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the Socialist

Issue 1357 | 6-11 March 2026 | formerly Militant

Build a mass movement to END TRUMP'S WAR ON MIDDLE EAST

For a socialist alternative to Trump, Netanyahu, Starmer and all the warmongers



Build the anti-war movement:

- The trade unions should call a weekend demo against war, racism and austerity
- Students and youth get organised in schools and campuses and protest to fight for a future free from war
- Fight to build a new mass workers' party that stands for socialism and internationalism, including by building for the widest-possible stand of socialist anti-war, anti-austerity candidates in May's elections
- Capitalism means war. Fight for socialist change - nationalise big business and the banks under democratic working-class control to carry out a socialist plan of socially useful production to meet the needs of all

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MIDDLE EAST WAR TRADE UNION MODEL MOTION ▸▸▸ p4

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formerly Militant
Issue 1357
6-11 March 2026

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

TRUMP AND NETANYAHU HAVE OPENED THE 'GATES OF HELL'

For a socialist alternative to imperialism and capitalist war!

TONY SAUNOIS
SECRETARY OF THE COMMITTEE FOR A WORKERS' INTERNATIONAL


Missiles prepared to be fired into Iran from the flight deck of the USS Abraham Lincoln US NAVY/PUBLIC DOMAIN

The unleashing of the dogs of war once again on Iran by the rogue regimes of Trump and Netanyahu has opened the 'gates of hell' for the masses throughout the Middle East. The genocidal war waged against the Palestinian people in Gaza and increased repression and de facto annexation of the West Bank has now been intensified as war rages against Iran. This embroils the Gulf states and the whole of the Middle East.

The mass protests which erupted in Iran at the turn of the year against the brutal, theocratic Iranian regime was savagely crushed by the dictatorship. Displaying heroic courage, more protests broke out again at the universities. Afterwards, Trump, having assembled an armada, together with the Israeli military, launched an aerial bombardment, having, like last year, dragged out 'peace talks' with the Iranian regime. All the while they were preparing to launch a military offensive. And their motive for this was what?

They care little about democratic rights and much less about the suffering of the Iranian people. Behind this military action is the clear objective of carrying through regime change in Iran and forming a pliable Iranian regime. As the war has widened, the Israeli regime has relaunched its attacks on and put its troops back into Lebanon.

The real motive of the Trump and Netanyahu regimes is to reconfigure the Middle East. Netanyahu has a long-declared objective of establishing 'Eretz Yisrael' (a greater Israel), driving out the Palestinian masses, and securing regime change in Iran. This, together with the aim of collaborating with compliant regimes in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, aims to establish a secure region for US imperial interests. In doing so, the rising challenge of China to US imperialism would be weakened.

Trump and Netanyahu seemed to have the delusion that they could repeat what was done in Venezuela when Maduro was kidnapped. That is, cut off the figurehead and work with a compliant regime – in the case of Venezuela it is sections of the Bolivarian regime – prepared to capitulate to Trump and US imperialist demands.

However, Iran is not Venezuela. The killing of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, and other key leaders of the regime has not at this stage led to its collapse or sections of the regime switching allegiance, as happened in Venezuela. The killing of Khamenei has made him a martyr - a central element in Muslim Shia religion - in the eyes of supporters of the regime in Iran and amongst big sections of the Muslim world.

The two grim reapers hope they can achieve regime change through missiles and bombs raining down on Iran. Some are promoting Reza Pahlavi, the son of the former Shah, to head a new regime. Yet amongst many in Iran there is deep hostility towards the former regime of the Shah, who was overthrown in 1979.

Trump appealed to the Iranian masses to rise up as he launched missiles against cities throughout the country. What Trump wanted was for the Iranian people to be cannon fodder – to later simply be cast aside. During a regional war, such a development is now highly unlikely. No regime in history has simply been removed through aerial bombardment. Should the regime not be removed because of aerial attacks, Trump has now not ruled out the use of troops on the ground. Such a development would only deepen the crisis and have incendiary consequences in the US.

Forgetting the catastrophic experience of Iraq and Libya, when western imperialism intervened to overthrow the existing regimes, the US has no alternative or plan following the fall of the regime. Both Iraq and Libya were plunged into sectarian and ethnic conflict and became 'failed states.' Should the Iranian regime eventually implode, which is possible, a similar disaster could take place, bringing more carnage. Upheaval and conflict would reverberate to an even greater degree around the Middle East.

This assault will be seen as an attack on the Muslim world and, despite the reactionary character of the Iranian regime, it will fuel an anti-imperialist mood in much of the 'global south.' This can also lead to the strong possibility of a resurgence of reactionary Muslim fundamentalist organisations and revenge terrorist attacks internationally, which would deepen ethnic and religious divides in some countries.

A multifaceted crisis

The continuing bombardment by US imperialism and the Israeli regime, and counter-attacks by the Iranian state on US forces in the Gulf states and other countries, have plunged global capitalism into a multifaceted global crisis. It threatens to provoke a major international economic crisis, pushing up the price of oil and gas. At one stage, the price of liquified natural gas (LNG) rose by over 50% following the closure of energy producing facilities in Qatar at Ras Laffan and Mesaieed.

Now the Strait of Hormuz has been closed to shipping. Three oil tankers were previously hit. This is potentially disastrous for global capitalism, as 20% of global crude oil shipments pass through the Straits. If the war lasts for any length of time, it will have a global impact. It will be potentially devastating for Asia, as 82-84% of oil supplies going through the Strait is destined for Asian markets, especially China and India. This can easily push India and others into recession, which will ripple through to Europe and elsewhere. Several EU countries have tilted towards Asia in trade deals recently, as they have sought more autonomy from the US under Trump. Reflecting this, China is reportedly now trying to pressurise the Iranian regime to re-open the Strait of Hormuz and is also demanding that the US, Israel and Iran halt the attacks. China relies on Iran for 13% of its crude oil imports. In total, 33% of China's oil, and 25% of its gas imports pass through the Strait of Hormuz. Loosing this supply could push China to closer relations with Putin, especially to secure oil supplies. Already Russia accounts for 20% of China's crude oil imports.

20%
of the world's crude oil passes through the now closed Strait of Hormuz

Arising from this conflict, China can bolster its position internationally, especially in some areas of the global south.

The military assault by Trump and Netanyahu has provoked further division and conflict between the ruling classes. It has also provoked polarised division within countries. In the US it will greatly increase the polarisation and division rocking US society. Big sections of the ruling class are now in conflict with Trump's rogue regime. Having fought the presidential election promising an end to US foreign intervention, a revolt by a section of Trump's MAGA base is under way. Opinion polls are pointing to only 27% of Americans supporting the attack on Iran. Following on from the mass movement in Minneapolis against the brutal deployment of thousands of ICE enforcement officers (a paramilitary state organisation, which used fascistic methods of repression, and which forced a retreat by Trump), the political and social crisis in the US has reached a turning point.

The multipolar world conflicts are being aggravated and intensified as a result of the launching of the war against Iran. In Europe, the EU is split over what position to adopt. Prime Minister Keir Starmer in Britain initially refused the US forces using British military bases. Then he flip-flopped and agreed they could. Although this was not enough to keep Starmer safe from a slap from Trump, who dubbed him a "disappointment" and that he is not dealing with a "Churchill".

German chancellor Frederich Merz declared that international law is now "irrelevant". Others like Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez oppose the war and have refused the US permission to use Spanish military bases. In response, Trump has declared that all trade with Spain will now be blocked.

The fact that French president Emmanuel Macron, Starmer and Merz issued their own statement on 28 February, which had no position on the US-Israeli attack, without the rest of the EU, reveals the divisions that are opening. Reflecting the rival national interests, Merz, just before he travelled to meet Trump in Washington, declared: "International rules have relatively little effect – all the more so when violations carry few consequences". Despite polls in Germany showing that only 29% of Germans supported the US-Israeli attack, Merz added: "Now is not the time to lecture our partners and allies."

The growing rift between the US and Europe, and the increased drive to militarisation, is illustrated by France offering other European countries to come under its nuclear umbrella. There are reported negotiations of French "nuclear assets" being deployed in the Netherlands, Germany and Poland. If this takes place it will sharply increase the antagonism with Putin in Russia.

China's role

A crucial element now in inter-imperialist global relations is the US countering the rising influence of China. Iran has been a crucial element in China's geopolitical strategy. Beyond the oil and gas shipped through the Strait of Hormuz, Iran serves as part of one of three 'land bridges' to Europe. This is part of the 'Belt and Road initiative,' including a direct rail link from Tehran and Xi'an, which opened in May 2025. The claim by the US to have destroyed Iranian naval operations, cutting off its ability to check sea shipping routes, will affect China.

China and Russia, for their own reasons, have both stridently opposed what Trump has done. There have been major deepening trade ties, supply chain links, and economic interdependence between China and Asia, Latin America, Africa, and parts of Europe. A struggle for domination of supply chain routes is unfolding. This was a major component of Trump's claim to take over Greenland and thereby control shipping lanes.

Only 27%
of Americans support the attack on Iran


Trump overseeing the bombing of Iran from his resort in Florida PUBLIC DOMAIN

The emergence of a strengthened trade alliance in the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) reflects the changing balance of forces that is unfolding internationally. This is asserting itself more as a challenge to US imperialist domination. Within this bloc there are many divisions and internal contradictions and a lack of a coherent position on many issues. However, it does constitute part of a developing challenge to US imperialism. Trump, through the imposition of tariffs and other measures, would like to break the BRICS, and other blocs that may emerge. However, tariffs and other punitive measures will not be enough to halt the change in the balance of power globally which is taking place.

The war in Iran brings these historic changes into focus and forms a part of them. There are now major wars taking place – in the Middle East, Ukraine, and other major conflicts, such as between Pakistan and Afghanistan in Asia, and Sudan in Africa. Putin's war in Ukraine is set to continue for a longer period.

There is an understandable fear amongst young people and others that the world is growing dangerously violent and even perhaps on the brink of a World War III. Yet modern warfare involving an all-out military conflict between the major imperialist powers today would likely lead to a nuclear Armageddon. This would obliterate the working class and poor and capitalism itself. This nightmare is not yet posed today. For this to take place the crushing of the working class and the coming to power of Bonapartist military dictatorships in at least some of the main imperialist countries would be necessary. This is not posed at this stage.

