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Issue 1356 | 19 February - 4 March 2026 | formerly Militant

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CREATE JOBS

THE WORKING CLASS NEEDS ITS OWN PARTY

Join the socialist, anti-cuts election stand!

SHEILA CAFFREY
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE AND NEU EXECUTIVE MEMBER (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

The working class is angry. We had a taste of our potential power during the 2022-23 strike wave, we can see through the Labour government's lies, and we're pushing back.

Education workers in the National Education Union (NEU) are launching a national ballot next month to fight against workload, funding cuts and redundancies. And other workers in the public sector - ravaged by austerity cuts and privatisation - can fight back too.

Birmingham Labour Council has been to court, trying to push through an injunction to hinder solidarity action with bin workers fighting against extreme pay cuts and cuts to health and safety. Phlebotomists in Gloucestershire have been on strike for months to win a regrading pay rise that recognises them as vital health workers.

But politically, we don't have a voice. None of the capitalist establishment parties represent us. This Labour government represses protests, passes bills backing the bosses, and implements further cuts and privatisation.

We clearly need a new party - one that is built by us, controlled by us and led by us. One that is part of the working-class and trade union fightback for the jobs, pay, and services we need.

The May elections are an enormous opportunity to stand hundreds of trade unionists and working-class fighters, putting forward what is needed to win.

Without a working-class alternative, many will look to express their anger and frustration by voting for Nigel Farage's Reform UK. But like all the other mainstream parties, Reform promise more of the same cuts, closures and redundancies, and help the bosses by trying to divide our class.

We need people who will stand fighting for funding for health, education and public services. A programme of mass council house building and an end to homelessness. A programme that is built on what working-class communities need and will fight for, one that smashes the lies that 'it's not affordable' by pointing to the obscene wealth of the super-rich and fights for socialist change.

If you support that, it's time for you to step forward! Come and stand with us, as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), to fight for what is needed.

SOCIALIST STUDENTS CONFERENCE ▸▸▸ p8-9 | STARMER'S CRISIS HEADACHE FOR BOSSES ▸▸▸ p4 | PALESTINE ACTION RULING DEFEAT FOR LABOUR ▸▸▸ p3 | GREEN COUNCILLORS: YOU CAN FIGHT CUTS! ▸▸▸ p5

the Socialist
formerly Militant

Issue 1356
19 February - 4 March 2026

DO YOU HAVE NEWS FOR US?
The Socialist is written, read, sold and bought by ordinary workers, trade unionists, young people and Socialist Party members. We want you to write for the Socialist.

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

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DEADLINES
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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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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socialistworld.net

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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



Flooding in 2024 TCEXPLORER/CC

Flooding: capitalism puts profit over our safety

JAMES COLLETT
SOUTH WEST SOCIALIST PARTY

Following weeks of wet weather, across Britain people's homes have been flooded, crops are in danger of rotting in fields underneath the floodwater, transport infrastructure has been damaged and even graveyards have been flooded.

The Met Office estimates that at current levels of global warming, very wet winters like 2023-24 have gone from being once in 80-year events to once in 20. And with further warming this could become even more frequent.

Flood defences

The bosses' capitalist system puts profits above all else, including preventing climate catastrophe. And these same priorities are applied to flood defence: decisions come down to the value of what is being protected vs the cost of protecting it. It's no wonder that working-class people again and again find that their homes are left vulnerable to flooding. The ruling class doesn't care about us – for them, value is measured in money, not our quality of life. Decisions about where to build houses, often on flood plains, aren't made democratically by the people that live there but by unelected, unaccountable penny pinchers.

In the upcoming May elections we need workers' candidates standing up for our interests, not the interests of the super-rich and their crumbling system. Candidates that, if elected, would vote against all cuts to jobs and services, instead putting forward people's budgets that are based on the needs of working-class communities. That includes flood defences and environmental protections decided by us, not by big business and their politicians. Elected committees of workers and local residents could decide democratically what is needed in their communities to protect housing and infrastructure from flooding, as well as environmental measures that create jobs.

This has to be linked to building mass campaigns to force central government to fully fund local authorities, and to the fight for socialism: for a democratic plan of production nationally and internationally to sustainably produce what's needed. This can only be done by taking big businesses into public ownership, under workers' control and management, so that we control what's produced and how it's produced.

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Windsor and Maidenhead residents to face 7.49% tax hike!

NEIL ADAMS
SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBER IN WINDSOR

Residents of the Liberal Democrat controlled Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead are to face another council tax rise above the so-called maximum 4.99%.

The Labour government has granted the council the power to raise the tax by 7.49% from April 2026 (one of seven councils that have received this permission), following last year's increase of 8.99%.

The council's excuse is that the borough has a council tax level below average. And changes to the allocation of grant funding this year will see them £30 million worse off: "one of the biggest losers nationally".

The council's draft budget for 2026-27 states that the council will have a £50 million shortfall in funding that, they say, will increase to £112 million by 2030-31 if rises are kept at the standard 4.99%.

They will also, yet again, be looking to the government for Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) which is a form of government loan. This is granted to councils that are in danger of having to issue a section 114 notice, creating a repayment burden in future budgets.

So, on the cards will be years of further exorbitant council tax rises until we are at the same crippling levels seen elsewhere. Added to this, the council plans to implement £8.8 million in 'savings' (cuts to you and me) for 2026-27 with around three quarters of this targeting health and social care.

Contrast this with the nauseating opulence of the royal family residing here at our expense, facing no kind of funding shortfall or being asked to pay more for less!

We need councillors that are prepared to use spending powers to set no-cuts budgets and build a fight back to demand the actual funding needed from central government, rather than EFS loans and tax hikes!



End this rotten system – fund the fight for socialism

ISAI MARIJERLA
SOCIALIST PARTY TREASURER

This year's Socialist Party Congress (28 February – 2 March) is taking place in an increasingly volatile and polarised period. The crises of capitalism and its failure to provide a decent future for the majority is being exposed more and more.

Part of our Congress is a financial appeal to all members and supporters to help fund our work - so we can promote the socialist ideas needed to end this rotten system. You can donate online at www.socialistparty.org.uk/donate or by scanning the QR code:

The Epstein files have exposed the brutal exploitation and corruption that is part and parcel of the capitalist system. Keir Starmer, while surviving the latest calls for his resignation, is now weaker and even more unpopular. He is now the most unpopular Prime Minister for 50 years, essentially because, like the Tories before him, he is overseeing a system run in the interests of the bosses against the working class and young people.

In this year's May elections, we are fighting for the biggest possible anti-cuts stand, against all the divisive austerity establishment parties. What we need is clear: we need more resources and funding for vital services, jobs that pay us well, secure homes, and a party to fight for it.

The Socialist Party is the most determined fighter for the working class to have its own party, and we are confident that we have the ideas and programme to bring about the much-needed system change in the interest of the working class and young people. Help us to spread our ideas, and build our party. Donate today!

This issue of the Socialist covers the fortnight from 19 February to 4 March. During this time, the Socialist Party is holding its national congress which will discuss and debate the political situation in Britain and the world, and the tasks for building support for socialism. To allow the hundreds of delegates and visitors to prepare for this conference, many of whom write for the Socialist alongside work, studies and political campaigning, the next issue of the Socialist will be published on 5 March.

DO YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?
- *Send your news, views and criticism, to editors@socialistparty.org.uk - or PO Box 1398, Enfield EN1 9GT*
- *We reserve the right to shorten and edit letters. For legal reasons, we need your full name, address and phone number - but confidentiality will be respected if requested*

THE SOCIALIST INBOX

Jim Ratcliffe: Not my views. Not at my club.

It's not usual for billionaires to bite the hands that feed them by making racist comments like Manchester United owner Jim Ratcliffe.

Ratcliffe had a go at "nine million people on benefits"; some of them will be those thrown into unemployment when he shutdown his Grangemouth oil refinery in April 2025. And, textbook billionaire tactics, he deployed some divide and rule, claiming Britain has been "colonised by immigrants", for which he eventually made a mealy-mouthed apology.

He might be looking favourably at Reform leader Nigel Farage now, but Ratcliffe switched from backing Tories to Labour in 2024, anything to accumulate profit. A decade ago, he was a multi-millionaire. His personal wealth is now estimated at £17 billion. In 2020 he moved his tax residency to Monaco so he pays zero tax in the UK.

In 2024 he became part-owner of Manchester United Football Club and sacked 250 low-paid workers. They weren't responsible for money being leeched from the club unlike the majority owners – the Glazer family – who have benefited to the tune of £1.2 billion in two decades!

There is disquiet within the club. Ratcliffe has virtually ignored the women's team competing in Europe for the first time. Fans say the only things he's interested in are rebuilding Old Trafford stadium and pre-season foreign tours, both for personal profit accumulation. Many believe on-field results only matter to him because they make the club more attractive to the best players so he can make more money.

It was very noticeable this week that Manchester United issued an official club statement recommitting to their stance of equality for all. The wording shows this clearly wasn't Ratcliffe's idea!

As I was writing this article, I watched United win the 'minderby' – the match between the two Manchester under-18 sides. Playing for United were Godwill Kukonki, Bendito Mantato and Yuel Helafu, all English-born into reasonably recent migrant families and all tipped for careers at the higher levels of football. Do you think for one minute Ratcliffe considered the effects his 'colonisation' comments may have made on these youngsters? Of course not! But he may find the supporters did.

Not our views. Not at our club.

DAVE GORTON





Protesters fighting the ban on Palestine Action faced mass arrests PAUL MATTSSON

Palestine Action ban: Labour suffers defeat in the Supreme Court

Mass workers' action can defend the right to protest

CALLUM JOYCE
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

In another humiliating setback for Starmer's Labour, High Court judges have ruled that the proscription of Palestine Action last year was 'unlawful.' The proscription of Palestine Action as a terrorist organisation made membership punishable by a potential prison sentence of 14 years. Over 2,500 people have been arrested since then simply for opposing the ban and showing support for Palestine Action, although none have so far gone to trial for any offence. These trials have been paused as home secretary Shabana Mahmood is appealing the judgement, meaning membership of the groups is still banned.

This judgement follows another rebuff to the government's attacks on the right to protest when six members of the 'Filton 24' were found to be not guilty on charges of aggravated burglary and the jury refused to convict them of other charges after they allegedly broke into and sabotaged a weapons factory (see 'Filton 24 verdict: mass workers' action can defend the right to protest' at socialistparty.org.uk).

