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the Socialist

Issue 1358 | 12-18 March 2026 | formerly Militant



END THEIR SYSTEM OF WAR AND CRISIS

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Fight for socialist change

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Issue 1358
12-18 March 2026

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Editor of the Socialist Josh Asker
socialistparty.org.uk Mark Best
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"The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it."
Karl Marx

NO TO TRUMP, NETANYAHU, STARMER AND ALL THE WARMONGERS!

Socialist Party

WHAT WE THINK

US and Israeli missiles are continuing to rain down on Iran, with thousands killed. The Iranian regime is in turn still firing at targets across the Middle East. Fifteen countries have so far been hit by one side or the other, with an estimated 7.5 million people living within 1km of a missile or drone strike. Israeli troops have reinvaded southern Lebanon. Brutal repression of the Palestinians in Gaza and, increasingly, the West Bank continues unabated.

Donald Trump and Benjamin Netanyahu are not motivated to end the suffering of the Iranian people heroically struggling against its theocratic dictatorship. Netanyahu wants to further reconfigure the Middle East in the interests of Israeli capitalism and at the same time increase his chances of winning the Israeli general election.

Trump too, was partially motivated by distracting workers at home from his growing unpopularity. Trump seems to have imagined he could easily repeat a version of what the US did in Venezuela in January, using force – this time on a much greater scale – to bludgeon a section of the Iranian regime into doing the US's bidding. That achieved, Trump would not give a damn for the continued suffering of the Iranian population.

At this stage, however, Trump's schemes have come to nothing, and the bombing continues across the Middle East. The implosion of the Iranian regime, were that to happen, would be very unlikely to produce a new stable regime which would do the bidding of US imperialism! But 'regime change' via an air campaign alone has never been achieved, yet for the US to commit ground troops in any numbers would be a domestic political disaster for Trump.

It is reported that the US is attempting to arm different national minorities and encouraging them to take on the Iranian regime, giving air cover to Kurdish fighters crossing the border from Iraq, although it is not clear how widely it is taking place. This is utterly cynical by Trump. US imperialism, and British imperialism before it, has always been willing to abandon different peoples fighting for their national rights when supporting them is no longer useful to their imperialist interests. Remember how, at the end of the first Gulf War in 1990, having encouraged the Shias and Kurds to rise up against Saddam Hussein in Iraq, US, British and French forces stayed in Kuwait and allowed them to be slaughtered by the Iraqi regime.



Effects of airstrike on Tehran, Iran's capital PHOTO: MEHR/CC

As the negative consequences of the war for US imperialism mount up, Trump is under increasing pressure to try and find the 'off ramp.' However the war develops, increased suffering for the working class and poor in the region, and growing instability and turmoil, are guaranteed. Nor is there any prospect of the conflict bringing greater security for the working class in the US and Europe. On the contrary, it will fuel a new wave of terrorism.

The oil price surged past $100 a barrel, and the financial markets have been sliding in fear of the economic blowback from the conflict. And before the full economic consequences hit workers' pockets, this war is unpopular. According to opinion polls, only 26% of Americans support it, an unprecedented low in the first week of a conflict started by the US. Far from distracting from Trump's problems at home, this conflict will enormously add to them.

Consequences in Britain

It is also making Keir Starmer's difficulties even greater. He is already hated, with Labour trailing behind the Greens and Reform in the polls.

Britain's bond, or government debt, market has so far been hit among the hardest by the global turmoil. That in turn will increase the pressure from the capitalist elite for the government to inflict more austerity on the working class. At the same time, the prospect of increasing stagflation is posed – as the economy stalls while inflation surges.

And on the war itself, Starmer has managed to annoy everyone and please no-one. That he did not initially ask 'how high?' when Trump said 'jump' reflects two things. First the decline of the power of US imperialism. It is still the strongest power on the planet – not least militarily – but it no longer sets the framework for the world. In this increasingly multipolar world every capitalist power has no choice but defend its own interests, rather than simply follow the lead of the US.

The other factor, however, which explains why Starmer initially took a slightly more critical stance than German chancellor, Merz, for example, was the large scale of the anti-war movement here. That has been reflected in the size of the biggest Gaza demos, but also in the way



London demo 7 March PHOTO: PAUL MATTSSON

Socialist Party says

- **The trade unions should call a weekend demo uniting the struggles 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 against all the warmongers**
- **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**
- **Fight for a socialist world, including for a voluntary socialist confederation of the Middle East, with full rights for minorities**

voters, particularly those from a Muslim background, broke with Labour in the general election – resulting in the four 'Gaza' Independent Alliance MPs being elected, alongside Jeremy Corbyn.

In the Denton and Gorton by-election that same mood was expressed in a vote for the Greens. Labour is facing a catastrophe in the local elections, and Starmer knew – with two thirds of the population against Trump's attack on Iran - uncritical support for it could only have made that worse. Of course, voters are going to be able to see that Starmer's few words of mild-mannered criticism of Trump do not alter one iota the reality the government is supporting US imperialism's bombardment of Iran. RAF jets have been used to shoot down drones, and US planes involved in the conflict are flying from RAF Fairford in Gloucestershire.

What tasks for the working class?

At this stage, looking on at the nightmare being suffered by the masses of the Middle East, the predominant feeling of most workers and young people in Britain is powerlessness; an understandable feeling that there is nothing we can do to stop Trump and the other warmongers, nor to aid the working class and poor in Iran facing a brutal dictatorship and US missiles.

But we are not powerless. Even now, Starmer's mealy-mouthed criticism of Trump reflects the power of the anti-war movement. In the US, the mass working-class opposition to ground troops being deployed is a major factor curtailing Trump's options. At the end of last year, general strike action in Italy on the question of Gaza was one of the factors that pushed Trump to 'end' the conflict – although of course the horror continues in a different form.

The working class, in Britain and internationally, is a potential superpower. We are organised in trade unions in our millions in our workplaces. Collectively we are the force which keeps society running and which makes profits for the capitalists. Collectively, we also have the power to overturn this sick capitalist system, and build a democratic socialist society. To achieve that, however, our class needs to get organised as an independent force.

Back in 2011, the Middle East was the centre of the world's attention for a different reason. A mass movement of the working class and poor demonstrated our class's huge power in action. It swept the region overthrowing dictatorships. Ultimately, however, those movements were defeated and dictatorships restored, because the working class of the different countries lacked their own parties with a programme to break with this rotten capitalist system and build a new socialist society. A society based on peaceful cooperation rather than imperialist war and where science, technique and technology would be harnessed to meet the needs of all rather than used for the profits of the billionaires. Today the masses of the Middle East, not least in Iran, face the same task as they did back then.

And so do we. The most important solidarity we can bring to the working class and poor in the Middle East – and to those opposing Trump and ICE in the US – is to build the movement against our own capitalist class, and the politicians that do their bidding, here in Britain. Building a new mass workers' party that stands for socialism and internationalism is a crucial step in that struggle.

Protesting against war



PHOTO: LONDON SP

East London

A modest gathering of activists and local residents gathered in Waltham Forest to show their anger at the widening war, which has already caused thousands of deaths and displaced masses of people across the region.

We spoke with locals about the war and linked opposition to it with the fight against austerity. In these discussions we raised the hypocrisy of the UK government's priorities, pointing out that there always seems to be money for bombs and bullets, yet when it comes to properly funding the NHS there apparently is no money. Instead, working-class people are expected to bear the cost of continued austerity.