However, as we have seen, rogue regimes and conflicts between the capitalist powers will result in major conflicts and wars in the new age of inter-imperialist and national conflict that now exists. The military manoeuvres undertaken by the Chinese regime after Trump unleashed his assault on Iran in March were intended as a warning. Should China conclude it is being cornered it could make some interventions to protect its strategic interests.


Gandhi Hospital in Tehran damaged by airstrikes TASNIM NEWS AGENCY/CC

A socialist alternative to imperialist and capitalist war

The horrors unfolding globally are irresolvable so long as capitalism and imperialism exist. The solution lies in the hands of the working class through ending capitalism as a social system. The masses of the Middle East and internationally can have no trust in imperialism or any of the reactionary capitalist, feudal regimes in the region. Lessons must be drawn from the experience of 2011 when dictatorships in the Middle East and north Africa were overthrown by the masses but then ultimately replaced by new dictatorships. The working class through its organisations, which must be revived and rebuilt as necessary, need to take up the struggle to oppose all capitalist and imperialist wars and capitalist politicians.

We call for:

- Mass protests against capitalist and imperialist wars and interventions are needed. Trade unions and workers' organisations should call protests in solidarity with the masses in the Middle East and in opposition to war
- Strikes and other actions need to be prepared for by the trade unions
- The bombings must stop and end the blood bath in the region. End the war! No war for oil!
- All imperialist forces out of the Middle East. Build an independent mass movement of the workers and poor in Iran and fight for a government of the workers' and the poor that defends democratic rights, and breaks with capitalism. Down with Netanyahu's government of death. No trust in imperialism nor any of the reactionary regimes in the region
- Build a united struggle to establish a voluntary democratic socialist confederation of the Middle East that defends the democratic and national rights of all the peoples of the Middle East. For unity of the working people of the Middle East and internationally in a struggle against our common enemies – capitalism and imperialism. For socialism as opposed to capitalist and imperialist barbarism

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. Further material is being published as the situation unfolds across the Middle East and can be found at:
socialistworld.net

Socialist Party leaflet: No more war in the Middle East

- Build a socialist alternative to Trump, Starmer and all the warmongers
- Stand against capitalism's war and horror



Aftermath of an Israeli missile hitting a school which killed over 100 children studying there
MEHR NEWS AGENCY/ABBAS ZAKERI/CC

How can we organise to end war?

Across the world, the reasons to feel fear have mounted as US President Donald Trump launched another Middle East attack. Alongside fear, however, there is also rage that the world's capitalist leaders have used their power so destructively again.

Since Saturday 28 February thousands have died as the Israel-US attacks have hit 131 cities in Iran. There have been casualties across 12 countries as war again hits the region. This is against the background of the genocidal slaughter in Gaza by the Israeli regime and its attacks in the West Bank.

Revealed once again is that the world establishment currently in charge, representing the interests of the billionaire capitalist class, have no plan of how to protect our future – be that preventing war, climate change, death by curable diseases, or poverty. Profit-before-all-else capitalism is in crisis.

It is urgent that the working class organises its own intervention – fighting for a socialist alternative.

That means building mass workers' struggle and organisation to fight back against the warmongers and exploiters and take power to begin democratically planning society free from war, exploitation and poverty. The magnificent movement against ICE in Minneapolis shows Trump can be pushed back by US workers and youth – and we can do the same here.

We have also seen the heroic movements of young people and workers in Iran, in rage against the government's repression, austerity and brutality. The enormous courage of the youth has even produced a resurgence of the protests in the last weeks.

The tragic lesson from the previous ousting of brutal dictators, as the masses did in the Arab Spring in Egypt and Tunisia in 2011, is that without the working class being organised with its own mass party to take power, the vacuum is only filled by more of the same.

The building, therefore, of a new mass party that represents the interests of the entire working class across all ethnic divides in Iran is urgent.

That wars and conflicts are on the rise is a consequence of a world dominated by the crisis of the capitalist system. Capitalist leaders offer no way out and the workers' movement needs to urgently fight to build its own independent challenge to them.

Trade unions

It is welcome that trade union leaders in Britain, reflecting the huge opposition among their 6.5 million members to more atrocities, have produced opposition statements already. Seventeen trade union leaders have signed a declaration opposing "any direct or indirect participation by the UK in this conflict".

The TUC has also produced a statement condemning the attack. It says: "We call on the UK government to do everything it can to deliver these objectives and resist all efforts to drag us further into the conflict."

But appeals alone will not work. Yes, Keir Starmer has made a statement saying that Britain will not join the US offensive action against Iran. But he granted permission on Sunday 1 March for the US to use British bases to target Iran's missile launchers and stores.

His contradictory approach reflects the different class pressures on him. On the one side are the big business bosses who want him to stay close to Trump in the hope of deals that benefit their profits. On the other is the huge public mood of opposition to war, shown in the mass anti-war movement that has marched in its hundreds of thousands since the attacks on Gaza began. A political expression of this was the election of Jeremy Corbyn and four independent Gaza MPs in 2024.

> **The trade union leaders could use their authority most effectively against British support for more war by calling their members to come forward as anti-war and anti-austerity candidates in those elections**

The two main parties, who between them have ruled for a century, were pushed into third and fourth position in the Manchester by-election. Starmer's party faces huge losses in the May elections in 136 English councils and the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Senedd. In those English councils alone, 73 are Labour-led, with over 2,200 Labour seats being defended.

We need a party of our own

The trade union leaders could use their authority most effectively against British support for more war by calling their members to come forward as anti-war and anti-austerity candidates in those elections. They could stand on their union's policies of opposition to job and public service cuts, to privatisation, to discrimination, and in solidarity with those facing war and poverty across the world.

This would be a huge step forward in the building of a new mass workers' party – giving a political voice to the workers in trade unions and across society, independent of all the rotten capitalist elites and fighting for a socialist programme: for power to be taken out of the hands of the major corporations and banks that dominate the economy, so society can be run democratically in the interests of the majority, based on planning and cooperation, instead of capitalism's ruthless pursuit of profit which leads to poverty, environmental destruction, and war.

We should not underestimate the effect that the creation of such a party – in Britain or any country – would have on strengthening the confidence of the working class and oppressed worldwide to build parties that struggle for the ending of this rotten capitalist system.

Trade union model motion

This union organisation condemns the unprovoked attack on Iran by Trump and the Israeli regime.

It is already causing thousands of deaths, injuries and displacement of ordinary people, and is rapidly escalating across the Middle East.

This union organisation totally rejects any idea that this war is in the interests of the Iranian people in their striving for democratic rights and their struggle against repression.

It is the for the Iranian working class and poor to decide for themselves and act to change their government. There have been heroic mass protests and strikes that have shaken the Iranian regime, and trade unions internationally should support the struggles of the Iranian workers and youth for their demands.

It is clear that this is an aggressive, imperialist offensive, in the interests of big business, by the US and Israeli governments that have blood on their hands with an increasing list of attacks and wars in Gaza, West Bank, Lebanon, Venezuela and while Trump is threatening to attack Cuba and annex Greenland.

This war has nothing to do with democracy as the US and other powers like Britain fully support the dictatorial Saudi regime which does not even pretend to hold elections or allow free speech.

This union organisation also condemns the hypocrisy of Starmer's Labour government which has effectively backed the aggression of Trump and Netanyahu over this whole period.

The Starmer government's claim that it supports defence against Iranian attacks is a propaganda trick aimed at covering up its refusal to criticise the US and Israeli for starting this war. It is similar to the attempts to justify the genocidal attack on Gaza.

This union organisation demands that our union NEC meets urgently to:

1. Make a clear public statement against this attack and opposes Starmer and the Labour government's warmongering, and effective support for the US attack, and any intention to join this imperialist war
2. Agree to demand an emergency meeting of the TUC General Council to call a national trade union led weekend demonstration against war, racism and austerity
3. To urgently call a national meeting of union reps in the defence, aerospace, transport and logistics sectors to discuss a programme for workers in these sectors, committing to defend any workers threatened by management for refusing to carry out work duties related to military production and supply. Also, to look at how alternatives to military production can be drawn up and implemented, guaranteeing workers' jobs, pay and pensions, based on the nationalisation of those industries
4. To set out a timetable for a discussion in our union on our relationship with Labour (if affiliated) and/or initiate with other unions, a conference on political representation

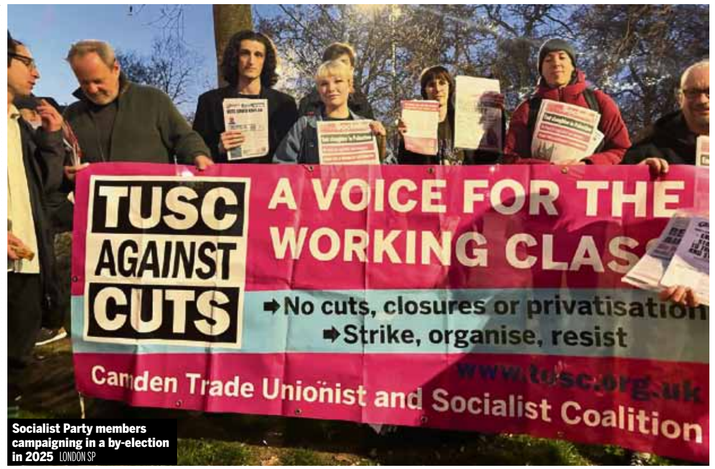
If this motion passes in your union branch or trades council then email a report to editors@socialistparty.org.uk

Appeal to all Your Party supporters:

HELP GET SOCIALISM ON THE BALLOT PAPER IN MAY!

The following appeal was published on 25 February by TUSC (Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition), the electoral coalition that the Socialist Party participates in. Since, the results of the Your Party CEC elections have been announced. Jeremy Corbyn's 'The Many' slate won 14 seats, Zarah Sultana's 'Grassroots Left' slate 7, with three independent candidates elected.

Socialist Party members are amplifying the call to 'get socialism on the ballot paper in May', and as part of that will be among those submitting their candidate applications to the TUSC steering committee by the next 14 March deadline.



Socialist Party members campaigning in a by-election in 2025 LONDON SP

With the inaugural Central Executive Committee (CEC) of Your Party beginning its term of office on 27 February, it's now time to seriously organise to get socialism on the ballot paper in the elections taking place on 7 May – with the official deadline for candidates' nomination papers to be submitted to councils' Electoral Services departments just weeks away.

