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the Socialist

Issue 1355

12-18 February 2026

formerly **Militant**



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END THIS

ROTTEN SYSTEM

The working class needs its own party

FIGHT FOR SOCIALIST CHANGE

READ WHAT WE THINK: **STARMER AND MANDELSON'S NEW LABOUR: THE WORKING CLASS NEEDS ITS OWN PARTY - LESSONS OF THE GORTON AND DENTON BY-ELECTION ON HOW TO DEFEAT REFORM** >>> p8-9

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Friday before publication, or Monday morning for urgent news, unless otherwise agreed with the editors.

The Socialist goes to press on a Tuesday night. We publish online on Wednesday and in print on Thursday.

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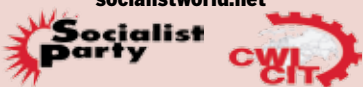
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The Socialist is the weekly newspaper of the Socialist Party, the England and Wales section of the Committee for a Workers' International
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ISSN 1366-9621

Published by Socialist Publications,
PO Box 1398, Enfield EN1 9GT
Registered as a newspaper
at the Post Office

Printed by trade union labour
at Reach Printing Services

Militant issue 1: October 1964
The Socialist issue 1: 7 February 1997

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



Protesters filled the streets in 2023 in opposition to Tory attempts to ban them as "hate marchers" PAUL MATTSSON

Filton 24 verdict: mass workers' action can defend the right to protest

NICK HART
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

The first six of the Filton 24 to go on trial have walked free. The activists, who allegedly broke into and sabotaged an Elbit Systems factory near Bristol which produces weapons for the Israeli military, were accused of aggravated burglary, criminal damage and violent disorder.

The six were arrested in late 2024, outrageously held in prison on remand for 500 days, and subject to a smear campaign linked to the subsequent ban on Palestine Action. But the jury refused to convict each of the six on the various charges. This verdict will only add to Keir Starmer's problems as he seeks to defend his war and austerity agenda in the interests of capitalism.

The defendants did not deny having entered the factory without permission and smashed drones and equipment. That the jury found the defendants not guilty of aggravated burglary is a reflection of the disgust in society at large at the genocidal

actions of the Israeli state in Gaza and Starmer's support for it.

No wonder then, that the Labour government is trying to end trial by jury for all but the gravest of criminal charges. According to the Bar Council, it will have minimal effect on clearing the 80,000 cases in the criminal courts backlog. But it will mean that the court system is directed even more by unelected judges, who disproportionately come from the wealthier sections of society and whose role is to ultimately defend the interests of the bosses' system.

Knowing its deep unpopularity, the Labour government has attempted to clamp down on the right to protest. This includes keeping the Tories' 2023 Public Order Act in place, while pushing for bans on repeated protests on the same issue, and banning face coverings at protests.

In Labour's sights aren't only anti-war and climate protesters using direct action, but the increasing potential for militant strike action of the kind carried out by construction workers at Hinckley Point and bin workers in Birmingham against a Labour council carrying out Tory fire-and-rehire and other attacks on its workforce.

Birmingham bin strike

Not content with slapping Unite the Union with an injunction preventing its members from disrupting bin lorries anywhere in Birmingham, the council has now gone squealing to the courts to attempt to prevent absolutely any "persons unknown" from doing the same under the threat of fines, seizure of property, or jail.

Self-sacrificing activists such as the Filton 24 or those arrested on the Defend Our Juries protests against the proscription of Palestine Action can help to expose the extremely authoritarian and paranoid nature of the Starmer government as it looks to restrict democratic rights. With the initial six Filton actionists set to face a retrial and the other 18 still on remand, there is still some way to run in this case.

Workers' action can beat repression

The best means of stopping state repression is mass action, working-class organisation making these laws in defence of the capitalist class unenforceable. In 2024 nationwide protests in South Korea forced the reversal of martial law. While in British history a developing general strike against the jailing of trade unionists in 1972 led to a humiliating climb down for the Tory government of the day. And the mass demonstration against the war on Gaza in defiance of Suella Braverman's threats to ban it as a "hate march" in October 2023 led to her removal as Home Secretary and was another nail in the Tories' coffin.

Mass working-class action against any undemocratic laws, including all anti-protest and anti-union laws, could spell the end of both Starmer's attacks on the right to protest and his entire government. This struggle would be strengthened by a mass party that represents the interests of the working class which can organise and fight back against big business politicians and their laws.

Working-class people singing out for an alternative to rotten capitalist system

Unsung Britain is the latest report from the Resolution Foundation. It provides statistical proof of what we already know: that everything has got worse over the last two decades for working-class people while the rich have got richer:

"Over the 40 years before 2004-05, the typical incomes of the poorer half of working-age families doubled. By contrast, if progress continues to crawl in the way it did between 2004-05 and 2023-24, a further doubling would take over 130 years."

And so it goes on: we work harder and carry the burden of services being cut and closed; but at the same time wages have stagnated, benefits have reduced, prices and bills have soared, and there is a housing crisis. Otherwise known as Tory and Labour austerity.

All the result of a rotten capitalist system in deep crisis, with a bosses' class determined to make us pay.

The Resolution Foundation doesn't have any solutions apart from a little bit of tinkering. But we do.

Working-class people may be 'unsung' in the eyes of the Resolution Foundation, but have actually been singing quite loudly in recent years: the 2022-23 strike wave was the biggest in Britain for 30 years; the Tories were booted out and replaced with Starmer's government, with historically low levels of support for any winning party; 800,000 signed up last summer to say they want a new party.

We can't afford a system that drives people into the dirt. Fight austerity with mass trade union action and a new workers' party that fights for socialist change. Take over the major companies and banks that dominate the economy, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need, and bring them under democratic workers' control and management, as part of a socialist plan of production, to guarantee jobs, homes, services and a decent life for all.

1 million

people in lower-income families have unpaid caring responsibilities equivalent to a full-time job

- *Unsung Britain*

Come to a Socialist Party meeting near you

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

- If you would like to participate:
- socialistparty.org.uk/events
 - Or text 07958 032071 with your name and postcode.

Students: Why you should join the Socialist Party

ADAM GILLMAN
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL YOUTH ORGANISER

Growing up today, unless things change, our future looks increasingly bleak. More and more wars around the world, increasing racist and sexist division being stoked, while the catastrophe from climate change threatens our very existence.

For young people, our tuition fees will reach over £10,000 in 2027, as fees rise with inflation. And over 13,000 job cuts have been announced at universities.

The cost of living has never been higher. Our accommodation rent is outrageously high, while we live in unsafe, mouldy conditions.

This is not even counting the hundreds of youth clubs that have been closed, and the youth and mental health services that have been cut, under Tory, now Labour, austerity. The list goes on.

But students are organising to fight back. Socialist Students helped organise walk outs against Donald Trump's visit to the UK in September. Students have marched and protested in solidarity with Palestine, and in support of teachers and lecturers in colleges and unis fighting to defend their pay and their jobs.

The capitalist system prioritises the profits of a few at the expense of the working class and young people. The bosses, and their politicians, are trying to force us to pay for a crisis of their own system.

But by getting organised, we can

force them back! The strike wave in Britain 2022-23 showed that workers, through their trade unions, taking strike action together could force the government to improve pay offers to workers. It showed how potentially powerful the working class is.

Now we have a Labour government that acts for the capitalist bosses, it continues to hike fees and underfund our education, fails to meaningfully address climate change, and uses increasingly authoritarian methods to try to stop us protesting.

What's our alternative?

We need an alternative that represents the working class – a new party based on the trade unions and that fights for a decent future for young people. We need a party that fights for free fully funded education; a minimum wage of at least £15 an hour, with no exemptions; rent control and decent affordable council homes for all; a fully funded NHS, and other public services; and more.

And we need socialists to be organised to answer the lies from the capitalist bosses that 'it is not affordable'. To argue for the socialist transformation of society, where we take the top 150 banks, big monopolies, and businesses into public ownership – nationalised under democratic workers' control and management. That way we can plan to meet the needs of society in Britain and internationally.

If you want to fight for socialist transformation to end capitalist chaos, then join the Socialist Party today.

Socialist Students Conference 2026

Organising the student fightback for socialist change!



Saturday 14 February 2026

University Place @ University of Manchester

176 Oxford Rd, Manchester M13 9PL



Do you agree?

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socialistparty.org.uk/join



'Circuit No' – end rip-off laundry charges



Socialist Students protesting outside the HQ of the private-equity owners of Circuit Laundry. BERKAY KARTAV

BERKAY KARTAV
LONDON SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Circuit Laundry is known for overcharging university students living in halls, and for providing poor service to students.

These are students who already face a cost-of-living crisis and struggle to make ends meet. At one University of Arts in London (UAL) accommodation, students are charged £4.10 per wash and £2.60 to use the dryer. You don't even get detergent included for that!

London Socialist Students organised a lobby outside the headquarters of Cinven – the private equity firm that owns Circuit Laundry. It has contracts with over 90% of universities in Britain.

We heard speeches from Socialist

Students organisers and we chanted. Students demanded an end to rip-off charges, and an immediate reduction of laundry fees to £1 per wash.

A lot of passers-by expressed their support. One security staff said he supports the protest, as it would affect his children when they go to university.

Students also used the lobby to launch a national petition too, which links the need to oppose laundry fees to the need to fight for fully funded free education.

The petition calls for kicking out private profiteers from universities, bringing these privatised services back in-house. Socialist Students is now stepping up the campaign.

● Sign the petition
– bit.ly/4rE9voJ

Why we're coming to Socialist Students conference

SUZIE MATTHEWS
SOUTH WALES SOCIALIST STUDENTS

The University of South Wales (USW) is going to Socialist Students conference for 2026. For the last year, we have been fighting for the opportunity to bring our Socialist Students society back into existence.

We had to fight to re-register. USW administrators weren't happy with our campaigning on campus against the war on Gaza, exposing the university's connections with companies providing software for

military drones used by the Israeli army.

Students are enthusiastic about learning of and discussing socialist ideas. Each student brings new ideas and experience – a small-scale version of the energy you can find at the annual conference.

Cardiff Socialist Students has hired a minibus to travel to Manchester this Saturday 14 February to take part in the conference. The seats are full!