Capitalist state

This ruling is not simply the result of courts acting as 'neutral' arbiters of justice or defenders of democracy, but is in reality a reflection of the huge anti-war sentiment that exists in society and the anger against the attempts of this increasingly unpopular government to attack our democratic right to protest. The courts and judges - the majority of whom are drawn from privileged backgrounds - have a long history of ruling in favour of the ruling class and the status quo against working-class, anti-war, and socialist activists.

The courts' role is ultimately to defend the interests of the bosses' system. They have been forced to recognise the Labour government has gone too far in attempting to ban Palestine Action at this stage, given the balance of forces in society. Even a number of Labour MPs and other senior political figures were forced to come out in opposition at the time of the ban - in truth, not because of their support for the anti-war movement, but because of their fear of the backlash that the ban could generate.

The protests against the proscription of the group, as well as the huge anti-war demonstrations that have continued regularly in London and around the country, have no doubt exerted considerable pressure leading to the court's outcome. This should be celebrated as a victory by anti-war activists but, with the appeal ongoing, the fight is not over. It is clear that the unchallenged proscription of Palestine Action would have set a precedent that could have been used in the future against other anti-war groups and workers' or socialist organisations as well. Overturning the ban will make it harder for the government to easily implement further authoritarian measures as they attempt to cut across the growing opposition to their pro-war, anti-working class policies.

Workers' action

But we cannot rely on the capitalist courts and legal procedures to defend our democratic rights. Only continuing to build mass pressure from the working class can hold back future attacks by this government. Birmingham City Council is currently seeking an injunction to ban the picketing of bin depots by anyone in support of the heroic bin strike that is taking place (see page 6).

> **Only continuing to build mass pressure from the working class can hold back future attacks by this government**

If the TUC (Trades Union Congress) organised a national demonstration against Labour's austerity, as was agreed at its conference last year, this would signal to the government that attempts to attack and oppress the working class will not be tolerated. A broad stand of socialist candidates in this May's elections, backed up by the trade union movement, would also pose the idea of a concrete alternative to Starmer's Labour and would build confidence that it is possible to fight back against their austerity onslaught and undemocratic policies.

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

Starmer's crisis a headache for bosses

Unions must lead fight for a workers' alternative

Socialist Party

WHAT WE THINK

Keir Starmer started the new year with net approval ratings (-66 points) lower than any prime minister since polling records begun in the 1970s. The sordid revelations from the Epstein files, going to the heart of the Blairite Labour Party machine of which Starmer is the figurehead, will only have deepened his unpopularity.

For now, Starmer remains prime minister of choice for the majority of the capitalist class. "The longer the prime minister fails to turn things around… and the more his misjudgements pile up, the less compelling the argument will become that his continued leadership is the lesser of two evils," the Financial Times (FT) puts it.

Any illusions that his Labour rule might be more stable than the Tories that preceded it, tearing themselves apart, will be melting away.

Starmer might not yet reach two years in office. In the unlikely event that he were to survive as prime minister leading a single-party majority in parliament past the three-year milestone, he would be the first to do so since Tony Blair. In other words, since the 2007-08 economic crisis.

The Epstein Files revelations again expose to millions the rottenness of the system and further undermine all its institutions. They come on top of a decade and a half of austerity attacks and stagnant living standards. In the 40 years to 2004-05, the typical income for the poorest half of working families doubled. At the current rate, a further doubling will take over 130 years, according to the latest report from the Resolution Foundation 'Unsung Britain.'

It is increasingly hard for the capitalist bosses to peddle the lie that their system is any longer capable of improving living standards and taking society forward. And it is increasingly hard to peddle the illusion that it is possible to improve things simply by electing a different set of capitalist politicians, without the working class itself entering the fray.

The FT talks of "the lesser of two evils". For them, for now, the lesser is Starmer who finds himself significantly weakened and, to their frustration, less confident to force through the attacks on the working class that are asked of him.

The other 'evil' posed in the immediate term is his replacement as Labour leader. Such is the character of the overwhelming majority of the Parliamentary Labour Party, and the iron-like grip of the Blairites on the broader party machine, the prospect of a new leader fundamentally changing the character of Labour as a capitalist party is not posed.



Taxi for Starmer? PHOTO: NUMBER 10/CC

Nevertheless, the 'evil' comes from the fact that whoever it is will be forced to pose as being to Starmer's left to win – and so can be a conduit through which working-class anger is expressed. For the capitalists, that means further potential frustrations to forcing through attacks on the working class.

Reform

Undoubtedly there are sections of the capitalist class who would like to try to overcome those frustrations through the medium of a right-populist Reform government. Billionaire Sir Jim Ratcliffe, in spouting his reactionary bile about Britain being colonised by migrants, and of nine million workers 'choosing to live on benefits' - his real target - also said of Reform leader Nigel Farage: "I think Nigel is an intelligent man and I think he's got good intentions. But in a way, you could say exactly the same about [Sir] Keir Starmer. I think it needs somebody who's prepared to be unpopular for a period of time to get the big issues sorted out."

Recent months have seen a procession of Tories into the ranks of Reform. As well as trying to secure future political careers for themselves, it also represents a conscious attempt to 'prepare Reform for government,' as is the formal responsibility of former Tory Daniel Kruger MP.

As Donald Trump's second term as US president is demonstrating though, right-populism is not a stable form of rule either and will provoke struggles of the working class – as inevitably the coming to power of a future Reform government would. These are reasons why the majority of the capitalists would, for now, prefer to avoid it. It is why there will be continued attempts to discredit Farage and Reform from sections of the capitalist establishment and media – which, in turn, can for sections of the working class have the opposite effect of helping to burnish Farage's false anti-establishment credentials.

What can most effectively cut across working-class support for Reform is steps towards the working class having its own political representation. Sharon Graham, general secretary of Labour-affiliated Unite the union, the party's biggest union funder, took to the FT to warn: "Next year, Unite's conference will consider our current affiliation to the Labour Party; the mood music right now is to depart."

Socialist Party members in Unite have successfully won support for a motion to get it onto the table of the union's executive calling for "the convening of special policy and rules conferences to draw political and organisational conclusions, potentially including the building of a new workers' party, standing and supporting workers' candidates, calling for a conference across unions to build a political alternative for workers on a pro-worker, socialist programme."

Steps like those, taken by Unite or any other trade union, would fundamentally change the equations on the capitalists' slates, and would tip the balance towards the working class.

That the authority of all of the capitalist institutions is being undermined, that the divisions in the capitalist class over how best to govern in their interests are widening, and that Starmer's capitalist government is weakened, are all favourable for the working class.

The trade union leaders should be pressing that advantage by acting on the decision of the TUC to call a union-led demo against Labour austerity, as a step towards coordinating future industrial action.

The capitalist class faces its own crisis of political representation, decades in the making. Much deeper is the decades-long crisis of working-class political representation, since Tony Blair's 1990s transformation of the Labour Party into the completely capitalist New Labour. Their crisis will not be resolved, it is driven by the failure of the rotten, crisis-ridden capitalist system. The case for the working class to have its own mass party, however, is now posed more starkly than ever. The Socialist Party will continue to fight for the trade unions to play the lead in bringing one into existence.

TUSC replies to Sheffield's Green councillors: You can fight cuts!

A recent exchange between the Green councillors group in Sheffield and TUSC and Your Party supporters in the city has again raised the important question – what can councillors actually do to resist the austerity agenda facing local public services?

Sheffield council provides over 500 public services to the city's half-a-million plus population – ranging from housing, schools, social care, libraries, parks, youth services and culture, to pest control, waste disposal, street maintenance, 16 cemeteries, and more. It employs over 8,000 workers, including those in its capacity as a local education authority. Since 2022 it has been run by a coalition of the Labour Party (with 36 of the 84 councillors), the Liberal Democrats (27 councillors), and the Greens (14 councillors). There is one Reform councillor and no Tories, in the fifth-biggest city in England.

In the run-up to setting this year's council budget, the Sheffield Your Party 'proto-branch' organised a no-cuts people's budget conference to discuss a 'needs budget' for the city, and invited the Green councillors to participate. Now that Zack Polanski has been elected as the Green Party leader, the letter of invitation said: "We appeal to you to consider taking the bold stand of proposing a legally balanced no-cuts needs budget by using reserves and prudential borrowing powers.

"Such a people's budget", the letter went on, "could mobilise support from local trade unions and local communities to pressure the Labour government into restoring lost funding and, by your example, inspire other councils facing the same or worse budget situations to follow the same course of action.

"This government has already made several policy U-turns under the threat of parliamentary revolts; how much more pressure would be several large councils standing up for local people refusing to implement any more cuts? Set a no-cuts budget and demand the government fund it".

To their credit, the Green councillors discussed the issue at a group meeting and, on their behalf, the Gleadless ward councillor Alexi Dimond replied. Unfortunately, however, it was to confirm that the Greens would not be proposing a no-cuts budget.



A better plan? Not in Sheffield PHOTO: PETE BIRKINSHAW/CC

Why take responsibility for a Labour-Liberal Democrat budget?

The arguments raised by the Sheffield Greens against a no-cuts stand are not new. They have been answered by extensive guidance material produced by TUSC, based on the real experiences of presenting alternative budgets by TUSC-supporting councillors in Lewisham, Southampton, Hull, Leicester and Warrington – as all the others? If there were 14 socialists on the council of the fifth-biggest city in England they would not vote for austerity, full stop.

Scaremongering and reality

Is there any truth though in the Greens' scaremongering claims? Firstly, it is a red herring to talk about "setting an illegal budget" and, in fact, councils going 'bankrupt'.

Unlike in the US a council in Britain cannot go bust in the same way as a private company can. Only an act of parliament can dissolve a local authority; council services, and the financing to provide them, are implicitly underpinned by central government.

That's why, to maintain some control by central government of council spending, local authorities are legally required to set a 'balanced budget' each year before they can issue council tax bills, set service charges etc. That is why TUSC does not advocate presenting deliberately 'unbalanced budgets' to council budget-making meetings or using the meetings to not set a budget at all.

But presenting a no-cuts People's Budget that is formally 'balanced' by the use of prudential borrowing powers and reserves, to buy time to build a mass campaign for government funding while still maintaining the functioning of the council, is a different matter. This is the strategy that has been pioneered by TUSC.