And the election battlefield has just got bigger! After yet another U-turn by Keir Starmer's increasingly beleaguered government – reinstating elections in 30 councils which it had previously cancelled – there will now be 136 local authorities going to the polls this year, alongside the contests for the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Senedd. (A full list is available at tusc.org.uk)

Of the councils with elections in May, 73 are currently led by Starmer's Labour Party, with 2,200 or so Labour councillors defending their seats. With no deposits needed to stand in local elections, everyone who was inspired in July last year by Jeremy Corbyn and Zarah Sultana's call for a new party to take on the rigged system should ask themselves: why couldn't I be on the ballot paper to help build an alternative to the establishment parties?



The process of moving from last summer's declaration for a new party to actually establishing its first elected leadership body has indisputably been a fraught one. Serious differences have come to the surface and, disappointingly, the potential that was there at the outset for a new mass workers' party to be formed has not been realised. Nevertheless Your Party has been established and its members and supporters could still play an important role in what lies ahead.

TUSC's offer

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), which as it says is a coalition of leading trade unionists and socialists from different organisations or none, has not 'chosen sides' – but offered instead its support to all steps towards the still vital goal of a new mass party of the working class, including a serious intervention in the May elections. It was TUSC supporters, for example, who sponsored the amendment at the November Your Party conference to "prepare for the May elections with a bold anti-austerity stand", including by the organising of local no-cuts 'people's budget' conferences.

This amendment, which also recognised the "huge opportunity" that the 2026 local elections in particular offered to socialists to "expose and cut across all the pro-austerity parties, not least Reform UK", was agreed by a 90% yes vote. The hope of Your Party members and supporters now will surely be that the differences of the past few months won't stop the election opportunities identified then from being seized. And not in local areas only, which unfortunately will not have an impact on the national political debate, but across the country – by achieving the widest possible presence for a socialist alternative, including in the media.

Fair media coverage

But that means standing a sufficient number of candidates. The official Ofcom threshold for the number of local election candidates needed to qualify for a legally prescribed minimum 'fair media coverage' is 840 – one in six of the around 5,000 council seats up for election. Surely the chance for Jeremy and Zarah to appear in party election slots which must be carried by all broadcasters on all their platforms won't be spurned? The 'fair media coverage' also legally obliges the broadcasters to cover a manifesto launch and ensure participation in regional debates and discussion shows, and mentions in news reports on both TV and radio, setting the tone for broader media coverage.

Is this not worth fighting for? And if it is, is it really inconceivable that from the tens of thousands of socialists, trade unionists, anti-war protesters and community campaigners who responded to the summer 2025 call, 840 candidates couldn't be found? Without, remember, any election deposits being necessary - the £500 charge made on candidates in parliamentary and mayoral elections - which don't apply when standing for a council seat?

In reality, what's at stake is either a fragmented election campaign, probably with some local highlights but not properly recognised nationally, or the possibility of a campaign that combines the local highlights with a national presence. Think, for example, what the narrative will be from the elections on 8 May, the day after polling day, if even the best results won by Your Party supporters are buried in the 'others' column? While Reform, and probably the Greens and the Liberal Democrats positioning as the 'progressive alternatives' to Starmer's Labour in England, are portrayed as the gainers?

There are still practical questions that need to be resolved to achieve a national challenge; not least how to meet the Ofcom stipulation that the 'fair media coverage' threshold applies only to candidates that appear on the ballot paper using the name of a party registered with the Electoral Commission or one of its supplementary 'registered descriptions'.

That is why TUSC, with the experience of organising hundreds of candidates in an election network – 748 was our peak number, in 2015 – has reached out to the new Your Party CEC for urgent discussions. Meanwhile, a Q&A guide to some of the questions around this issue that may be in the minds of Your Party supporters is published on the TUSC website (tusc.org.uk).

But our basic appeal is simple – not to miss the opportunities that are there in May but to help get socialism on the ballot paper!

tusc.org.uk

- **For the full list of elections in May, Elections 2026 Q&A guide, TUSC candidate application form, and more**



Protest against SEND cuts in Leicester STEVE SCO

Labour SEND reforms: Fight for fully funded services and democratic control

ALEX SAMPSON
PLYMOUTH SOCIALIST PARTY

The Labour government has announced its overhaul of SEND provision for young people, causing concern for children, teachers and parents.

Under new plans, instead of getting education, health and care plans (EHCPs), young people will be assessed for the new individual support plans (ISPs) which, depending on the level of support required, will be split into 'targeted', 'targeted plus' – which are to be agreed between schools and parents and reviewed annually – and 'specialist' needs. Only young people assessed as being within the 'specialist' layer of support will receive an EHCP, which will be young people with the most complex disabilities.

If this seems confusing and unnecessarily complicated, imagine how it will feel for stressed parents trying to negotiate this system and get their children the help they need to make the most of the education system. It is well-nigh impossible enough now as it is, but with these new layers of rules and definitions, it is likely to become insurmountable to those who don't know how the system works.

And this is what the government is relying on. EHCPs are a legally enforceable framework of support for the needs of young people (up to the age of 25) which have to be delivered on by the local authority. The new ISPs are purely an agreement between schools and parents and there is no legal redress to ensure that schools are delivering support to these children.

Thanks to the removal of schools from local control into academies, local authorities have had minimal influence over schools to reinforce EHCPs for some time. So the system needed to be overhauled, but by bringing schools back under local democratic control rather than removing more children from the EHCP pathway and the support they need. Charities are suggesting around 270,000 children will lose their EHCPs under these new rules, which will save the government billions of pounds annually.

This is the real reason for the changes to the current system. The number of children with an EHCP has doubled since 2014, despite waiting lists for assessments being vast. It is undeniable that the SEND system costs a huge amount of money, but to just remove legally enforceable help from young people risks their already massively swamped schools to struggle further. As education budgets have been cut over the last decade and a half, councils have increasingly relied on privatised facilities to cover their legal obligations around SEND. The amount of money that is going directly to private profiteers is the real cause for the massive budgets, and should be brought back in-house.

Ultimately, the people who will lose out are the children who will be massively disadvantaged by the loss of necessary support within the education system, which will impact them for their whole lives.

It is absolutely unacceptable that children's futures should be put at risk simply to save money, but it is the way capitalism works. This is why we need to fight for a socialist system which would give us fully funded health, social care and education systems, under the democratic control of education workers, student organisations and the local working-class community. We have the resources to ensure all children's needs are met, allowing them to reach their full potential, no matter what, but it is currently hoarded by the super-rich. As Keir Starmer and his Labour government are acting in the interests of that same super-rich, we will have to fight for the services we need and the resources to properly fund them.

Labour plan to cancel equalising minimum wage for young people

DEAN YOUNG
LIVERPOOL SOUTH SOCIALIST PARTY

Many young people expected Starmer's New Labour government would be a change from the Tories but not even two years in, our situations are much worse despite Labour's election pledges. Youth unemployment has gone up to 16.1% in February, the highest rate in five years. And another U-turn appears to be on the horizon. Under pressure from big business, the government is considering shelving the proposal to equalise the minimum wage for those over 18.

Minimum wage

- **£12.21** for those over 21 years old
- **£10** for 18- to 20-year-olds
- **£7.55** for 16- and 17-year-olds

I recall being 19 and working in Burger King for just £6.83 an hour, then around £3 less than my co-workers who happened to be four years older than me. They were hardly living the life of Riley themselves, but it is not fair to have workers doing the same job be paid at different basic rates. It should be an equal day's pay for an equal day's work.

Bad excuses

The excuse from the mouthpieces of megacorporations, such as Luke Johnson the former chairman of Pizza Express, that it is simply too expensive to pay workers, is a farce. Pizza Express, for example, had a revenue of £442 million in 2025. The problem isn't that people on minimum wage are being paid too much, it is that corporations and billionaire boards are seeking short-term profits at the expense of millions of working-class young people. And the government subsidises these employers paying low wages through Universal Credit payments; more people who receive benefits work than not.

What is needed is well-paid jobs that are sustainable. We need a £15 per hour minimum wage immediately for all workers, including those under 18, as a step towards a real living wage. We need trade union struggle that fights in the interests of young workers, including for the wages we need.

It is only 'impossible' to deliver a £12.71 minimum wage for all because the capitalist system operates on the basis of short-term profits for a few over a plan which serves the needs of the majority of us. And to those who say they cannot afford this, we say open the books and show us where the profit is going. And if small businesses genuinely cannot pay the wages we need to live on then they should be subsidised, taking the wealth away from the big bosses.

There is a socialist alternative to the capitalist race to the bottom. By nationalising under democratic working-class control the commanding heights of the economy – big business and the banks – we could allocate jobs to all who need them and properly train up employees. Capitalism doesn't wish to invest in young people; increasingly young people do not wish to invest their support in capitalism either!



MARY FINCH

PCS members in DWP want to strike but miss turnout threshold – How can we turn this around?



PCS members in DWP on strike in 2023 OXFORD SOCIALIST PARTY

BROAD LEFT NETWORK SUPPORTERS IN PCS IN DWP

85% of members of civil service union PCS in the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) pay ballot have voted for strike action.

But the 37% turnout fell short of the 50% threshold set by the Tories' 2016 anti-trade union laws. This means there is no legal mandate for the strike action which we need to achieve our pay demands.

It is disgraceful that Keir Starmer's Labour government has still failed to scrap this anti-union legislation. Our union should be giving the lead in challenging the Starmer government – we need a fightback, and we need a political voice that actually represents the interests of our members.

But the key questions are why did we fail to breach the threshold, and what is to be done?

40,000 DWP members are facing the fourth year in a row on minimum wage. Pay has been eroded by over a third, there is chronic understaffing, and workers are being forced back into the office (instead of hybrid working) for an extra 20% of their time.

There is a strong mood for action on pay. That is clear from the members' meetings that have taken place across the country and from the overwhelming 'yes' vote.

The PCS DWP group leadership - which is dominated by the same misnamed 'Left Unity' group that has a majority on the union's National Executive Committee (NEC) - has pinned the blame largely on postage delays.

It is true that more than a dozen delivery offices have reported having to prioritise parcels over letters, meaning post has been delayed in some areas. However, this is unlikely to account for the 5,000 additional ballot papers needed to reach the 50% strike ballot threshold.

Lacklustre leadership

The truth is that the union leadership has not implemented what the members instructed them to do at our 2025 conferences. They delayed balloting, watered down the demands, and ran a lacklustre campaign.

