politicians who carry out cuts, or supporting the call for a new workers' party. Socialist Party members will continue to argue for these policies to be adopted, as they are essential to mobilising members and ensuring this leadership change results in a genuine transformation of the union.

Andrea Egan's election is a major step forward. Turning that step into a decisive shift in Unison's direction will require continued pressure from below, a clear fighting programme, and active involvement from members in every branch.

- **Andrea Egan 58,579 votes (59.8%)**
- **Christina McAnea 39,353 votes (40.2%)**

# Lea Interchange bus strike in east London: 'Without strong reps, no one is safe'

**UNITE MEMBER**

As the Socialist goes to press, Unite members at Lea Interchange bus garage in Leyton, east London, are preparing for another two days of strike action on 9 and 10 January over victimisation of reps.

Unite members have recruited and built a vibrant union branch, on the understanding that 'without strong reps, no one is safe'.

Stagecoach management were clearly shocked at the size and determination of the strike and the day-long picket lines in December, setting up at 3am and still going late into the night.

The strength of the picket line has been backed up with support from other Unite branches, Waltham Forest Trades Council, other unions and the National Shop Stewards Network. The 450+ Unite members at the garage thank supporters for donations which are being used for hardship support, and to provide warmth, shelter, food and drink for the 'picket welfare station': "You are keeping us warm, fed, and ready to win".

Unbelievably, just days before the first Lea Interchange strike in December, Stagecoach Managing director Paul Lynch told the London Assembly: "Safety doesn't make a profit"! Unite members want to know if this is why victimisation of health and safety reps is happening?

A group of 'pensioner freedom riders' travelled the buses first thing in the new year to distribute a trades council leaflet explaining the issues to passengers and appealing for support. The bosses have been inundated with emails from the public, prompting a standard reply that "we have no such problems in our other 12 garages" - which, as far as the Unite members are concerned, is an admission of a toxic culture in the garage.`

Workers know the bosses are under pressure. The managing director posted a letter to drivers' home addresses, clearly a desperate attempt to create divisions in families. But the workforce is standing strong.



LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

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# Solidarity with UCU strikes fighting to save further education

**MARCO TESEI**
UCU NEC MEMBER, PERSONAL CAPACITY

University and College Union (UCU) members at 29 Further Education (FE) colleges in England are taking a first round of coordinated strike action over pay and funding on 14, 15 and 16 January.

We are fighting for the demands of the union's 'New Deal for FE' campaign: a 10% pay rise, pay parity with school teachers in three years, and binding national agreements on pay and workload. The essence of which is that we need full funding urgently! FE is on its knees, brought down by years of Tory and now Labour austerity, and by the harmful effects of marketisation since college incorporation in 1992.

The militant mood of post-16 education workers was expressed loud and clear at UCU's annual congress last May. Members in both Further and Higher Education (HE) voted overwhelmingly to ballot for national strike action in the autumn.

On FE campuses, there is also growing disgust at our fat-cat college leaders who, instead of joining us in the fight for full funding, prefer to balance the books by axing jobs and increasing workload. Meanwhile, parasitically, they continue to extract six-figure salaries from empty coffers!

In 2022-23, when 32 colleges came out together with similar demands, some managed to win significant local pay awards. Now, with the spectacular failure of Keir Starmer's Labour to offer FE anything but yet more austerity, anger is even higher and the union's demands are bolder, including demands for agreements on workloads as well as pay.

The ballot of over 60 colleges in November returned a whopping 90% 'yes' vote on a 50.6% turnout. Had we been balloted on an aggregate basis there would now be national action on a much larger scale. But because the ballot was disaggregated college by college, despite the gigantic efforts of reps, several colleges were disqualified by the undemocratic 50% turnout threshold laws, and some have reached individual agreements with college bosses.

The lack of a centrally led ballot campaign actively aiming to get as many colleges out on strike as possible has been glaring. UCU's leaders, including general secretary Jo Grady, have stopped making avowals of faith in Starmer's Labour, but are still averse to mounting the determined fightback that is needed. A motion presented by Socialist Party members at the special November Further Education Committee (FEC), to re-ballot those colleges that came close to the turnout threshold, and to take initial action before Christmas, was voted down by the right.

Nonetheless, resilient, sustained action in FE colleges can win significant gains. Both Starmer's government and the Association of Colleges (the employers' body that makes pay recommendations for the sector) are under pressure to concede binding national agreements.



Sheffield UCU FE members on strike before Christmas SHEFFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

## Serious action

Serious action now can also prepare the ground for a new and stronger wave of national action later. In particular, it can inspire members in non-striking branches to take action at the earliest next opportunity, and may persuade branches which haven't yet settled locally and were excluded from the national dispute to now confront their bosses independently.

Similarly, UCU members in HE can be encouraged. The aggregated ballot in HE did not achieve the 50% threshold, despite the huge 69.69% vote for action to fight 15,000 planned job cuts and hundreds of course closures – scuppered by Starmer's scandalous maintenance of draconian Tory laws.

Socialist Party activists in UCU, including on the FEC, will argue to name the next coordinated dates for escalating action and for reballots. We also argue for regional and national meetings, and for strike rallies and mass pickets to build further links between members and branches. We will encourage striking branches to establish a joint hardship fund to sustain prolonged action.

Solidarity to all FE strikers! For full funding! For FE under public ownership and democratic control!

- **It is more important than ever that left, fighting candidates win a majority in the upcoming UCU National Executive Committee elections, including re-electing Socialist Party member Duncan Moore to a UK-elected FE seat**

# Birmingham bin dispute – trade union unity needed more than ever

## Council using GMB as reason for not negotiating - it's time to take a side!

**BY A UNITE MEMBER**

The heroic Birmingham bin strikers continue to push forward, building on the magnificent ballot and strike action taken by agency staff. This incredible act alone can set a precedent for future strikes.

The campaign is now at another crucial point, however. Incredibly, the Labour council has issued a report claiming that industrial relations between the unions and the Council are very good! But the latest report from the government-appointed commissioners sent in to run the council makes it clear that as far as they are concerned, the obstacle in the way of a settlement is the leadership of the GMB union.

The report states what the council considers to be the reason for talks breaking down, specifically that the GMB would come back with equal pay claims if Unite members got a deal to compensate workers for the loss of pay.

The commissioners state: "The council's attempts to reach a negotiated settlement on the dispute caused the main litigant union (GMB) to seek to re-open the in-principle equal pay negotiation settlement, claiming that any settlement with their equal pay comparators would require further financial compensation."

"Consequently, progress in the council achieving final settlement on the equal pay claims stalled for at least four months, and only recommenced in earnest in early August, when the council and commissioners made the decision to cease further talks with Unite following several rejected offers of settlement."