Socialist Students conference is an opportunity to get to know like-minded students. It truly gives you a sense of our movement's scale and energy.

That was my biggest takeaway from last year. It reminded me that we are in a real movement, and that everyone wants a change in our conditions.

Hopefully this year will be similar.

ICE anger echoes all the way to west London

On our Socialist Students campaign stall outside the University of West London on 6 February, loads of people wanted to discuss the protests against ICE in Minnesota in the US, and how both Donald Trump and

Keir Starmer can be challenged. We got more names of people who we're going to invite to the Socialist Students conference on Saturday 14 February.

WEST LONDON SOCIALIST STUDENTS



Sheffield - Socialist Students organise walkouts against Trump

Student loan crisis

Scrap the debt! Fight for free education! Make the super-rich pay!

ALI MANSFIELD
YORKSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY

Current students and graduates are paying the price as the proportion of university funding direct from central government has shrunk dramatically over two decades. Over the same period, the average debt for recent graduates has increased by more than five times, now sitting at well over £50,000 (my own is at £87,763.49).

This huge increase in the amount of debt facing university graduates and hikes in their interest mean a much longer time to pay off the loans. Two thirds of Plan 2 borrowers, who took loans out between 2012 and 2022, see their debt increasing rather than going down, as interest on the loan accrues faster than they can pay it off. Nearly three quarters of Plan 2 borrowers will never pay off their loans before they're written off in 40 years time!

A graduate tax in all but name?

Repayment thresholds being frozen are posed to mean anyone working full time, even on minimum wage, would start making repayments on their student debt by 2030. Graduates have to pay up to 8% of their income above the thresholds - another tax in all but name! Along with an extended repayment period, and freezing the salary threshold for earlier graduates, this marks a clear attempt to place more of the burden for the university funding crisis on students.

Labour's decision to raise tuition

£66,000

amount you have to earn for your student debt to decrease, estimated by IFS

fees last year only adds to this burden, while having no prospect of making up the funding shortfalls universities face. This is far from the "secure future for higher education and the opportunities it creates" promised in Labour's 2024 manifesto.

As well as being unfair, the tuition fee model of higher education funding is unsustainable. The marketised system, where universities compete for student enrolment numbers (especially more valuable international students, which universities can charge even more extortionate fees), promotes short-term thinking for institutions to gain a competitive edge against each other. Under a marketised tuition fee model, further attacks on students and workers in the education sector are inevitable.

We need a fully funded higher education system, under the democratic control of workers and students. Free from the constraints of the market system, universities could truly become places of learning for all, with the goal of broadening our understanding of all aspects of life. Universities could sustainably expand their services, creating more opportunities and more jobs.



MARY FINCH

RMT protest against P&O sackings in 2022 PAUL MATTSSON



Labour pushes back fire and rehire ban

Workers need a party that represents us

SCOTT HUNTER
SWINDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Labour has yet again delayed implementing one of the key measures of the Employment Rights Act: the ban on fire and rehire.

Fire and rehire - where employers dismiss sections of their workforce and then recruit for similar roles, but with worse pay and conditions - has become one of the most hated tactics used by the bosses in recent years. It hit the headlines in 2022 when P&O Ferries sacked 800 workers with little to no notice.

The experience of having to reapply for your own job and justify why you should be doing what you've been doing for years, all for a pay cut or longer hours, is not only stressful and humiliating but lays bare the inequality at the heart of capitalism. If employers don't like the terms of the employment contracts they signed, they just change them. Not so for workers. If CEOs had to periodically justify to the workforce why they deserve to stay in their job, how many would make the cut?

Labour promised before the 2024 election that its Employment Rights Bill, while never enough, would at least end some of the most exploitative employment practices such as fire and rehire and zero-hour contracts. Since then, the bill was subject to delays for 'consultation' with employers - in other words, watering down.

The Act, which became law in December, already allows fire and rehire in 'exceptional circumstances' such as local authorities under financial

pressure - so, essentially all local authorities! It also has a baked-in grace period before the meagre protections are actually enforced, allowing bosses to go on a fire and rehire spree this year. The protections were originally meant to come into force in October 2026, now delayed until January 2027 - apparently the bosses needed to have the freedom to hand out redundancy notices for another Christmas!

Bosses want concessions

The delay may give employers the chance to wring more concessions from the government, including, as reported in the Financial Times, allowing employers to attack 'non-core' benefits "employees might rely on heavily to do their job, such as long-term accommodation for staff in care homes".

How do we win real protections for workers? When the Tories introduced their Minimum Service Levels legislation in 2023 - which would have required trade unions to organise their own scabbing - they were met with a national demonstration from the TUC (Trades Union Congress). The law ended up being a dead letter when the first attempt to implement it was met by defiance and escalation by train drivers' union Aslef. What really terrified the Tories was the threat of solidarity actions across the trade

union movement and the conclusions workers would draw from it.

Unions can act

These are vital lessons for today: it is organised and collective action of the working class which can defeat the bosses. Last September, the TUC adopted a motion to organise a national Saturday demonstration against austerity. That motion needs to be actually implemented and the unions should demand the immediate abolition of all the anti-trade union laws.

Several trade union leaders have argued for a new workers' rights bill. The trade unions should be instructing MPs in their parliamentary groups to coordinate to introduce such a bill into parliament and vote for it. And if MPs won't work towards union policies, they don't deserve our support!

Starmer's Labour is weak and rotten to its core, and militant trade union action could win concessions far beyond what's currently on offer. However, it's ultimately clear that we can't rely on any of the bosses' parties - we need our own! Workers and trade unionists should stand in elections at every level as a step towards building a new mass workers' party to really take on the bosses and end their exploitative capitalist system.

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UCU further education campaign strengthened at FE committee

DUNCAN MOORE

STANDING FOR RE-ELECTION TO UCU NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, PERSONAL CAPACITY

The Further Education Committee (FEC) of the University and College Union (UCU) met on Friday 6 February to discuss the ongoing 'New Deal for FE' campaign, which includes demands for 10% pay and national bargaining, and next steps.

Members in FE voted 90% for action in the disaggregated national ballot in November, exceeding the 50% turnout threshold on a national basis. Had the ballot been aggregated it would have enabled large-scale national action.

Of the 80 branches balloted, 32 passed the legal turnout threshold and 28 took action, representing 17 colleges.

These branches know they can win improved offers from their employers by taking more action, as over 70% of members in these branches responded positively to a UCU survey asking if they wanted to continue striking.

Their continuing fight can give confidence to branches which narrowly missed the 50%, that they could

reballot to win better deals, and with more branches joining in the campaign it would send a stronger message to the Labour government that colleges demand funding, and binding agreements in pay and workload for our lecturers.

The motion submitted by Regine Pilling, UCU Left member and candidate for vice president of the union (who the Socialist Party is supporting) called for the remaining striking branches to be supported and to encourage branches to make donations to strike funds. The motion also argued to prepare the ground for the possibility of an aggregated ballot on national bargaining.

Winning now and preparing ground

Myself and fellow Socialist Party member Marco Tesi brought amendments adding that strikes of those branches still in dispute should be assisted to coordinate and others should be given the option of rebalotting (though the FEC has refused to give a lead and proactively organise the rebalotting of branches, citing 'branch autonomy').

Striking UCU members are asking how the campaign can be

strengthened. On picket lines and in strike rallies the question being posed is: how can we build action and make it truly national? In other areas, many UCU members are despairing of a leadership that isn't leading.

Much of the national leadership of the union has abandoned the idea of this year's campaign achieving its goals (including many of those in the UCU Left). In their view, now the task is just to get good local deals for colleges where possible.

We disagreed and pointed out what needs to be done in order to strengthen the campaign this year and maintain a fight on the demand for binding national agreements, to keep up the pressure on Starmer's government. Building the current campaign and engaging members can prepare the ground for a fresh ballot this year, this time aggregated so all branches can participate. Our amendments were passed.

The will of members to fight is clearly there. They just need to be given a lead!

● Duncan is standing for re-election to the National Executive Committee in a UK-elected FE seat

Solent uni strike: No to sham subsidiary employment!

MAGGIE FRICKER

PRESIDENT OF SOUTHAMPTON AND SOUTH WEST HAMPSHIRE TRADES COUNCIL

A lively University and College Union (UCU) picket line took place across Southampton Solent University on the first of two planned strike days.

Members are united against being moved to a wholly owned subsidiary of the university, voting by 93% for strike action.

This is 'fire and rehire' by another name, as staff have been told they will be sacked if they don't accept the transfer under worse terms and conditions. In particular the inferior new pension scheme would create uncertain income in retirement, with the potential loss of £10,000 a year.

Yacht design students, in particular, joined their lecturers in common struggle. They were incensed by yet another attack on staff and the impact it would have on their studies, putting the blame firmly on the vice chancellor.

Pickets were also joined by the trades council, and members of UCU and Unison from across Hampshire who face similar attacks in the pipeline.

The money saved at staff expense will not cover the financial shortfall, and staff are well aware of the need to make a stand against this or face further attacks down the line.

There was generalised anger at the cost-of-living crisis and Labour's failure to support public sector workers. We must demand fully funded higher education both for staff and our students - not just in our city but across the country.



Solent MAGGIE FRICKER



London Met ADAM POWELL-DAVIES

Stop closure of Essex Uni's Southend Campus



Southend DAVE MURRAY

ELEANOR DONNE

ESSEX SOCIALIST PARTY

"The greatest power workers have is collective power and solidarity." This was the message from Andrea Egan, Unison's newly elected left general secretary, to a large rally on 5 February against the closure of Essex University's Southend campus.

Members of University and College Union (UCU), Unison and trades councils joined with students and the local community to say: 'No job cuts! Save our campus!'

400 jobs are at risk at Essex University, and 800 Southend students have been told their campus is closing and they will have to move to or travel to the campus at Colchester.

UCU members voted 91% for strike action to defend jobs and courses and will strike 12-19 February. Around half of the proposed job cuts affect the non-teaching staff at Southend and Colchester, members of Unison, who will be balloted shortly. This opens up the possibility of coordinated action.

Student campaigner Beth, who organised the first protest just days after the news of the plans broke, urged students to turn up at the UCU picket lines to show support. Many are mature students studying for qualifications in nursing, social work, midwifery, and health and social care.