PCS conference back in May 2025 voted for a national campaign for a 10% pay rise, genuine hybrid working, opposition to job cuts, and restoration of pension overpayments. But no campaign was implemented and the leadership accepted the government pay remit.

The DWP Group conference also voted to campaign on pay: for a 10% rise, and a sliding scale of wages to stop our members repeatedly falling to minimum wage.

But the DWP pay ballot didn't take place till four months after the imposed, inadequate pay 'rise' was already in our pay packets. The DWP Group Executive Committee (GEC) decided to demand 'pay flexibility' - more money to the lower grades and an increased pay gap between grades. Such a vague demand failed to inspire members. In reality the leadership was trying to fit within the paltry government pay remit rather than challenge it.

In addition, the leadership did nothing to mobilise the membership to build for industrial action. When increased hybrid attendance was imposed, the leadership just sent out a survey, and mounted no opposition either to these changes or to the office closures announced at four sites.

To win, we need a serious, concerted campaign that inspires the confidence of members.

Low pay and all the other issues have not gone away. But we need a leadership that will campaign, place demands on the employer, and mobilise members to fight, giving reps the tools to do so.

Nominate BLN-supported candidates for NEC and DWP

The PCS Broad Left Network (BLN), in which Socialist Party members participate, stands for a fighting, democratic union. Supporters of the BLN are collaborating with other lefts in the union in a 'coalition for change,' seeking nomination for election to the NEC and DWP GEC.

- For the NEC candidates and the programme we are standing on, see 'Nominate candidates for PCS National Executive Committee who will fight job cuts, the pension crisis and austerity pay'. For DWP GEC candidates go to bln.org.uk

Get all the latest union news...
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Sheffield Veolia strike – Agreement reached



SHEFFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBER

After over 18 months of action, the strike of Unite members for union recognition at Sheffield Veolia has finally been settled, with an agreement that was put to and agreed by the strikers. This is a testament to the sheer determination of this group of bin workers who took action on this principle.

The Unite union always made clear that it was willing and prepared to work with other unions. Many public sector workplaces are multi-union.

But the behaviour of the GMB union leadership in preventing recognition of Unite has been disgraceful. It should not be forgotten that not only did GMB full-time officials take to social media to disparage the strike campaign in appalling language, they also actively attempted to break the strike by assisting the company to get vehicles through picket lines. This was not disguised – they did so wearing a GMB hi-viz!!

This is in sharp contrast to workers on site, including GMB members, who always maintained good relations with the strikers.

This was yet another campaign, like Birmingham bins, where the employers sought and gained an injunction to prevent union protest. Veolia is the contractor for Labour-controlled Sheffield City Council - yet another Labour council that has no problem using the law to attack workers. This should not come as a shock – it is, after all, the same party that continues to refuse to remove the turnout thresholds all the anti-trade union laws leftover from Tory governments.

The upcoming local elections no doubt focused the minds of the council, which made clear that they did not want another Birmingham.

There are lessons workers will want to discuss from the dispute, on tactics and demands - but this cannot take away from the fact that action by this determined group of workers moved the employer to make a proposal, which led to agreement from the members, and which represents a win to be built on.

Cwm Taf health visitors strike for fair pay

JOHN WILLIAMS
CARDIFF SOCIALIST PARTY

Over 100 health visitors in Unite at Cwm Taf Morgannwg Health Board are taking strike action for four weeks at the refusal of the board to pay them the correct salary based on their qualifications. This is costing them £8,000 to £9,000 per year.

Health visitors do vital community outreach work for new mothers and families, but their bosses refuse to acknowledge their skills. They are paid at band six, despite internal job-grading matching them as a band seven, acknowledging a Masters qualification.

Other health boards in Wales put their health visitors on the correct pay band. In Scotland they were put on band seven in 2017!

Reps Ceri and Jo started questioning the banding system at Cwm Taf Morgannwg in 2021, but management have stalled for five years, often refusing to discuss the issue at all. So the health visitors have been forced to begin one month of strike action, and are prepared to keep fighting for as long as it takes.

They held a mass meeting outside the board offices on day one of the strike, with a vibrant rally. Supporters came from other Unite branches in South Wales and Cardiff Trades Council, and health workers came from as far afield as London and Gloucester.

On 10 March they are lobbying the Senedd (Wales parliament). All trade unionists should come and support them.

- John Williams is standing for election to the LGBT seat on Unite's Executive Council, alongside other Socialist Party members, as part of the 'Workers Unite' list



SOCIALIST PARTY WALES

SOCIALIST PARTY CONGRESS 2026: PREPARING FOR THE BATTLES TO COME

CHRISTINE THOMAS
SOCIALIST PARTY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Almost 300 elected delegates and visitors attended the Socialist Party Congress. It was held in Coventry from 28 February to 2 March. Around half the people in the room only joined the Socialist Party since 2020. The enthusiasm, determination, and sense of responsibility for building the Socialist Party of all those present - young and not so young, new and experienced - was expressed in the many contributions to the discussions and the financial appeal which raised £37,876, on top of the tens of thousands raised to put on this successful event. It was impossible to leave the Congress without feeling extremely optimistic about the struggle for socialism in Britain and internationally.

A new global era

Congress began just hours after the first US and Israeli missiles had rained down on Iran, killing hundreds of civilians, including 165 school children. By the third day, many countries across the Middle East had been hit. These dramatic events graphically and brutally illustrate the new age of imperialist rivalry, polarisation and conflict described by Tony Saunois, Secretary of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), and Judy Beishon, Socialist Party Executive Committee (EC) member, who introduced and concluded the opening session - A World in Crisis.

We are now in an extremely unstable multipolar world marked by imperialist conflict and wars, economic and military - of intensifying social and political polarisation not seen since the interwar years. Donald Trump is both a product and an accelerant of this new volatile era.

Trump's intervention in Venezuela, his threats against Greenland and other countries in Latin America are the naked promotion of US capitalism's economic interests. In particular, they reflect the rivalry between US imperialism and China, which is a principal feature of this new era. Although the US is still the biggest economic and military power globally, it has been in relative decline. While in 1960 the US accounted for 40% of world GDP that figure has now fallen to 26%. China's share has increased from 2% in the 1970s to around 22% today.

Trump reflects the weakness of US imperialism, which can no longer even pretend to play the role of the world's policeman on behalf of capitalism.

At home, Trump is also facing a society in turmoil and a deep political crisis. The state terror meted out by ICE in Minneapolis and the mass protests that erupted in response mark a turning point. These dramatic events, the continuing cost-of-living crisis and the Epstein scandal are further undermining all the institutions of capitalism and Trump's approval ratings.

We are in a period that contains elements of revolution and counterrevolution. One feature has been the rise of right-populist and far-right parties and the increasing repression and authoritarianism of capitalist governments of all colours. Where right-wing populists have come to power they have not resolved any of the problems in society. The other feature globally has been mass uprisings in countries like Bangladesh and Nepal, and a revival of the class struggle, with general strikes in Belgium, Greece, Portugal Argentina, and in India - the latter involving 300 million workers.

> **At home, Trump is also facing a society in turmoil and a deep political crisis. The state terror meted out by ICE in Minneapolis and the mass protests that erupted in response mark a turning point**

A missing factor globally is the existence of mass parties based on the working class that can expose and challenge capitalism and provide a socialist alternative. But the new global era and the early stirrings of class struggle are sowing the seeds for this alternative to be built.

Britain in crisis

The global instability, the sharp turns and sudden changes, the looming crisis in the world economy, will all have an impact on events in Britain.

"Just 20 months ago Starmer was elected with an historic 174 seat majority, just five less than Blair got in 1997", said Socialist Party general secretary Hannah Sell, introducing the session 'Perspectives for class struggle in Britain'. "But this is an entirely different world to 1997. Today the capitalist class has a profound crisis of political representation that they cannot overcome".

This is the inevitable result of the inability of their system to improve the living standards of the majority. That is what destroyed the Tory party, once the most successful capitalist party on the planet, with millions of members, now reduced to 1.9% of the vote in the Gorton and Denton by-election.

Labour's chosen candidate went down to a devastating defeat, in third place behind Reform, the Greens winning by over 4,000 votes. For the best part of a century capitalism in Britain was ruled via two stable parties. That era has gone for ever. Both are going to get a battering in the May elections.

Like in the Caerphilly Senedd by-election last year, won by Plaid Cymru, voters wanted to punish Labour, and looked to parties broadly seen as on the left to do so. Starmer is a "dead prime minister walking". But even if he is replaced, possibly after the May elections, this will not fundamentally overcome the disintegration of Labour or solve the capitalists' crisis of political representation.

One advantage that the capitalist class has for now is the early stage in development of class struggle, still low levels of consciousness and cohesion of the working class, and the absence of a mass workers' party. It could have been so different had the leadership of Your Party built on the initial enthusiasm of the 800,000 who supported the call last summer for a new party, launched a campaign aimed at the base of the trade unions, and implemented a democratic structure that put unions at the core. But that opportunity has been squandered.

However, the issue of working-class political representation will continue to be posed sharply in the trade union movement. After all, it was the Birmingham bin workers' ongoing heroic struggle which was the catalyst for the vote at Unite conference to review the union's link with labour.



"The capitalist class has a profound crisis of political representation that they cannot overcome", said Socialist Party general secretary Hannah Sell, introducing the session 'Perspectives for class struggle in Britain' PHOTO: MARTIN POWELL-DAVIES

The pressure for strike action is mounting and the union leaders will not be able to hold back the tide indefinitely. The unions have a key role to play in fighting austerity and against the far right. But Reform and right-wing populism cannot be cut across while calling for a Labour vote. Linked to this is the question of the trade unions entering the political arena.

Many trade unionists and thousands of young people who consider themselves socialists are currently joining and looking to the Greens, who they see as an alternative at this point in time. Socialists must seek every opportunity to discuss and debate the best way to build representation for the working class, including using the petition calling on Zack Polanski to commit Green election candidates to vote against all cuts and closures.

Defeating Reform and its division is a task for the workers' organisations, and the Congress recognised that this won't be done by giving in to the pressure that will inevitably grow for 'lesser evilism.' This is the argument to back one 'progressive candidate' against Reform even when those candidates have backed austerity and created the conditions for Reform to grow. Instead, we will need anti-austerity, socialist, workers' councillors and MPs to organise and channel the mass opposition that will inevitably erupt against right-populism here, just as it has against Trump in the US.