The implication here, if what the commissioners are saying is true, is that GMB leaders sabotaged talks and therefore the campaign. Of course, the government-appointed commissioners can't be trusted. If, as we hope, this report is untrue, the GMB leadership should immediately make a public statement saying so.



Agency workers joining the Birmingham bin strike BIRMINGHAM SOCIALIST PARTY

## GMB and Unite members need unity

We know that GMB members are supportive of the Unite action and would want that approach reflected by their leadership – they know that the attacks by the council on Unite members could be made against them as well.

Leaving aside that Unite has KC opinion to show that there is no equal pay risk, a union should be fighting to harmonise up, not encouraging a race to the bottom. GMB leaders cannot have it both ways - they cannot support bin workers fighting pay cuts while at the same time appearing to use bin workers whose pay is attacked as pawns, while making an equal pay deal for other staff. How many other employers will GMB leaders use this tactic with?

Women workers who have benefited from lump-sum payments as part of the equal pay deal would not have wanted bin workers to take a pay cut of £8,000 to pay for it. During the last bin strike in 2019, striking women homecare workers joined bin workers' pickets. If the leadership of the other council unions refuse to side with the bin workers, a direct appeal to their members to do so will have to be made.

In summary, according to the commissioners' report, the GMB leadership is threatening the council with legal action should it make an agreement with Unite to settle the dispute. The logic of that position could only be for refuse workers to accept the loss of £8,000 a year with no compensation.

GMB members will want their leaders to speak up: to deny the commissioners' statement and come out in support of the Unite refuse strikers – not side with the employers.



Marching against the cuts in Bristol PHOTO: MATT CAREY

# WHAT IS THE GREENS RECORD IN OFFICE?

**Tom Baldwin**
**Socialist Party National Committee**

"We will break the shackles of poverty and hardship" promised Green Party leader Zack Polanski at their conference in October. He has repeatedly talked of taxing the rich in order to help ordinary people. With the Labour government doing the exact opposite, increasing numbers of people are looking to the Green Party as a left-wing political alternative.

That has accelerated under the leadership of Polanski (right), a self-styled 'eco-populist' from the left of the party. Since his election in September the party membership has grown by 100,000. Opinion polls show support for them at 15%, more than double their vote at the last general election. They are easily the most popular party among 18 to 24-year-olds, with support from 36% of this age group.


PHOTO: BRISTOL GREEN PARTY/CC

But a party cannot be judged by its leader's words alone. So what actually is the record of Green parties in power, in English councils, in Scottish government, and across Europe?

## Local councils

The Green Party of England and Wales has over 800 local councillors, participating in the leadership of 41 different local authorities. It has governed in coalitions or agreements with every establishment party, with the exception of Reform UK.

Councils have faced year after year of funding cuts from Westminster governments, first under the Tories and continuing under Labour. Unfortunately, so far Green councils have made the same decisions as all other parties – to work within the spending constraints imposed rather than try to fight them. This can only mean implementing the austerity that many Greens claim to oppose, with the working class made to pay the price.

They have carried out cuts in two separate stints running Brighton and Hove as a minority administration, provoking strikes on both occasions. In 2013, bin workers were forced to take strike action against plans to implement £4,000 pay cuts. There are clear parallels between the actions of the Greens then and the Labour council in Birmingham today. This anti-working class policy earned them the description at the time of being "Tories on bikes".

The Green Party currently leads Bristol City Council as the largest party within a committee system. In February, they passed the largest budget ever set by a Green-led administration. With £50 million of service cuts it was a seamless continuation of the austerity implemented by the previous Labour mayor.

More than half of this came from children's care services. The frequency of bin collections was reduced. Domestic violence and mental health services also saw cuts, as did many other areas. Council tax was raised by the maximum permitted amount of 5% while the council tax reduction scheme which assists the least well off to pay was cut. Working-class people are once again expected to pay more for less.

Green councillors didn't even make a pretence of contrition for their role in these attacks. Both the Green leader of the council and the leader of the Green group spoke of their "pride" in the budget and its passing was greeted with applause.

Many Greens try to distinguish themselves from other parties by claiming they will implement austerity in a 'nicer' way. But there is no nice way of making cuts on this scale, especially when services have already been cut to the bone over the last decade. In fact, many of the proposals passed by the Bristol Greens were identical to those previously put forward by Labour but dropped under pressure from campaigners. No doubt council officers kept the paperwork in a drawer to be dusted off as the financial situation continued to worsen. The Greens in Bristol have now carried out cuts that Labour failed to.

The thousands of new Green members, many of them young people, have joined enthused by Zack Polanski's criticism of austerity and inequality. However, in local authorities across the country, Green councillors repeat the arguments made by other establishment politicians that councils must make cuts or the government will 'send in commissioners' to do it for them. Unfortunately, responding to a question from a Socialist Party member about whether or not he would support Green councillors supporting a no-cuts stand, Polanski fell back on the same line.

But it is not true that councils cannot defy government austerity. Councils still have room for manoeuvre and could use reserves, borrowing powers and other measures to produce a legally 'balanced budget' with no cuts and improved services. In fact, Bristol City Council put money into reserves at the same time as cutting services!

By building council homes and reopening services, an anti-austerity council would get mass support. It could mobilise a movement to make it impossible for government commissioners to operate. Instead the fragile Starmer government could be forced to cough up!

Two centuries of experience of the working-class movement shows there can be no progress without struggle. The role of fighting, anti-austerity councillors should be to help to lead and develop those struggles.



PHOTO: PETE BIRKINSHAW/CC

## Ireland, Germany and France


The German Greens enter the 'traffic light coalition' in 2021 PHOTO: SANDRO HALANK/CC

Elsewhere in Europe, the Greens sister parties have also participated in capitalist governments. And with the same results – that they help implement anti-working class policies, their 'radical' image is tarnished, and their popularity undermined.

In Ireland, the Green Party joined a coalition government between 2007 and 2011, helping make the working class pay for the Great Recession, a sin repaid by electoral wipeout in the Dáil (Irish Parliament). They eventually clawed back popularity as people searched for alternatives that appeared to be against the establishment. Once again they joined a 'grand coalition' with the two main capitalist parties, Fiánna Fail and Fine Gael, between 2020 and 2024. Again they were hammered electorally.

In Germany, the Greens first participated in a coalition government with the German SPD, the equivalent of the British Labour Party, from 1998 to 2005, implementing an austerity programme of tax cuts for business and social cuts for the working class. Then, after 16 years in opposition, the Greens joined the federal government in 2021 alongside the SDP and FDP (equivalent to the Lib Dems). This was known as the 'traffic light coalition' for the parties' colours.