We also called for the anti-war movement to put pressure on the trade unions to take a clear stand against the war and oppose the warmongering of Starmer's Labour. We raised the need for the Trades Union Congress to call a national demonstration led by the trade unions against war, racism and austerity. We argued for a meeting of union representatives in the defence, aerospace, transport and logistics sectors to discuss how workers can resist the war and fight for alternative socially useful jobs that protect their pay and pensions.

There was discussion around Waltham Forest Council's own links to the arms trade through the investment of council workers' pension funds in arms companies and other corporations that profit from the death and destruction wrought upon the Middle East. Despite promises to divest, Waltham Forest Labour Council has continued to delay taking meaningful action.

During a speech addressing the protest, we made it plain that a stand must be taken in the May local elections. In Waltham Forest, bus workers, socialists and other working-class candidates will be standing on a workers' list as proud anti war and anti austerity candidates.
SMITH SAMSON

York uni

Socialist Students held a meeting at the University of York after campaigning against Trump and Netanyahu's war on Iran. The stall was one of our busiest, drawing the most new people we've had outside of a freshers' period.

For most of those attending, it was their first Socialist Students meeting. One Iranian student shared her experiences of the desperation many have been feeling after a long period of brutal repression under the Ayatollah regime. Others were coming just to learn more about what's happening, and to discuss what students can do.
ALI MANSFIELD

Birmingham

Around 100 people attended a vibrant demonstration against Trump and Netanyahu's bombing of Iran in Birmingham on 7 March. There were lively chants and the response from the public was overwhelmingly supportive. Demonstrators pledged to return every Saturday for as long as Trump bombs Iran.

Protesters called out the complicity of Starmer and companies that invest in the Israeli war machine, we raised the need for workers' action and a working-class political alternative to Starmer's Labour.
CLIVE WALDER

TUC must not abandon disability cuts fight

BEN GOLIGHTLY
SWANSEA SOCIALIST PARTY

In 2025, the TUC (Trades Union Congress) unanimously passed motions 38 and 39 opposing the UK government's disability cuts and calling for coordinated and sustained trade union action.

Since then, however, the TUC has taken the position that it does not need to implement these actions due to the concession that Personal Independence Payment (PIP) cuts will be delayed until the conclusion of the Timms Review in the coming Autumn.

This is a mistaken position.

The concessions on PIP are only temporary, and continuing cuts to Motability, Access to Work, and Universal Credit Health Element remain an emergency issue for trade union members and the working class as a whole.

The continuation of decades of austerity and cuts to council budgets, and the knock-on effect on social services, transport and education, disproportionately impact disabled service users, despite existing policy from TUC Cymru and trade unions calling on councils to set no-cuts budgets.

The government is now particularly targeting young disabled people through the Milburn Review, Wes Streeting's review into supposed 'over-diagnosis' of disability, a rollout of 55,000 compulsory work placements under threat of sanction, and threats to abolish Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs).

Trade unionists must urgently push for a recommitment to action.



ALEC THRAVES

House of Cash: MPs' pay rises yet again

From 1 April, MPs' pay will rise to just shy of £100,000. The new £98,599 a year basic salary is not an April Fool's joke and definitely not very funny for the millions of workers, including many civil service and public sector employees, who won't see a similar 5% rise or any real-terms rise at all. Also note the word basic, some MPs receive more, as well as all getting a pad in central London.

The latest NHS pay deal from April onwards in England is a below-inflation 3.3%, as one worker says: "Yet again, they're expected [us] to keep delivering more while effectively being given less, as pay slides behind living costs."

The Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (Ipsa) sets MPs' pay and says it was also aiming to move towards a salary of around £110,000 by the end of this parliament, due in 2029.

Ipsa claims that "higher levels of complex casework, and abuse and intimidation" is the reason for the raise, but what about the public sector workers who are constantly working more following funding and staff level cuts and sometimes facing abuse for carrying out draconian government policies, such as in job centres?

We call for MPs to only be paid a worker's wage, and not to benefit from any material privileges, like Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition chair and Socialist Party member Dave Nellist and other Militant-supporting Labour MPs did.


TERRY OTT/CC



ULTRASONICMADNESS/CC

Bankrupt BrewDog: Fight to save all jobs

JOHN WILLIAMS
CARDIFF CENTRAL SOCIALIST PARTY

Hundreds of hospitality workers face losing their livelihoods after craft beer chain BrewDog collapsed into administration.

The company has been sold to a US drinks firm in a cut-price deal, with 38 bars set to close and around 484 workers losing their jobs. Many staff reportedly discovered the news through a rushed conference call, highlighting once again the contempt bosses have for the workers who built the brand and its profits.

Unite, a union which organises hospitality workers, has rightly condemned the disgraceful treatment of staff during the sale.

For years BrewDog cultivated an image as an 'alternative,' anti-establishment company, marketing itself as different from the traditional corporate beer giants. But the mask has long since slipped. The company and its bosses have been repeatedly embroiled in scandals over workplace culture and the treatment of staff.

Now, when profits fall, BrewDog's bosses are behaving just like any other capitalist employer – with workers thrown on the scrapheap.

Guarantee jobs

Unions must demand full transparency over the sale and fight for the best possible redundancy terms where job losses can't immediately be prevented. But the workers' movement should go further.

If profitable venues are being closed as part of corporate restructuring, they should be taken into public ownership to protect jobs, with workers and local communities able to run them under democratic control.

The closures also highlight the wider crisis across hospitality. Workers at Pizza Hut have faced threats of job losses and closures, while McDonald's workers have organised against low pay, harassment scandals and unsafe workplaces.

Hospitality workers create the wealth. Instead of closures and attacks on conditions, the industry should be run in the interests of workers and communities, not profit-driven bosses.

- John Williams is standing for the LGBT+ seat in the Unite Executive elections as part of the Workers Unite slate

Over £37 thousand raised to fight for socialism

Pay in pledges by end the month

A big thank you to all who contributed to the marvellous Socialist Party Congress appeal. A total of £37,876 was raised to fund the fight for the socialist ideas needed to end the rotten war-driven system. For a socialist alternative to all the capitalists and warmongers. Already £15,343.50 of it has been paid in. Please redeem your pledges by the end of the month; smashing our quarterly fighting fund target is vital to fund all of our campaigns, including our bold anti-austerity stand in the local elections.

Scan to donate:

SOCIALIST PARTY FIGHTING FUND

AREA	£ RECEIVED	£ TARGET	Q1: JANUARY-MARCH 2026	DEADLINE: 31 MARCH 2026
North West	1,579	1,200		132%
Eastern	1,648	1,300		127%
Northern	917	800		115%
West Midlands	2,940	2,700		109%
London	4,155	5,000	83%	
Southern & SE	1,768	2,400	74%	
Wales	1,589	2,400	66%	
Yorkshire	1,728	2,650	65%	
South West	1,075	2,100	51%	
East Midlands	939	2,050	46%	
Other	792	2,400	33%	
TOTAL	19,129	25,000	77%	

Newham's former mayor leaves Labour for Reform

NEWHAM SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS

Newham's former Labour mayor, Sir Robin Wales, has been appointed London Director of Local Government for Reform UK. Explaining his defection, Wales claimed he had "seen Labour abandon its roots" and that it had "become a party that prioritises the wealthy elite over the working class it was built to represent."

Lois Austin, a Socialist Party member who has stood for Newham mayor as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, including against Wales in 2014, responded:

"It is true that Labour under Keir Starmer has shifted the party dramatically to the right since Jeremy Corbyn and his supporters were purged. Today's Labour government has attacked pensioners and families in poverty with its policies, only partially retreating under pressure. The government has supported the Israeli state's devastating assault on Palestinians in Gaza. Despite limited clashes with Donald Trump, Starmer's government is allowing the American military to use British bases for operations in Iran and the Middle East.