They are mostly women and many have dependent children. Many chose to study locally because their children are in school, and it would be hugely disruptive to move to Colchester or to travel two hours on the train each way. Many also work, as student finance is not enough to live on. They now face a 'choice' of giving up their course or their job.

Essex University has blamed its alleged financial crisis on falling numbers of international students and 'a decade of stagnation in tuition fees'. The university bosses are claiming 'commercial confidentiality' to avoid scrutiny of their accounts by the trade unions.

Full funding

The Office for Students (OFS) says around 25 English universities are at risk of closing within a year, and almost one third of UK universities report financial deficits. Most universities, including Essex, have had previous rounds of voluntary redundancies. The current round of cuts is reaching crisis point.

We demand an end to universities acting like private corporations, and for full funding not fees. Unions and students should continue to hold Southend Labour MPs to account - demand emergency funding from the government to prevent Southend campus closing.

Fighting 120 job cuts at London Met uni

CIARÁN O'DONOGHUE

EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Staff and students at London Metropolitan University have been protesting against the university's plans to get rid of 120 lecturers and support staff. Staff are angry and prepared to take action. The University and College Union (UCU) and Unison have organised a series of protests, supported by students. Socialist Party and Socialist Students members have attended.

The planned cuts are occurring despite the university's £180 million of 'unrestricted' reserves and the high wages of many individuals, including £341,000 given to the vice chancellor.

These cuts also pose a risk to students of whole courses being cut, as

well as loss of vital student services. A lot of London Met students are working-class people, many of whom might be the first in their family to attend university.

These planned cuts are another part of the trend towards the increasing inaccessibility of university education to working-class people. In addition, post graduation, students face a mountain of debt from student loans, as well as difficulties in finding jobs after university in many cases.

The decision to make these job cuts should be immediately reversed by the university, drawing from their plentiful reserves. Universities should be fully funded to ensure access to higher education for working-class students across the country.

Stage is set for the battle for the future of Unite



Birmingham bin strikers have been out for a year against a cutting, union-busting Labour council. We must vote for EC candidates who will maintain and extend this fighting approach BIRMINGHAM SOCIALIST PARTY

KEVIN PARSLAW
UNITE BRANCH SECRETARY

The period for Unite branches and workplaces to make nominations for the next Executive Council (EC) of the union has now closed. Any candidate with three or more nominations will be eligible to stand in the ballot, which runs from 23 March to 27 April.

Socialist Party members and supporters in the Unite Broad Left are part of the slate of candidates supportive of the industrial strategy of general secretary Sharon Graham, known collectively as 'Workers United'.

But they also highlight the political strategy agreed in the emergency resolution at last year's policy conference, for a review of the union's relationship with the Labour Party in light of the attacks on the Birmingham bin workers by the city's Labour council, a dispute which has still not been resolved, and in which the council has injuncted Unite.

From early reports, the nomination period has gone well for those standing for this fighting approach. For example, Socialist Party member John Williams, standing for the union-wide LGBT+ seat on the EC, has

gained 225 nominations. Others have reported increased nominations in their regions or sectors, and significant support for the programme.

These elections, important as they always are, are especially vital this year. The EC has been hamstrung for the last three years in a battle between supporters of Sharon Graham's militancy and those, particularly in the United Left, who remain wedded to the union's link with Labour and want to hold back struggle so as not to embarrass Starmer's government. It is no exaggeration to say that the future of Unite as a militant union is at stake.

To build a union with a militant outlook, on both the industrial and political fronts, a fighting programme and decisive leadership is required. It will be vital for this programme to be received by Unite members in workplaces throughout Britain and Ireland before they cast their vote. Socialist Party members will play a key role in this, as we have done in the nomination period in a number of branches.

● **The full list of Workers United candidates can be found here: 'Unite's status as a militant union on the line in upcoming elections' at socialistparty.org.uk**

Probation workers at breaking point: Vote 'Yes' in the pay ballots

Probation workers across England and Wales in both Unison and Napo are voting in a national pay ballot on the employer's 4% offer.

AMY SAGE
UNISON REP, PERSONAL CAPACITY

This pay offer comes at a time when workloads, staffing levels and safety concerns have all sharply deteriorated, and when anger in the service has reached breaking point.

Unison, the largest union in probation, has taken the important step of recommending a reject vote. This marks a significant shift.

When a similar offer was made a few years ago, Unison did not take a position at all, much like GMB today, which is neither recommending acceptance nor rejection.

The fact that Unison is now taking a clear stance shows that the leadership is being pushed by the mood of the members.

And that mood has hardened. Over the past two years, probation staff have repeatedly asked why we weren't taking action when other public services were striking and winning. In the recent general secretary elections, members ousted the Starmer-supporting Christina McAnea and elected Andrea Egan, who

stood on a platform of more serious action.

Meanwhile, the situation in probation has deteriorated sharply. Caseloads remain dangerously high, staffing levels continue to fall, morale is low, and workloads are unsafe.

In the past six months alone, there have been two serious incidents involving the stabbing of probation staff. After the first incident, where a probation officer was almost killed, the employer dismissed it as 'rare' and unlikely to happen again. Since then, another stabbing has taken place.

Stretched beyond limits

Workers know this is not a coincidence. It is the direct result of a service stretched beyond safe limits. Against this backdrop, it would have been impossible for Unison's leadership to avoid taking a clear position in the ballot, or to try to hold back the possibility of strike action.

This pay ballot, with two unions balloting simultaneously, could mark a turning point for probation. Years of underfunding, unsafe workloads and falling pay have pushed the service into crisis. Members are increasingly unwilling to accept another real-terms cut while the job becomes more dangerous and more impossible to do safely.

The employer's offer represents a real-terms cut and falls far short of the unions' 12% claim and £15 minimum wage demand. It does nothing to reverse a decade of pay erosion, leaves the lowest-paid on course to be overtaken by the national minimum wage, and widens the gap with comparable public sector roles.

Crucially, it offers no solution to the staffing crisis or unsafe workloads, even as the employer withholds a £100 million underspend created by its own failure to recruit.

If probation workers vote to reject, and if unions move to a formal industrial action ballot, it will be because the workforce has had enough. The pressure from below is real, and it is reshaping the union's stance. The question now is whether members will seize this moment to fight for the pay, funding, safety and staffing levels the service desperately needs.

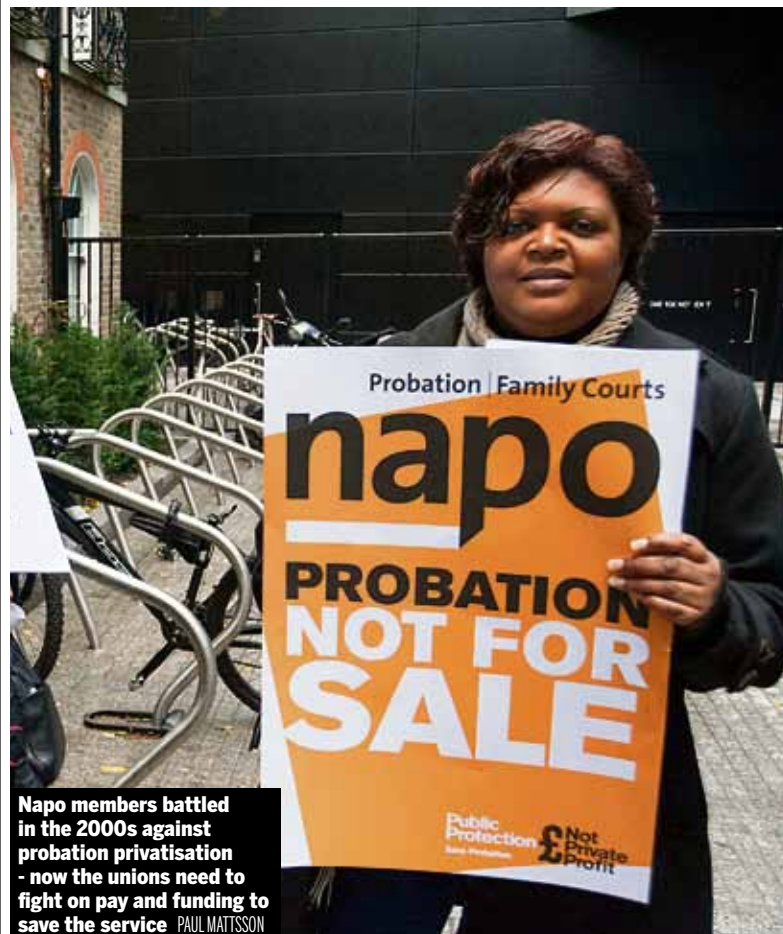
● **Amy is seeking nomination to stand for the Police, Probation and Cafcass Service Group Executive (SGE) in Unison. Other Socialist Party members standing in the SGE elections are Adrian O'Malley and Paul Tovey in health, Mathew John and Balaka Fell-Holden in local government, and Manny Dominguez for the Community SGE**

ADAM HARMSWORTH, NAPO VICE CHAIR, ADDS IN A PERSONAL CAPACITY:

Last August, Napo members showed their determination to fight with a 90% vote for strike action over pay. Unfortunately the ballot fell short of the 50% turnout required by the 2016 anti-union law, which still remains in place under Labour.

Members' anger has only grown since, over the lack of a pay offer and the wider crisis in probation. Napo's Young Members Network met just days after the pay offer was finally received, and young activists reported how in some offices probation workers immediately gathered to express outrage and disappointment. There is a mood to fight back especially, but not only, among young probation workers.

This year, Napo and all probation unions must do everything to beat the threshold. Napo has already launched a programme of online meetings and social media posts for the indicative ballot. A strong rejection alongside preparing branches for a ballot of industrial action could see us not only beat the 50% threshold, but give our members the strength and organisation to take on this weak divided Labour government.



Napo members battled in the 2000s against probation privatisation - now the unions need to fight on pay and funding to save the service PAUL MATTSSON

JOIN THE SOCIALISTS

● Visit socialistparty.org.uk/join
● or call **020 8988 8777**
● or text your name and postcode to **07958 032071** to find out more today!