Building our work in the trade unions

One of the widely recognised strengths of the Socialist Party is our roots in the workplaces and the trade unions. Opening the session on our work in the unions, Rob Williams, Socialist Party industrial organiser, explained that strike action is not at the level of 2022-23, but is higher than before Covid. Replying to the discussion, EC member Paula Mitchell pointed out that there is the potential for national action in schools and further and higher education, while pressure is building on the question of NHS and local government pay. Members reported the enthusiasm for motions on working-class political representation they proposed to union branches, as part of the 'Trade unionists for a new party' campaigning the party has been involved in.

Stormy events are looming and we must strive to raise the confidence of workers and young people, including by campaigning for a fighting leadership of the trade unions for the battles to come. We do that through a combination of putting demands on the existing leaders and building left opposition in the unions, including by standing candidates in trade union elections offering a socialist programme.

Our caucuses, which bring together Socialist Party members active in the various trade unions, are vital for organising our work in this crucial arena. Delegates active in seven different unions spoke in the discussion, with many others not able to contribute because of lack of time. A young member in Unison, called on all young Socialist Party members to get active in their union and respective caucus.

Members from Birmingham and Gloucestershire explained how they had been consistently visiting the picket lines and bringing solidarity to workers involved in the two longest strikes - the bin workers, out now for 15 months, and the phlebotomists, on strike for almost one year. 22 different Socialist Party bulletins have been distributed in Birmingham helping to point a way forward for the strike.

Socialist Party members are part of the left opposition in the most important unions. There are 11 Socialist Party members on national executive committees and members are standing as candidates for election or re-election this year for NECs in three unions, UCU, Unite and PCS, and for four service group executives in Unison.

In many areas our members are working with local trades councils to organise People's Budget conferences, drawing up an anti-austerity programme for local council areas. We are also active in the National Shop Stewards Network, which provides a fighting programme for activists, and we will be mobilising for its 20th Conference on 27 July and lobby of the TUC on 13 September.

As well as taking part in the caucuses, all trade union members were encouraged to read, write for, and sell our Socialist newspaper.

May elections

Congress discussed the elections on 7 May, which will be the first in many cities under a Labour government since 2010. As there is unlikely to be a national Your Party stand, the Socialist Party will be supporting and promoting the appeal of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, which we participate in, to 'help get socialism on the ballot paper', and its aim to get a sufficient number of candidates to achieve 'fair media coverage' (see page 5). The key task for Socialist Party members is encouraging trade unionists, young people, community and anti-war campaigners, Your Party supporters and all those opposing war and austerity to stand.

Preparing for a new period of struggle

Who would have thought that a discussion on party structures would be one of the most lively of the Congress? But it was. That's because, as Sarah Sachs Eldridge, EC Secretary, said in her introductory speech, the session was about the vital question of how our party can prepare for the mass struggles that will inevitably erupt, given the deep crisis of capitalism.

The resolution the Congress was discussing began by stating that "our party seeks to arm the fighting layers of the working class and youth with perspectives, a programme and a clear idea of the next steps needed to take the movement forward". That is primarily a political task, but being prepared "requires attention to building teams that take responsibility at every level of the party".

Congress is the primary decision-making body of the Socialist Party. In between Congresses, political and tactical decisions are taken by the National Committee, elected at the Congress, and an Executive Committee, elected by the National Committee. As we are moving into a new period, in which events are speeding up and decisions need to be made rapidly, the resolution proposed that we move to a tighter National Committee that can meet more frequently, with more time to discuss perspectives and respond to events.

> **Stormy events are looming and we must strive to raise the confidence of workers and young people including by campaigning for a fighting leadership of the trade unions for the battles to come**

The resolution also raised the need to strengthen the building of teams at every level of the party, including at regional and branch level. National Councils, with delegates elected from every branch, and also from our national trade union caucuses, national youth and student bureau, and national special oppression groups, would aim to meet twice a year. In particular, delegates stressed the importance of maximising the voice of our worker and trade union members.

The resolution was passed with no votes against and three abstentions.

Conference then went on to elect a new National Committee and to discuss how we can increase our finances, part of "sharpening all our tools" for the new period, as National Treasurer Isai Marijerla put it. 2025 was a year of improvement, especially with regards to the regular subscriptions members pay but there is still great potential to increase all aspects of our income, from subs, fighting fund and sales of our publications. Developing finance organisers and teams will be key to this, and is primarily a political task.

Youth are the future

Listening to our young members is always a highlight of Congress. But this was especially the case this year, with a growing number of youth playing important roles in building the Socialist Party at every level. The final session discussed our work amongst students in the universities, colleges and schools. Socialist Party members have helped build and are active in Socialist Students, which is striving to develop as a mass broad socialist student organisation.

Young members spoke enthusiastically about the campaigns and events they have been involved in and are planning for the coming months: the school and college walkouts against Trump's visit last September; debates with the Greens; campaigning and standing youth candidates in the local elections; protesting against the war in Gaza and against a wider war in the Middle East; campaigning against rent hikes and rip-off charges on campus; building for International Women's Day events against sexism and the system; fighting closures and showing solidarity with university workers fighting cuts and redundancies; fighting the far right; standing in student union elections to build a combative student leadership.

In addition to all these and many other campaigns, Socialist Party youth and student organiser Adam Powell Davies explained that nationally a Socialists Student youth contingent would take part in the 28 March 'Together' demo against the far right. Also protests would be organised against the G20 meeting which will be held in Britain in 2027.

Young people are especially hit by the crisis of the capitalist system and many are searching for a socialist solution. Socialist Party members will be doing all we can to ensure that our ideas reach as many of those young people as possible.



PHOTO: NICK CLARE



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PHOTO: NICK CLARE

> **Young people are especially hit by the crisis of the capitalist system and many are searching for a socialist solution**

Liverpool unions demand councillors stand up for us

BECCA BAYMAN
LIVERPOOL SOCIALIST PARTY

50 people came to the Liverpool Trade Union Council meeting to discuss a 'People's Budget.' The Save Liverpool Women's Hospital campaign was there, emphasising the harm of healthcare privatisation, calling for the NHS to be adequately funded and regenerated.

Local Labour MP Ian Byrne was unable to attend. Liverpool's councillors were invited. Local Green Party councillor Martyn Madeley and Your Party councillor Alan Gibbons did attend.

Our people's budget included rejecting council tax rises, building 5,000 council homes, and stopping cuts to services – reversing over £56 million of cuts by Liverpool Labour council.

Liverpool Labour's new proposed cuts include fines for parents whose children miss school, removing second carers from vulnerable people, and restricting one-to-one care to "exceptional circumstances". The Labour council's budget demonstrates its vicious willingness to inflict austerity onto the most vulnerable, stripping the pockets of working-class families in a cost-of-living crisis.

Dying from cuts

Since the Conservative-Liberal Democrat national coalition government in 2010, Liverpool has lost more than £600 million in government funding. In 2015, The Liverpool Echo reported that 160 people could be dying each year on Merseyside "due to austerity cuts".

More than ten years on, there's no end to austerity in sight. Now, Reform is trying to profit from working-class anger.

Therefore, trade unions must take matters into their own hands, to fill the political vacuum on the left. The trade union council's people's budget proved that there is an alternative.

The meeting was underpinned by the legacy of the Liverpool 47 – the socialist Labour council in the 1980s, led by Militant (now the Socialist Party). That council drastically improved the lives of Liverpool's working class in the face of Margaret Thatcher's Tory austerity agenda – translating socialism into the language of jobs, homes and services.

So local councils do have a choice, and can choose not to implement austerity, going against the 'advice' of unelected council finance officers.

Opposing cuts is essential. Thousands of people could be mobilised in campaigns to build council houses and improve workers' lives. Just as 50,000 workers in Liverpool marched to the town hall to support the 47 on the day of the budget meeting in 1984, in a one-day general strike.

Today, councillors making a stand against cuts would be backed by the working class. A government threating to 'send in commissioners' to make cuts would face huge working-class opposition.

During the discussion, Green councillor Martyn Madeley signed the trade unionist petition, calling on Zack Polanski to ensure that Green Party candidates will only appear on the ballot if they have made a public commitment to vote against all cuts. Your Party councillor Alan Gibbons also agreed to present the budget to the council, speaking about "breaking the gap between funding and needs", and rejecting council tax rises.

Teachers at the meeting opposed education privatisation, calling for school debts to be written off. We agreed to include demanding funding to reopen a local library. And to lobby the council budget meeting, and send a delegation. This people's budget will be used as a springboard for 2027 local elections, and the Liverpool Trade Union Council could endorse a slate of candidates that will put forward what we had raised, and to stand against cuts.

Green and Your Party councillors

After the meeting, councillors Martyn Madeley from the Greens and Alan Gibbons from Your Party wrote to say that they would not be supporting the people's budget.

The Greens' Martyn Madeley said: "We decided not to propose the People's amendment this year." Your Party's Alan Gibbons said: "It might have been better not to go for a zero council tax rate [rise]".

We think that would be a mistake. As the Socialist goes to press, they still have time to change their minds again.

In the 1980s, Thatcher's Tories were forced to return tens of millions of pounds to Liverpool City Council. But this movement was isolated to Liverpool by the right-wing in Labour, led by Neil Kinnock.

Now, with people's budget meetings taking place across the country, the opportunity arises for trade unions to take charge in improving the lives of working-class people and channel their resources into a political fight for that.



- **Sign the petition: Greens must pledge 'no cuts' – change.org/GreensMustPledgeNoCuts**



We're fighting for a people's budget

Newham – 'our campaign is winning'

SCOTT JONES
NEWHAM AND EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Buoyed by forcing Newham Labour council to backtrack on attacks on libraries and the reinstatement of a suspended rep, 200 workers and supporters protested outside the council's budget meetings.

Instead of planned library closures and cuts of £500,000 initially announced, opening times are now protected. Save Newham Libraries said: "Our campaign is winning". But £200,000 cuts remain.

'Austerity is over'

Despite Newham Labour council claiming that "austerity is over", following an increase in government funding, more than £101 million worth of cuts are planned over the next three years.

A number of Socialist Party members – representing Newham National Education Union (NEU), Newham Trade Union Council, Hackney Unison – addressed the lively crowd. We raised the need for fighting trade union action, no-cuts council budgets, and a workers' stand in the May local election to fight for the funds the borough needs. Many took our leaflet, and 15 people bought the Socialist newspaper.