They entered government riding a wave of popularity, appearing to offer something different to the more established political parties in their call for "social-ecological transformation". But again, the traffic light coalition carried out huge cuts to public services and pensions, while money was found to increase military spending. The coalition oversaw real-terms falls in workers' incomes. Environmental policies centred on green taxes and charges, ultimately making the working class pay for the climate crimes of big business. The Green energy minister, Robert Habeck, even oversaw the reopening of coal-fired power plants.

This jarring contrast between promise and delivery meant the Greens lost over one million votes in the 2025 federal elections. At the same time, the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) doubled its vote share as people looked elsewhere to punish the main parties.

In France, the government continues in its state of crisis. President Macron's latest prime minister, Sébastien Lecornu, cannot form a stable collection of parties in the national assembly to easily carry through his austerity policies. In December, he relied on the abstention of 26 Green MPs to allow benefit attacks to remain in the government's austerity budget. The Green leader in parliament said, "If I listened to my heart and my gut, I would vote against this text", but argued the Greens' abstention from voting against the government had "avoided disaster". Disaster for who? The capitalist class, or workers facing attacks on welfare benefits?

## Scottish parliament

The Scottish Greens have also been involved in carrying out cuts in Glasgow, Scotland's largest local authority. But it's in the Scottish parliament that they've been tested on their biggest stage in the UK so far. Between 2021 and 2024 they were effectively coalition partners in the government of the Scottish National Party (SNP) with members becoming ministers in a deal known as the Bute House Agreement.

During that time, the Scottish government repeatedly passed on Westminster cuts. In 2022 it delivered budgets totalling £1.2 billion of cuts coming just eight weeks apart, in addition to the usual annual budget. This was the largest package of cuts ever implemented by the Scottish government, with devasting consequences for areas such as the NHS and social care. Workers across the public sector were handed real-terms pay cuts and given angry warnings not to strike. A five-year spending review unveiled tens of thousands of additional job cuts.

Large areas of the Crown Estate were handed to energy multinationals and investment funds to profit from through entirely privately-owned projects. For all their talk of a "greener, fairer Scotland" the Greens were hand in glove with the SNP in carrying out these anti-working class policies.

The Green leadership dismissed opposition within their own party as an 'obsession with purity,' saying: "The central faction of the Scottish Greens are broadly liberals and progressives who want to play nice with the other parties in Holyrood [the seat of the Scottish Parliament]".

They were happy to work with the out and out pro-big business parties who represent interests that are completely opposed to the vast majority of people in society. 'Playing nice' only applied to the other Holyrood parties though, not to the millions hurt by their policies. Attacks on the working class were seen as a price worth paying to maintain their seat at the table of power.



PHOTO: EDINBURGH GREENS/CC

Despite growing discontent within the Greens, it was SNP First Minister Humza Yousaf that eventually dissolved the Bute House Agreement. As they struggle to regain popularity lost in this episode, the Scottish Greens elected new joint leaders this year, with less than 1,000 people voting. The new leaders claim to be on the left but one of them, Ross Greer, was the architect of Bute House and has defended cuts with the well-worn excuse of making "tough decisions."

Three Glasgow councillors have since defected to Your Party, saying: "We felt we could no longer be complicit in decisions which do not align with our socialist values." Pressure must be kept up within Your Party to ensure that the "bold anti-austerity stand" agreed at its conference applies in deeds as well as words.



PHOTO: HELEN PATTISON

## A socialist alternative

Thousands have joined the Green Party looking to support a radical political alternative, attracted to Zack Polanski's left-wing rhetoric. Many will see themselves as joining 'Polanski's party', not a party of cuts and austerity.

Socialist Party members are playing a central role helping to organise people's budget meetings locally – bringing together trade unions, community organisations, anti-cuts activists and socialists to draw up council budgets to meet the needs of our communities.

Young people enthused by Zack Polanski are invited to attend to discuss how we can fight austerity. Green councillors will be invited too!

In May's elections, the working class needs political representatives prepared to resist austerity, helping to mobilise working-class struggle to demand money from the bosses. It is because Green parties have no vision of a systemic alternative to the system of capitalism – based on exploitation – that means they end up following the capitalist logic and attacking the working class.

Getting workers' candidates elected, fighting for a socialist alternative based on nationalisation and working-class democratic control, would be the first step to achieving the mass working-class party we need.

**Join the fightback**

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*to find out more today!*


Socialist Party


PHOTO: IAIN DALTON

# West Yorks Combined Authority workers fight for decent pay

**ALI MANSFIELD**
YORKSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY

Just before Christmas, workers at the West Yorkshire Combined Authority (made up of a Labour mayor and six west Yorkshire councils, five of which are Labour-run), members of Unison, began strike action in response to a below-inflation pay offer.

After refusing meaningful talks for months, delaying agreement on a cost-of-living pay rise due last April, the combined authority put forward a real-terms pay cut of 1.3%. Workers on the picket line spoke about discontent building up over years of "unacceptable" wage suppression, overseen by successive Tory and Labour governments.

The strikers expressed solidarity with theatre assistants at Leeds Hospital Trust taking action the same day. Further strike dates are planned in January.

# Leeds NHS workers strike for rebanding

**IAIN DALTON**
LEEDS SOCIALIST PARTY

Perioperative Assistants working in surgical theatres across Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust (LTHNT) took an initial two days of strike action over rebanding to reflect their clinical duties. Well-attended pickets of 30 to 40 were outside Leeds General Infirmary in the city centre on Thursday 18 December and St James' Hospital in Harehills on Friday 19 December.

Across the country in recent years, around 40,000 NHS workers have been rebanded from Band 2 to Band 3, and awarded back pay, to reflect the range of clinical duties they perform. Theatre assistants' work includes inserting cannulas, sterilising equipment and other tasks. Workers at the trust doing similar work on the wards have been rebanded, but the trust is refusing to do the same for workers in surgical theatres.

New LTHNT chief executive Brendan Brown was previously in charge at Calderdale and Huddersfield Foundation Trust, where workers doing the same jobs were rebanded from Band 2 to 3 with five years back pay.

On both picket lines, workers were angry at Trust bosses that they feel take them for granted. Groups of workers leafleted passers-by to explain their situation, while speeches from local trade unionists and other supporters were interspersed throughout the mornings.

With resident doctors striking for five days, and microbiologists commencing strike action at Airedale hospital in West Yorkshire, the strike wasn't isolated – highlighting how the service is reliant on underpaid and overworked staff whose goodwill is exploited.

Instead of health secretary Wes Streeting blaming NHS workers for the winter crisis, the real culprits are the private health companies – some that have generously donated to Streeting.

They have been leaching resources out of the NHS through rip-off PFI and outsourcing. Putting an end to that, and making the super-rich pay to fully fund the NHS and other public services, would mean more resources available to both pay NHS workers properly as well as improve the service.