"However, Robin Wales bears responsibility for that. He was a supporter of Tony Blair's project to turn Labour into a big business party and an opponent of Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity leadership. This led to his own deselection as Labour's mayoral candidate. Now he is joining a party led by Nigel Farage, who comes from a privileged background and works alongside former Tory ministers and MPs. Reform UK is a right-wing populist party whose policies run counter to the interests of the working class. It is an even more divisive anti-immigrant and anti-trade union party!"

Lois's socialist, anti-cuts stand was in opposition to Wales who presided over millions of pounds of council cuts. Lois demanded a reversal of austerity, expansion of council housing, defence of public services, and opposition to developer-led gentrification.

She campaigned alongside council workers against job losses, outsourcing, and privatisation, and supported strike action and trade union resistance. In response to the council's austerity programme, Lois's TUSC stand advocated using Newham's borrowing powers and financial reserves to protect services, setting a needs-based budget, while organising trade union and community resistance to win the necessary funding back from central government.

Responding to Wales's defection, several current Labour councillors in Newham have attempted to distance themselves from his record. Lois added: "These are the same councillors who loyally supported Robin Wales while he implemented austerity. They voted through cuts and continue to do so under his replacement Rokhsana Fiaz, selected on a promise of changing direction which she immediately broke. The current Labour-run council has just passed another cuts budget, including reductions to the public library service - retreating only partially after significant local opposition."

Socialist Party members in Newham are fighting for an anti-cuts stand again, and for that Newham stand to come together with socialists nationwide fighting against austerity under the TUSC banner.



Lobby of the council against planned library cuts from Newham Labour council LONDON SP

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SIA321/CC

Khan plans publicly owned bus company
We say: fully nationalise public transport

DARA FITZGERALD
WEST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Transport for London (TfL)'s 2026 business plan raised the prospect of setting up a "publicly owned bus company". TfL is under the control of Labour mayor Sadiq Khan, and is responsible for the capital's public transport network.

Londoners will know the experience: waiting for buses that never turn up and, when they do, crowding into them like sardines. London largely escaped the mass bus privatisation and deregulation Margaret Thatcher enacted in 1986. In cities outside of London, bus passenger numbers have dropped by over 50% since privatisation, despite the population growing by 21%. The centralisation under TfL of bus routes has undoubtedly led to a better situation in London than the rest of the country – London bus journeys doubled in that same period.

Currently, TfL operates bus services and routes in the 'franchising' system, where private bus companies bid to take on routes in a tendering process. TfL awards the contract to what it considers the most suitable bid. Private bus companies try to maximise their profits from these contracts by cutting costs – which includes driving down workers' pay and conditions.

Failures of privatisation

Khan's move towards creating a publicly owned bus company may seem like a shift from him to the left, but in many ways, TfL has been forced towards this measure. Bus companies are increasingly exiting early from contracts or turning down picking routes up as there is no money to be made for them, as their 'margins' are getting tighter.

As it stands, the details of the plan are currently very thin. While bringing failed tenders 'in-house' is a step forward, why stop there? Khan could standardise the pay and conditions of all London bus drivers. As it stands, drivers at different companies are played off against each other to prevent collective industrial action and bump up the profits of the bus companies. Khan could make this a condition of tendering immediately, with a publicly owned bus company taking the routes if not. As it stands, Khan's record has not been stellar – tube workers have taken strike action to defend their pay and conditions, and he has stood on the side of the bosses when workers have taken strike action against bus companies, such as against victimisation at Lea Interchange in recent months.

Nationalise transport

Why not bring the whole bus and train network fully into public ownership, on a democratic basis, with workers themselves in control over transportation? These policies also cannot be paid for with 'cost-cutting measures' such as reducing services or cutting down on staff. If Khan doesn't have the money to invest in the vital transport system of the capital, he should send the bill direct to Keir Starmer's desk.

Kicking out private companies from all areas of our transport network – from cleaners to bus drivers – would enable the investment for the free, good quality and environmentally friendly public transport system we need without private companies extracting profits from it. On the recent strikes at Lea Interchange by bus drivers organised in Unite, workers had "nationalise the buses under workers' control" on their banner. We need that, not just in London but across the country. However, it's not on the agenda for Labour, which Unite continues its affiliation to. A number of the Lea Interchange workers are preparing to stand in May's local elections, pointing towards the mass workers' party with socialist policies that is needed. A fully nationalised high-quality public transport system, including buses and trains, with the investment needed to make it free and work for us not the bosses.

Join the fightback
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to find out more about joining us today!

Morrisons workers vote 97% to reject pay offer

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN USDAW

Over 25,000 Morrisons workers voted by 96.8% to reject the supermarket company's non-offer on pay. The Usdaw Broad Left held an open discussion on 4 March on the way forward. As the national officer of retail union Usdaw Darren Matthews said in a video on official social media pages, all options are on the table including strike action.

Jake Welsh, an Usdaw branch chair representing Morrisons workers, opened up the discussion. He explained how the debt-fuelled multi-billion takeover of the company by Clayton, Dubilier and Rice (CDR) of the company a few years ago had accelerated the decline in pay and conditions - losing various benefits including Sunday premiums. Previously the company had been the first major retailer to pay a £10-an-hour wage. Petrol stations have been sold off to Motor Fuel Group, another CDR-owned company.

In 2024 Morrisons threatened workers' pensions, which saw Usdaw threaten strike action, and Unite members at two sites strike, forcing concessions. But Morrisons delayed a pay rise that year until October. That was the backdrop which has fuelled members' anger, resulting in the pay ballot result. Jake had been to five sites around Manchester, with some members really up for action if nothing further is offered and others unsure given they've never taken strike action before.

UCU NEC member Marco Tesei brought solidarity greetings to Morrisons workers, as well as to Usdaw members who have been taking strike action at Tetrosyl in Rochdale.

Usdaw Broad Left Secretary, and former Morrisons Usdaw rep, Iain Dalton was the final speaker, drawing lessons from recent strike action by retail and distribution workers as to how Morrisons workers can move forward.

Strike action has been put on the table by Usdaw's leadership. To win a statutory ballot will require following up this compulsory ballot with the mobilisation of the wider membership. For example, GMB's action in Asda was preceded by mass demonstrations outside the company's headquarters in Leeds. The same could be done outside Morrisons headquarters, or with regional rallies in support of a decent, above-inflation pay rise for Morrisons workers.

But a key barrier which would need to be overcome, as UCU and other trade unions have successfully done, is the 50% strike ballot turnout threshold, which Starmer's Labour government has pledged to repeal but so far not enacted.

Crucial to any campaign to win a pay rise would be democratic discussion about the aims and tactics of a campaign amongst Morrisons reps and members, and the mobilisation of the wider Usdaw and trade union membership in support of the strikers.

The picture painted by a number of Morrisons workers contributing to the discussion, was of plenty of new members signing up as a result of the campaign. One rep reported that in their store there was a lot of anger at Morrisons management. While not uniform, the mood was tending towards wanting to ballot for strike action or action short of a strike, such as an overtime ban. As with the ongoing dispute at Tetrosyl, a hardship fund would be crucial to support any strike action.

With a number of Morrisons workers and other Usdaw members outside the ranks of the Broad Left registering for and attending the meeting, then this will be an ongoing discussion if Morrisons fail to meet the overwhelming rejection in the pay ballot with a decent pay rise.