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

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STARMER AND MANDELSON'S NEW LABOUR: THE WORKING CLASS NEEDS ITS OWN PARTY

Socialist Party

WHAT WE THINK

Keir Starmer is currently clinging to his job, desperately trying to portray Peter Mandelson as an aberration, completely different to other New Labour politicians who he claims believe in 'duty' and 'public service'. But Mandelson was at the heart of Tony Blair's transformation of Labour into New Labour – an out-and-out capitalist party.

This is the man who said back in 1998 that he was "intensely relaxed about people getting filthy rich". There was never anything relaxed, however, about his desire to make sure he got filthy rich. In 1998, and again in 2001, he had to resign from the Cabinet as a result of dodgy financial dealings. This and, of course, his long association with the paedophile sex trafficker and banker Jeffrey Epstein were well known to Starmer when he made him US ambassador in the hope he could successfully suck up to Donald Trump.

Before that, Mandelson had played an even more important role for Starmer and – more fundamentally – for the capitalist class. In the period of Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party, Mandelson proudly declared that he worked "every single day in some small way to bring forward the end of his tenure in office." It has now been revealed that he was allowed to personally vet parliamentary candidates in the 2024 election in order to weed out those on the left. Far from being an aberration, Mandelson – with his messianic drive to annihilate Corbynism and to make Labour once again a reliable representative of the capitalist elite – is 'Starmerism' personified.

Your Party not contesting by-election

The Mandelson affair can only increase the chance of Starmer's increasingly hated New Labour being defeated in the Gorton and Denton parliamentary by-election taking place on 26 February. However, it is not going to be the new party founded by Jeremy Corbyn and Zarah Sultana, 'Your Party', taking him on at the ballot box.

On the contrary, Your Party is not standing. The leadership's statement justifies this by saying that "the single greatest threat to this country right now" is a "far-right Reform government" and that they do not believe "a Your Party candidacy would serve

our collective goals", and so instead they will "actively mobilise against the far-right" in this by-election. Your Party MP Zarah Sultana has been explicit that this means backing the Green Party candidate, and this is implicitly the position of the whole Your Party leadership. A similar position has been taken by others on the left, including George Galloway's Workers Party.

The current situation was not pre-ordained, however. Back in the summer of 2025, when Jeremy Corbyn and Zarah Sultana first announced a new party, there was a huge surge of enthusiasm. More than 800,000 signed up to support it. Opinion polls indicated that this – as yet unformed – party could get up to 18% of the vote nationally. That response demonstrated the positive memory that millions had of Labour's anti-austerity programme under Corbyn and, above all, the clear potential to build a party that – instead of being one more party of the capitalist elite – would be a party of and for the working-class majority. Had that opportunity been seized, not least by a systematic campaign aimed at the base of the trade unions, Your Party could now have been a powerful force, with the potential to win the Gorton and Denton by-election.

Unfortunately, we are very far from that. Instead of turning out to the working class, Your Party's leadership has taken a top-down and controlling approach. No wing of the party's leadership sees that the working class is the central force in the struggle for socialism. There is therefore no concept of building a party based on the organisations of the working class, in particular the trade unions which organise more than six million workers. As a result Your Party is not on course to meet its initial potential to become a mass democratic workers' party. Just over 11,000 people have taken part in the nomination process for the party's current leadership election (see box), a tiny fraction of the numbers who were initially enthused by its announcement.

Green victory possible – but what are the lessons?

Given the current situation, it is inevitable that casting a vote for the Green candidate is going to be the choice of the big majority of those in Gorton and Denton who want to both punish New Labour and to stop Reform from winning. As a result, it is not excluded that Hannah Spencer, the Green Party candidate, could be the next MP for the seat. Just as the victory of the Plaid Cymru candidate in the Caerphilly by-election last October was met with relief by many across the country – happy to see Labour defeated, but not by Reform – the same would be true

in response to a Green victory on 26 February.

However, whatever the outcome of this by-election, it is going to intensify discussions on how to defeat Reform at the ballot box. There is a clear danger that the approach taken in this by-election becomes generalised. This would be a serious mistake. There are many different elements in the current electoral support for the right-populists of Reform. Farage is cynically harnessing all the reactionary ideas – particularly anti-migrant moods – that have been whipped up by successive governments, including this one, in order to win votes.

Above all however, Reform, falsely posing as standing for the 'little people', is being picked up by voters as a means to express their rage against all the establishment politicians, which will only have increased in response to the latest Epstein revelations. There is only one force that could cut across this – and that is party of the working class, with a socialist programme and fighting determinedly in defence of working-class people from every background. There have been multiple opportunities to start building such a party over recent years. The biggest was Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party. In the 2017 general election, under his leadership, Labour's anti-austerity programme won over more than a million voters from UKIP, the predecessor of Reform.

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In the period of Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party, Mandelson proudly declared that he worked "every single day in some small way to bring forward the end of his tenure in office." It has now been revealed that he was allowed to personally vet parliamentary candidates in the 2024 election in order to weed out those on the left

We could have been in a very different situation today if, instead of repeated attempts to conciliate with the pro-capitalist forces in Labour – epitomised by Mandelson – Corbyn had launched a struggle to transform the Labour Party into a genuinely anti-austerity workers' party. This would have included fighting for MPs to be subject to compulsory reselection by a democratic party under the control of its members, with the rights of trade union affiliates restored. Another missed opportunity to build a workers' party was Enough is Enough – half a million strong and launched by two national trade union leaders and the then Labour MP Zarah Sultana during the 2022-23 strike wave.



PHOTO: NUMBER 10/CC



PHOTO: HOUSE OF COMMONS/CC



PHOTO: ALISDARE HICKSON/CC



PHOTOS: MRIGNAVY/CC AND PUBLIC DOMAIN

Lessons of the Gorton and Denton by-election on how to defeat Reform

And of course, the initial enthusiasm for Your Party was another indication of the potential for such a party. It is also shown in the debates that are developing in the trade union movement on political representation, not least the virtually unanimous vote by the Unite conference last year, representing over a million members, to reassess the union's relationship with Labour. It is vital to take those debates forward, and to fight for steps towards the organised working class having an independent political voice in order to successfully cut across the right-populists.

“Progressive Alliance” no alternative

It is already clear that right-wing trade union leaders are going to use the need to stop Reform in order to desperately try and justify continued support for a Labour government that is attacking the working class. In reality this approach amounts to rolling out the red carpet for Reform. Others, however, will suggest that a 'progressive alliance' is needed, where voters are encouraged to back one candidate with an alleged better chance of winning in order to stop Reform. Where the boundaries are of what counts as 'progressive' is rarely defined.

Green leader Zack Polanski has certainly taken a more vocal anti-austerity stand than previous Green leaders, including denouncing 'the system rigged for the rich', but he has indicated that his 'progressive alliance' could include Labour, provided Starmer is no longer its leader. Yet it is clear that, after the experience of Corbynism, the capitalist class is determined never to allow another genuinely left Labour leader, and while a new leader will want to appear to be a 'new broom', the fundamentally anti-working class character of Labour would not change.

If the workers' movement was to refuse to step into the electoral field in order to back allegedly 'progressive' candidates that then continue to attack the working class, this would guarantee future victories to Reform and their ilk, even if it managed to block them in the short term in a particular election. What is more it would leave the working class without a political voice.

In this volatile political period it is impossible to predict the outcome of the next general election. There are going to be further opportunities to found a mass workers' party which would completely transform the current situation. But for all those who are rightly desperate to stop a Reform victory it is also necessary to think about what would be needed to defeat Reform if they were to win a general election. Trade union membership has increased 200% in councils that they lead, and a Reform government

would face huge working-class opposition from day one. But how much more strength that movement would have if there was at least a bloc of socialist working class MPs offering real opposition in parliament? By contrast, if the only parliamentary opposition was from capitalist politicians calling on Reform to be more 'pro-establishment', it would help them to maintain their false anti-establishment credentials for a period. There is a comparison here with the debates that took place in the trade union movement at the start of the last century where huge pressure to back the allegedly 'progressive' Liberal Party in order to block the more openly reactionary Tories was ultimately unsuccessful in preventing the working class starting to build its own party.

So should we just back the Greens?

Some of those initially enthused by Your Party have since joined the Greens, hoping that it can develop into the kind of party that is needed. The Greens already have four MPs and more than 800 councillors, and are certain to get more of the latter elected in May. That is why leading trade unionists have signed a petition, initiated by the Trade Unionists for a New Party campaign, calling on Zack Polanski to join the struggle against local authority austerity and insist that "no candidate shall appear on the ballot paper on behalf of the Greens who has not made a public commitment to vote against all cuts and closures to council services, jobs, pay and conditions should they be elected as a councillor on May 7th."

Clearly a positive response to the petition by Polanski would be a step forward. Up until now, however, that has not been the approach of the vast majority of Green councillors. Their existing councillors could already be an important weapon in the fight against local council cuts, but instead in 41 councils they are currently part of administrations – in coalition variously with Labour, Liberals, 'Independents' and Tories – and are implementing cuts and council tax rises on the same basis as other councillors. Nor are they all taking an anti-austerity stand even when in opposition. In Warwickshire County Council, where Reform leads the authority, Green councillors were among those who voted against Reform – in order to demand a bigger increase in council tax. To state the obvious this will do nothing to cut across Reform!

The Green Party is not a workers' party, and a trade union that affiliated to it would have no say in its democratic decision-making process. More fundamentally, it does not see the working class as the force that is central to social change. It is also a party that – in essence – accepts the

constraints of this rotten capitalist system. That it has not yet been prepared to take a stand against local authority austerity but has instead joined local coalitions with capitalist parties, points to the danger of how in the future it could follow the road of Green Parties in Germany, Ireland, Scotland and elsewhere in joining capitalist pro-austerity governments.

Clearly, some in the Green Party are socialists. However, it would be a serious mistake for socialists and trade unionists to stand aside from the elections this May – and future parliamentary by-elections – in order to back Green candidates regardless of their position on austerity. Instead we need the broadest stand of trade unionists, socialists and working-class community candidates as possible – alongside Your Party and genuine anti-austerity Greens – as a step towards overcoming the current crisis of independent working-class political representation.