PHOTO: IAIN DALTON

# Richard Cobden School strike against 'clueless' management

**HUGO PIERRE**
FORMER CAMDEN UNISON SCHOOLS CONVENOR

Unison school support staff at Richard Cobden School in Camden took their third four-day block of strike action before Christmas. The school's management proposed a restructure that cut permanent posts, retained agency staff and increased workload for all support staff. The increased workload was both in volume and responsibilities, especially for teaching assistants.

Unison opposed these cuts, the scale of which only became apparent after cross-examining the headteachers, because they would not work for the children, especially at lunchtime, and schools would become unsafe. There were already a lot of safety issues for staff that management were kicking under the carpet.

Unison members were also committed to giving the children, especially those with SEND (special educational needs and disabilities), the best support to meet their needs: taking groups out of class or providing specialist one-to-one support. None of this was recognised in their pay, so Unison demanded an increase for teaching assistants' pay grade to scale four.

The school rejected most of the Unison response, making a few small changes. Members have taken strike action since the beginning of October to win their demands. The action forced management to look at a grading appeal of the work they do. Incredibly, the appeal accepted that they were doing more work than management said they were doing, but decided that the staff took this on voluntarily!

The school management and governors could end the dispute by agreeing that support staff, as proposed in the reorganisation, have these additional responsibilities. Instead, they appear to be clueless about the role of their own staff.

The school's Unison rep said: "The fact that it got to strike action without any communication from the senior leadership team tells us there was no desire to have any meaningful conversation about the situation.

"Given that many other schools have regraded their support staff to level four without strike action, shows how little management at Richard Cobden value their support staff. All this in the light of them asking us to do more under a restructure and deletion of posts at the very roots of the school.

"Are they suggesting to parents that the support their children receive is of less quality than what other schools in the borough provide?

"Since the successful ballot for strike action, we have seen a massive increase in Unison membership and a desire from support staff to have their voices heard. Membership has nearly doubled since the dispute began.

"The fact that management have claimed they are trying to resolve the dispute has infuriated members and has been extremely damaging to morale. This has motivated people to stand up and be counted!

"Action will absolutely continue unless management is responsive to our requests. It is both baffling and infuriating to think that our friends in neighbouring schools are paid a higher scale for exactly the same job. All of this in the face of the Department for Education officially recognising that Richard Cobden School is one of a number in London that is facing unprecedented strain due to an increased SEND intake."



PHOTO: HUGO PIERRE

# Stop Reform closing Lancashire care homes

**MARTIN POWELL-DAVIES**
LANCASHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY

Lancashire's Reform council wants to close five council-run care homes and five day centres.

Reform claims that the buildings are out of date. Although, that claim was apparently partly based on out-of-date surveys. But, instead of putting in the investment needed to improve services, Reform is using this as an excuse to try and shut them down.

Closure puts hundreds of jobs at risk. Users and residents have a right to the support they need.

Some will argue that residents should be "living in their own homes", with 'community support,' instead of care homes. But that means condemning service users to a miserable unsupported existence, or homelessness. A decision that could literally mean death for some elderly users.

Some will argue that the private sector should provide provision, instead of councils, supposedly saving £4 million. But everyone knows what that means – privatisation for profit, meaning worse services for local people, worse pay and conditions for staff. And councils still needing to spend millions in extortionate fees charged by the profiteers.

Unison trade union has pointed out that Reform council cabinet lead on adult social care, Graham Dalton, owns a private care company. Councillors have told Unison that private firms are already knocking at the door.

But pressure is building on the council. Reform now says it is still considering whether to go ahead with the closures or not. We are marching against the closures on 17 January in Preston.

Reform pretence as 'anti-establishment' is being exposed. Reform supporters will soon start to realise that Farage and Co.'s promises to "cut waste" and "make efficiency savings", actually means cutting services that working-class communities need.

Of course, it isn't just Reform. Labour, Tories, and all the austerity parties, wherever they are in charge of councils, are making similar decisions in budget meetings over the next few months. The pressure needs to be put on all these councillors to reverse cuts, through public campaigning and local authority unions taking strike action.

Reform's budget will be considered by a council committee and cabinet in January and February, before a full council meeting on 26 February for the budget. So time for action is short.

The threat to care homes and day centres is the tip of the iceberg. The council says it needs savings of "£100 million over the next three years". On top, £43 million was built into the 2026-27 budget by the previous Tory council.

These further cuts being 'consulted' on include £10.1 million in highways and transport, £4.7 million in waste management, and £7 million from other 'service reviews.' These surely can only mean worse roads, higher car parking costs, and cuts to waste collection and other vital council services.

Instead of making even more cuts, we need councillors who will lead a mass campaign for proper government funding for our local services. A council prepared to fight for the working class could use its borrowing powers and reserves to set a legal no-cuts 'balanced budget' that meets the needs of our communities, then launches a mass campaign to demand the money to pay for it from central government. That is the policy of the trade unions representing council workers.

Your Party founding conference – by a majority of over 90% – called for open public conferences to be organised, bringing together representatives of trade unions, community organisations, socialist parties, and others, to draw up a no-cuts 'people's' budget,' based on local community needs, not Keir Starmer's continued austerity.

We call on trade unions, campaign groups, and anyone opposing Reform's cuts in Lancashire to come together and call a 'people's' budget' conference, and demand 'no cuts.'


Nursing Home in Poulton-le-Fylde, Lancashire PHOTO: BELOVEDFREAK/CC

# Trade unionists meet to discuss how the unions can lead the fight against the far right



Marching against Tommy Robinson PHOTO: IAN PATTISON

**PCS MEMBER**

Dozens of trade unionists met on 10 December to discuss coordinating anti-racist and anti-far right campaigning across London and the South East. The meeting was initiated by civil service union PCS London and South East regional committee, though it did not receive official PCS support.

The invitation to the meeting said it was being called because of "the duty of the trade union movement to fight back." It said: "We have not yet risen to the challenge… for decades we have relied on external organisations… We need to produce our own materials to oppose far-right lies; and to mobilise seriously and safely for counter-demonstrations with our own defensive stewarding."

In the meeting, trade union activists raised concerns about right-wing marches and the attacks being made on our class and communities. Everyone who spoke expressed the urgent need for trade unions to lead the struggle against the right and for a bold, fighting socialist political programme to cut across the division created by organisations such as Reform.

The meeting also took place shortly after the announcement of the Together Alliance, which continues the approach of Stand Up to Racism on a broader scale. The right-populist Nigel Farage and far-right figures like Tommy Robinson try to exploit people's despair as a result of years of austerity and the soaring cost of living. But the demands of Together do nothing to address that, while continuing to enable trade union leaders to avoid leading a struggle.