PHOTO: JIM BARTON/CC

Crane operators' pay strike

On 6 March, Unite the Union members working as crane operators for Wolffkran held another strike with a picket line at a construction site in Wapping, east London. This is part of a national strike involving nearly 100 crane operators working for Wolffkran across the UK.

The crane operators are angry that they have been given no pay increase for the last three years, in spite of rising inflation. So they have had a real pay cut. About 30 to 40 took part in the lively picket, including striking crane drivers, Unite members and other supporters. Socialist Party members supporting the picket were well received with one of the workers there agreeing with us about the need for a new workers' party saying: "It's a shame we don't have a party fighting for us".

CHRIS NEWBY
TOWER HAMLETS SOCIALIST PARTY



PHOTO: CHRIS NEWBY

Vote for Socialist Party member **Dave Walsh** standing for the Construction, Allied Trades & Technicians seat on Unite's Executive Council as part of the 'Workers Unite' list,

- See backtotheworkplace.org/executive-council-candidates for the full list

Children's services workers protest council's fire-and-rehire attacks



PHOTO: TOM BALDWIN

TOM BALDWIN
SOUTH WEST SOCIALIST PARTY

70 Unison members formed a vibrant lobby of Lib Dem-run Bath and North East Somerset Council on 9 March, despite it having been called at short notice for a Monday morning. The union has been forced into an emergency response after workers in children's services were told their roles were being 'deleted' and they would have to reapply.

Council management claim it's due to the government's new 'families first' policy, but workers were clear: this is being used as a Trojan horse for fire-and-rehire and swingeing cuts. These cuts are devastating for the workers and the vital service they provide protecting vulnerable children and families.

This is both cruel and calamitous. Speaking with the workers, it seems the decision was made by senior council management without informing team managers, or even councillors! If true, the councillors must now reverse the decision.

Workers were sent emails after work hours so had no chance to support one another. Those emails were riddled with errors and have had to be reissued, sometimes more than once. Workers are still in the dark about important issues regarding their livelihoods and the people they support. It seems senior management have no plan and no clue as to what the future of the service will look like, beyond cost-cutting.

Council workers recently cancelled a planned strike while negotiations with ACAS were ongoing. Now they're faced with an even worse attack. Staff are understandably scared about what the changes will mean, but aren't intimidated and are so far refusing to engage with the reapplication process. They are in no mood to take this lying down. The lobby followed an emergency meeting of 120 members, called with just 24 hours notice, discussing their options for fighting to defend jobs and services.

In a show of solidarity, the lobby was joined by Bristol-based Unison members from mental health charity Second Step. These workers have been on strike for union recognition and against a real-terms pay cut. That action has been stepped up and they are now out continuously until 17 March.



Phlebotomy under threat at Gloucestershire hospitals



Rallying in Gloucester PHOTO: CHRIS MOORE

CHRIS MOORE
GLOUCESTERSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY

On 17 March it will be a year since Unison's Gloucestershire hospitals phlebotomists started strike action, after years of being underpaid and ignored. It is the longest-ever strike of contracted NHS workers. As specialist blood takers they need months of training followed by shadowing to deal with over 300 complex blood test procedures, vital to patient care. Nationally, phlebotomy is still on the lowest pay band, just a few pence above the minimum wage. The position of this injustice has been shifting with successful challenges by phlebotomists in several trusts, such as recently Unison at Homerton Hospital in Hackney winning a banding increase with just the threat of strike action.

But the heroic Glos 'Phleboes', initially nicknamed the 'Magnificent 37', have been met with a vicious, intransigent management. Their initial request for a banding review was ignored by the trust, followed by months without meaningful negotiations. What started as a strike over pay has developed into a battle to defend phlebotomy in Gloucestershire hospitals. If the trust get away with diluting phlebotomy other trusts may be tempted to follow suit as a cost-cutting venture.

A couple of weeks ago, the trust put two options to the strikers. Either return to work as Health Care Support Workers (HCSW's) on Band 3 with at most a 50% phlebotomy role, with some compensatory pay; or go to the National Job Evaluation Group (JEG) for a review of the pay banding, with back pay only on the table if a Band 3 was awarded. But the trust made clear, whichever option was chosen, it intends to replace phlebotomists with HCSWs. Dedicated phlebotomist training would be replaced by a half day in-house venepuncture course. As co-lead steward Caroline Hayhurst said: "The trust was saying we're not wanted or needed". The anger among the strikers at these proposals was shown by the refusal of all but one phlebotomist to vote at all!

During the dispute the phlebotomists have felt increasingly confident to challenge the process themselves. Despite being told there was no option to continue the strike, that's exactly what they were determined to do. As Caroline said: "We'll continue to fight so low-paid workers, who are leaving the NHS to pay their bills, feel empowered to take on these corrupt execs on ridiculous six-figure salaries". Such a fighting approach forced the trust to make concessions. An offer to wipe out a mistaken overpayment of wages to strikers was previously only on offer if the HCSW role was accepted now it was linked to both options. Phlebotomy would now be protected for six months after the end of the strike. At present, many hospital staff are unaware of the trust's intention to dispense with a stand-alone phlebotomy team. So giving time to rally support to oppose these plans. And 'no to both options' was added to the new ballot.

The election of the new Unison General Secretary, Andrea Egan, has offered a more fighting national approach, more support for members and a reappraisal of the Labour link. The government intends to increase NHS private provision by 20%. As co-lead steward Dawnie Elliott says: "Drastic change is needed to keep our NHS. There is a growing need for a political voice that represents working-class people and public sector workers".

Andrea has been in contact with the phlebotomists and injected some confidence. Health Secretary Wes Streeting has said the dispute is a local trust issue. But Unison could take a different view and start to campaign among phlebotomists nationally for a pay upgrade. Streeting also said the NHS will have to get used to money being tight. Health unions need to prepare for bitter battles ahead, including balloting over the recent 3.3% NHS pay offer.

Stop press: Workers vote to undergo job evaluation and return to work

As the Socialist goes to press, the union has reported results of the ballot with 83% voting in favor of 'A joint referral to the national job evaluation group for an assessment'. Caroline told the Socialist: "We're not defeated, we return to work as phlebotomists with heads held high. The battle to keep phlebotomy will continue"

NEU support staff special conference

Campaign for unity between unions, not division

ALEX MOORE
SPECIAL CONFERENCE DELEGATE, PLYMOUTH NEU, PERSONAL CAPACITY

Against the background of a national indicative ballot to reject the government's below-inflation and unfunded pay offer, spiralling workload and redundancies threatened in many schools, 1,200 delegates at a National Education Union (NEU) special conference voted overwhelmingly to begin recruiting unorganised school support staff and to withdraw from an agreement not to, signed with the TUC (Trades Union Congress).

This is a historic decision for the NEU, following complaints from the leaders of other unions that organise support staff and a fine levied by the TUC. Socialist Party members have consistently argued for maximum unity between unions, and for disagreements to be resolved through discussion and negotiation, not through complaints and sanctions.

The decision also opens a debate about how to build union strength. Two thirds of support staff in schools do not belong to any union. The NEU has seen significant increases in membership and its number of support staff members has tripled from 20,000 to over 65,000.

Workers join unions that they think will fight for them. At the height of the Covid outbreak, campaigning by the NEU - holding a Zoom meeting of half a million - forced then-prime minister Boris Johnson to U-turn on reopening schools. The NEU took national strike action in 2023.

Despite the unanimity of the final vote, conference did not decide lightly. Twelve amendments were submitted to the main motion in a serious debate weighing up the pros and cons, trying to get the balance right and maintain a principled stand.