They could hear us

The protest marched around the corner to the big windows of the town hall, so that the council meeting could hear us. We could see the windows snapping shut, as our chants disrupted them setting their cuts budget.

Some of us have been kicked out of the public gallery at that annual budget meeting more times than we can count. But they couldn't kick us out of the street!

The protest was one of the biggest outside Stratford Town Hall in years. The partial victory by Save Newham Libraries, combined with the slight increase in central government funding from the new formula, should be a cue to go on the offensive and demand restoration of all cut services.

Labour set to lose

Newham Labour could face serious losses in the local elections. The Greens and Newham Independents – supported by Jeremy Corbyn – are likely to win more seats.

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

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

Brighton Greens say they're better at making cuts than Labour

DAVID MAPLES
BRIGHTON SOCIALIST PARTY

Thursday 26 February was a busy night for the Green Party. At one end of the country, they were humiliating Labour in the Gorton and Denton by-election.

But, in their established base in Brighton it was the council's budget meeting. The Green Party has twice run Brighton council. When Brighton Green council tried to cut bin workers' pay by thousands of pounds, it provoked strike action by council unions.

Winning back control?

Brighton does not have elections this year. But the Green Party has high hopes of winning control again next year.

The Green Party finance spokesperson, councillor Ollie Sykes, made an extraordinary speech. Since 2010 Brighton has lost over £100 million in funding from central government. So did he call for this money to be restored?

No. Instead, he said: "Fair funding review 2.0 seems to have been fairer to Green-run Bristol, than Labour-run Brighton. We were promised that a Labour council with a Labour government would help the city thrive.

"Notwithstanding this, Bristol City Council also has to make significant savings. I've been told that after the Greens took over there, the achievements of savings in-year rose from 65% under Labour to 85% under Greens.

"Here in Brighton and Hove, Labour's in-year savings achievement is currently running at about 65%. Roll on May 2027."

So the Greens are bragging about making deeper cuts than Labour.

Brighton and Hove Unison and the Trades Union Council lobbied the council, calling for a needs-based no-cuts budget. The lobby heard impassioned speeches, particularly regarding the proposed closure of Wellington House, the last remaining day centre for adults with learning disabilities. We are supporting staff and relatives to campaign to save this service.

Zack Polanski

Green Party leader Zack Polanski recently spoke to 1,500 people in Brighton. We couldn't afford the £26.25 admission price. But, outside, we received a good response to the petition calling on him to instruct his Green councillors to vote against cuts.

We will work with anybody who will consistently vote against cuts. But it looks as though that will need to be trade unionists and service users standing themselves as socialist, working-class, anti-austerity candidates.



Brighton Socialist Party ask Zack Polanski and the Greens to oppose cuts

Sheffield will resist Labour and Green cuts

MAAZ NAYYER AND ALI COOK
SHEFFIELD NORTH WEST SOCIALIST PARTY

The no-cuts conference – organised by Sheffield Your Party supporters – posed a simple question: What is the point of the economy, if it cannot provide the services its people need? The morning session was chaired by Sophie Wilson, a former Sheffield councillor who has fought for no-cuts budgets, and included four speakers.

Economist Jamie Gough said how no-cuts budgets could be funded. Jamie thought central government is critical, because focusing on local taxes only would leave deprived areas behind. He suggested raising corporate tax, cutting business exemptions, clamping down on tax transfers, and a fairer land tax.

Sam Moorcroft, Sheffield Trades Union Council president (personal capacity), emphasised an alternative to the current system that actually served the working class. He described the awful outsourcing contracts, as well as job and service losses. Sam spoke about the need to insource council services to improve quality and accountability.

Sam highlighted the threat of Reform. Given the desperate situation, he wondered if the public would even notice if Reform were worse.

Onay Kasab – Unite the Union national lead officer – provided insight into the ongoing battle between Birmingham Labour council and the bin workers. Onay also talked about the failure of this Labour government – the new bill for SEND support (special educational needs and disability), selling off council houses, and 'fire and rehire' of workers.

Workers striking back

Onay also pointed out the link between deteriorating public services and the rise of the far right. Crucially, he provided hope – agency workers voting unanimously to join the Birmingham bin strike.

Nottingham Socialist Party member Gary Freeman spoke about Shuguftah Quddoos – a councillor in his local area that has tabled a no-cuts budget. Contributions from the floor talked about the Green Party, and we finished this session stating that councillors should act on behalf of their public, not the government.

Sessions on 'housing' and 'jobs and services' drew up a budget for what Sheffield needs.

- **No to zero-hour contracts**
- **£15-an-hour minimum wage**
- **Move services back in-house, and introduce comprehensive apprenticeship schemes**
- **Rent caps – linked to income for affordability**
- **Abolish 'right to buy'**
- **Expand works department to build and retrofit council homes**

The feedback was that the event was a significantly more positive initiative than much of the other Your Party meetings. In particular, the emphasis on policy was welcome. 44 attended.

We are taking these demands to the council budget. Labour and Green councillors have promised to vote for cuts, with none of the resistance that is required.



Students flock to York socialists' anti-war campaign

ALI MANSFIELD
YORKSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY

Students flocked to our Socialist Students campaign stall at the University of York, where we had the slogans of "Stop Trump's wars in the Middle East" and "Say no to Starmer's complicity", opposing the bombing of Iran.

We linked this issue to the question of university funding, and the need for universities to open their books to democratic oversight of students and campus trade unions.

Many students who approached were keen to talk about next steps, asking about our plans to protest around the issue. York Socialist Students is holding a meeting – and meetings around the country – to discuss these immediate campaign questions, and how we can build a movement fighting to end capitalist wars.

Join the student fightback
JOIN socialist students
socialiststudents.org.uk/join

Anti-asylum seekers protest outnumbered and countered in Worcester

THEO HERCULES
WORCESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

On 28 February, the 'Patriots of Worcester' group organised an anti-asylum seekers protest in Worcester, just outside the Fownes Hotel, where a few asylum seekers are housed. The protest began at around 11.30am with speeches from the 'Patriots' on the High Street. Shortly after, the Rally 4 Unity counter-protest, organised by Worcestershire Against Hate and the Trades Union Council, gathered nearby.

The counter-protest was made up of anti-racism organisations, political organisations and trade unions, including members of the Socialist Party.

At the hotel, the protesters were held in place by a cordon of police officers, while the counter-protesters were behind a metal fence. A number of 'auditors' were live-streaming or otherwise filming the counter-protest as a method of intimidation. The counter-protest held firm until 4pm, by which point the last of the 'Patriots' had left. At the protest's peak there were only around 80 protesters and 350 counter-protesters, which sent a clear message that Worcester stands firmly against hatred and will always support those in need.

'Together, you are unstoppable': Anti-racist activists march through Southampton

JAMES GRETTON
SOUTHAMPTON SOCIALIST PARTY

Local activists marched through Southampton in solidarity with refugees on 1 March, from Portswood to the Peace Fountain in East Park. Socialist Party members marched in the protest. The demonstration countered the far-right Southampton Patriots, who have organised weekly anti-immigrant rallies outside Highfield House Hotel, Portswood.

The far right were recently responsible for an attack on a Unite Community meeting, accusing trade unions of supporting paedophilia and terrorism. On 1 March, significantly outnumbered by counter-demonstrators, Southampton Patriots ultimately decided not to march through Portswood.

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!

JOIN THE SOCIALISTS

- Visit **socialistparty.org.uk/join**
- or call **020 8988 8777**
- or text your name and postcode to **07958 032 071**

to find out more today!



Help fund the fightback!

DONATE TODAY

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Obituary: Alan Alberry 1949-2026 'A crucial role in the miners' strike'

Socialist Party members in Mansfield and North Derbyshire have been saddened by the death of long-standing member, Alan Alberry, aged 76. While few comrades will have met him, Alan played a crucial role in the past, above all during the 1984-85 miners' strike, despite having already retired from the industry with ill-health.

Trained as an underground fitter, as a young miner he took part in the 1972 and 1974 strikes. With little interest in politics, he enjoyed the time fishing. However, in his early 20s he started developing muscle weakness, eventually diagnosed as multiple sclerosis (MS). This worsened and he became wheelchair- and eventually house-bound, losing the use of all four limbs. No-one expected he'd live another 45 years!

Alan's drastic change in circumstances, by then married with a young child, made him question the way things were. A friend advised contacting his MP for help - left-wing ex-miner, Dennis Skinner, who cycled over and suggested Alan join the Labour Party.

At Alan's first meeting a member reporting back from Labour Party conference passed round a paper picked up there - Militant, forerunner of the Socialist. Alan read it and took out a subscription. He became one of the first Militant members in North Derbyshire.

Over the next few years he travelled to conferences in his wheelchair, a Labour Party Young Socialists summer camp and Militant Miner meetings. He said the education from these lasted him decades. He attended Bolsover Constituency Labour Party meetings, carried upstairs in his wheelchair. Most delegates were miners or other trade unionists.

When the 1984-85 miners' strike broke out, Alan's house quickly became an unofficial strike HQ. He couldn't get to picket lines but strikers called in afterwards, discussing the titanic struggle against Margaret Thatcher's vicious Tory government and the massive police forces sent to break the strike. Weekly 'Militant Miner' news-sheets were written and eagerly taken by pickets. Alan was at the centre of all these discussions.

Sue, Alan's wife, was a key organiser of the local Women's Action Group. It ran a strike kitchen feeding up to 300 pickets each morning, school holiday children's dinners, weekly food parcels and more.

In the evenings, Militant meetings filled their home, discussing the strike, wider political issues and lessons from past workers' struggles. Comrades visited from outside the coalfields supporting this work. Their house was under covert police surveillance and their phone tapped.

The strike's eventual defeat, as national trade union leaders failed to organise solidarity strike action, was a bitter blow. Every local pit closed over the next eight years. But another big struggle developed.

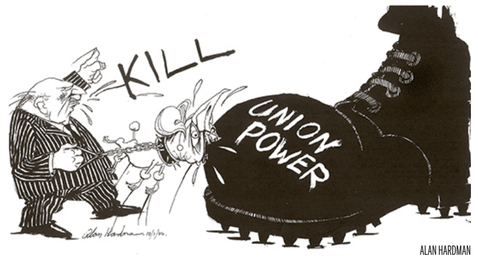
Poll tax

The battle against Thatcher's hated poll tax was joined by thousands across North Derbyshire and 18 million nationally. Alan's refusal to pay, taken through court by Bolsover (Labour) District Council, was reported on TV news.