> **"The trade unions organise 6.5 million workers with huge potential to mobilise a movement that can defeat the right**

The trade unions organise 6.5 million workers with huge potential to mobilise a movement that can defeat the right. Socialist Party members at this meeting put forward the need for trade unions to be at the head of any movement against the right, and for such a movement to have a pro-worker programme. We argued for a democratic and accountable movement rather than top-down.

The meeting also discussed forming an organising committee made up of delegates from union branches, trades councils and community groups, and that this could aim to produce material, help coordinate responses to far-right activity, and put pressure on the TUC (Trades Union Congress) to carry out its 2018 Congress policy to launch a campaign on 'jobs and homes, not racism.'

This meeting was a positive step towards that - trade union activists on the ground coming together to discuss how the workers' movement can defend our class against far-right attacks. It agreed to meet again in the new year.

# Obituary – Peter Redfarn

**ANDY BEADLE**
SOUTH EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

At the end of last year, Socialist Party member Peter Redfarn passed away aged 86. We send our condolences to his sister, family, and all his friends.

A few years ago, at a South East London Socialist Party meeting, discussing the British government's plan to bomb Syria, Peter made an important contribution to the discussion.

He talked about how, as a young man, his own disgust at war and all its consequences for ordinary people had led him first to join the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, then later the Labour Party Young Socialists.

His conclusion at our recent meeting was that we absolutely had to support this new generation getting organised against war, and support any school walkouts.

Having moved back to Merseyside in 1961, he met Peter Taaffe from Birkenhead Labour Party Young Socialists, and Ted Mooney from Liverpool, among a number of comrades who launched Militant in 1964, forerunner of the Socialist Party.

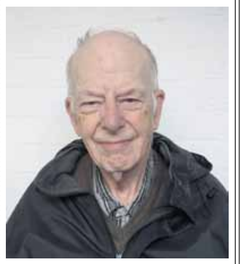
Peter Redfarn even had an article in the first issue of Militant about workers' control, particularly around the technological developments in the car industry at that stage. Peter had moved south to become a research assistant at the London School of Economics. At one point, Peter was a union rep at the National Freight Corporation, before spending his later working years as a postie at Nine Elms.

In November 1975, he shared a flat in south London with two other Militant supporters. They were shocked to find themselves featured in a witch-hunting Sunday Express article, under the headline: "Why the secret of 13 Elsiemaud Road shocked Mrs Box" – the landlord. The reporter revealed they had a portrait of Karl Marx on the wall!

Peter fought to stay active in the Socialist Party for as long as his health would allow, continuing to attend Socialist Party meetings and events until recently. He will always be remembered as generous with his time and money.

Peter was thoughtful and patient. He strongly defended socialist ideas throughout his life. He will be sorely missed by all who knew him.

- Funeral - 1pm, Wednesday 21 January, Hither Green Crematorium





John McGarry (right) campaigning with the Socialist Party

# Obituary – John McGarry

John McGarry had been an active Socialist Party member in Peterborough for the last nine years. Of Irish heritage, his family settled in Peterborough, after moving from south London for work – which explains John following Crystal Palace.

John had many talents, including as a classical pianist. He looked forward to attending the BBC Proms concerts each year. He also performed regularly at a local church, when there were food and drink sessions at whatever prices, if any, those attending could afford.

John first met the Socialist Party 18 years ago. But it was some years later, during the height of the Brexit dispute, when he was evidently weighing things up, that he attended some of our meetings, and found he agreed with the Socialist Party over the alternatives really open to the working class.

## Corbyn

It was also during the time that Jeremy Corbyn became the overwhelming choice for Labour Party leader by hundreds of thousands that John saw the need to have organised discussions with our party, with a view to joining. Prior to this, as a middle manager in a big unionised communications company, he would have been subject to conflicting demands from both higher management and the organised workforce.

John was also the victim of harassment at his housing association home. Getting this resolved took grit and courage, especially as he was undergoing treatment for a serious illness. Socialist Party members with social housing experience were pleased to assist John.

Since joining the Socialist Party in 2017, John was also active in Unite Community, latterly as Fenlands branch equalities officer, and in Peterborough Palestine solidarity events, including on national demos in London.

John was also very involved with the idea of workers having their own public representatives, and topped the local Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidate votes in the 2024 Peterborough Council elections – with 101 votes in North ward, ahead of the Liberal Democrats.

We will all miss John. Our most sincere thoughts and condolences go to John's family and friends.

**CAMBRIDGESHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS**

*John's brother Brendan wrote to the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition.*

Dear Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition,

I am writing with very sad news about my brother, John McGarry, who stood as a TUSC candidate in the May 2024 local elections for the North ward in Peterborough.

In August of this year, John was seriously assaulted in Peterborough city centre, and sadly he never recovered. He passed away after spending an extended period in a coma at Addenbrooke's Hospital.

Campaigning for TUSC, and for trade union and socialist causes, was central to his life and his identity. His commitment to workers' rights, anti-cuts campaigning, and fighting for social justice defined so many years of his activism, and he was deeply proud to stand under the TUSC banner.

## Union members

The work and community of the trade unionist movement meant more to him than I can fully express. As an employee of the railways, I am too a member of a trade union (RMT), and I will always remember the many chats myself and John had how important it is to belong to a union!

I wanted to let you know of his passing, and to thank you sincerely for the role that TUSC played in his life – providing purpose, solidarity, and comradeship that sustained him over many years.

If appropriate, I would be grateful if you could acknowledge his campaigning and commitment to the cause, and share that with others who knew him in the movement.

Thank you for everything you have done, and for the work you continue to carry forward.

With respect,

**BRENDAN MCGARRY**



Prospect on strike at the Civil Aviation Authority in February 2025 DIANA YAZOVSKAYA

# Launch of 'Democratising Prospect'

**A PROSPECT MEMBER**

Prospect is a trade union that represents scientists, engineers, specialist workers in both public and private sectors, and, since its merger with BECTU, film and theatre workers.

The formation of a new network, 'Democratising Prospect,' is a welcome development. While starting with democratic concerns particularly, it has the potential to develop as a body that can bring the left together in the union. Our members, like workers everywhere, have suffered under austerity and the cost-of-living crisis and need a union that will defend us.

## Fighting union

Launched as a "a rank-and-file network... which organises independently to transform Prospect into a democratic, fighting union that stands in solidarity with all workers and oppressed groups around the world," it is the result of a number of built-up frustrations.

One of these is the leadership's top-down control of delegates at the 2025 Congress of the TUC (Trades Union Congress), particularly the instruction that delegates abstain on a motion to support trans rights, despite policy set by Prospect conference.

Another is the scandalous way that Prospect failed, for four months, to properly inform members that its database had been hacked, exposing members' details, including bank details and protected characteristics such as sexuality and disability. The breach is specially concerning for Prospect members working in sensitive industries like nuclear, defence, and counter-intelligence. The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) has now launched an official investigation.