Socialist Party member and elected National Executive member Sheila Caffrey spoke against an amendment which called for the NEU to not actively organise in schools where there is a rep from another union: "Our aim should always be to unite the widest layer of workers ... If there is a good rep in a school - brilliant! We work with them... We must not poach members from other unions. But we also must not be timid about ensuring that every member of school staff has a strong voice in a strong union." This argument was strongly supported and the amendment fell.

Annabel Griffiths, a member of Bristol Socialist Party, has just started work as a teaching assistant. Her speech was met with cheers as she explained it was urgent that the hundreds of thousands of school support staff facing poverty pay, term-time-only wages and not being able to find adequate housing, were in a union. "Workers are stronger when they fight together."

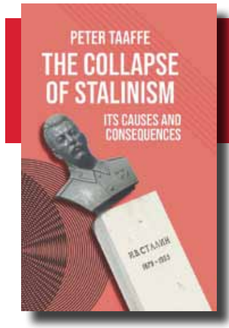
There was much debate around the TUC. We believe that being part of the TUC gives a chance for over six million workers to organise collectively. For example, at TUC Congress last year the NEU spoke in favour of the TUC calling a national anti-austerity demo. Ending an agreement is not breaking with the TUC. We want the elected executives of the relevant unions to meet together to work out how we can collaborate.

The final motion agreed "to make it clear to the [other] unions that we will continue to seek to work collaboratively in the interests of the workforce, and will always be open to proposals for an amicable resolution of our disagreements."

The special conference resolution did not come out of the blue. The policy was agreed at 2025 conference, and has taken nine years campaigning by support staff in the NEU. Socialist Party members on the exec have argued all along that support staff members expect their union to fight for them and voted against signing agreements to prevent that.



Protesting during TUC general secretary Paul Nowak's speech
PHOTO: SHEILA CAFFREY



THE COLLAPSE OF STALINISM – ITS CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

Martin Powell-Davies, Socialist Party National Committee member, introduces the latest collection of works from Peter Taaffe, former Socialist Party general secretary. Available to buy from Left Books for£12 +pp at leftbooks.co.uk



PHOTO: SUE REAM/CC

'The Collapse of Stalinism – its Causes and Consequences' is the latest book to be published by Mentmore Press. It is essential reading for anyone who wants to understand why the dictatorial, bureaucratic Stalinist regimes of Russia, Central and Eastern Europe foundered, allowing capitalism to be restored. It also explains how that collapse at the end of the 1980s fuelled a global ideological offensive against the ideas of socialism, one that still weighs heavily on working-class consciousness and organisation today.

At the time, capitalist journalists, politicians and academics gleefully proclaimed that socialism had been beaten once and for all. The American writer, Frances Fukuyama, declared that it marked "the end of history... the endpoint of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalisation of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government".

However, in today's unstable world, that capitalist triumphalism has been replaced by pessimism for the future of their system. The task for the world's working class is to rebuild the mass workers' organisations and parties needed to organise a united struggle for a socialist world. It also requires learning from the horrors of Stalinism, to ensure that capitalism is replaced by genuinely democratic planned economies, this time freed from top-down bureaucratic control.

Stalinism, the negation of Bolshevism

This book is written to help workers learn those lessons. Like last year's well-received publication 'Great Revolutionaries,' it brings together a collection of articles by Peter Taaffe, the former general secretary of the Socialist Party. They are presented in three sections, tracing the rise and fall of the Stalinist regimes, before analysing the 'post-Stalinist' world of today.

The book's first section, 'Stalinism, the negation of Bolshevism,' exposes the brutal character of these dictatorial, bureaucratic regimes. They had nothing in common with the workers' democracy being built after the victory of the 1917 Russian Revolution.

Sadly, in the absence of successful socialist revolutions taking place in more economically developed countries, the Russian workers' state was left isolated. It was left to try and develop a socialist plan with an already weak economy, one then further weakened by civil war, as imperialism sought to strangle the revolution at birth.

The book outlines how civil war stretched the economy and the Red Army to its limits. It also severely undermined the fledgling Soviet democracy too. With many of its worker delegates killed on the front lines, the soviets – or workers' councils - were no longer able to keep the officials and bureaucrats in charge of state administration sufficiently in check.

Growing in confidence, the bureaucracy then manoeuvred to ensure the Communist Party met its needs, not those of the workers and poor peasants. In Joseph Stalin, they found a leader that would deliver for them.

The book includes reviews of the memoirs of Leopold Trepper and Petro Grigorenko, who both became opponents of the regime. They chillingly spell out how the bureaucracy was so fearful of the working class moving to overthrow it, that anyone suspected of providing even the mildest opposition was brutally suppressed.

> **The workers' revolt that shook the foundations of the Stalinist regimes in 1989 started by raising demands for democratic reform, not capitalist restoration. That had also been the case in earlier struggles, such as the 1956 Hungarian Revolution and those raised at the height of the 'Solidarity' movement in Poland in 1980**

Trepper's memoirs confirm that the remaining genuine revolutionaries, the supporters of Leon Trotsky in the 'Left Opposition' "fought Stalinism to the death, and they were the only ones who did". But, Trepper adds, "they had the enormous advantage over us of having a coherent political system capable of replacing Stalinism."

The book summarises Trotsky's analysis of the rise of the bureaucracy, stressing that Stalinism was only able to consolidate its power by purging all traces of genuine Bolshevism.

In 1936, in 'Revolution Betrayed,' Trotsky described how "two opposite tendencies are growing up out of the depth of the Soviet regime. To the extent that, in contrast to a decaying capitalism, it develops the productive forces, it is preparing the economic basis of socialism. To the extent that, for the benefit of an upper stratum, it carries to more and more extreme expression bourgeois norms of distribution, it is preparing a capitalist restoration".

The hopes of socialists basing themselves on Trotsky's analysis was always that it would be the progressive tendency, towards socialism, that would prove dominant. Indeed, while the productive forces within the Stalinist states still appeared to be growing, it was not just with hope, but with a degree of expectation, that Marxists predicted that the working class would push aside the parasitic bureaucrats and carry out a political revolution.

Indeed, as the book describes, the workers' revolt that shook the foundations of the Stalinist regimes in 1989 started by raising demands for democratic reform, not capitalist restoration. That had also been the case in earlier struggles, such as the 1956 Hungarian Revolution and those raised at the height of the 'Solidarity' movement in Poland in 1980.

However, not least because of Stalin's mass purges, the forces that could have provided these movements with the necessary revolutionary leadership had been wiped out. As Peter puts it: "The collective memory of the masses and their ability to gather themselves together to challenge the Stalinist regime in a conscious way was eliminated".

By the 1980s, bureaucratic misrule had brought economic growth in the Stalinist states to a complete standstill. In comparison, the capitalist economies 'over the wall,' then going through a temporary economic upswing, appeared to a growing layer of workers to offer a better chance of prosperity and freedom of expression. In these circumstances, the opposite tendency identified by Trotsky, towards capitalist restoration, grew ever stronger.

Why did Stalinism collapse?

The articles in the second section, 'Why did Stalinism collapse?', describe the growing crisis within the Stalinist regimes and how Mikhail Gorbachev stumbled around to try and find a way of preventing an uprising from below.

Right up until the 1960s, despite the overheads of bureaucratic mismanagement, the advantages of a planned economy meant that the Soviet Union experienced economic growth that easily outstripped world capitalism.

The main 'Achilles heel' of the Stalinist economies was quality. Without workers and consumers being able to influence production through workers' democracy, substandard goods were churned out. Thanks to the bungling, corruption and bad planning inherent in the undemocratic top-down system of economic management, there was also huge wastage and massive uncontrolled environmental degradation.