Yes, this would not avoid a potential clash down the line with council chief finance officers (CFOs) or the government. The alternative budgets that were presented by TUSC-supporting councillors were not positively recommended by council officers. But neither could they be ruled as 'illegal', or 'deliberately unbalanced'. The use of borrowing powers and reserves to meet projected deficits – including reserves previously 'earmarked' for other purposes – is, by statute, a 'matter of judgement' for councillors to make.

Fundamentally, to say that the technical means cannot be found to avoid making cuts is wrong. But it is not, above all, a technical question. The key ingredient to fighting back is the political will to do so.

If you don't fight, you'll always lose

The Sheffield Greens' reply completely avoids the points in the letter of invitation of what impact an anti-austerity stand could have in mobilising public support, in the city and outside – including on the other 800 or so Green councillors up and down the country. Instead it asks for 'evidence' that a fight wouldn't lose – proof of a negative – which the Greens might take to the £100k plus-a-year CFO or the cross-party (but currently Labour-led) Local Government Association to "get advice". As if they are the impartial arbiters on what public services working-class people should have and how they should be fought for!

Are the Green councillors really saying that it would not be possible to force Starmer to retreat on local council funding? TUSC doesn't think so. As our co-founder, the general secretary of the RMT transport workers' union the late Bob Crow, used to say: "If you fight you might not always win. But if you don't fight you'll always lose". And hopefully there will be many working-class community campaigners, trade union fighters and socialists who will come forward with that spirit to take up the fight against council austerity as candidates at the ballot box in May.

- **Read the article in full, including the full correspondence with the Green councillors at tusc.org.uk**

TRADE UNIONIST AND SOCIALIST COALITION

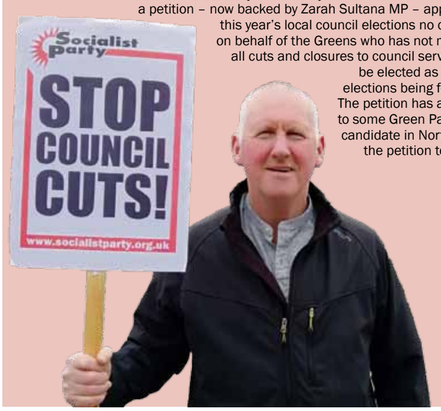
TUSC AGAINST CUTS

tusc.org.uk

Sign the Greens Must Pledge: No Cuts To Services petition

At the end of January over twenty current and former trade union executive members launched a petition – now backed by Zarah Sultana MP – appealing to 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 May 7th", in the first set of elections being fought since he became the party's leader. The petition has already had an impact in giving confidence to some Green Party members to make a stand. One Green candidate in North London has not only signed it but taken the petition to others in his borough group to do so too.

- **https://www.change.org/GreensMustPledgeNoCuts**



Birmingham bins: Labour council attempts injunction against 'persons unknown'

In recent months, independent activists supporting striking Birmingham bin workers have been disrupting bin collections by standing and walking in front of bin lorries at the depot gates. Having already outrageously obtained an undemocratic injunction to prevent bin workers themselves conducting normal legitimate picketing, the council is currently applying the courts to prevent any and every "persons unknown" from doing so anywhere within the city.

The Socialist has received this anonymous letter:



PHOTOS: BIRMINGHAM SOCIALIST PARTY

As one of the so-called "persons unknown" now targeted by an injunction application from Labour Birmingham City Council, I am more convinced than ever that this legal offensive is about suppressing effective solidarity, not solving a dispute. The council's own evidence shows just how rattled it has become by the determination of Birmingham's refuse workers and their supporters. After fourteen months of strikes backed by Unite the Union, the authority is now asking the courts to criminalise tactics that have exposed the reality of its pay-cut agenda, increased the pressure on the council and hampered its scabbing operations. The council admitted during the court hearing that collections are down 50% and it is struggling to cope.

Solidarity has grown because people across Birmingham understand what is at stake. These workers face losses of thousands of pounds a year, while senior management salaries remain untouched. That injustice has mobilised trade unionists and campaigners, including support networks coordinated through Strike Map and the National Shop Stewards Network. Their involvement reflects a wider recognition: an attack on one group of workers is an attack on all.

The council claims it only wants to prevent 'disruption', but the disruption has been caused by the council's attack on the workers, which the action of supporters is aimed at forcing employers to negotiate to resolve. If granted, this injunction could threaten protesters with fines, asset seizure, or even prison, simply for standing with workers. That is a dangerous precedent. It reveals how quickly legal mechanisms can be deployed to curtail collective action when it proves effective.

The protests outside depots have been peaceful, disciplined, and rooted in a proud tradition of working-class people standing together in solidarity. Supporters have used slow walking and a mass presence to highlight that a service built on slashing workers' wages is not sustainable.

Yet instead of negotiating seriously, the council has stated that it is prepared to dip into its reserves to bankroll lawyers and injunctions. It will spend to break the strike, but not to settle it. That choice speaks volumes about Labour's priorities in a city already struggling with years of cuts and declining services.

This should increase questions for the leadership of unions that remain affiliated to the Labour Party, not least Unite. Many workers hoped that the change of government would mean a rollback of anti-union restrictions. Instead, we are seeing the same old playbook: wage cuts imposed, resistance met with lawfare, and democratic protest portrayed as the problem rather than the policy that provoked it.

Whatever the court decides, the dispute will not be resolved through injunctions. It will end only when the council negotiates a fair settlement. Until then, "persons unknown", and this should mean the whole trade union movement, must and will remain standing shoulder to shoulder with the bin workers - both industrially and politically - defending their livelihoods and the principle that solidarity is not a crime.

By P. Unknown

Strike against closure at Essex uni

ELEANOR DONNE
ESSEX SOCIALIST PARTY

Academic staff at Essex University started a week of strike action on 12 February to defend their jobs and stop the proposed closure of the Southend Campus of the university (see 'Stop closure of Essex Uni's Southend Campus' at socialistparty.org.uk). Essex Socialist Party members spoke to University and College Union (UCU) pickets at the Southend Campus.

200 teaching jobs are at risk at Essex, plus a further 200 admin and student support roles, with redundancy notices due in May. Unison, representing non-teaching staff, is starting to ballot its members at Southend and Colchester, with Unite also considering action. It is vital that support continues to be built among students too, in preparation for the action that could be necessary if the plans to close the campus continue.

The university has now said it is cutting the 'Pathways' programme, which aims to bring working-class 'non-traditional' students into higher education. Up to 80% of the Pathways workforce are to go.

The University of Essex 'Manifesto' says that it is on the side of "people with guts - rebels with a cause". This clearly needs a rewrite, though perhaps not by the vice chancellor on her £280,000 salary…

In fact, university management have tried to operate a hostile environment for unions, cutting Unison's facility time, and removing a Unison regional organiser from the campus!

The main strike rally was at the Colchester Campus, addressed by Paul Nowak, General Secretary of the TUC. He called on the government to 'step up and end the broken fees system'.

University bosses should of course be held to account for poor planning or even mismanagement of finances. But universities cannot and should not be run like commercial companies. Education should be publicly funded.

Imperial uni joint union fight on pay

MARY FINCH
UNISON REP, PERSONAL CAPACITY

Imperial College London workers in Unite, the University and College Union (UCU) and Unison are continuing our local strike campaign for a real pay rise. Management imposed a 2% pay increase in 2025 - another real-terms pay cut, after years of below-inflation increases.

Management refused to negotiate with the joint trade unions. They claimed that 2% was all Imperial could afford, but we know now that the university's financial position is far better than expected, with an operating surplus £51 million higher than projected last year!

Pay at Imperial is benchmarked against other London institutions, supposedly meaning that staff are offered higher salaries than other employers. The joint trade unions uncovered serious errors in the benchmarking data used to justify the 2% increase - it produced results which are statistically impossible. Management acknowledges the inaccuracies, but staggeringly, refuses to correct them.

So far, they've also refused to negotiate over last year's pay offer. 2026 pay negotiations will begin in April. It's clear that Imperial can afford a real pay rise, and united action by all three trade unions can win one.

Real-terms pay cuts, threatened job losses and course closures are becoming commonplace in universities everywhere, not just at Imperial.

Determined action by trade unions can and has pushed back these attacks. The Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) imposed a 1.5% pay increase in 2021. Unite, Unison and UCU members rejected the offer and took part in a national, coordinated strike in 2022 - and the pay offer was doubled to 3%! This was nowhere near enough, but it shows what's possible when workers fight back.

Solent UCU strike grows

Support continues to grow for the University and College Union (UCU) strike at Solent University, where lecturers are facing fire and rehire and attacks on their pensions. Branch membership has increased by 25% since the start of the dispute. Despite the impact the strike has on students, strikers report their students are overwhelmingly supportive. The picket on 17 February was joined by members of Southampton TUC, local Unison branch members, and Socialist Students members building solidarity for the strike. UCU members are discussing how they can escalate the action if management don't respond.

NICK CHAFFEY, SOUTHERN AND SOUTH EAST SOCIALIST PARTY


Solent SOCIALIST PARTY

Union members in universities have taken strike action over pay again in 2026, although UCU missed the Tory turnout threshold (disgracefully kept in place by Labour) in a national ballot. Many universities are fighting enormous cuts and closures. Coordinating the national and local disputes is essential. It is vital to build up towards a genuinely national fight in 2026 for the future of higher education.

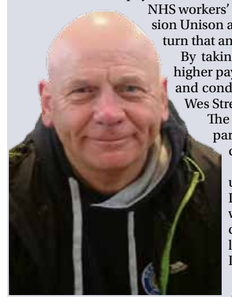
Reject 3.3% NHS pay cut: Prepare for strike action now!

The Labour government has announced it will impose the below-inflation, 3.3% pay increase on NHS workers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, as recommended by the widely discredited NHS Pay Review Body (PRB).

Adrian O'Malley, Yorkshire and Humberside, standing for re-election to Unison Health Service Group Executive, says (in a personal capacity):

After inviting the trade unions to talks over a possible multi-year pay deal and much-needed pay structure improvements for Bands 2 to 5 before Christmas, the Labour government has backtracked and followed the PRB recommendation. It was clearly playing with the staff while preparing to impose yet another below-inflation pay rise. Unison and the other main NHS unions, the Royal College of Nursing, Unite and GMB, all have policies for direct negotiations over pay with the government instead of the PRB, as is the case in Scotland.