“

Leading trade unionists have signed a petition calling on Zack Polanski to join the struggle against local authority austerity

Your Party CEC elections

Voting in the CEC elections is scheduled to run from 9-23 February. Unfortunately, the Socialist Party members that wanted to contest the elections, Dave Nellist, April Ashley and Moe Manir, were undemocratically excluded on the grounds that they are members of the Socialist Party as well as Your Party, despite the Socialist Party writing to the Your Party leadership well in advance in order to try and clarify the issue. (See 'Letter to Your Party', from the Socialist Party' at socialistparty.org.uk)

Nonetheless, we call on Your Party members to vote for candidates in their regions who support the call for the party to 'turn to the working class', to put the trade unions central, to make the most of the opportunities presented for an anti-cuts socialist stand in May's elections, and stand against exclusions of socialists.

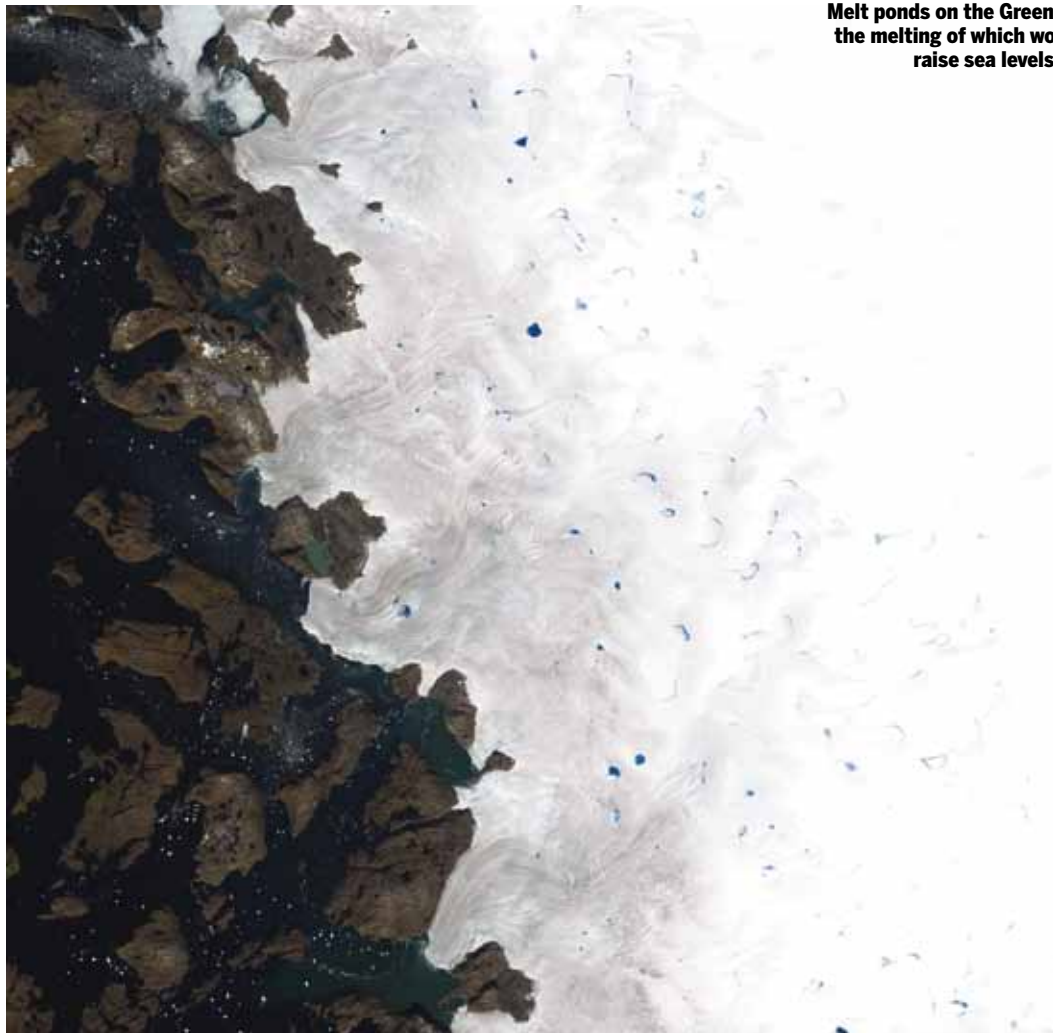
This approach is not wholly applicable for all the candidates for the National Office holders. Neither Jeremy Corbyn nor Zarah Sultana, for example, see the need to orientate to the organised working class with a campaign aimed at the base of the trade unions. However, to vote for one but not the other would accelerate the possibility of an early split – without a sufficiently clear demarcation – which would set back the role Your Party could still play, if it 'turns to the working class', in the formation of the mass workers' party that is needed.



Dave Nellist says: "Coventry Socialist Party is recommending voting for Councillor Grace Lewis as No. 1 in the Your Party executive elections for the public office holders' seats, as the first councillor to switch to Your Party, who has championed the local People's Budget conference and nationally campaigned on an anti-austerity and anti-war agenda."

Capitalism's flawed model means environmental catastrophe

Melt ponds on the Greenland ice sheet, the melting of which would drastically raise sea levels PHOTO: PUBLIC DOMAIN



TOM YOUNG
CHESHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY

The fact that our climate is changing and that it is doing so due to human activity is not in dispute. A mounting body of scientific evidence since the 1970s now stands alongside many years of real, current effects of climate change, with heatwaves, wildfires and more frequent and severe storms being the most visible examples. This reality has become so undeniable that the super-rich capitalist class has had to modify its tactics to try and preserve the status quo and its ruling position. Whereas before they had tried to claim that climate change was not happening, or at least that it wasn't caused by the massive overconsumption of resources, especially fossil fuels, that has made them rich, they have now had to retreat to downplaying the potential dangers.

It is in this context that the Guardian recently reported that many of the economic models used by governments and banks fail to factor in the worst effects of climate change. While they estimate some GDP loss as a result of consistent warming, commonly used models don't include the effects of less predictable severe weather events or so called 'tipping points' - scenarios where a system crosses a threshold where it can't easily recover, for example, the Greenland ice sheet collapsing. These events would certainly cause major harm to the global economy, because they are hard to predict, hard to prepare for, and can do severe damage. Consider the \$112.9 billion estimated cost of Hurricane Ian in 2022, and the \$78.7 billion of damage caused by Hurricane Helene just two years later in 2024. With the

frequency of such storms increasing, we should expect these shocks to the global economy to go up as well. Tipping points are much harder to quantify because they are completely unprecedented. If the Greenland ice sheet melts, for example, it will drastically raise sea levels and alter rainfall patterns across the globe, which would likely be catastrophic for ecosystems and agriculture.

The models being used give a false impression of precision by factoring in manageable costs for the capitalists, while masking a much more dangerous reality. Even though it is understood that paying the costs of moving away from fossil fuels now will be much cheaper than trying to mitigate the effects in the long run, a large section of the ruling class has a vested interest in continuing to profit from those same fuels, while the rest want the working class to foot the bill for any transition!

In an increasingly sick capitalist system, racked by shocks and instability, it is easier for the capitalist class to rely on flawed models to hide reality. Far from socialism being a utopian system, it is capitalism that has to resort to sheer fantasy to justify itself! To be able to make the necessary changes to investment and production to escape climate destruction we need socialist change. Until the working class runs society for the benefit of all, rather than for the profits of the few, the bosses will continue to bury their heads in the sand and choose short-term profit at the expense of everyone else. We need to take the wealth and resources of the world out of the bosses' hands and democratically plan production to transition away from polluting fossil fuels, to provide a decent standard of living for all without destroying the environment.

Enfield people's budget – 'the money is there'

Local campaigners are organising a 'people's budget' conference in Enfield, north London. It's backed by the Socialist Party, the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), the trade union council, and Your Party supporters in Enfield. Below is an extract from the leaflet promoting the event.

Enfield Council has received an extra £203 million from the government over the next three years. The Labour council can no longer say 'the money isn't there'. But, we have to campaign for them to spend it on our services!

The 2026 local elections are a huge opportunity to stand anti-cuts candidates that can expose and cut across all the pro-austerity parties, including Reform.

To build for such a stand, we are organising an open public conference, including representatives of local trade union branches, community organisations, socialist parties, Enfield residents, and others, to discuss our local community needs, so we can draw up a no-cuts 'people's budget' based on those needs, not Keir Starmer's continued austerity.

Local election candidates will pledge to take these issues and more into the council chambers, demanding the money to pay for it from central government.

Fund our services

56% of children in Enfield live in income-deprived households, the seventh worst local authority in the

entire country. Enfield has the highest youth knife crime in London.

We need safe places for young people. But youth service funding in London has been slashed from £145 million to £42 million from 2011-21. At least 130 youth centres have closed, and over 600 youth worker jobs lost. We have gone from an average of 48 youth workers per borough to 15.

Enfield Labour council closed most of its youth services, instead of building a campaign to fight for the money to fund them.

Enfield Labour's library cuts of £630,000 closed eight local libraries last year. Privatising leisure centres takes these important facilities further out of the reach of young people.

Scandalously, Enfield has 6,401 families on its social housing waiting list, while unaffordable private homes are being built on public land. We need council homes!

Enfield Labour council has over £75 million in reserves. It didn't have to choose these cuts. Now, Enfield Council has received a 58% increase in what it calls its 'core spending power'. More to the point, the 100 biggest companies in the UK are paying

shareholders £80 billion a year!

The council is in £1.5 billion debt, one of the highest in the country. It spent over £30 million just paying interest on its debt last year. Labour locally raised council tax by 5% last year, and it says it will raise it again this year.

Workers and young people in Enfield need to organise to make sure that this extra funding is used on our services. Reopen the libraries, fund our youth services, and build council houses.

Enfield Trades Union Council, which brings together local trade union branches in the area, has debated and agreed on a campaign for a budget based on the needs of the local community.

Anti-war campaigners correctly call out any links between our council and the arms trade. Councils should be funded by central government to provide all the public services we need, rather than getting into deals with big business, including war profiteers.

Let's unite in the fight for a budget based on need, and a council that fights for us. We need to stand as many anti-cuts candidates as we can in the local elections in May.

Come and have your say in what Enfield needs, and what should be included in a 'people's budget' on Sunday 22 February, 1pm-4pm. Above Poundland, Edmonton Green shopping centre, London N9 0TZ



PHOTO: ENFIELD AND LEA VALLEY SOCIALIST PARTY

Merseyside socialists win support for no-cuts stand



Dean gets Zarah Sultana to sign the 'Greens must pledge no cuts' petition

DEAN YOUNG
LIVERPOOL SOUTH SOCIALIST PARTY

Zarah Sultana MP spoke at an unofficial Your Party branch meeting in Crosby, Sefton on 7 February. We were pleasantly surprised to see a well-attended meeting of 100 people.