Some also feel bitterness at the continued grovelling praise of Starmer's Labour government from Prospect general secretary Mike Clancy, despite the union's claims to be "proudly politically independent." Socialist Party members in Prospect are raising the need for the union to be part of the fight for a political voice for workers.

Finally, there is a feeling in some branches of failures to uphold basic democratic norms.

## Winning for members

At the launch meeting, a member rightly pointed out that, though Prospect is a relatively small union, it is in fact twice the size of the RMT transport union - a union historically seen as a democratic, militant union that wins for its members.

A renewed, democratic, fighting Prospect would be a significant positive development for Prospect members and for our ability to link up with members of other unions in fights to defend jobs and pay.

The network pledged to stand for:

- Increased accountability and transparency of union leadership
- More power to branches and elected lay-reps
- Union staff on a wage no higher than that of a skilled worker
- A 'strategy for building real industrial power' in the union, including a strike fund, and a cultural shift for it to become a fighting working-class organisation
- Solidarity: standing against the far right; supporting the international workers' movement; organising across unions; and defending disabled Prospect members, and disabled people and carers more generally, against repeated government attacks on their conditions



# End rip-off student laundry fees - No to Circuit Go at UAL

**UAL SOCIALIST STUDENTS**

Circuit Go provides poor-quality and expensive laundry services to many. Profits are up at Circuit Go – over £13 million in 2024.

One of Circuit Go's parent shareholders – Cinven – was fined £100 million for increasing medicine prices by more than 1,000%. This means that the company that charges us extortionate fees to wash and dry our laundry is effectively owned by a firm that has been fined for price gouging critical drugs used by NHS patients.

How can we trust this company to provide us 'fair' prices for laundry services? They are ripping us off!

## £100s a year

If we don't get organised, then our universities will let this private company continue overcharging each of us £100s a year for the poor service they provide. Students are already struggling to make ends meet.

While profiteering companies rake millions every year, ordinary students are expected to pay higher tuition fees, extortionate rents, and rising shopping bills. It can't go on like this.

'Circuit No!' campaign, launched by Socialist Students in London, brings students together. We can organise meetings in all the different university halls to democratically decide the next steps for the campaign. This includes protesting outside Cinven's headquarters in central London.

Newcastle University, which also has a contract with Circuit Go, provides subsided laundry services at £1.30 per wash on weekdays. If a university can provide subsidised laundry facilities during certain hours at one particular hall, why can't all universities in Britain, including Newcastle University, immediately provide laundry services at all times for £1 per wash?

We also demand that laundry should be included in rent, and for there to be rent controls. Rents should be set by democratically elected representatives, composed of students and staff. This body could also provide oversight for laundry services, repairs, and maintenance.

This means kicking out these private profiteers from our halls and campuses, and bringing all privatised services back in-house. We call for investment to provide high-quality, safe, and accessible accommodation, including to meet the specific needs of disabled students.

## We can win!

Socialist Students also says this is part of a wider national campaign to oppose marketisation of higher education. Students are seen as cash cows – people that private companies can profit from.

That's why we say kick out the profiteers. Don't make students pay for the university funding crisis through higher tuition fees and poor service – make the super-rich pay.

**WE DEMAND:**

- Higher-quality, well-maintained laundry facilities, and a suitable number of machines per flat
- An immediate reduction of laundry fees to £1 per wash – not rip-off charges
- Laundry to be included in rent, and rent controls in university accommodation
- Kick out private profiteers, and bring all privatised services back in-house
- No to fee rises, for free, fully funded education – make the super-rich pay



UAL Socialist Students campaigning

## Help build the campaign

- Sign our petition. Spread the word
- Organise a meeting in your hall
- Come to our London-wide organising meeting – Tuesday 3 February, 7pm. Venue TBC
- Protest the company that owns Circuit Laundry – Wednesday 4 February, 3pm. Where: Cinven Limited, 21 St James's Square, SW1Y 4JZ. Nearest station: Green Park

**Join the student fightback: join...**

socialist students

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

# TV review – The War Between the Land and the Sea

**NICK COOPER**
CARDIFF EAST SOCIALIST PARTY

Screenwriter and producer Russell T Davies could never be accused of hiding his politics. His latest offering, set in the Doctor Who universe, is closer to his darker, grittier works, such as Years and Years or The Second Coming.

The War Between the Land and the Sea isn't just a Whovian monster-feature with a heart. It's a searing, albeit occasionally clumsy, indictment of a ruling class that would rather engage in biowarfare than risk the profits of pollution.

## Rooting for the 'villians'

An ancient aquatic civilisation – the Sea Devils, rebranded Homo Aqua – have emerged from the depths to reclaim their world. Humanity, or rather the industrial giants and craven politicians who run things, have turned the oceans into a plastic-choked graveyard. Once they start returning our junk onto land, it's difficult not to start rooting for the 'villains.'

The show shines when it focuses on the boardrooms and bunkers. We see 10 Downing Street and the Pentagon – with shades of Don't Look Up – treating an existential threat to the planet as a policy issue to be managed. Davies beautifully captures the inertia and unqualified arrogance of the capitalist elite in the face of human extinction.

The introduction of Sir Keith Spears, a 'utilities businessman' sitting among military decision-makers, is a masterstroke. It illustrates the revolving door between private capital and the capitalist state.

The series falls down somewhat in its portrayal of UNIT – the military organisation that combats paranormal and extraterrestrial threats in the Doctor Who universe.

## Tool for status quo

The organisation ultimately remains a tool of the status quo, continually telling Russell Tovey's impeccably portrayed 'everyman,' Barclay, to "stay on message", as he desperately seeks to represent the true intentions of humanity as their accidental ambassador, against the tsunami of capitalist ineptitude.

Barclay's personal drama sometimes feels like a distraction from the global stakes. But his ability to ground events into a relatable world remains his greatest strength as an actor.

While the CGI is impressive, the real impact comes from the spine-tingling poignant dialogue. When Homo Aqua leader Salt tells humanity that their "words are vetted, and craven, and hollow", she speaks for every worker who ever heard a politician offering "green initiatives", while subsidising oil, gas, and coal.

## Spoilers

The ending – hinging on 'mutually assured destruction' – is a bleak reminder of the limitations of a pro-capitalist liberal imagination. Davies is deftly able to demonstrate the horrors of the system, in a vocabulary we recognise. But he can't envisage a way out that doesn't involve a Cold War stalemate.

The series is a welcome expression of rage. But like much of Davies's writing, stops short of suggesting an overthrow of the capitalist order that can actually save the environment.