Such 'commandism' could achieve some success when the main task was to develop an initial industrial infrastructure, but it was impossible to plan and set the prices of thousands of commodities from on high in a more developed economy.

Genuine socialist planning requires genuine workers' democracy. As Peter explains: "That would mean workers' control in the factories and workers' management at national, regional and local levels. This would harness all the talents, ideas and views for the future development of society by the producers, consumers, and by society as a whole." He adds a telling warning that such a top-down approach, borrowed from Stalinism, risked undermining workers' support for the Chávez government in Venezuela.

The articles also show how, as events developed, Peter, alongside the majority of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), recognised that, rather than events leading to a political revolution to restore a democratically planned socialist economy, there was an increasing danger of capitalist restoration.

For many workers, comparing their lives with what could be glimpsed through the shop windows of the West after the fall of the 'Berlin Wall,' the attractions of capitalism appeared to be overwhelming. It led to a social counter-revolution with the liquidation of what remained of the planned economies of Russia and Eastern Europe.

The consequences of Stalinism's collapse

The third section of the book, 'The consequences of Stalinism's collapse,' discusses the consequences of this return to capitalism.

For the working class of Russia, what followed was not the improvements that they had hoped for, but an unprecedented economic collapse. Peter's book explains the 'gangster capitalism' that emerged as Putin and other members of the former regime fought with each other for control of the nation's wealth and natural resources.

The working class internationally also paid a heavy price. The collapse of the planned economies dealt a heavy blow to the idea that society could ever be organised in a different way to capitalism.

Some former 'lefts,' such as journalist Paul Mason, concluded that Stalinism's collapse meant the end of any prospect of socialism. One of the articles in the book answers Mason, noting that, yes, the immediate effect had been to strengthen world capitalism, providing new markets and a source of cheap skilled labour. But, as Peter writes: "Reality always has two sides. The other side of this development was the enormously increased potential power of the working class, which has already been glimpsed but will be shown dramatically in the mass upheavals to come".

As is increasingly obvious today, the collapse of Stalinism in no way resolved the crisis facing global capitalism. Nor did workers suffer the kind of crushing defeat inflicted by fascism in the 1930s. Nevertheless, the ideological effects of the collapse of Stalinism still need to be overcome.

The book explains how it led to the wholesale political collapse of the leaders of the workers' organisations. They abandoned socialism - even as a historic aim - and fully embraced capitalist ideas. Internationally, former workers' parties imploded into openly pro-capitalist formations. In Britain, that took the form of Tony Blair's 'New Labour.'

> **1989 did not bury socialism or Marxism. It temporarily blurred the vision of the working class, which is now being cleared through the present crisis and the incapacity of this system to solve even the basic requirements of the mass of the peoples of the planet**
> **- Peter Taaffe**

In the trade unions too, most leaderships sought to accommodate themselves to the system, adopting 'social partnership' with the employers, to the detriment of their members. This timidity from the union leaders, together with the abandonment of the historic aim of socialism by the leaders of the workers' organisations, enormously bolstered the confidence and the power of the capitalists. It allowed them to restrict the share of the world's wealth going to the working class back to levels not seen since before the first world war.

Peter points out that "It is true, as Lenin argued, that the Labour Party through its pro-capitalist leadership has always been a 'bourgeois' party ... However, Lenin also emphasised that ... through its trade union base in particular, it was also a working-class party. ... In office it was subject to the pressure of the unions and therefore could potentially endanger the interests of capitalism". He gives the examples of the unions refusing to allow Ramsay MacDonald to impose 'austerity' under the 1931 Labour government and, similarly, preventing Harold Wilson's 1969 government from introducing the 'In Place of Strife' anti-trade union legislation.

Mass workers' parties bring workers together to build struggles and reach conclusions together. Their absence has made it harder for working-class consciousness to catch up with the severity of today's capitalist crisis, let alone to understand the need to overthrow it. The kind of mass socialist and communist parties that existed in the 1930s, at least formally standing in opposition to capitalism, do not exist at the present time.

> **As is increasingly obvious today, the collapse of Stalinism in no way resolved the crisis facing global capitalism. Nor did workers suffer the kind of crushing defeat inflicted by fascism in the 1930s. But, the ideological effects of the collapse of Stalinism still need to be overcome**

That's why in the articles in this book, and in the pages of 'the Socialist,' we have consistently stressed the importance of rebuilding mass workers' parties, and for them to include a firm Marxist current too. Such a core is vital to provide the theoretical clarity needed to stand up to right-wing leaderships and to oppose the damaging influence that supporters of capitalism will seek to introduce into them.

Peter concludes the introductory article to the book by saying: "As the most optimistic but also the most realistic trend within the labour movement, we recognised what had occurred was a significant setback for the workers' movement. But we were not thrown off balance. The collapse of Stalinism did not eliminate the inherent contradictions of capitalism... But the very weakness of the labour movement encouraged the confidence, indeed the overweening arrogance of the ruling class, which overreached itself in the bubble economies of the last two decades...

"1989 did not bury socialism or Marxism. It temporarily blurred the vision of the working class, which is now being cleared through the present crisis and the incapacity of this system to solve even the basic requirements of the mass of the peoples of the planet".

This book can hopefully play a role in helping to clear that fog.

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Swansea ALEC THRAVES

Protest pressures Lewisham Greens to oppose cuts

JAY COWARD
SOUTH EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

50 people, packed with energy, protested the night before the Lewisham Labour council set the borough's budget. Four Green council election candidates attended, along with their mayoral candidate Liam Shrivastava.

Passions were rightfully high. A few of the speakers were on their way in to make motions and demands of how the council funds the area.

Can we afford them?

Private firm LandSec intends to 're-develop' Lewisham Shopping Centre, and use half of the space for high rise flats. Just 6% is promised to be 'affordable.' And there is widespread doubt that the Labour council will ensure that any of the 11,000 households on Lewisham's council housing waiting list would actually be able to afford them.

This does not even mention the profound effect the development would have on local business, increased emissions, and residents' access to sunlight. Residents were angry, and eager to fight back.

Lewisham Labour Council wants to cut £33 million in the near future:

- £9 million from children's services
- £800,000 from special needs children
- £850k from adult social care

Lewisham Labour is also proposing the maximum legal increase to council tax – 5%. And the council is reducing council tax support for those struggling to pay.

Green mayoral candidate Liam echoed the disdain for Labour's cuts. He said he was on his way to the council meeting to propose the council use £2 million reserves to combat cuts and prevent future ones. He called on Lewisham Labour mayor and council cabinet to take a 20% pay cut.

Labour cuts

We welcome this change. Only a year ago, Liam was part of the Labour group which oversaw massive cuts to services.

We want Green candidates to oppose cuts. Trade unionists have launched a national petition calling on Zack Polanski to only allow Greens candidates to stand if they are willing to publicly commit to voting against all cuts.

The petition was received enthusiastically. A Green trade unionist signed it, promising to circulate it. We want Liam and the Lewisham Green candidates to sign the petition too.

This would help build confidence to build a mass campaign to demand central government funding to reimburse what's been cut from Lewisham by Tories and Labour. In Lewisham, we will be standing Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidates in May's local elections to help push that too.

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

Birmingham Labour at war with bin workers and Brummies

REFAT
BIRMINGHAM SOCIALIST PARTY

Austerity has been a plague affecting the people of Birmingham since 2010. Every service imaginable has been slashed.

When the Tories were in power, Labour councillors claimed that they couldn't do anything. But now that Labour is in power, cuts are continuing.