In the meeting, Zarah spoke, and then it broke into a questions and answers section. Zarah's speech particularly focused on "organising where hate is taking root", "the need to stand nationally in elections and target winnable seats", also referencing the need to fight austerity "as Liverpool knows how to do."

Myself and another Socialist Party member, Conor O'Neill, took the opportunity to raise the issue of a no-cuts election stand during the Q&A. We pointed to the new petition 'Greens Must Pledge: No Cuts To Services', calling on "new Green Party leader, Zack Polanski, to ensure that in this year's local council elections, no candidate shall appear on the ballot paper on behalf of the Greens,

who has not made a public commitment to vote against all cuts and closures to council services, jobs, pay and conditions should they be elected as a councillor on 7 May."

Lots of people in attendance supported that stance, 28 people signed the petition (including Unite, PCS, Prospect, Unison and UCU union members), including Zarah Sultana (pictured).

We also highlighted the policy voted for at Your Party's founding conference in favour of bringing together trade unions, socialist groups, and community organisations to draw up 'people's budgets' to meet the needs of communities, then for Your Party candidates to take those policies into the council chambers. Lots of the people we spoke to were interested in attending the people's budget conference in Liverpool on 21 February, something Socialist Party members have been instrumental in planning.

● **Sign the petition at tusc.org.uk and change.org**

AREA	£ RECEIVED	£ TARGET	Q1: JANUARY-MARCH 2026	DEADLINE: 31 MARCH 2026
Northern	574	800		72%
North West	418	1,200		35%
Eastern	391	1,300		30%
South West	501	2,100		24%
West Midlands	643	2,700		24%
London	1,087	5,000		22%
Yorkshire	423	2,650		16%
Southern & SE	345	2,400		14%
Wales	318	2,400		13%
East Midlands	185	2,050		9%
Other	474	2,400		20%
TOTAL	5,358	25,000		21%

Leicester campaigns defy Labour council ban to protest cuts

STEVE SCORE
LEICESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

Six different campaigning groups defied Leicester City Council's ban on campaign tables, and set up in the city centre on 7 February. 'City Wardens' made no attempt to stop them.

The council has enacted a 'Public Space Protection Order' (PSPO), supposedly to control anti-social behaviour. However, it attacks the democratic right to protest and organise, at a time when that is needed.

SEND travel removed

Leicester Labour council has slashed services by well over £100 million. More recently, the Labour council has removed the automatic travel support for SEND (special educational needs and disability) school students over the age of 16.

The council also now includes Personal Independence Payments (PIP), meant to pay for care, mobility etc, as income in assessing council-tax benefit. Some bills for low-income people are quadrupling.

Locally, Labour has ended support for adventure playgrounds, and threatened libraries, community centres, museums, and more. Massive community campaigns have

won victories, forcing the council to do partial U-turns on some of these proposals. But more cuts are on the way – at least another £20 million.

Leicester Socialist Party and some trade unions have called on the council to refuse to make cuts. Instead, they could use reserves and other measures to keep services running, and buy time to build a mass campaign to force more funding from the government.

Still making cuts

Instead, the council is selling off public buildings to private property developers, and borrowing. The Labour council claims that this means it can make fewer cuts. But Labour is refusing to build a 'no-cuts' campaign, and is still making cuts!

Socialist Party member Heather Rawling was issued with a notice and fine for contravening the so-called 'anti-social behaviour' order in May. She wrote back to the council to say that she wanted to challenge it in court.

The council says that you can challenge it in court, if you do not pay the immediate £100 fine. However, the council has not given her a court date.

Heather said: "We all want to stop

anti-social behaviour. But campaigning with a small table is not anti-social behaviour.

"Commercial organisations that pay a lot of money to the council have been allowed to set up large displays, gazebos, and other equipment in the city centre. How are these causing any less nuisance than not-for-profit voluntary campaign groups?"

Fines and threats

"The council is infringing on our democratic rights, and should not continue fining or threatening campaign groups, while refusing to test their ban in court."

While the event was taking place on 7 February, City Wardens walked past and made no effort to stop us. Does that mean they now recognise that this aspect of the PSPO is unenforceable?

● The following groups of trade unionists are opposed to the ban: Leicester and District Trades Union Council; Leicester Unite Community branch EM/LE 100C; NEU Leicester City; Unite SPS Technologies; George Atwall, Midlands regional officer, Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union (BFAWU).



Heather (right) being fined by the council for campaigning in May

West Mids socialists meet to organise

Adam Tyas is a new Coventry Socialist Party member, and a first-time attendee at our regional conference in the West Midlands.

Over 40 Socialist Party members from across the West Midlands met on 8 February to discuss the incredibly fast moving national and international events, and the difference the Socialist Party is making in our respective areas, and beyond.

Events have not come out of thin air, but from a thick stink at the heart of a rotten capitalist system. Jeffrey Epstein, and the exploitation of the corrupt capitalist class, is on show for all.

Donald Trump has revealed bare face the true brutality of the capitalist world order. But the working

class is beginning to re-enter the scene.

Young people want to take a stand and build a better future for themselves. The whole working class is moving away from the established capitalist parties. The Socialist Party is helping to organise the next generation of socialists.

The need for a new workers' party is there. We need to use every platform, including by standing as widely as possible in the May local elections, using the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) banner, to get that message across. My own Coventry Socialist Party helping organise a 'people's budget' conference is an example of this.

For over a year, Birmingham Socialist Party has been supporting

striking bin workers. The Labour council has now spent over £30 million to try and break the strike.

We're taking steps to grow, develop, and relaunch Socialist Party branches in Stoke and Shropshire. Student members support Socialist Students campaigning against fees and cuts at universities.

The important role of the Socialist paper was highlighted, and the debates and arguments carried within it. The conference was a success in continuing strong regional work to fight for a socialist future.

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



WHAT WE STAND FOR

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

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

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

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

WORK, PENSIONS AND BENEFITS

- A trade union struggle for the immediate implementation of the TUC demand of a £15-an-hour minimum wage for all as a step towards a real living wage, without exemptions. For the minimum wage to automatically increase linked to average earnings or inflation, whichever is higher.

- Share out the work. A maximum 32-hour working week with no loss of pay or worsening of conditions. The right to flexible working, under the control of workers not employers. An end to insecure working, for the right to full-time work for all who want it; ban zero-hour contracts.
- All workers to have trade union rates of pay, employment protection, and sickness, parental and holiday rights from day one of employment. End bosses using bogus 'self-employment' as a means to avoid giving workers rights.
- No to austerity through inflation.

For all wage rates to be automatically increased at least in line with price rises.

- Open the books of all companies cutting jobs or claiming they can't afford to pay a real living wage. State subsidies, where genuinely needed, for socially-useful small businesses.

- For trade unions independent of the capitalist state, with members having democratic control over their own policies, constitutions and democratic procedures. For all trade union officials to be regularly elected, subject to recall by their members and paid a worker's wage.
- Reduce the state retirement and pension age to 55. For decent living pensions.
- Replace universal credit and the punitive benefit system with living benefits for all who need them.

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 under democratic control. Kick out the private companies! Nationalise the pharmaceutical industry under democratic workers' control and management.

- Renationalise privatised utilities – including rail, mail, water, telecoms and power – under democratic workers' control and management.
- Free, publicly funded and democratically run, good-quality education, available to all at any age. Abolish university tuition fees and write off student debt, end marketisation, and introduce a living grant. No to academisation. For all schools to be under the genuine democratic control of local education authorities, school staff, parents and student organisations.
- The right to a safe secure home for all. For the mass building of genuinely affordable, high-quality, carbon-neutral council housing. For rent controls that cap the level of rent. Fair rent decisions should be made by elected bodies of tenants, housing workers and representatives of trade unions. For cheap low-interest mortgages for home buyers. Nationalise the privately owned large building companies, land banks and estates.

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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

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are set by consumers, small farmers, and all workers involved in the production, processing, distribution and retail of food.

DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

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

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SOCIALISM 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.

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Usdaw members at Tetrosyl fight pay catastrophe



PHOTO: IAIN DALTON

IAIN DALTON
USDAW BROAD LEFT

At the end of January, members of Usdaw union at car products company Tetrosyl in Rochdale took their sixth day of strike action.

Lively picket lines, with vuvuzelas blaring, were joined by other Usdaw members and trade unionists. It was a firm rebuff to the draconian pay cuts imposed by bosses, which run to £4,000-7,000 a year. The company paid out £2 million in dividends last year.

That pinch is now being felt as pay deductions – a result of the new contracts they felt they had no choice but to sign – have come into effect. One worker told me his pay packet was down by £500 for last month!

Usdaw needs to urgently look into establishing a hardship fund to support the strikers, and not allow Tetrosyl bosses to starve the workers into submission.

Newcastle – growing rage at Starmers

ELAINE BRUNSKILL
NEWCASTLE SOCIALIST PARTY

There was anger at cuts in the council and NHS on our Socialist Party campaign stall, and growing rage at Keir Starmer's Labour. There was support for the workers and young people in Minneapolis struggling against ICE.

Other strikers commented that their family members were on strike during the 2022-23 strike wave and received more publicity than they feel they are getting. While Usdaw HQ has upped its game, promoting the strike on social media, it is vital to raise the profile of the dispute.

Tetrosyl's head office is in Rochdale. A weekend rally outside, inviting other trade unions to join them, or even a march on a strike day from the distribution centre to the head office, could help build the pressure and wider publicity.

Usdaw is applying to the Central Arbitration Committee for statutory recognition, with over 50% of the workforce reported to have joined the union.

A continued programme of sustainable industrial action will help ensure that the company is forced to negotiate, and that they feel under pressure to address the pay catastrophe they have inflicted.

Selling the Socialist

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

There was also support for what Liverpool's socialist City Council did in the 1980s – it fought Margaret Thatcher's Tories, and won big concessions. Even Melania Trump's film, which is flopping, got a mention.