- The War Between the Land and the Sea can be viewed on BBC iPlayer


BAD WOLF/BBC STUDIOS

**WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?**

- **editors@socialistparty.org.uk**

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

Socialist Party

# 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:

CWI CIT

### 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.

### 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

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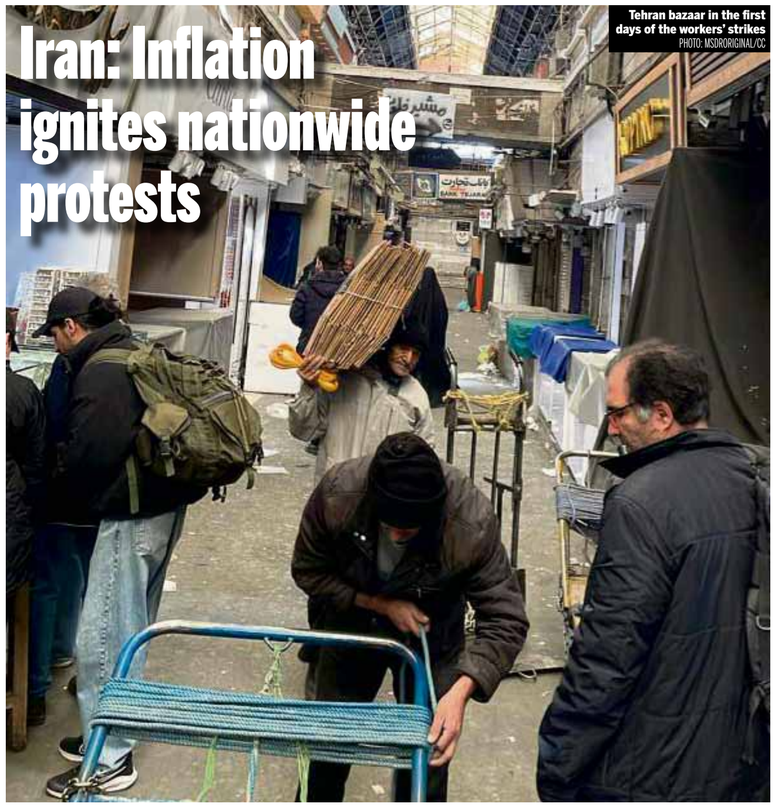


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# Iran: Inflation ignites nationwide protests



Tehran bazaar in the first days of the workers' strikes PHOTO: MSDRORIGINAL/CC

**SCOTT HUNTER**

Iran has been rocked by a new series of nationwide protests which have now entered a second week.

Demonstrations began on 29 December as market traders and small business owners in Tehran closed down their shops in protest over inflation - which is currently around 50% - and the free-falling value of the rial. These actions have since become a lightning rod for accumulated anger against the Islamic Republic regime - a deeply reactionary theocracy - and the dire state of Iranian capitalism which it is attempting to manage. The protests have now spread to 78 cities, with students, civil rights groups and sections of workers taking part.

This is the latest in a series of protest waves in recent years, including the 'Women, Life, Freedom' movement in 2022 and a nationwide truckers' strike in 2025, that began with protests against fuel price hikes at the end of 2017. This time, the government will no doubt remember the role played by the bazaaris - Iran's market traders - in sparking the demonstrations and strikes that ultimately culminated in the overthrow of the Shah and the Iranian Revolution of 1979, as well as the role played by market traders in the more recent Arab Spring revolutions. Already, before these protests started, a number of strikes took place while pensioners were holding regular weekly protests.

Dissatisfaction with the regime has grown markedly in recent years. Turnout in the 2024 presidential elections was only 49% in the second round, compared to 73% in 2017. The present demonstrations all come off the back of a contradictory and unpopular budget presented to parliament in the week before the outbreak of protests. The budget proposes a 20% increase in wages while increasing taxes by 62%. President Pezeshkian himself summed up the impossible position of trying to manage an Iranian capitalism in deep crisis in a speech to parliament: "They tell me you're taxing too much, and they're saying you must increase wages. Well, somebody tell me, where do I get the money from?"

Whether the regime can weather this current round of unrest, it is certain that the theocracy will fall sooner or later. The question is always: what will replace it? The Western imperialist powers would no doubt like to see a 'colour change' - preserving capitalism while adopting a more pro-Western government. These illusions may also exist among certain layers in Iran, and there are reports of pro-monarchy slogans on some of the demonstrations - although it is difficult to judge how popular they are.

Fundamentally, there is no prospect of a sustained rise in living conditions under capitalism in Iran regardless of the specific character of the government. Any illusions in the restoration of the monarchy or Western-style liberal democracy will be shattered by reality, giving socialists the opportunity to argue for socialist policies and a workers' government to implement them.

However, it need not even come to that: the potential is there right now for the Iranian working class to lead the way in the overthrow of both the theocracy and dead-end Iranian capitalism. Previous waves of demonstrations have seen the formation of struggle coordination committees; these could be revived and expanded to draw in broad layers of workers, providing a forum to discuss strategy, tactics, and draw up a common programme of demands and concrete actions. The working class, especially those sections organised in the semi-legal trade unions, must enter the movement en masse and take the lead.

CWI CIT

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**

# Germany: 55,000 protest against military conscription law

**CASPAR LOETTGERS AND CHIARA STENGER**
SOL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, CWI GERMANY

While a new military conscription law was being voted on in the German Bundestag on the morning of 5 December, school students across Germany took to the streets. A total of 55,000 people are said to have protested in over 90 cities.

Sol members co-organised or supported protests and school strikes in many places and intervened in the protests. We made suggestions on how to further build the movement and how defence minister Boris Pistorius's plans are linked to general rearmament and the crisis of capitalism.

Even though the new military conscription law has been passed, the battle will continue in the new year. For the time being, all 18-year-old men will be required to fill out a questionnaire asking if they are interested and willing to join the military, and an increasing number will be medically examined to determine whether fit to serve. If not enough volunteers come forward, a vote will be held on "conscription based on need." Currently, all polls indicate that not enough 'volunteers' will be found.

The federal government is therefore already trying to convince young people with material arguments, in addition to a propaganda offensive in the form of classroom visits, YouTube mini-series, and posters. For example, the monthly pay for recruits has been increased to 2,700 euros (previously 1,800 to 2,200 euros). In addition, a subsidy of 3,500 euros will be provided for driver's licences.

This makes it all the more important that, in the future, the fight against conscription is linked to the fight for social justice, good training places and remuneration, and investment in our schools and universities. Every euro that goes to the German Armed Forces is missing elsewhere.

Even though the school strikes were smaller than in the past (e.g., Fridays for Future 2019 or against the Iraq War 2003), the local spread (in over 90 cities) shows how many school classes discussed the issue and how much uncertainty there is.