Helga Pile, Unison head of health, said: "Hard-pressed NHS staff will be downright angry at another below-inflation pay rise."



NHS workers' anger, after two decades of pay austerity, is totally justified. But the decision Unison and the NHS unions have to make is what do we do about it? How do we turn that anger into action?

By taking strong and consistent strike action, the resident doctors have won higher pay increases and direct negotiations with the NHS bosses over pay, terms and conditions. This despite the constant vilification by Labour health secretary Wes Streeting, Keir Starmer and the billionaire media.

The NHS unions must lodge a national dispute immediately. We must prepare the ground for coordinated strike action as early as possible to coincide with the imposition of this insulting award.

The continuation of the Tories' austerity pay policy can be beaten by a united NHS workforce acting in solidarity together. This weak and rotten Labour government, continuing Tory austerity, cannot be trusted by NHS workers. They have made U-turn after U-turn after imposing anti-working class policies. We can force another U-turn by standing together and delivering coordinated strike action across England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Adrian O'Malley

Len Hockey, Unite branch secretary at Barts Health Trust, standing for election to Unite Executive Council, says:

Labour's imposed 3.3% pay 'deal' will further anger overworked health workers. With the RPI rate of inflation standing at 4.2%, the pay increase amounts to a substantial real-terms pay cut.

Nearly all the unions have boycotted the review body, including my union. Allegedly independent 'experts', it has delivered real-terms pay cuts over years, with parameters set by government, including its 'financial envelope'.

As Unite general secretary Sharon Graham said: "It beggars belief that a Labour government should seek to ride roughshod over the health unions when deciding on NHS pay."

Pay is also being cut by some trusts by other means, including down-banding and fire and rehire. Intertwined are the policies of both pay erosion and involvement of for-profit organisations in our NHS. By continually cheapening, debasing and devaluing the workforce, burgeoning privatisation is increasing at scale.

The response from all health unions must be immediate. That must mean coordinated sustained strike action.

Local, regional and national rallies should be organised, with reps' meetings in constituent unions called, and joint union meetings at all levels: in hospitals, districts and regions, and nationally.

Rumours at possible attempts to divide medical staff from the wider workforce, if true, need to be met with unified action and called out for what they are: attempts at divide and rule.

The actions by Labour, including the Mandelson scandal, give added urgency to the review of Unite's relationship with pro-capitalist Labour agreed at the July 2025 national conference. We cannot wait till 2027. Unite should call an emergency rules conference and end affiliation to the party. We need our funds used only to support council and parliamentary candidates, including health workers, that stand for our union's policies.


Len Hockey ALL PHOTOS: SOCIALIST PARTY

Fighting mood at Unison women's conference, but where's our political voice?

SALLY GRIFFITHS
CONFERENCE DELEGATE, PERSONAL CAPACITY

Women's conference this year presented numerous issues, including AI, women's health, soaring child-care costs, sexual harassment and safety – but the thread running through all of them was the lack of funding, cuts to public services and the attacks on women through the Labour government's ongoing austerity.

These are women working in public services who, along with many other workers, kept the country running in lockdown. One motion said, in capital letters: "WE HAVE NO MORE TO GIVE".

The conference was addressed on day one by the newly elected Unison general secretary, Andrea Egan. Her message about the need to fight was generally welcomed, in contrast to the approach of Starmer-supporting Christina McAnea who was ousted in the election.

Elephant in the room

But the elephant in the room, both in Andrea's speech and in the motion debates, was that there was no mention of the union's relationship with the Labour Party, or the need for the working class to have a political party that represents our interests and delivers a society that provides for working-class people's wants and needs.

The reception for Lucy Powell MP was less enthusiastic. Lucy was recently elected deputy leader of the Labour Party, supported by some in the trade unions on the basis that she was a 'left' (under McAnea, Unison had supported Starmer-ally Bridget Phillipson). But the mood of delegates was that her words were not believed and were seen as platitudes. Workers delivering public services know what is really happening. One delegate referred to "Labour's mute voice"; a later speaker said that when Labour aren't mute they are using language that attacks our migrant worker comrades.

A motion on the negative impact of the far right on women raised the issue, but not the solution. Women shared their experiences, including fear and actual physical attack. But the desperation that workers and families are feeling, that drives some of them to vote for Reform, is real: their lives are substandard due to relentless austerity, price hikes and wages not keeping up, not even close. The capitalists and their servants, like Reform, are saying: 'Look at those immigrants.' The trade union movement needs to say: 'We will fight for jobs, homes and services for all.' But it also needs to be made clear that this will be delivered through our own political alternative.

The imposition of the 3.3% pay rise for NHS workers was announced by Labour health secretary Wes Streeting on day two of conference. It may not have made it to the conference floor, but it was hotly discussed among delegates, who recognised that it will not touch the soaring cost of living. Streeting's imposed rise is in effect a pay cut and will do nothing to restore public sector pay.



Women Unison members in action SOCIALIST PARTY

What was clear is that while women in Unison are ready to organise and fight inequality and exploitation, that isn't being challenged or changed by the Labour government. We need our new general secretary to lead a serious fightback, and that has to include taking steps towards our own political voice too.

- A meeting in August 2025 of 'Unison members for a new party' launched a petition to campaign among members for a review of the political funds
- Sign the petition 'Labour's not our party! Let Unison members decide our political choices' at change.org

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PREPARING FOR THE NEW ERA, FULL OF OPPORTUNITIES - SOCIALIST STUDENTS CONFERENCE 2026

NICK HART
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

"We truly are in unprecedented times" - these were the opening words of the 2026 Socialist Students conference in Manchester. On Saturday 14 February, over 80 student activists from across England and Wales battled train cancellations and a cost-of-studying crisis to come and debate what can be done to combat crisis-ridden capitalism on and off campus.

Kicking off the opening session on 'The struggle for socialism in a world on fire,' Robbie Davidson from Manchester Socialist Students pointed out that young people can see more clearly than ever that this is a system with no answers. The purpose of the discussion wasn't just to moan about the ills of capitalism today, but to have a stocktake of what is wrong with the world so we can understand how to change it.

That's why he described the brutal repression being meted out by Trump and his anti-immigration ICE goons in Minneapolis, and the stoking of global tensions with military interventions in each of Venezuela, Nigeria and Iran in recent months.

This is not coming from a position of strength, but because Trump is unable to answer declining living standards and becoming ever more unpopular among workers and youth in America. There's been walkouts of students and workers in Minneapolis against ICE killings, and occupations, as well as some of the biggest protests in US history around the No Kings movement.

And crucially, socialism is back on the agenda in the US. Newly elected Zohran Mamdani declares himself a socialist, a point of attraction rather than a turn-off for the million-plus who voted for him, and the thousands who came out to campaign for him.

Walking out against Trump

The effect of "bigot in chief" Trump on radicalising young people isn't just a factor in the US, but also here in Britain. Last September when he came to Britain, Socialist Students organised walkouts of school and college students against the red carpet being rolled out for him by Starmer and the royal family. Despite attempts by headteachers to threaten disciplinary action, lock school gates and snatch leaflets from our hands, Socialist Students met college and school students taking political action for their first time and helped them get organised.

Not that there's a lack of reasons to be angry much closer to home. Those turning 18 today will have lived their entire life in the wake of the 2008 banking crisis. Many of British capitalism's problems stem from this era. In the two decades since, Tory, Lib Dem and Labour governments have attempted to break even by making the working class pay.

Low pay and high rents accelerated in the austerity era, schools became underfunded to the extent that teachers have been paying out of their own pocket for supplies for years. Dean Young from Liverpool described the dire situation facing young people leaving education. The unemployment rate among 16 to 24-year-olds is now 15.9%, with over half a million looking for work and unable to get it, while 800,000 claim Universal Credit. Linked to this is the disappearance of graduate and entry-level job roles.

And as James Taylor from Birmingham described, those able to find full-time employment on marginally more than the minimum wage will be faced with crippling loan repayments of 9% of their income over the £28,470 threshold for repayments, set to be frozen for the remainder of this government. Crippling interest of inflation +1% and additional repayments of 14% for those with postgraduate qualifications means that even those entering previously well-paid professions are finding their income squeezed by student debt. No wonder in recent years there have been well-supported strikes by resident doctors, teachers and even barristers!

These are just a few of many examples of trade unions coming back on to the scene. Conference delegates gave plenty of examples of how Socialist Students groups have worked with unions, including those in higher education struggling against job cuts, low pay and bad working conditions.

Tilde Resare from University of Sheffield described the ongoing strikes against redundances. Management have been hard to negotiate with, demanding strikers work in their own time to make up for work missed during strikes or face losing 100% of their pay (including for non-strike days). Striking University and College Union members effectively faced a 18-day-long lockout.

One staff member was penalised for not running a tutorial to prepare for an exam that had already happened. Sheffield Socialist Students have been able to help explain the reasons for the strike to students by leafleting alongside striking workers.

Ben from Birmingham called on delegates to look for where workers are fighting back in their local areas, such as the Birmingham bin workers fighting pay cuts and deskilling, or Oxfordshire firefighters campaigning to maintain a safe level of cover.

These examples of collective action by workers aren't just deserving of support in their own right, but can give confidence and inspiration to students in how to organise to win their own struggles.

The University of Essex is threatening closure of its Southend campus – hundreds of local students, especially from working-class backgrounds and facing barriers to study are being told they don't have a place at university.

15,000 threatened job cuts

Nationally there have been 15,000 threatened job cuts in higher education since the start of 2025, with the government not ruling out closure of some unis. The occupation of campus buildings and mass assemblies on the level that took place against the trebling of tuition fees in 2010 could spark a national movement. This would put pressure on the Labour government to step in with emergency funding and replace the current inadequate funding model for higher education that relies on UK students being saddled with debt, international students rinsed for every penny, and universities making deals with arms companies and other unethical investments.

In Manchester, where the university is the largest landlord in the city, Socialist Students have played a leading role in the relaunched 'Fight The Rent Hike' campaign. This is in response to one of two relatively affordable options for university halls being replaced with one costing £100 a week more, with the rents raised after prospective students had already applied to live there.

With student finance held at below-inflation levels for years, the cost-of-studying crisis has reached such a level that a few quid extra a week in laundry costs represents a big hit for students. Socialist Students at University of Arts London (UAL) launched the Circuit No! campaign against washing machine provider Circuit Go charging over £5 a load for laundry.