One woman had apologised to us as she had no money to buy a Socialist paper. As we had finished up and were walking away, she rushed up to us.

She'd seen a friend and had borrowed money to give us. She also thanked us for being out on the street campaigning.

Your Party Scotland launched – build the socialist election challenge for Holyrood

SOCIALIST PARTY SCOTLAND REPORTERS

'Your Party Scotland' was officially launched at a conference on 7/8 February in Dundee. Attended by around 250 members in person, with more taking part online, the conference was the first national opportunity for Your Party (YP) Scotland members to debate issues, which included whether to stand for the Holyrood (Scottish Parliament) election in May, the attitude to take on the national question, no-cuts budgets, dual membership, and the right of trade unions to affiliate to YP Scotland, among others.

The fact that the conference agreed some important advances compared to the UK Your Party conference in Liverpool in November 2025 is to be welcomed. However, the backdrop to the conference was the enormous missed opportunity to build a mass workers' party.

That the launch of YP has only led, up to now, to the creation of, in reality, a small left party, rather than the potential for the creation of a mass working-class force of up to one million members on a UK basis, is entirely due to the mistaken approach of the elements of the leadership in charge of steering its creation.

As we warned at the time, the failure to involve trade union organisations, leading trade unionists, and socialist organisations with a record of calling for and encouraging steps in the direction of a mass workers' party would have significant consequences.

Socialist Party Scotland and the Socialist Party in England and Wales have participated in the Your Party process since it began. But we have also called out the increasingly top-down, bureaucratic methods being used in the party. This was a theme of the YP Scotland conference.

Making the first intervention in a debate on whether YP Scotland should ultimately be independent of the party at a UK level, Socialist Party Scotland member Philip Stott urged Your Party Scotland members to turn our collective backs on the mistakes made at UK level, driven by bureaucratic and top-down methods of bans and exclusions of Socialist Party members Dave Nellist and April Ashley from standing for the Central Executive Committee (CEC), and to build a bridge to the working class and its mass-membership trade unions.

Trade unions key

Jim McFarlane, Unison NEC member and Dundee City Unison branch secretary, proposed an amendment, drawn up by Socialist Party Scotland members, that called on trade unions to be able to affiliate "at a local, regional and national basis and send representatives to Your Party Scotland structures".

Jim explained that the working class and the multi-million-membership trade unions have to be the basis for building a new mass party.



Socialist Party Scotland members and supporters at the Your Party conference in Dundee. PHOTO: SOCIALIST PARTY SCOTLAND

He pointed to the history of trade union struggle in Dundee, the Timex strike in 1993, and, more recently, the strike wave, which showed the power of the working class when it takes action.

Jim answered those who argued that trade union affiliation allows trade union bureaucrats to affect Your Party when he said: "We don't want to bring in right-wing trade union leaders; we want to bring in working-class fighters to Your Party."

Wayne Scott, a PCS rep from Dundee and a Socialist Party Scotland member, also spoke very well in this debate. While some delegates spoke against the idea of trade union affiliation, the amendment was agreed by 81.5% of those who voted.

Dual membership

In the debate on allowing dual membership for Your Party Scotland, an amendment was agreed by 82% of the conference which allows for "Scottish socialist political parties, except those determined by the SEC [the Scottish leadership body] as not aligning with Your Party Scotland's values", to be members until any possible future "ban" list is drawn up by the SEC.

This allows for Socialist Party Scotland members, for example, to take part in elections to the SEC and stand as candidates. We moved an amendment arguing for socialist organisations to be members of Your Party Scotland as of right, but this was compositated out.

Nevertheless, Socialist Party Scotland members played a key role in the debate, with Sinead Daly and Lynda McEwan both making powerful speeches. Lynda explained the

key role that Militant - Socialist Party Scotland's predecessor - played in the victories over the poll tax and the Liverpool council struggle, and why that history and tradition should be seen as an asset for YP Scotland.

On the second day of conference, Socialist Party Scotland members continued to play an important role in shaping the direction of the debates. On whether Your Party Scotland should take no specific position on the Scottish constitutional debate or whether to back Scottish independence, two Socialist Party Scotland members were able to speak.

Sinead Daly explained that Socialist Party Scotland members had moved an amendment that argued that an independent socialist Scotland was the best route to improve the lives of the working class in Scotland, but this was not included. But we will give critical support for Your Party Scotland to take an explicitly pro-independence position rather than take no position, as was proposed in the other option. This pro-independence option was passed by 63% of the conference.

No-cuts budgets

The amendment to the Political Statement on no-cuts budgets, again proposed by Socialist Party Scotland members, insisted that "Your Party Scotland and our elected councillors and parliamentarians will never vote for cuts and will support the moving of legal no-cuts budgets in councils and at Holyrood."

Harvey Duke graphically drew out the consequences of councillors voting for cuts and its contribution to the rise of parties like Reform UK.

Harvey also highlighted the work done by anti-racists in Dundee who, for months, had been confronting fascists and racists who had targeted asylum seekers' accommodation. This amendment was agreed by 85% of delegates.

Whether to stand for Holyrood was among the most contentious debates of the weekend. However, in the end, 70% supported standing candidates. This is an important step towards mounting a serious election challenge in May.

It could, if the policy is implemented fully, also mean that only in Scotland will there be a significant Your Party challenge in the elections due in May, which includes English council elections and to the Welsh Assembly. Leah Ganley from Inverness made an excellent contribution, arguing that to cut across Reform UK, a socialist election challenge is vital, making the case for jobs, homes, and public services for working-class communities, not racist division.

Socialist Party Scotland played a leading role in the October conference involving trade unionists and socialists, to build for a socialist election challenge (see 'Socialists debate and prepare for Holyrood 2026 election' at socialistpartyscotland.org.uk)

Divisions persist

Deep divisions in Your Party between the contending groupings fighting for a majority on the CEC are evident. Both Jeremy Corbyn and Zarah Sultana addressed conference on the second day. Sultana made a combative speech, calling for a worker-controlled, publicly owned socialist economy, and welcomed the decision of conference to back a no-cuts position.

She also commented that she was the only Your Party MP at Westminster, a clear criticism of the other MPs who had initially supported the Your Party process, including Jeremy Corbyn, who remains an independent MP.

Corbyn supporters have launched The Many as a public forum to campaign for the CEC elections. One of its subheads is "so members call the shots, not sects". A formal split in YP is possible in the aftermath of the CEC elections.

However, the fact that Your Party Scotland has decided to contest the Holyrood election gives the opportunity to turn outwards to the working class with a fighting socialist policy. By standing for election on a pledge that Your Party MSPs will live on a workers' wage, will fight for no-cuts budgets, and for massive investment in public council housing and other public services, it can find new layers of support.

Socialist Party Scotland members are prepared to stand to become YP Scotland candidates with the aim of aiding this urgent process. With the threat from Reform and the failures of the SNP and Labour, as well as the Greens, there is an urgent need for a widespread socialist election challenge.

We will continue to make the case for the building of a mass working-class party based on the trade unions with a fighting socialist programme. Your Party Scotland is not that party, but it can still play a role in helping to make the case for socialism and mass working-class political representation.

Documentary film review: The Revolution Will Not Be Televised

Eyewitness to the failed 2002 coup against Hugo Chávez and the popular fightback it provoked

CALLUM JOYCE

SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

On 11 April 2002, Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez was arrested and removed from power by leading figures in the Venezuelan military with the backing of big business, the private media, and religious leaders. The reforms of the past three years that had been implemented in the interests of the poor began to unravel and the rule of Chávez and his 'Bolivarian Revolution' was over.

Then less than 48 hours later, the military coup was aborted, Chávez was back in the presidential palace, and the leaders of the new government were fleeing abroad with their tails between their legs. How this remarkable series of events took place is the subject of this highly interesting 2003 documentary which follows the struggles of that month as they unfolded.

Chávez had been elected in 1998 with a huge landslide in opposition to the neoliberal policies of previous governments. Using the country's revenue from its position as one of the world's largest oil exporters, the new regime began to implement reforms that would benefit the peasants and the urban poor who comprised over 80% of the population.

Interviews with Chávez supporters show what the impact of the reforms has been on their outlook: "Politics meant nothing to us. One group got rich while we got nothing. But now we're really interested in politics, because politics is now about participation and democracy."

Opposition

But support for the new government is not universal. The right-wing opposition, led mainly by those who benefited under the previous pro-capitalist regimes, decide to take action when Chávez replaces the heads of the crucial state oil company with his own supporters.

The opposition leaders and the lackeys of the ruling class are flown to Washington DC to discuss their concerns with the US government. The motivation behind these discussions is casually made clear by the then-director of the CIA: "Venezuela is important because they're the third largest supplier of petroleum. I would say Mr. Chávez... probably doesn't have the interests of the United States at heart."

Leading Venezuelan military figures are interviewed on national television, warning Chávez to resign or face an ominous threat of 'action'. In a country with a history of military coups, the meaning could not be any more obvious! The first loyalty of the tops of the military and the state forces is to the status quo and the interests of capitalism - not to any democratically elected president or the wishes of the population.



PHOTO: VITAGRAPH FILMS

Huge protests

A huge protest is whipped up outside the state oil company headquarters, but at the last minute they decide to march on the presidential palace instead. As they arrive they meet a rally of Chávez supporters and tensions quickly reach boiling point. The documentary footage captures the awful moments as shots ring out and a number of Chávez supporters are shot through the head by sniper fire. Some inevitably return fire - in Venezuela a quarter of people carry handguns - and a shootout ensues between small sections of the opposing crowds.

The military leaders capitalise on the chaos and swiftly intervene as they had always planned - a fact which they happily admitted to in television interviews afterwards! Troops surround the presidential palace and demand that Chávez resign or the tanks will open fire.