Over £650 million has been cut from services. Another £250 million of public assets have been sold at an undervalued price, with at least £500 million more planned.

The money earned from this is not enough to justify selling valuable assets. It's almost like they want to give it away for free!

Socialists believe these are worth keeping. Selling assets and underfunding services has left infrastructure rotten, creating severe issues across every aspect of life.

That's why Birmingham Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) supporters organised a people's budget meeting. This brought together trade unionists and community campaigners to discuss what services Birmingham needs, and how we can fight for the funding to get them.

Brummies in the meeting stressed that we are in an emergency. So the meeting drew up policies that elected councillors could fight to implement.

This would start by tapping into the council's £157 million reserve fund, and borrowing money against the public assets that the council owns, in order to fund essential services. That would help mobilise a mass campaign to demand that national government plug the gap with additional funding on a permanent basis.

At a protest outside the council, Socialist Party member Nick Hart said: "This money could be used to keep bin services weekly, rather than this pointless war on the bin workers. That's cost the council £30 million, and counting. A Labour council that wants to drive workers into the dust, at the bidding of a Labour government."

Birmingham bin workers have been striking for over a year against the Labour council trying to cut their pay by £8,000 each. This attack should be reversed.

It is important that Brummies have a say on what services money is spent on. In the meeting, it was the dire housing situation, mental health epidemic, and employment crisis. Rents have soared, whilst wages are stagnant.

We urged public housing to be built in many brownfield sites across Birmingham. 45,000 homes could be built this way, even by the council's own estimate.

Others said the city is hard for those who are disabled to move around. Many places are inaccessible.

Mental health is a key issue. On person spoke from her personal experience. She struggled to get the proper treatment for many years.

Lack of employment, training, and support of workers across many industries has plagued us, whether we have experience or have only recently left education. All these issues voiced at the meeting can be solved if the council were to fight the increasingly weak Keir Starmer Labour government for proper funding.

Haringey Labour top decade of austerity with £50m more cuts – what's the alternative?

NICK AUVACHE
CAMDEN AND HARINGEY SOCIALIST PARTY

Labour has set what could be its last budget as the governing party in the London Borough of Haringey. It was no surprise that they took the decision, once again, to pass on further cuts.

This Labour council has already implemented £148 million of cuts since 2010. The council is now cutting a further £53 million!

Whilst there was little opposition voiced to these cuts in the council chamber, a loud and vibrant protest was organised outside. The protestors mainly consisted of socialists from the Haringey Socialist Alliance (HSA), including the Socialist Party and Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC). Some Green candidates also supported the protest.

Two Green councillors present – Rory and Mark – pledged to vote against the budget. Luca, a Green candidate, spoke in favour of a needs-based no-cuts budget.

Others cited the example of Liverpool socialist council in the 1980s. Led by Militant, now the Socialist Party, it beat Margaret Thatcher's Tory cuts.

Socialist Party member and teacher Chris Holmes spoke about austerity in education and teacher strikes last year in Haringey. He called for support for TUSC and Haringey Socialist Alliance candidates standing in the May local elections.

Mass movement

Chris emphasised the need for councillors to vote against and oppose the cuts, and also to present an alternative budget to protect jobs, services, and wages. He called for a coordinated fightback, explaining how councils setting no-cuts budgets could find themselves at the forefront of a mass movement against austerity nationally.

He finished by citing the slogan used in support of socialist Liverpool council, and in other struggles – 'better to break the law, than break the poor.' Unlike in the 1980s, setting a needs-based, no cuts budget is now no longer illegal. But, protesters responded enthusiastically to this call.

Many people are looking for an alternative to the familiar diet of austerity and cuts offered by the traditional pro-capitalist parties. The Greens are favourites to win big across Haringey and other boroughs.

TUSC, together with other socialists, like Haringey Socialist Alliance, are also standing candidates. TUSC and HSA offer a clear 'needs-based, no-cuts' alternative – the only practical way to defend jobs and services, and fight for rent freezes. And this requires the movement to engage with the trade unions and wider working class.



Backing Birmingham bin strikers

Labour in UK, Wales, and Swansea making cuts

BEN GOLIGHTLY
SWANSEA AND WEST WALES SOCIALIST PARTY

150 protesters converged on Swansea Labour council as it met to vote on £12 million of proposed cuts to the city's budget. Simultaneously, the council is splashing out on Skyline – an environmentally destructive vanity project.

Swansea Council began by marking International Women's Day. Yet, in its own budget, it admitted the local figure for women's life expectancy is already 2.1 years below the national average. This makes a mockery of its attempts to supposedly ensure the cuts don't have a "disproportionate" impact.

Fighting for no-cuts budget

Socialist Party members and representatives from Swansea & District Trades Union Council called on councillors to set a "legal, no-cuts, needs budget that is formally 'balanced' by the use of prudential borrowing powers and reserves, in order to build time for a mass campaign for adequate government funding, while still maintaining the functioning of the council."

'No provision' for disability cuts

The Disabled People Against Cuts Cymru (DPAC Cymru) coordinator raised Swansea Council's own shocking admission. The Swansea Labour budget makes "no provision" for any increased costs or reductions in income, arising from disability cuts.

DPAC said the Labour council is in for a shock in April, when people newly unable to work through disability will be more than £200 per month worse off than disabled people today.

Two Kilvey Hill Skyline protesters also attempted to question the council. But they were cut off, and told the answer was confidential.

Swansea councillors have spent 15 years loyally implementing Tory austerity, waiting for a UK Labour government to save them. But now austerity is continuing – carried out by a Labour council, a Labour Welsh Government, and a Labour UK government.

We need a political alternative. Unfortunately, not a single one of the main parties, Greens and Plaid Cymru included, supports the policy of organisations such as TUC Cymru, representing 400,000 trade union members in Wales, to set no-cuts council budgets.

Mistakenly, Swansea's sole Green councillor – who is also their Senedd (Welsh parliament) election candidate – only abstained on Labour's cuts budget. In fact, they didn't even turn up to vote.

That's why in the Senedd elections Swansea Socialist Party members will be standing for the Welsh Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) in the Gwyr Abertawe constituency - to stand up for council workers, service users, and communities.



Opposing the far right in London in 2025

Bristol anti-racists block far-right march

TOM BALDWIN
BRISTOL SOCIALIST PARTY

Groups like Bristol Patriots have managed to capture the anger of some workers by diverting justifiable rage about falling living standards away from our billionaire exploiters, and towards scapegoating others workers, especially immigrants and Muslims.

They tried to march through the city on 7 March. This follows two separate incidents of masked far-right thugs trying to attack anti-fascist and left-wing events in recent weeks, as well as attempts to intimidate anti-war protests

Only about 40 'patriots' turned up. Whereas Bristolians came out in their hundreds to block them.

Police

The overwhelming superiority of numbers from our counter-protest meant the event would have been over before it started, had the police not tried with might and main to enable the far right to march. Violent police tactics, which have been used to help the far right previously, were escalated on this occasion.

Police claim they want to facilitate peaceful protest by all groups. But socialists and trade unionists in Bristol know how selectively this is applied.

The far right threaten immigrant communities. And their politics create dangerous divides in the working class that hurts all of us, making it harder to challenge Keir Starmer's Labour government. Collective mass united action by workers terrifies the ruling class.

Anti-racist counter protesters were on the sharp end of police violence on 7 March. We were pepper sprayed and beaten with sticks simply for peacefully standing our ground. Police vans were driven at us and we were charged with horses.

In the event, however, even these violent police tactics were only partially successful. The racist march was repeatedly blocked by anti-racist counter protesters, taking hours to walk only part of their route.