To add insult to injury, costs for the same washing machines provided by this company, who have 90% of the UK market stitched up, vary massively between campuses, even within the same city.

As Kat from UAL put it: "Students across the country are being ripped off. It's time for students to take a stand".

Morgan Tritton from University of Hertfordshire described the epidemic of violence against women on campus: "We're not putting up and shutting up". Socialist Students societies have recently campaigned to improve sexual harassment reporting policies at Herts, won gender neutral changing rooms at Queen Mary University, and reinstated the night bus at University of Liverpool.

Socialist Students national organiser Adam Powell-Davies described how, although we are not at the moment in the middle of a national wave of student struggle, there is a questioning of the system in the minds of young people.

Socialist Students has been making progress, with a record number of students signing up to get involved this academic year. That's because we don't just talk about revolution, or fight for every possible gain on campus, but link the two to the need for socialist transformation of society.

To set ourselves up for this new era of opportunities to build support for socialist ideas on campuses, the conference debated and voted to adopt a new constitution for Socialist Students. This re-establishes the democratic structures of Socialist Students, with each society having the right to send motions to conference establishing the political and campaigning direction of the organisation, send a representative to the national steering committee that assesses the work of Socialist Students and takes decisions between conferences, and to vote on the officers responsible for the day-to-day running of the organisation.

This includes the existing 40 societies and campus groups active across England and Wales. But the conference also agreed that other student groups with a socialist orientation should be able to affiliate to Socialist Students and participate in its structures.

We expect everyone involved in Socialist Students to agree to aims of fighting for socialism, while encouraging maximum debate on how it can best be achieved. This will mean testing out ideas in the real struggle and then reassessing based on the fullest possible democratic debate within the structures of Socialist Students.

Your Party and the Greens

Already, representatives of Aston Left Society and Kings College London and University College London Your Party supporters were present at the conference.

With the huge surge in support for and membership of the Green Party among young people since the election of Zack Polanski as leader, this could include Green Party societies. As Tom Porter-Brown from Leicester put it, we have to show the way to Green Party members who want to fight austerity and capitalism.

It's likely that after the May local elections, the Greens will have over 1,000 councillors, including in areas with large student populations, and a greater platform than ever to fight austerity. This will put them to the test as to whether they take an active role in campaigning for more funding for services, or a backseat one, or worse still join council administrations in wielding the axe as they have in Bristol and Sheffield.

Against the arguments that nothing can be done under the current model for funding local councils, we should be prepared to argue that the organised mass of young people and workers can knock back commissioners and council cuts, and that Green councils use reserves and borrowing to put a stop to the cuts (see page 5).

Say to Greens, let's come together and prove that the answer to our problems lies in the coffers of the fat cats. After all, no party governing under the constraints of the capitalist markets will be able to fundamentally change things for working-class and young people.

This includes Reform UK. Many spoke on the worry students and young people feel at the prospect of a Reform government, and the growth of the far right beyond that. At the same time, the conference recognised that they have been able to grow due to the failure of the establishment parties and that the working class does not yet have its own mass political voice.

As Ali from Yorkshire pointed out in the closing rally, Reform societies have been set up on some uni campuses but at the moment find a limited echo. When Farage's social media manager was invited to speak at York University, hundreds came out to protest.

After all, what do Reform have to offer students? They have no answers to the higher education funding crisis, for example, or any of the crises students face. So what better way to cut across support for Reform and the far right than to offer a real alternative? A socialist world free from want and oppression.

Multiple speakers pointed to the two thirds of young people in Britain who, in opinion polls, have said they'd like to live in a socialist economic system. The task now will be to translate the constitution and motions voted on from words on a bit of paper into action, so Socialist Students can be a real factor in the battles emerging on campus.

As Becca Bayman from Liverpool commented in the closing rally, it's an increasingly difficult time for students, but increasingly important to build a fightback. After this year's conference, Socialist Students is well placed to lead this.

Socialist Students conference sending solidarity to young people getting organised against ICE, Trump and capitalist world disorder PHOTO: ALEX GERROLL



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Brighton trade unionists fight cuts

DAVID MAPLES
BRIGHTON SOCIALIST PARTY

Brighton's people's budget conference, organised by Brighton and Hove Trades Council, met on 15 February days after an eighth Labour councillor elected in 2023 left the Labour Group on the council.

The model 'Starmerite' council is floundering. Despite passing a "legal balanced budget" last year, it has a General Fund overspend of £8.8 million. Attempting to find £25 million cuts this year, it has struggled to come up with £20 million. The council has now applied for "Exceptional Financial Support".

Trades Council Secretary Andy Richards explained the intolerable pressure council staff are under. Labour's proposed insourcing has proved to be the complete opposite. The council has privatised supported-living service Burwash Lodge and is looking for private management for Roundabout nursery in Whitehawk.

Tim Halpin, the Unison convenor at learning disability charity Grace Eyre, explained that the council's delay in agreeing care support uplifts had led the charity to stop paying the Real Living Wage. Because of financial pressures created by the council, it also sold its headquarters and made redundancies.

Matt Webb, Trades Council President, gave an impassioned defence of education, including the campaign he is running to stop the academisation of his daughter's school, Coombe Road Primary.

The conference was shocked when guest speaker Paul Kershaw, chair of the Unite Housing Workers branch, reported that 36 homeless people had died in Brighton in 2024.

Paul set out measures the council could take, including:

- Freezing council rents and pressurising housing associations to do the same
- An accountable programme of retrofitting housing to improve thermal performance
- Supporting tenants' organisations, including with legal resources
- Pressurising housing associations such as Sanctuary to recognise a trade union



Council unions protest against Brighton council cuts in 2025 PHOTO: DAVID MAPLES

Brighton council has twice been run by the Green Party. They have high hopes of taking control again in 2027, so the attendance of one of their candidates, Warren Malone, was very welcome.

The budget papers talk of a further £30 million cuts in 2027-28. Trades Council Executive member Bill North set out the Trades Council's approach. It called on the Labour administration to withdraw the draft budget and charges for 2026-27 and for the Labour and Green groups to produce a revised budget based on freezing council tax, rents, business rates and charges, and to campaign for Labour to restore government funding levels to the 2010-11 pre-austerity level, in real terms.

Warren reported that the Greens have struggled to find candidates, those who apply being warned that they will be 'required' to vote for future cuts - "a poisoned chalice". Warren did sign the petition calling on Zack Polanski to ensure the Greens take a fighting, no-cuts stance (see p5).

The trades council is supporting Unison's lobby of the council budget meeting on 26 February and elected a committee to take the campaign into the wider movement and community.

Polanski is speaking in Brighton on 23 February, tickets cost £26.25! Socialist Party members will be hoping to give him, and those in attendance, an opportunity to sign the petition!

Hillingdon trade unionists quiz Greens and socialists on cuts

RYAN LEONARD
HILLINGDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Hillingdon Trades Council organised a preliminary meeting to discuss "Can socialists and the Green Party find common ground to take on Reform and establishment parties in the May council elections", with speakers from the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) and the Green Party. Members of the trades council had also invited a speaker from Your Party but got no response.

The desperate need for a left-wing force to stem the tide of Reform and block further local cuts, whoever the cuts are being administered by, was mentioned by many in the meeting. We highlighted the need for any electoral agreement going forward to be based on a clear political agreement. Socialist Party members called on Green Party candidates to themselves commit to fighting local government austerity and sign the petition calling on Zack Polanski to insist that all Green candidates and existing councillors should do the same.

The Green Party speaker didn't directly address the issue and refused to commit to a no-cuts budget. The meeting had differences of opinion.

Campaigners in Hillingdon have very real fears about the reputational damage allying with the Greens could have if they help to push through cuts. At the same time, Reform is a growing threat in the area.

The central question, as yet unanswered, is: can Green candidates be won to building a fightback against austerity in Hillingdon and against the government?



Socialists campaigning in Hillingdon PHOTO: AMNON COHEN

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West Midlands	1,343	2,700	50%	
North West	468	1,200	39%	
London	1,735	5,000	35%	
South West	726	2,100	35%	
Eastern	422	1,300	32%	
Wales	487	2,400	20%	
Yorkshire	534	2,650	20%	
Southern & SE	451	2,400	19%	
East Midlands	192	2,050	9%	
Other	642	2,400	27%	
TOTAL	7,575	25,000	30%	

Reading people's budget meeting

SARA GILLMAN
READING SOCIALIST PARTY

Around 20 attended Reading's people's budget meeting on 7 February. Speakers included an NEU activist, a Socialist Party member and Your Party member. Several warned that the financial situation for the council is set to get worse.

The Labour council has plans for further cuts and the government is trying to push down dissent by integrating smaller councils into bigger unitary authorities.

The fact that funding for Special Educational Needs services is set to be cut drastically by 2028 was raised. Several other areas of cuts were also discussed, with ideas put forward for demands on housing , social care, and public transport .

A Green councillor in attendance described how the budget-setting process has now become even more bureaucratic and undemocratic. Opposition councillors are given just ten days to respond to the budget once they have been shown it. Even more worrying is how Reading Borough Council now withholds the financial papers from general public viewing. Councillors are told not to talk about it at all!

Overall there was unanimous agreement to demand the council sets a needs-based budget, funded from reserves and borrowing. And importantly, to mobilise a campaign demanding the funds which have been stolen from us by central government through austerity cuts.

Hackney library workers score victory!

HACKNEY SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS

Library workers' determined resistance has pushed back the Hackney Labour council's proposed cuts to library services. This is another victory for the local community as well as the workforce. The library workers have fought many battles over the years against several rounds of cuts proposals by the council.

The latest round of attacks was announced in Autumn 2025, with Hackney council launching a public consultation to reduce opening hours in six libraries as part of severe budget cuts. It also proposed cuts in the workforce, security guards and the book stock budget.

Since 2016, more than 180 council-run libraries have either closed or been handed to volunteer groups. The remaining libraries have had their hours reduced. Libraries are vital services. They are important to the residents, the most vulnerable and students. They are a vital lifeblood in our communities and need to be defended and protected.



Hackney library workers on strike in 2023 PHOTO: HACKNEY SP

The U-turn is a result of the backlash from the local community, staff and trade unions. That the 'higher-than-expected funding allocation for the borough' is being used to change course on library cuts is not an accident. With local government elections less than three months away, the Labour council is right to be worried!