Alan said he'd had life easy as he had no choice but to live with disability and it was Sue, his carer for 45 years, who had the tough life. He remained fiercely loyal to the Socialist Party, paying subs, joining meetings on Zoom when possible. He stressed the importance of studying Marxist theory to understand today's struggles and those we will face in the future. His determination greatly inspired others.

Socialist Party members send our condolences and solidarity to Sue - his partner and carer, Darin and Maria.

MANSFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS



ALAN HARDMAN

Socialist Party member gives evidence to the Undercover Policing Inquiry

On 26 February, the Undercover Policing Inquiry heard further testimony from Lois Austin, a member of the Socialist Party, about her experience during a mass police kettle in central London in 2001

See press release at socialistparty.org.uk

Unison NEC first meeting with new left general secretary

APRIL ASHLEY
UNISON NEC, PERSONAL CAPACITY

The first Unison National Executive Council (NEC) in 2026, on 18 February, welcomed the newly elected left general secretary, Andrea Egan, to her first meeting.

As the first lay member elected to the position, Andrea resoundingly beat the outgoing right-wing general secretary Christina McAnea, after disappointing national pay campaigns that did not lead to national action in local government or health, which have left Unison members with some of the lowest pay in the public sector. She said: "We are the biggest and best-resourced union in the country and we should act like it".

The NEC began with a discussion on the new trade union political fund rules brought in by the Employment Rights Act (ERA), which now state that all new members automatically pay into the union's political fund unless they opt out. Unison has two political funds, one of which is the affiliated political fund supporting the Labour Link, and the other a general campaign fund.

Labour link

This immediately began a debate on Unison's link to the Labour Party, as only 16% of Unison members currently pay into the Labour Link. The NEC agreed to set up a working party on implementation to bring proposals to a future NEC. Socialist Party members argued that we must ensure members are not automatically put into the Labour Link against their wishes.



Unison strikers looking for a way forward JOHN GILLMAN

This will ignite the debate at conference about the role Unison should play in fighting for working class political representation.

The debate flowed into the general secretary report that the repeal of 50% turnout threshold in ballots for industrial action has been pushed back, and the Labour government may only look at this in the third stage of implementation of the ERA.

This will infuriate Unison activists who were only persuaded to vote for Labour because of the ERA and promise to repeal the 2016 Trade Union Act. Now even more activists will question the link to the Labour Party.

When Socialist Party members asked about Andrea's manifesto commitment to review Unison's link to the Labour Party because of members' anger at Labour's betrayals, there was no real response.

The NEC meeting also discussed the Together Alliance demo on 28 March. Socialist Party members argued that trade unionists must lead the fight against racism and it must be linked to the fight against austerity. The rise of racism, Reform, and far-right groups in the UK and across Europe is driven by the cost-of-living crisis and austerity. The government and the bosses seek to blame migrant workers for austerity. If we don't fight austerity, the rise of racism and Reform will continue.

The NEC also debated inviting Angela Rayner to speak at Unison's conference, proposed because of her perceived role in pushing through the ERA. Left NEC members challenged inviting her - we had previously challenged her role against the Birmingham bin strike. I said inviting her to speak could put the union into disrepute.

This first NEC of the new year is the beginning of a stormy period, as members will seek to fight under the new general secretary for national industrial action on pay and cuts in local government, health, higher education, schools and social care – and will seek a political strategy that matches that fight.

- 'Unison members for a new party' has 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

- **Socialist Party members have been nominated to stand for election for Unison's Local Government, Health, Community, and Police, Probation and Cafcass Service Group Executives. The elections take place in April.**

JOIN THE SOCIALISTS

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

- Visit **socialistparty.org.uk/join**
- or call **020 8988 8777**
- or text your name and postcode to **07958 032071**

to find out more today!



Unison needs to up its game to fight NHS pay

ADRIAN O'MALLEY
UNISON HEALTH SGE MEMBER, PERSONAL CAPACITY

Three weeks after the Labour government announced it will be imposing a 3.3% pay increase on NHS workers on 1 April, NHS workers are asking what the trade unions are going to do about it?

Are we going to dispute the rise and put in a claim for more? Are we going to rally around a claim that restores pay back to levels prior to 15 years of pay austerity, and start a co-ordinated campaign for strike action involving all the NHS unions?

The Unison Health Service Group Executive (SGE) met on 19 February. It agreed to enter into pay negotiations with the other NHS unions through the NHS Staff Council, to seek improvements in pay via the terms and conditions banding structure.

An amendment to lodge a dispute in opposition to the 3.3% in principle while talks took place was defeated by 20 votes to five.

The danger in entering talks over the pay structure without a guaranteed increase in the pay budget above the 3.3% already given is plain to see. It is divisive as it could mean different groups of the workforce potentially getting pay rises, which may have conditions attached, such as job losses or cuts to other services.

It also does nothing to redress the fact that pay is lower than for equivalents in Scotland.



Gloucestershire phlebotomists in Unison, the longest strike in NHS history SOUTHWEST SOCIALIST PARTY

The SGE meets again on 5 March. It will hear whether there has been any progress in setting up talks with the government with new money on the table, and in agreeing common cause across the NHS unions.

Publicly, there has been a concerning silence from the national unions over the last three weeks following their initial condemnation of the 3.3%.

NHS workers deserve better. We demand our trade unions unite around an inflation-busting pay claim, and commence with organising a campaign for strike action, nationally, regionally and locally.

The 5.5% pay rise for MPs has angered NHS workers even more. 5.5% of an MP's wage for NHS workers would be a good start in reversing 15 years of pay austerity in the NHS!

Unison members have recently voted for a new general secretary, Andrea Egan, because they want a more fighting union, following years of right-wing leadership that has held back struggle. Members in the NHS will be expecting a fight. But the Health SGE is still led by the old right wing.

- **Adrian O'Malley is standing for re-election to the SGE, alongside fellow Socialist Party member Paul Tovey. Winning a fighting Health SGE in the elections in April is a vital step towards securing action**

Sri Lanka's corrupt, warmongering former ruling Rajapaksa family rejected in Britain



Anti-government protest in Sri Lanka 2022 and Namal Rajapaksa (inset) PHOTOS: ANTANO/CC AND INDI SAMARAJIVA/CC

TU SENAN
COMMITTEE FOR A WORKERS' INTERNATIONAL

Cambridge and Oxford university unions cancelled debates scheduled for the end of March involving Namal Rajapaksa, the son of former Sri Lankan president Mahinda Rajapaksa. Tamil Solidarity and various youth and student groups organised opposition to the Oxbridge events, arguing they would provide a platform for Namal Rajapaksa, in an attempt to rebuild the family's image. The historic mass movement of 2022 drove the Rajapaksas from effective control of state power. Gotabaya Rajapaksa, then president, went into hiding and was later rehabilitated and protected by Ranil Wickremesinghe, who succeeded him as President of Sri Lanka.

Before that, the family controlled over 70% of the Sri Lankan budget and held five ministries and numerous senior government positions under Rajapaksa brothers and relatives. The Rajapaksas are widely seen as looters, corrupt, and responsible for wartime crimes by a large majority across ethnic groups in Sri Lanka. The family is now plotting a comeback by promoting Namal Rajapaksa as a leader of the disgraced Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) - also known as the Sri Lanka People's Front - an attempt to rebrand its image.

Following a humiliating defeat in the last election and facing potential legal consequences in corruption scandals, Namal Rajapaksa is seeking to rehabilitate his reputation. It is common for the offspring of ousted leaders and dictators to try to reestablish themselves through overseas connections and using wealth smuggled out of their home country. The Rajapaksas stand accused of moving tens of millions of dollars abroad through various scandals.

Oxbridge unions are known for strong links to the right, frequently giving platforms to right-wing and far-right figures under the banner of 'free speech'. This defence of free speech is not always extended to the left, except on rare occasions - such as when they once invited Peter Taaffe, former general secretary of the Socialist Party.

The unions often act as a training ground for so-called 'future leaders' - dubbed as 'nursery of the Commons' - teaching rhetorical manoeuvres rather than debating real matters or demanding straight answers on serious issues. The Oxford Union, especially, has faced heavy criticism in the past. However, its former president, George Abaraonye, has faced attacks from the right for his debate with the well-known right-wing US public figure, Charlie Kirk, and for social media comments after Kirk's killing, last year.

Inviting Namal to speak sparked immediate anger among Tamil students and youth. In a statement, Tamil Solidarity argued: "To grant such a figure a platform within the Oxford Union and the Cambridge Union is not academic engagement; it is political rehabilitation".

When Tamil Solidarity's statement was covered in Sri Lankan media, the initial reaction from Namal's team was sarcasm and dismissal, as they expected the event to proceed. Milinda Rajapaksa even tweeted in response, saying: "Let's meet and see in London". But over 20 Tamil youth groups, along with Indian, Palestinian and Ambedkar student societies at Oxford, Cambridge and other universities, united in opposition and warned they would mobilise protests if the events went ahead. Eventually both unions withdrew the invitations, agreeing the forum would not produce a fair debate.

> **The cancellations mark a clear rebuke to the Rajapaksa family's attempt at political rehabilitation and a victory for organised student and diaspora resistance**

'The antithesis of free speech'

In a further statement, Tamil Solidarity said the Rajapaksa family are "the antithesis of free speech", while reiterating that Tamil Solidarity "respect and defend the right to free speech." And it "has consistently argued for discussion and debate to clarify truth and develop political understanding. We oppose 'cancel culture' and non-platforming people for political differences. One of our key demands has been free speech and the right to assembly. Many Eelam Tamils know the value of free speech well: the Rajapaksas have historically denied them even the right to remember the dead. Journalists have been threatened, killed, and prosecuted for speaking out.

This is not an equal debate. Allowing Namal a high-profile platform creates hype and gives him an opportunity to boast and propagandise. He is unlikely to say anything meaningful, either in his remarks or when answering questions. It is beside the point: an unequal platform creates a false equivalence between a defender of war crimes and his victims".

The cancellation was widely covered in Sri Lankan media. Sections of the local press have been used by the Rajapaksas in the past to whip up chauvinist sentiment against diaspora activities, often denouncing the diaspora as a 'threat' to the nation. On this occasion, only a few outlets - such as Sri Lanka Mirror - defended Namal.