## What next?

It would therefore be good if pupils and students now organised themselves in local groups against conscription, planned discussion and information events, wrote educational material, and prepared protests: for example, for youth clubs instead of recruitment centres and barracks, or against armed forces advertising in schools and public spaces.

A nationwide conference would be helpful for networking local groups, where they could discuss how to continue resisting militarisation and compulsory military service, as well as social cuts and austerity measures. Based on this, further nationwide protests could take place and a campaign against the implementation of "needs-based conscription" could be prepared. This campaign should highlight the direct link between militarisation and social cuts in order to reach those who are still uncertain or sceptical, thereby increasing the scale of the protest.

## Some of the local reports:

### Aachen

A demonstration with several speeches was registered in Aachen, including one from Sol. Around 200 people were there, most of them students. We also got to know someone who wants to continue discussing with us. The mood was very combative, critical, and anti-capitalist.
**JOSHUA, STUDENT AND SOL MEMBER**

### Freiburg

In Freiburg, around 800 demonstrators and strikers took to the streets. According to the speakers, significantly more students than expected turned up. Many younger students, but also families with children, as well as some older people took part. The speeches and the mood at the rally were combative. After the demonstration, there was also a strike café where people could exchange views on the demonstration and political experiences. A few good conversations took place and I was also able to sell a few copies of our newspaper.
**PIA, STUDENT AND SOL MEMBER**

### Hamm

In Hamm, about 50 people took part in the school strike, many of them striking students. Our members' speech addressed capitalism as the cause of wars and emphasised that we have no interest in dying for the profits of the rich. In addition, the local branch of the Left Party gave a speech, alongside a number of spontaneous contributions at the open mic.
**MERLIN, SOL MEMBER AND ACTIVIST IN LINKSJUGEND (YOUTH ORGANISATION CLOSE TO DIE LINKE) HAMM**

### Kassel

Over 1,200 students and anti-militarists gathered in Kassel to demonstrate against the reintroduction of compulsory military service.

We were also involved in planning and mobilising for the strike and worked to ensure that capitalism was named as the cause of war and compulsory military service. In a speech at a feeder demonstration, one of our comrades emphasised that the fight against this must be linked to the fight against budget cuts, because these budget cuts cannot be separated from the billions spent on the armed forces.
**MAX, SOL MEMBER AND ACTIVIST IN THE LINKSJUGEND KASSEL**

### Mainz

The nationwide momentum to organise school strikes also had an impact on Mainz. Initially, there was no school strike planned, but rather a demonstration in the evening. However, just under a week before, students contacted the 'Mainz Against Conscription Alliance' expressing their interest in organising a school strike in Mainz as well. As a result, school strikes took place at lunchtime with over 150 students participating, and several hundred people demonstrated in the evening.
**LAURENS, SOL MEMBER AND ACTIVIST IN THE LINKSJUGEND MAINZ**

### Stuttgart

Around 1,000 striking students attended the rally at Kronprinzplatz. We were able to reach many people with flyers and newspapers, and generally encountered openness to anti-capitalist ideas. We organised an event to discuss the ongoing struggle against militarisation and capitalism, which we were able to mobilise support for.
**LEO, SOL MEMBER**

### Rostock

According to the organisers, around 500 people, mainly young people, took part in the demonstration in Rostock at its peak. We were represented as Sol with a stand and also had the opportunity to give a speech.
**JULIAN, STUDENT, SOL MEMBER, AND ACTIVIST IN YOUTH FOR SOCIALISM ROSTOCK**

- *See the leaflet that Sol distributed on the day at socialistworld.net*



Mainz PHOTO: SOL MAINZ

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Issue 1350 8-14 January 2026 formerly Militant

# DEFEND OUR NHS FROM LABOUR CUTS AND PRIVATISATION

On the picket line, **Kartik Goyal, co-chair of the BMA Merseyside and Cheshire Resident Doctors Committee**, explained the reasons for striking, amid the Labour government's best efforts to discredit the doctors. The BMA is now reballoting for strike action.

In October, there were no strikes whatsoever, yet 54,000 patients received corridor care for more than 12 hours. Just yesterday morning, I walked into A&E to see a patient who'd been waiting on a trolley for over 12 hours with no sleep whatsoever, because it's always loud in the corridor. There's lights on all the time, and there's so much commotion going on.

Patients need to be cared for. They need to be given adequate dignity about where they're going to be stationed. Their pain, and their sleep, and things of that sort, need to be controlled.

If a patient is on a corridor, we have less monitoring. We are not able to look after them, we don't have enough nurses to look after them.

There aren't enough doctors in hospitals. Patients are waiting eight, nine, or more months to get surgery. Yesterday, I was doing a hernia operation for a patient who'd been waiting for over a year in pain.

We have two disputes with the government. The first one is jobs.

This year, 40,000 doctors are expected to apply for 10,000 training positions. We require more doctors, we require more GPs, we require more consultants, to help bring down waiting lists.

The second thing is pay. You might have heard in the media a million times that we've had a 22% pay increase.

Firstly, that's been over the last couple of years. And the offer we accepted back in 2024 explicitly stated that pay restoration is going to be a journey, it's not going to stop at that level.

But since, the government has not kept up their end of the bargain. They gave us a small increase for 2025-26, and the offer they've put out for 2026-27 is 2.5%. That's just not acceptable.

A lot of the doctors who I've trained with here in the UK go to other countries, like Australia or New Zealand. We need to retain the doctors we train.

I'm a 25-year-old doctor and I'm training to be a surgeon. But a lot of my colleagues are going to be unemployed from August.

The hostility from Labour and health secretary Wes Streeting is unacceptable. We've been called names in the media.

But we're the ones who see what's happening inside hospitals every single day. I work 60 hours a week on average.

We're willing to have a discussion, to come back to the table right this minute. Bring out a deal on pay and jobs, and we'll work to cancel the dispute right away.

But if that doesn't happen, then we're going to be back on the picket line again. That's something none of us want to do.

We have the best of doctors in hospitals right now looking after patients – our consultants have trained for at least a decade. Wes Streeting asked for 95% of elective activity to continue during the strike.

Yet what we advocate for during a strike is to focus on emergency and urgent care. But Wes Streeting, or NHS England, keep asking for elective care to keep up. That's something he's going to have to sleep with.

## The Socialist Party says:

- **Fully fund our NHS**
- **No more privatisation – kick out the profiteers**
- **Democratic public ownership of pharmaceutical giants and medical manufacturers**
- **Inflation-proof pay rises that actually match the real cost of living**
- **Support workers striking back**
- **Make the super-rich pay**
- **Trade unions must organise a national demo against Labour austerity**

WHAT WE STAND FOR: THE SOCIALIST PARTY'S MAIN DEMANDS ▶▶▶ see column on page 14

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