Both Caroline Woodley, Labour Mayor of Hackney, and Cllr Chris Kennedy, Cabinet Member for Health, Adult Social Care, Voluntary Sector and Culture, have been making statements to the press saying how they listen to the communities. Cllr Kennedy said: "We are proud to have kept all of Hackney's libraries open during years of austerity, and we are committed to keeping them at the heart of our communities. This settlement allows us to do just that for the years ahead."

Brian Debus, recently retired library worker and long-standing Unison activist, set the record straight: "Three months ago Cllr Kennedy was only too happy to post a video, shot in Hackney libraries, promoting reducing the opening hours. This was nothing but blatant propaganda. Why did he not shoot a video challenging the government to provide more funding to maintain and develop the service? His recent statement is somewhat hypocritical in the circumstances!"

Hackney Unison welcomes the announcement, but it also stresses that the council should commit to keeping this lifeline service open, staffed and safe across the borough.

Socialist Party members in Hackney will continue to support Hackney Unison and library workers. Our members are preparing to stand in the upcoming local elections in Hackney Central and Hoxton East & Shoreditch wards.

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Why I joined the Socialist Party

ADAM TYAS
COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

I have known for a long time that there is oppression of people and vast inequality in our society.

I learnt over several years the political ideology of the ruling class and parties; how working people are exploited for greater profits for the very richest, and how minorities are victimised for the failings of capitalism – workers are encouraged to point the finger of blame at a colleague rather than the boss.

In my home city of Hull I have seen how the destruction of industry and local cuts to public services have destroyed people's livelihoods and their prospects.

I came to the realisation that reforming capitalism isn't enough. The bosses might be forced to agree to paying a bit more tax to redistribute a small amount of their wealth, but ultimately they will find other ways to try to claw it back.

I knew about the Socialist Party through a friend and fellow member in Liverpool, but never actually looked at joining until I went to a Your Party conference in Leicester.

The buzz and feeling of hope from the idea of a new mass workers' party fighting for socialism really drew me in to the idea that socialism is possible. However, the faltering around Your Party left me feeling that I needed and wanted to join a long-standing force in the struggle for socialism, to work within the wider Your Party activities and outside of it too.

So I passed on my details to the Socialist Party members on their campaign stall at that meeting. It was as easy as that. I was put in touch with the Coventry branch, where I live.

The Socialist Party offers experience, discussion, and thought-out impactful action on local, national, and trade union issues.

The party fights most closely for what I believe in and in a way that makes a difference. The emphasis on pulling trade union leaderships away from the existing capitalist parties to fight for socialist policies is important, and what I think is the best way to fight for working people.

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Durning Hall PHOTO: NIALL MULHOLLAND

East London fight to save Durning Hall community centre from gentrification

NIALL MULHOLLAND
EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Several years after Newham's Labour-run council shamefully approved plans that paved the way for the loss of much of the iconic Durning Hall community centre, the building has stood largely dormant. The charity that owned Durning Hall, Aston Mansfield, found 'property market' changes thwarted their 'regeneration' plans.

Although Durning Hall recently reopened for limited use following its sale to a "London based property development company", new redevelopment proposals now threaten to further erode what remains of this vital local resource.

For decades, Durning Hall has been a cornerstone of community life in Forest Gate. As recently as 2021, more than 40 different groups were using the centre. Many have since been displaced or closed down altogether.

Instead of restoring and strengthening community use, the proposals prioritise commercial development. The scheme includes a 157-room hotel, 93 aparthotel rooms, and the conversion of an adjacent former sorting office into 28 flats. When I asked directly at a recent 'consultation' event, representatives were unable to confirm whether any of the 28 flats would be social housing.

Even the previous redevelopment scheme, approved in 2021, for 78 units with 35% 'affordable' housing, fell far short of what local people need.

A retail supermarket is among the redevelopment plans. Forest Gate already has a Co-op, Lidl, Tesco, and Iceland. Recent local redevelopment has replaced smaller independent shops with multinational chains. There is speculation that a 'high-end retailer' such as Waitrose could occupy the new unit - an indication of who this development is really designed to attract.

The historic character of Forest Gate, with small, independent, local businesses and accessible community spaces, is steadily being eroded. The area does not need more hotels. What Forest Gate does need is affordable, accessible community space and genuinely affordable social housing.

Durning Hall has served generations of local people. There is no reason it could not be refurbished where necessary, with council funding, and brought under democratic council and community control.

Campaigners who opposed the previous redevelopment are once again organising to resist these plans. Socialist Party members will again participate fully in the campaign and will be raising the issue at Newham Trades Union Council to seek the backing of the organised trade union movement.

The future of Durning Hall should not be dictated by commercial priorities. It should be decided by the needs of the community that used it for decades.

Your Party expels socialist Rob Rooney

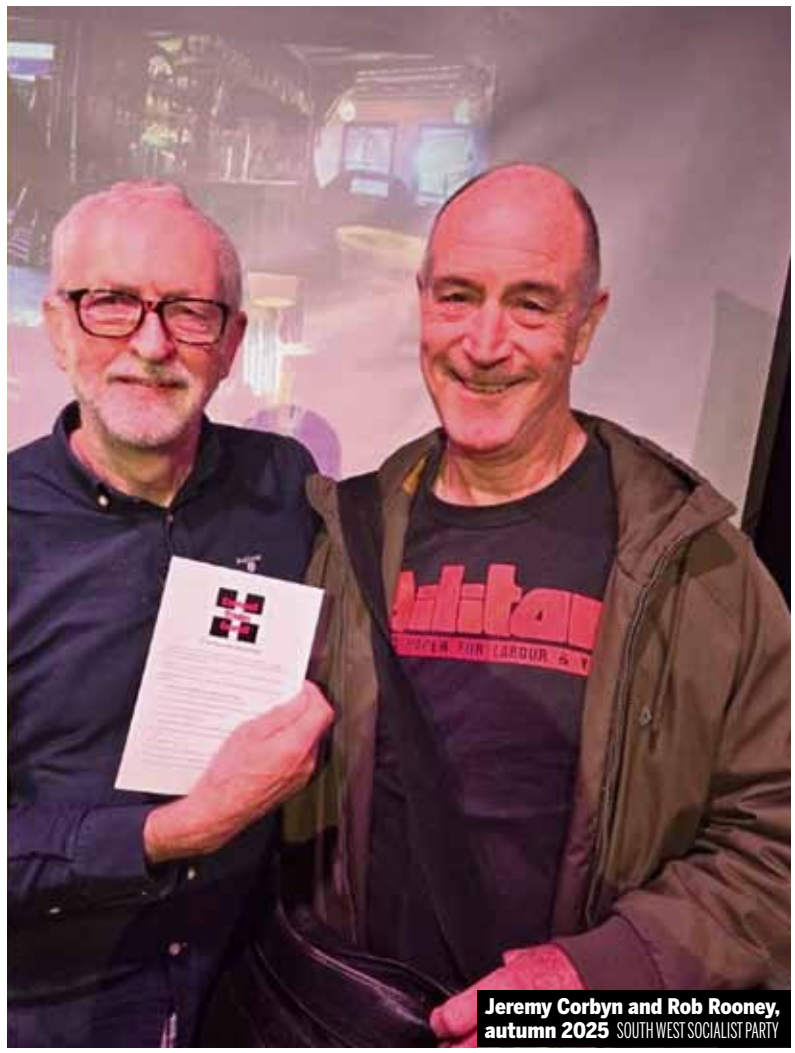
TOM BALDWIN
SOUTH WEST SOCIALIST PARTY REGIONAL SECRETARY

Cornwall Trades Council president Rob Rooney has been expelled from Your Party and barred from standing as a candidate for the party's Central Executive Committee (CEC). Rob's 300-word CEC candidate statement sketched out his 40 years of experience as a trade unionist and fighter for the working class. The positions to which he's been elected to represent workers include shop steward and lead negotiator.

Rob's statement also explains his campaigning record: instigating and leading a successful community campaign to stop an abattoir expansion in Preston, East Yorkshire, 20 years ago; to today playing a similar role in the campaign to have Fowey Hospital, Cornwall, re-opened. He has also been the chair of Lanteglos-by-Fowey Parish Council since 2023.

Rob's statement says that he is involved in leading Cornwall Trades Council's 'Needs Budget for Cornwall' campaign, which has been praised by Jeremy Corbyn for taking on council cuts and fighting for services for local residents.

Rob says: "By demanding need is met rather than ignored on the grounds of cost (while billionaires proliferate and billions are spent on bombs) councillors, senior council officers and trade union officials are challenged and held to account. By defeating capitalism at home, making billionaires history and distributing the wealth we create 'from each according to their ability, to each, according to their need', we strike a blow for the Palestinians and all oppressed people."



Jeremy Corbyn and Rob Rooney, autumn 2025 SOUTH WEST SOCIALIST PARTY

The decision to expel him, according to an email sent by Marion Roberts, Treasurer, Your Party, on 11 February, was made "in light of your amended statement of candidature". However, Rob's statement has not been amended.

Rob has never hidden that he is a Socialist Party member. It was written plainly in black and white in the statement he submitted when applying to be a candidate, three weeks before his expulsion. Rob's statement ends by listing his current memberships: "Your Party, Socialist Party, Unite Community".

It was this statement that encouraged enough Your Party members to endorse him to earn him the necessary 75 nominations to get on the ballot paper. In fact, at the time of writing, his statement is still on the Your Party website and Rob is still listed as a candidate for the South West, presumably meaning that people can cast their vote for him but that these won't be counted. The letter barring him from the election came from the Your Party treasurer, not Andrew Jordan, the returning officer, who is meant to be conducting the election. Both are unelected and acting in an interim capacity.

No reply to Socialist Party letter

On 7 January, Hannah Sell, Socialist Party general secretary, wrote to the Your Party leaders on behalf of the Socialist Party, to seek confirmation that members of our party are eligible to stand in the elections to Your Party's CEC. No reply was received. A number of potential candidates were then blocked at the start of the election process, including Socialist Party members Dave Nellist, a former socialist Labour MP, and April Ashley, a current executive member of Unison representing black members. (see 'Letter to Your Party, from the Socialist Party' socialistparty.org.uk)

However, Rob's case seems to be the first time a socialist has been removed from Your Party membership. In an email of a few terse sentences, Rob was informed that he is "ineligible both to be a member of Your Party and to stand as a candidate" and that "the relevant teams will be informed and will take appropriate action." No process of appeal was mentioned, nor has been given in response to Rob asking.