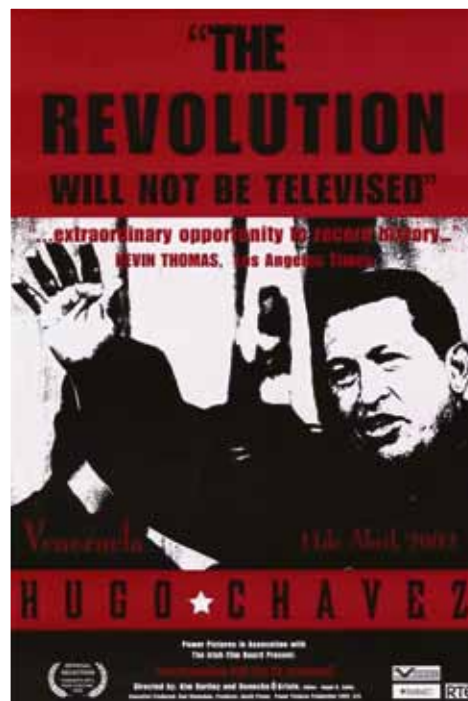
Chávez is arrested and the reins

of government are handed to the opposition. It all appears to be over, but one Chávez supporter foreshadows what the military and capitalist leaders have failed to anticipate - the reaction of the masses: "Wait and see, tomorrow there'll be a bloodbath in Caracas [Venezuela's capital]. People aren't going to stand for this."

The following day the media begins spreading the story that Chávez has willingly agreed to resign. Pedro Carmona, head of Fedecámaras - the main federation of big business in Venezuela - is sworn in as the new president. The National Assembly and the Supreme Court are dissolved. Numerous speeches about the return of freedom and democracy are made, interspersed with footage of brutal police repression and live rounds fired at Chávez supporters in

the street.

Despite deception by the media, news slowly begins to spread that Chávez has not resigned, but



The real Chávez legacy

The February edition of Socialism Today reprints an article by Tony Sauniois that was first published in the April 2013 edition of Socialism Today, No.167. This was following the death of Hugo Chávez, Maduro's predecessor, and draws up a balance sheet of the legacy of Chávez and the 'Bolivarian revolution'. The article warns that despite Chávez implementing reforms to the benefit of the poor masses in Venezuela, unless the revolution were to go further and break with capitalism the way would be paved for a growth in corruption, inefficiency, and economic sabotage and collapse. These processes were greatly intensified and accelerated under Maduro, who sought even more to accommodate with capitalism, resulting in the economy collapsing by a mind blowing 80% during his presidency, fatally undermining the previous economic and social gains of 'Chavismo'.

Monthly magazine of the Socialist Party

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is being held prisoner. The new government is not legitimate. More importantly, the reforms that have begun to lift some of the weight of grinding poverty are in danger. The 'whip of counter-revolution' spurs the masses out onto the streets once more - chants of "Chávez, the people are with you!" ring out as tens of thousands march on the presidential palace.

Protesting masses

The leaders of the interim government and the generals hole up, protected by the presidential guard. But they are oblivious to the processes taking place, even in their own state forces. All of a sudden they are surrounded as the presidential guard proclaims its loyalty to Chávez and seizes the presidential palace, to great cheers from the protesting masses outside. Messages of support from troops and low-ranking officers around the country flood in to protest how they have been lied to by their leaders.

The coup plotters just manage to escape, but it's clear the game is up. Any attempt now to deploy the military against the movement would see it split apart in their hands. Grudgingly, they are forced to return Chávez to the jubilant crowds: "He's back! He's back!" The 'all-powerful' state apparatus and the ruling capitalist class behind it are paralysed before the might of the masses.

But in his first speech Chávez calls for calm. The protesters are encouraged to return home and Chávez later promises there will be no 'witch-hunt' against those involved in the coup. The machinery of the capitalist state is left in one piece and the Venezuelan ruling class - which, despite the important reforms carried out, is still in control of the decisive levers of the economy - is left to regroup and plot its revenge.

No clear programme

There is no doubting the genuine intentions of Chávez and the genuine support of the poor for his reforms, including their willingness to go out and fight for them, as shown in this documentary. But without a clear programme to dismantle the profit-driven anarchy of capitalism and a clear perspective for what type of struggle is needed to break the resistance of the ruling class, those reforms can only be temporary and will always be under threat.

Absent from the events in Venezuela in 2002 is any party explaining the need for such a programme and organising to fight for it. The situation in the country today, with the collapse of the economy, millions having left the country, and the unravelling of many of Chávez's reforms, is a graphic demonstration of the consequences.

Anyone seeking to understand the situation in Venezuela today will gain valuable insights from this fascinating documentary and be aided in drawing the key lessons about how future struggles to transform society in the interests of workers and the poor can succeed.

• The Revolution Will Not Be Televised is available to watch on YouTube, Vimeo and other online video platforms

Film review: The Seed of the Sacred Fig

Powerful thriller captures 2022 Iranian 'Women, Life, Freedom' movement

CHRIS NEWBY

TOWER HAMLETS SOCIALIST PARTY

In the last 18 months there have been at least three films produced by Iranian directors released outside of Iran that in their different ways are critical of the Iranian regime: 'My Favourite Cake', 'The Seed of the Sacred Fig' and 'It Was Just an Accident'. These films all reflect a mood of opposition to the regime in Iran that has now broken out into mass protests. The directors of all these films have faced restrictions by the regime, with the director of 'It Was Just an Accident' Jafar Panahi regularly being imprisoned.

The director of 'The Seed of the Sacred Fig', Mohammad Rasoulof, before the release of this film was served with an eight years jail sentence and flogging, and was forced to flee Iran along with some of the actors and production team. This film is set around the time of the 'Women, Life, Freedom' mass movement that developed in 2022 following the murder in custody of Mahsa Amini.

The film centres around the character of Iman and his family. Iman is a lawyer who has just received a

promotion to a position of government prosecutor, which brings with it an increase in his standard of living. But it also has potential dangers for which he is given a gun. This gun plays a central part in the film, particularly when it goes missing. Iman is clearly a supporter of the regime and is angered when his daughters show support for the protests, and even more so when the eldest daughter gets involved in the movement. This gives an indication of how those people related to the regime could be affected by these protests and how youthful they are.

The film is very well made, at times a thriller and at times very fast paced, with some excellent performances particularly Soheila Golestani who plays Najmeh, Iman's wife, who develops from supporting her husband to being an ally of her daughters. One of the more powerful parts of the film is the use of actual footage of the protests taken from protesters' phones, with one filming their own shooting by a member of the security services.

This film is available on many online platforms and I would encourage everyone who can to watch it.



PHOTO: RUN WAY PICTURES

Film review: I Swear

A film about ordinary people making extraordinary change



PHOTO: BANKSIDE FILMS

JOHN WILLIAMS

CARDIFF CENTRAL SOCIALIST PARTY

'I Swear' is the true story of John Davidson, who develops Tourette syndrome as a young child. Tourette's is a neurological condition where the brain sends unwanted signals, causing repeated movements or sounds (tics) that the person doesn't mean to do. These can include blinking, throat clearing, sniffing, or grunting, though swearing (coprolalia) is rare, and typically improves in adolescence. Tourette's can also involve co-occurring conditions like ADHD or OCD, managed through therapy or medication.

At the beginning of the film, we see how John develops Tourette's and how this hugely negatively affects his life as he gets older. Swearing at his teacher and getting into fights at school lead to him being hit with a whip. It was tearful to see John get into dangerous situations in his life, which was no making of his own. In one scene, he calls a woman a derogatory name, only to be badly beaten up by a group of men as he walked home and was put into hospital.

The acting was powerful, as we saw him put on a mask to protect himself from the dangerous world he was even sympathetic to people who laughed and even hurt him. Watching it, I could only feel anger at society and British institutions who mocked him and weren't even willing to believe

him when he said he wasn't doing it for attention. From teachers, to the police, to judges.

But as the film progresses, it does bring back your faith in humanity. It was only when he meets his friend's mother, Dottie Achenbach, and his boss Tommy Trotter, who works as a caretaker, that John feels like he can do something about it. As Tommy says: "I don't think Tourette's is the problem. People not knowing about Tourette's is the problem... educate them". And that's exactly what he does and is able to forge links with other sufferers, their parents, and institutions too.

The comedy of the film is very well timed too. And what's good about it, is that it doesn't make you feel bad for finding swearing randomly funny. I think the film did that so we didn't think Tourette's was a taboo, and that we could discuss openly about how it made us feel.

Yes, the development of the story is predictable, but that's exactly what you'd expect from a feel-good true story of a brave, honest and remarkable man who helped change our perceptions of Tourette's. Ordinary people making extraordinary change. Society moulds heroes like John because that is what society needs to make it more progressive. And as soon as John had the power to stop people and make them listen, they immediately understood.

• I Swear is available to watch now on Amazon Prime, YouTube and other platforms, as well as some cinemas

£1 / £2 solidarity price

socialistparty.org.uk



the Socialist

Issue 1355

12-18 February 2026

formerly **Militant**

ADAM HARMSWORTH
COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

Every day we see the impact of over a decade of underinvestment. Our roads and buildings are literally crumbling, our council taxes are always going up and the services we rely on get worse or go.

But on social media, Labour boasts about a “huge boost to council funding”, with the tagline “Investment, not decline”. The reality is, the “investment” is mostly from council tax hikes, and many will get a decline in services anyway.

The government is giving barely any new money to councils. Instead, the ‘funding boost’ assumes councils raise council taxes by 5% every year, which will harm many already impoverished households. Labour has also taken over £2 billion from some councils to give to others. The worse-off councils will be looking to make even deeper cuts – closing more youth clubs and libraries, slashing more council jobs, reducing funding to charities.

But even the councils in receipt of the £2 billion aren’t in the clear. After a decade and a half of brutal austerity, any slight improvements to services will not make a dent in the devastating decline.

Over the next month, councils will set their budgets for the year ahead. Whoever runs your council - Labour, Tory, Green, Reform - you can be sure that they will make you pay more yet again. Reform have shown their true colours: raising taxes and cutting essential services. And Green councillors unfortunately undermine their party’s national anti-austerity message by doing the same.

Councillors do not have to accept austerity. Councils can oppose cuts and fund the services people need, and rally the working class to demand the money we need from government. Keir Starmer’s government is weak. A socialist anti-austerity stand in the May council elections could win seats, challenge establishment parties in the council chamber, and start to win back the funding that has been stolen from us.

This is an appeal to any reader who agrees that we need to fight for decent local services – stand in the May council elections on an anti-austerity working class programme!

• Visit tusc.org.uk to find out more about the planned anti-austerity socialist stand

FIGHT COUNCIL TAX RISES AND CUTS

Working-class fighters need to stand

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



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ISSN 1366-9621