Many Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim youths in Sri Lanka mocked Namal's 'tour' of London. Namal arrived with a large entourage and what appeared to be grand plans to present himself as a statesman. Instead he toured Westminster streets around the parliament and met a handful of 'supporters' in pubs who came to console him about the embarrassment of the cancellation of the Oxbridge events. Humiliated and frustrated, Namal's team later attacked the diaspora in their usual rhetoric - framing protesters as LTTE sympathisers and fuelling chauvinism against them. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was a Tamil separatist organisation that fought a decades-long armed struggle to establish an independent Tamil state, Tamil Eelam, in Sri Lanka's north and east.

The cancellations mark a clear rebuke to the Rajapaksa family's attempt at political rehabilitation and a victory for organised student and diaspora resistance. They also expose the limits of liberal 'free speech' defences when a platform would serve as propaganda. The struggle for accountability, justice and genuine democratic debate must continue - on campuses, and beyond to prevent the return of those responsible for corruption, repression and wartime crimes.

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

End the gender health gap

Fight for a fully funded, publicly owned NHS, democratically controlled by the working class

FIGHT SEXISM STARMER & THE SYSTEM

MARY FINCH
WALTHAM FOREST SOCIALIST PARTY

Many women, if not most, have been ignored, dismissed or belittled by healthcare services at some point in their life. 'Hysteria' is no longer considered a legitimate medical diagnosis - but the underlying attitude that women cannot be trusted to accurately describe their symptoms remains. Debilitating pain is downplayed as part of a normal period. A whole range of physical health concerns are often explained away as "just anxiety".

These inequalities, including in access to treatments, funding and outcomes, are described as the gender health gap, and it isn't new. But in the past few years, there has been a shift in consciousness; a survey found it to be the number one issue for women under 25. More and more women understand it as a political issue instead of an individual one. It's part and parcel of living under a sexist system.

Sexual harassment used to be viewed in a similar way - an individual experience that women just had to put up with. The #MeToo movement, which started by women sharing their experiences of harassment and violence online, highlighted just how widespread sexual harassment is in society. One effect of this was to increase women's confidence to challenge abuse, a contributing factor to broader mobilisations of people of all genders against sexism, in some countries in mass demonstrations.

It seems a similar process is now taking place around women's experience of healthcare. Growing numbers of women have been emboldened to demand an end to the gender health gap. A movement is developing, and already capitalist politicians have been forced to respond.

The previous Tory government launched the first 'Women's Health Strategy' and the current Labour government has similarly pledged to prioritise women's health.

But neither Labour or the Tories actually have any solutions - in fact, they are part of the problem! Labour continues to preside over a deeply underfunded NHS, a crisis which often hits women's services the hardest. Waiting lists for gynaecological care have doubled since 2020, for example, leaving many women in pain for months before seeing a specialist. Even then, it's often another long wait for treatment - if they are referred for treatment at all.

Very little research is done into these conditions or how to treat them, which compounds the problem. Women are also often excluded from general medical studies because hormonal differences present too much of an 'outlier'. We know very little about many essential aspects of women's health.



PHOTO: PAUL MATTSSON

A recent CQC (Care Quality Commission) survey found that one in five women feel their concerns were dismissed or ignored during childbirth. Undoubtedly, that is partially due to extremely stretched NHS services, which are often literally unable to provide safe levels of staffing on maternity wards. Almost a third of newly qualified midwives are struggling to find a job, despite chronic staffing shortages.

But funding cuts alone aren't sufficient to explain it. The same survey found evidence of discrimination against birthing women from working-class backgrounds, and racism. Black women are 2.8 times more likely to die during pregnancy or childbirth than their white counterparts. Asian women are 1.7 times more likely to die.

Struggles to highlight and address the gender health gap and social attitudes that fuel it are absolutely necessary and can have an impact, as similar struggles have. However, misogyny, sexism, and gender stereotyping and discrimination, are all rooted into the framework of capitalist society and its institutions. The cause of underlying discriminatory and prejudiced ideas isn't the 'NHS culture' but capitalism. And so to succeed, the struggle to end the gender health gap has to extend to the need to struggle for an end to the capitalist system through socialist change.

NHS bosses, who have often covered up scandals in maternity units and elsewhere, can't be trusted to close the gender health gap. Nor can the capitalist parties, including Labour, who will likely try to use these scandals to justify further privatisation in the NHS. They starve public services of essential funding, and when they inevitably fail, claim that the private sector can do it better.

A democratically controlled, fully funded NHS would allow workers and service users to discuss and collectively decide what change is needed. Women would be given genuine recourse if they feel dismissed or ignored; most who make a complaint to the NHS under the current system may receive an apology, if they're lucky, and nothing else. They're still stuck on an endless waiting list, or left to advocate themselves for essential treatment.

It would also mean trade union oversight of the training provided to healthcare professionals before they enter the workforce - and this is critical to closing the gender health gap. Conditions which primarily affect women, such as endometriosis, are often little more than a footnote. Healthcare workers can't diagnose and treat without knowing what symptoms to look for.

Democratic control of the medical and pharmaceutical industries would allow workers to decide what research is prioritised, according to need, not profit.

Women and workers urgently need a party that will stand up for us and fight for the changes necessary to close the gender health gap. The explosion of initial interest in Your Party shows that ordinary people are looking for a political alternative. A new workers' party with the might of the organised trade unions behind it could easily harness that anger and enthusiasm. Workers want to fight back - they just need a lead.

SOCIALISM TODAY



Monthly magazine of the Socialist Party
March issue includes...
- **Women's movements**
For International Women's Day 2026 Christine Thomas looks at the state of the global movements against women's oppression.
- **What's behind the gender voting divide?**
Helen Pattison reviews a BBC Radio Four podcast exploring a growing divergence in the voting patterns of young men and women,
socialismtoday.org/subscribe 020 8988 8777
- Paper subscription £3.50 a month, e-subscription £3.30

Public meetings

- **Birmingham:** Monday 9 March, 7pm, Top Floor Wellington, Bennetts Hill, Birmingham City Centre, B2 5SN
- **Bristol:** Tuesday 10 March, 7:30pm, Horfield Quaker Meeting House, 300 Gloucester Road, Bristol, BS7 8PD
- **Camden and Haringey:** Wednesday 18 March, 6:30pm, St Mary Hornsey Rise, Purple room, Ashley Road, N19 3AD
- **Cardiff:** Sunday 8 March, 4pm, Cathays Community Centre, 36-38 Cathays Terrace, Cardiff CF24 4HX
- **Enfield and Lea Valley:** Saturday 14 March, food from 12:30pm, meeting starts at 1:30pm, Ponders End Methodist Church, 378 High St, Enfield, EN3 4DG
- **Essex:** Sunday 8 March, 2-4pm, George Hurd Centre, Audley way, Basildon SS14 2FL
- **Leicester:** Saturday 7 March, 2:15pm, Secular Hall Humberstone Gate Leicester LE1 1WB
- **London Red Line (Socialist Party rail workers):** Sunday 8 March, 12:30pm, Lucas Arms (Upstairs), 245A Gray's Inn Road, London, WC1X 8QY
- **Newham and East London:** Wednesday 11 March, 7:30pm, Sylvia's Corner, 95 Aldworth Road, Stratford, E15 4DN
- **South East London:** Sunday 8 March, 5:30pm, AAJA Music, Comet Pl, Deptford, SE8 4EP
- **South West London:** Thursday 5 March, 7:30pm, Bonnington Centre, 11 Vauxhall Grove, SW8 1TD
- **Swindon:** Saturday 7 March, 3-5:30pm, Central Community Centre, Emlyn Square, Swindon, SN1 5BP
- **Plymouth:** Monday 9 March, 7pm, Quaker House, 74 Mutley Plain, Plymouth, PL4 6LF
- **Teesside:** Monday 9 March, 7:30pm, Tipsy Turtle pub, Stockton, TS18 1EF
- **Tower Hamlets:** Thursday 12 March, 7:30pm, Pelican House, 144 Cambridge Heath Road, London, E1 5QJ
- **Waltham Forest:** Thursday 12 March, 7pm, Bakers Arms, for venue details call Martin on 07813501648
- **West London:** Thursday 12 March, 7:30pm, West London Trade Union Club (upstairs), 33-35 High St, Acton, W4 6ND

Scan to see more meetings

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International Women's Day 8 March

FIGHT SEXISM STARMER & THE SYSTEM



PHOTO: PAUL MATTSSON

ISIS SMYTH
LIVERPOOL SOUTH SOCIALIST PARTY

Since November 2025, millions of documents in the 'Epstein files' have been released. The scale of the horrors committed by sex-trafficker Jeffery Epstein (worth almost $600 million when he died) are being further revealed. So too his links with exorbitantly wealthy 'pals' throughout the entire capitalist establishment.

One thing is clear: the Epstein files are not an aberration but an insight into what keeps this deeply unequal, exploitative capitalist machine running.

In Britain, the files have implicated not only ex-Prince Andrew but also Peter Mandelson, who has long been influential in Keir Starmer's Labour Party. Until September last year he was Starmer's appointed US ambassador.

Starmer's Labour government says it wants to halve violence against women and girls in ten years. Yet, scandalously women's refuge centres are in danger of closing due to a lack of funding, leaving vulnerable women at risk of homelessness and violence. Police forces are failing to respond adequately to violence against women and girls. But resources are found to arrest those protesting peacefully in solidarity with Palestine Action!

They argue there is no money. But look at all the wealth of those implicated in the Epstein files! We could house, feed, and clothe all in Britain, and still have plenty left over!

Women's rights have come a long way in the past hundred years, but it's clear we still have far to go. Legal battles have been won, and in Britain in law women and men are considered 'equal'. So why is the gender pay gap at 15.4%? Why are one in four women raped or sexually assaulted? Why are there constant reports exposing sexism and misogyny inside capitalism's institutions, including the police?

Capitalism depends on a weak, divided working class. It systematically exploits the working class, and it is within the capitalists' interests to oppress women workers doubly so - as workers and as women.

Capitalism cannot smash sexism and misogyny or 'the patriarchy' because these are not separate from but part and parcel of the system itself. Only socialism, operating based on principles of need, not profit, and striving for equality, can lay the basis for sexism to be defeated once and for all.

Socialist Party branches across the country will be holding public meetings on how we can build the fight for women's liberation and socialism this International Women's Day.

Get in contact to find your local branch and join the fight for socialism!

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

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