Top-down bureaucratic manoeuvres of this nature will not deliver the "democratic, member-led socialist party... with the working class at its heart" that Your Party claims to be.

Civil service pensions crisis a result of privatisation and neglect

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN PCS UNION

On 1 December 2025, private company Capita took over the administration of the civil service pension scheme. A seven-year contract worth £239 million – and it has not gone well.

The company has left thousands in limbo, due to years of neglect and as a direct result of privatisations.

Just how bad this is was revealed at a Public Accounts Committee hearing on 12 February:

- 120,000 cases awaiting action
- 8,500 members missing expected pension payments
- 6,300 cases concerning deceased members
- 12,000 members due payment but not entered the system

Behind these figures are heartbreaking stories of hardship and anxiety. Many face severe hardship because of delays paying out for ill-health retirements and to families because of deaths in service. Working members cannot plan with certainty as they cannot guarantee that pensions will be paid on time if they want to retire. The scale of the problem is enormous.

Capita bosses blame the problems on the backlog they say they inherited from MyCSP, the previous pension provider. This is difficult to accept as they had plenty of time to prepare to take on the work. The backlog has grown since they took over.

The Public Accounts Committee warned in October that Capita would not be ready. According to the BBC, Capita has previously faced criticism over its management of teachers' and firefighters' pensions. What does this say about a government which is supposed to conduct 'due diligence' before entering into any private contracts?

Civil service trade unions opposed the privatisation of the pension scheme in 1996, and have consistently argued that the work needs to be brought back in-house. This has been an accident waiting to happen and the warnings from unions, including during the recent strike of MyCSP workers, have not been heeded.

It is the Cabinet Office and government which should be held to account.

Civil service pensioners are being told to apply to their old department for interest-free loans of £5,000, or exceptionally £10,000. Members might appreciate this financial help, although getting it may not be straightforward.

However a temporary fix is no real solution to this crisis. The unions should demand that the work is immediately taken into the civil service, with all those affected given hardship payments and compensation.

The unions must launch a joint campaign to force Labour to honour its manifesto pledge of 'the biggest wave of insourcing of public services in a generation'. Transfer this Capita contract into the civil service with immediate effect.



PCS members working for MyCSP on strike in 2025 LIVERPOOL OCIALIST PARTY

Youth services in crisis, we need to fight back



Memorial Park, Southdene, Kirkby PHOTO: REPTON1X/CC

What was once a free pastime, using local fields and cheap premises, has become closed off and herded into sports centres. This can cost around £100 for a single hour's session!

NEILL DUNNE
MERSEYSIDE SOCIALIST PARTY

Being in my 40s, I can look back and remember the youth clubs I frequented with friends, while meeting new friends.

The basic joy of meeting up at the youth centres playing on computers, playing sports, and in a town like Kirkby - football. There was always football. Discos would be exciting too. Things that we possibly took for granted, assuming they'd be around forever: a safe space to socialise, and improve talents or learn new skills.

In boroughs like my own of Knowsley, these services have suffered a major decline in funding. Successive governments have cut youth services, then appear shocked at the rise of anti-social behaviour.

In Knowsley, in the past 20 years, 16 high schools with sixth forms, have become eight schools (seven of which are academies). This has heaped a massive burden on the budgets with PFI (private finance initiative) debts taking a big chunk of the council's budgets.

Class sizes are bursting. This has left some kids behind, and if they have a behavioural problem they are ushered out of the borough to a school for 'unruly kids'.

There was a time when schools handled kids better as they had the time and resources to devote to all kids, now they send them away to prove they can come back!

This decline in education in Knowsley is a reflection on attitudes to the youth of these poor areas, whether North or South, but when you add the many other crises families face today, the grim reality is clear.

Funding for youth services has been slashed since 2010. Austerity disproportionately hit working-class communities. The Tory-Lib Dem coalition had the idea to create a "Northern Powerhouse", as Chancellor George Osborne once described it. We now know he, and the government, had zero substance or intention of following through with this plan. Cutting funding from essential youth services and cutting jobs was the real plan, with the following generations paying the price of attacks with a lack of a good education and a stable community.

Youth services that once provided stability and structure to kids in the evening or weekends are gone. And in their place, private companies that provide sports coaching or dancing at a substantial cost to families.

The football alone is a prickly subject when raised with the kids in Kirkby. What was once a free pastime, using local fields and cheap premises, has become closed off and herded into sports centres. This can cost around £100 for a single hour's session! This is in a Knowsley council-built sports/leisure centre.

This normalisation of kids wandering the streets in gangs means, after school, being forced to find fun, entertainment, or a source of income. This problem may still have happened if youth services were still a fully funded institution, but it is very unlikely the anti-social behaviour would be as bad. It is worth pointing out that a safe space to socialise would give young people boundaries, playing games and sports would keep them off the streets. A youth worker would be an ear, a shoulder to cry on, offer advice they may not have had.

Fully funded youth services would provide a sensible distraction to the chaos on the housing estates. Teenagers self-esteem could improve by building confidence, taking part in leisure activities and sports, completing tasks individually or as a group.

Since 2010, schools in England have seen funding cut by £4.2 billion according to ActionNetwork.org. The YMCA adds to this: "Local authority funding for youth services has fallen by 76% in real terms over the past 14 years, amounting to a loss of about £1.3 billion altogether since 2010–11. In 2024–25 alone youth services spending by councils in England and Wales fell by [around] 10%, the largest annual reduction in almost a decade."

Councils and pro-capitalist politicians have no right to wonder why antisocial behaviour or violent crime is on the rise. It is on the rise because of the decade and a half in which Labour councils have accepted and implemented Tory cuts instead of fighting for the funding and services we need. We need to take the wealth that is hoarded by the super-rich and put it to work improving our communities not the bank balances of a few.

WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?

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

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

Pensioners need a voice: Maintain the National Pensioners Convention as a democratic campaigning organisation

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN PCS ARMS (ASSOCIATE AND RETIRED MEMBERS)

Since it was set up with trade union support in 1979, the National Pensioners' Convention (NPC) has been prominent in campaigning and lobbying for pensioners.

But recently, the NPC has had severe financial difficulties, leading many in the leadership to consider changing its status to a 'company limited by guarantee' (CLG). It is argued that this would enable the NPC to attract more funding to support its activities.

This has raised many concerns, the greatest being that as a CLG, with a reduced union role, the NPC would be less democratic and accountable to affiliates.

The NPC sent a consultation document to affiliates midway through 2025. A number of affiliates stressed the need for an annual conference, annual election of officers, and accountability of the NPC National Executive Council (NEC).

It was expected that these issues would go to a Special Delegate Conference in early 2026. Then out of the blue, in December 2025, the officers informed affiliates of an NEC meeting in January to discuss dissolving the existing NPC and setting it up as a CLG.

The January NEC meeting supported the motion to dissolve the NPC. A motion to delay this decision until there was a full discussion and agreement on structure and democratic issues was not allowed to be debated.

The NEC agreed to call a Special Delegate Meeting on 24 February to ratify the decision.

At the 24 February meeting, civil service union PCS representatives will move that the structures and rules in the current NPC constitution should transfer to the CLG until the consultation process has been completed and there has been a Special Delegate Conference to debate and agree the final structure.

The undemocratic way in which the controversial move to a CLG has been handled has shaken the confidence of a number of NPC supporters and affiliates.

But the attacks on pensioners from Labour, which have included cutting winter fuel payments, freezing tax thresholds and starving essential services of funding, make it essential that the NPC continues to be a strong, democratic, campaigning organisation for all pensioners, with democratic links to the trade unions.



PHOTO: PAUL MATTSSON

Socialist Party

WHAT WE STAND FOR

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

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

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

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

WORK, PENSIONS AND BENEFITS

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

PUBLIC SERVICES

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

ENVIRONMENT

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

DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

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

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

- No to imperialist wars and occupations!
- Take the wealth off the super-rich! For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and the banking system that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working-class control and management. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need, not to the fat cats.
- A democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, and in a way that safeguards the environment.
- No to the EU bosses' club. Organise a campaign with European socialists and workers' organisations to use the talks on post-Brexit relations to tear up the EU pro-capitalist rules. For a real collaboration of the peoples of Europe on a socialist basis as a step towards a socialist world.

Do you agree? Join the fightback!

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Rugby league clubs going under are casualties of the commercialisation of sport

IAIN DALTON

For the third time in three months, a professional rugby league club has become insolvent. Halifax Panthers were wound up in the courts on 9 February, following a dispute with HMRC. The second-tier Championship fixture list has been plunged into crisis once again, as it was after Featherstone Rovers collapsed in December, and the Rugby Football League (RFL) authorities decided not to issue a licence to a potential new company.

In part this will be because of the experience of Salford Red Devils, who also went under in December, before being resurrected in a phoenix club now playing in the Championship. Back in 2024, new owners were approved by the RFL on the basis of bringing in new financial investment to the club, which never materialised. Instead, wages went unpaid, players left as other clubs offered stable contracts, and the club was kept alive by an RFL management desperate not to invalidate the TV contract, eventually playing mostly reserve and short-term loan players.

Fans of the club rightly organised against this farcical situation. The one game that was cancelled, against Wakefield Trinity, was the one where fans had decided to organise a march to the match over the situation, with over 500 attending despite the game being cancelled, officially over player safety, but equally to spare the owners' blushes!

A fourth club, Oldham RLFC, has also been in court for a hearing with HMRC, however the winding-up order against this club was dismissed. Rugby union has also suffered blows, with three English top-flight teams collapsing in 2023, with added complications from the 27% ownership of the top flight by private equity firm CVC. And one of Wales's four regional sides is set to go. Like union, top-fight clubs in rugby league are mostly dependent on benefactors - with most clubs requiring a £1 million cash injection a year to keep afloat. Where these don't exist, clubs either operate on a shoestring budget or move from one financial crisis to another.

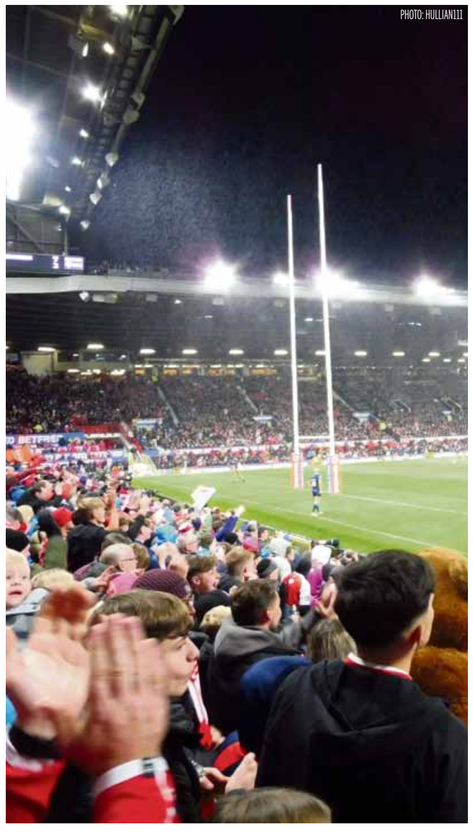


PHOTO: HULLIAN111

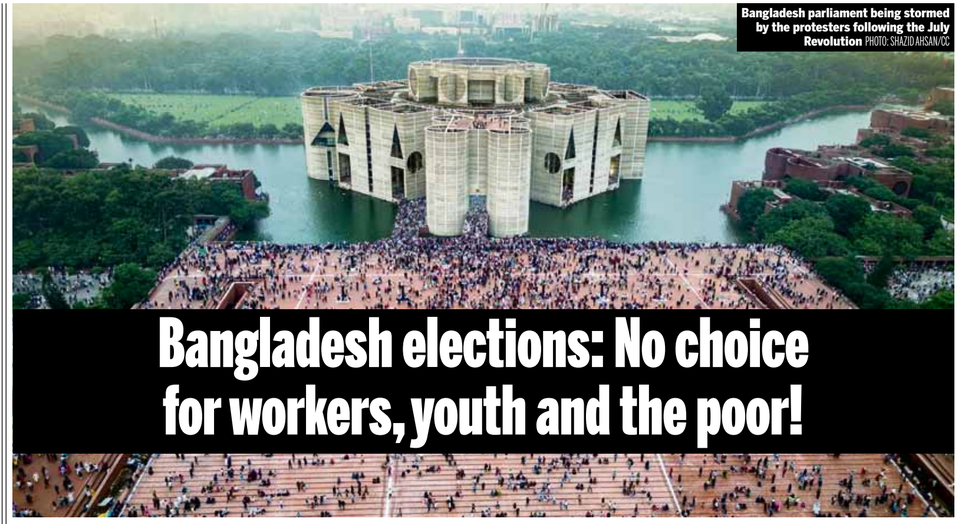
The RFL was shaken up last year by consultants IMG in their 'reimaging' of the sport. IMG was brought in by the RFL's governing body to help improve the profile and finances of the sport - at the time it was said their remuneration would come from a cut of increased funding going in. The reality has been that they have been paid hundreds of thousands of pounds a year despite this new money not yet materialising.

A report looks to how the other full-time professional league of the sport is run in Australia, the National Rugby League (NRL). But its increased revenue is in part based on taking matches overseas to earn lucrative gambling money - such as taking league fixtures to Las Vegas, depriving fans of home fixtures to watch their club without spending a fortune to fly overseas.

NRL men's and women's players have taken action short of striking, boycotting media duties and so on in pursuit of basic guarantees such as maternity leave for female players, an increased minimum wage for professional players and injury hardship funds.

Ultimately, under the capitalist system, broadcasters and other investors are looking for what will get the best return for the money they need to pay.

Among the demands that should be raised is for bringing the big media companies into public ownership, and for democratic control of the sport by representatives of fans, players and other workers. Such struggles need to be linked to the need for wider socialist change in society, by mass working-class struggle to take over the commanding heights of the economy, and democratically use all the resources of society to meet the needs of all, including sport and other leisure activities.



Bangladesh parliament being stormed by the protesters following the July Revolution PHOTO: SHAZID AHSAN/CC

Bangladesh elections: No choice for workers, youth and the poor!

HUGO PIERRE

The mass student movement of 2024 which saw the removal of the hated Sheikh Hasina regime has temporarily benefited the right-wing Bangladesh National Party (BNP), which gained a majority of seats in the general election on 12 February. The BNP won an outright majority of 209 seats in the 350-seat Parliament, the Jatiya Sangsad.

The student movement of 2024 started as a fight to end the corrupt quota system that ensured members of then Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's party - the Awami League - got preferences for government jobs. She won the January 2024 election in which opposition parties, including Jamaat-e-Islami, were banned from standing and others like the BNP boycotted. The protests however engulfed most of the country as a radicalised mass movement, which involved some workers in strikes in the main cities, demanding an end to her regime following state repression of protesters with an estimated death toll of over 1,500.

Hasina and many of her entourage were forced to flee. The leaders of the student movement collaborated with the army chiefs to bring in an interim technocratic government headed by Muhammad Yunus, a capitalist economist with links to the US, including some of the student leaders. During the mass student movement there were glimpses of youth and workers taking control of some functions. A mass demonstration forced the Chief Justice to resign as he attempted a 'judicial coup' to take power away from the interim government. However, the Yunus government used its power to clear the revolutionary youth from the streets!

The opportunity to develop a programme that met the aspirations of workers and youth was needed to prevent the corrupt establishment politicians from gaining the spoils of the revolutionary movement for themselves, particularly the BNP. The emergence of Bangladesh's economy had enriched a privileged layer while keeping the workers producing the wealth in poverty and dangerous working and living conditions. The BNP over decades was in a battle with the deposed Awami League to politically represent this layer among the masses.

The student movement leadership launched the National Citizen Party in February 2025 in an attempt to represent the aspirations of the youth and the mood for change. However the leadership of the new party had no clear political orientation, especially how it would connect to the working class. Some of the leadership left the interim government to form the party on the platform of the neoliberal ideas of Yunus. Others were moving towards a left position without a clear programme.

A further complicating factor was the re-emergence of the banned religious party Jamaat-e-Islami, which also claimed its student organisation was a key factor in the overthrow of Hasina. Past leaders of the party had been convicted of war crimes in the Liberation War in 1971 for independence from Pakistan. The ban on the party was lifted to allow it to contest the elections whilst Hasina's Awami League was banned.

However, the New Citizen Party chose to form an electoral alliance with Jamaat-e-Islami on 25 December. This split the leadership with many left student leaders leaving the party. The elections became a contest between two pro-capitalist electoral alliances offering no way forward for the working class and the poor. Unfortunately the third electoral block of the 'communist' parties, the Democratic United Front, lacked a coherent programme and a strategy to win sections of the working class.

The full outcome of the election is not known but the revolutionary aspirations of the July 2024 movement of youth and workers was not represented in the 26 February elections. The median age of the population of Bangladesh is 29 and 50% of the voters were under 39. The BNP captured power but the election turnout was below 60%, low given the tumultuous background to the election. From the limited published results, many contests were tight although, through better organisation, which it is reported often involved corruption, extortion and intimidation, and an established network of candidates they were able to win.

The July 2024 movement is the beginning of a process that will test and fracture the BNP government, which is set to continue the economic model of the interim government. The Bangladesh economy, while still growing, is faltering, and with prospects for a downturn in the world economy looking likely could lead to new clashes and social upheavals. Workers' struggles are always at the forefront, particularly the largely female garment workers and their importance in the economy. The lack of decent jobs for the youth is another ever present flashpoint. These clashes will pave the way for new political formations. Central to developing a real alternative is the need for a new mass workers' party that can develop a socialist programme as a real alternative in the future.

Socialist Party public meetings: Fight sexism, Starmer and the system!

The Socialist Party is organizing public meetings across England and Wales around International Women's Day 2026, to discuss how we build the fight to end women's oppression. This year, the fight is on so many fronts including: violence against women, the cost-of-living crisis, health inequality, and more, all are up for discussion.

If you are looking for a socialist alternative to the inequality women face, to Starmer's war and austerity agenda in defence of the interests of big business, and to the horrors of capitalism's war, climate crisis and inequality, come along to a public meeting and join the discussion.

FIGHT SEXISM STARMER & THE SYSTEM

- **To find out about meetings near you visit: socialistparty.org.uk/events**

CWI cr-cio

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

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NO TO WAR AND AUSTERITY



FIGHT FOR SOCIALIST CHANGE

DAVE MURRAY
SOCIALIST PARTY EASTERN REGION SECRETARY

Kicking off, appropriately enough, on Friday 13 February, The Munich Security Conference brought together over 50 heads of state and their representatives to discuss the world's most pressing 'security challenges'. There was no agenda item headed 'Are we the baddies?' though - in a world where there are much fewer than six degrees of separation between most of the attendees and Jeffrey Epstein, there doesn't need to be.

For Keir Starmer, the timing of the conference was perfect. He could push for European re-armament as if he will still be Prime Minister for much longer. To a world of war, genocide, repression, exploitation and ecological catastrophe he offered more taxes to buy more bombs. Unironically, he insisted that European politicians need to be more honest with their electorates. Whatever levels of honesty it is delivered with, the message: 'Our food banks are the envy of the world - we will defend them with your lives,' is not going to be popular!

In name, the representatives at Munich speak for the people of the world. In fact, they speak for the tiny segment of humanity that makes up the billionaire capitalist class – the real beneficiaries of capitalism globally. They are easy to ridicule but it's hard to laugh when you consider the enormity of their crimes. The global ambitions of these cannibals will be paid for by a permanent assault on wages and living standards of the working classes internationally. To try to help them get away with it they will try to sew divisions in the working class by summoning the demons of xenophobia and racism.

In an increasingly unstable world with growing conflicts, there can be a feeling among some that 'we have to be able to defend ourselves'. But the billionaire bosses and their politicians only have defence of their profits and power in mind.

One voice that was definitely not heard at the conference was that of the working class. Although in making any of their decisions, the super-rich are always aware of the risks of provoking a working-class fightback - such as the mass protests against the slaughter of Palestinians in Gaza, including the general strike action in Italy last autumn, for example.

Overwhelmingly internationally, including in Britain, the working class has not yet assembled a political voice of its own. If you want an alternative to permanent austerity and the threat of war, you must become part of the process of putting that right. If you, like us, would back socialism against barbarism, your next step should be to join the Socialist Party.

Do you agree?
JOIN THE SOCIALISTS
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Socialist Party

WHAT WE STAND FOR: THE SOCIALIST PARTY'S MAIN DEMANDS ►►► see column on page 12

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