At Cabot Circus shopping centre, we formed a resolute wall, resisting violent attempts by the police to clear a path for the far right. The police were left with no choice but to turn the march around, and take them back the way they'd come.

The working class of Bristol has shown, once again, that the far right are a tiny minority. But there can be no complacency.

What next?

Organisations like Bristol Patriots cannot be allowed to mobilise without challenge from the workers' movement. Nor are they the only ones to peddle divisive politics. Reform top the polls, while Labour and other capitalist parties echo their anti-immigrant division.

The workers' movement can't just fight the symptoms. We must fight the cause of austerity and falling living standards, and offer a socialist alternative that turns people's anger against the real cause of our problems – the billionaires and their capitalist system.

Socialist candidate in student election says: 'Funding not fees'

Socialist Party member Hannah Ponting is standing for one of the elected Guild of Students (student union) positions at the University of Liverpool.

Hannah said: "If elected, I aim to create a guild that will lead the fight in campaigning for free education and more. I back students and workers fighting back. This should not just be limited to the university campus alone."

The Guild asked Hannah what her priorities are. She said:

Fight for free education

The recent rise in tuition fees is one of the most pressing issues students face. Young people should not have to take on mountains of debt, simply to get an education.

Universities are going through a financial crisis that can only be solved by full funding from the government, not just pushing the burden onto us. I will fight against further fee rises, and for free education, and the scrapping of tuition fees.

Students are suffering from the cost-of-living crisis. Maintenance loans fail to cover our basic essentials, whilst plunging us into more debt down the line.

I will use my position as Guild Officer to campaign to expand student bursaries. We need grants we can live on, instead of loans, and rent caps in student accommodation too.

Support unionisation for Guild workers

The Guild hires roughly 230 staff, both permanent career staff, and part-time student staff. They serve us food and drink, keep the space clean, and make sure that society events can run.

However, with increasing cuts to universities and student unions, the rights of these workers are not fully protected, via having a trade union branch of their own. My pledge is to support the ongoing campaign to unionise the Guild, putting workers' rights first – ensuring better hours, pay, and workplace protection.

Expand the night bus route

Years ago, a campaign was started to reinstate the night bus. After years of campaigning, we won.

The night bus now goes through Smithdown Road and other areas in the south of Liverpool, ensuring that those who live there can get home safely. However, it still does not go into Kensington, the north of Liverpool, or the Wirral.

My pledge is that I will fight to expand the night bus routes to go into these areas, and increase the intervals from every hour to every half hour, so that every student can get home safely.

Financial transparency from the uni

The university should be transparent about where it gets its money from, and who it gives it to. And now universities are cutting jobs and courses.

The University of Liverpool should therefore open its financial records to both workers and students, so we can democratically decide what the money is spent on. Universities should have no part in war or arms sales, and student fees should not be used to fund it either.



Hannah speaking at Socialist Students conference 2025

Come to a Socialist Party meeting near you

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

If you would like to participate then check out:
socialistparty.org.uk/events

Nigerian socialists call for solidarity

On 11 March, Hassan Taiwo Soweto, member of the Democratic Socialist Movement (DSM – CWI Nigeria) and spokesperson of #EndBadGovernance Movement Lagos, and Dele Frank (Arole Fela) are expected to appear before a magistrate court for the commencement of a sham trial on the trumped-up charges preferred against them by the Lagos State Police Command over their participation in a peaceful protest.

The charges include conspiracy to cause a breach of peace, threatening violence, unlawful assembly, obstructing traffic, and singing abusive songs against the police and government! We call for the dropping of these charges as the trial is an attempt to use the court to legalise brazen attacks on democratic rights and criminalise peaceful protest against anti-poor actions of the government.

Soweto and Dele Frank were arrested and subsequently detained during a mass protest against unjust demolition and forced eviction of several poor peoples' communities in Lagos on 28 January. The protest was brutally repressed by the police, leading to many protesters sustaining injuries.

For playing a leading role in the protest, Soweto was specifically targeted and singled out for physical assault and severe torture by the police – an action that was directly supervised by the Lagos State Commissioner of Police, Jimoh Moshood.


Dele and Soweto (front and second from the right) after they were released on bail pending trial DSM

We call on trade unions, civil society and left organisations, socialists and activists, locally and internationally, to join us to resist the attempt by the police and Lagos state government to annul the right to protest in the state. It is in line with this that we call for different forms of solidarity actions on or before 11 March, including demonstrations and protest letters and messages to call on the Police and Lagos State government to withdraw the frivolous charges against Soweto and Dele Frank.

- **For more information search: 'a call for solidarity' at socialistnigeria.org**

Mining museum strike enters eighth month in battle over pay

IAIN DALTON
YORKSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY

Mine guides, cleaners and other workers at the National Coal Mining Museum for England are now entering their eighth month on strike in their dispute over pay.

With the end of the financial year coming soon, management is facing pressure due to the decline in visitor numbers because of the strike. This is because many members of the public are refusing to cross the picket line in solidarity, but also because the museum's main attraction, the deep pit experience, is out of action without the mine guides to safely operate it.

There have been additional attempts to encourage school trips from around the region to visit the museum. This included opening the museum up on Mondays and Tuesdays. This has thankfully only had limited success.

But as the dispute drags on, miners are becoming increasingly worried about the maintenance of the pit. This was reinforced after the museum's health and safety manager was made 'redundant' from the statutory role which should be exempt from redundancy. He had raised a number of safety issues, including the potential for build-ups of gas, which were being ignored.

Management rejected the workers' recent counter-offer, which over a two-year period would move pay towards matching the £15 an hour received by workers at the Big Pit, the Welsh government-run national mining museum for Wales. In doing so, managers committed to answer in writing questions on the museum's financial position. After a month, no answer has yet been received to the six questions submitted, which would have in effect opened up the books to the workers.

The Department for Culture provides the bulk of the museum's funds, so it could step in. Unison, the union which organises the workers, has criticised chief executive Lynn Dunning and called for her removal.

Wakefield District Council should be demanding the museum is turned over to their stewardship, run democratically by elected representatives of workers at the museum and the wider working class, to preserve this valuable museum for future generations.

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UCU national further education strike in January

UCU: fight for coordinated nationwide Further Education action

DUNCAN MOORE
UCU EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBER (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

UCU's Further Education Committee (FEC) met on 6 March. As reported from the Special FEC last month, the UCU's New Deal for FE campaign has won significant gains for many of those branches which achieved strike mandates. Some won improved offers after action, for others the threat of industrial action was enough to force the employer's hand.

Overall however, pay across the FE sector has risen in line with the Association of Colleges (AoC) recommendation of 4%. That average figure masks wide disparities between branches which won strike mandates and those which did not meet the turnout threshold of 50%, still in place as we approach two years of a Labour government which promised to scrap it.

Cuts, cuts, and more cuts

The crisis of recruitment, retention and high workloads remains. Colleges are not getting the funding they need, and staff and students are bearing the cost. In particular, colleges which deliver a higher proportion of adult education, as opposed to (relatively) better funded 16-19, are seeing lecturer pay fall behind other colleges, largely as a result of the Labour government's cut to adult education funding.

A broad layer of reps and activists in the union have recognised that the New Deal for FE campaign has so far failed to address the systemic problems of underfunding, privatisation and the lack of nationally binding agreements on pay and workloads.

Reps are asking; why was the ballot organised on a disaggregated, or branch by branch, basis? Why was there such a delay in taking action?

The result was a campaign fragmented, with branches settling disputes locally and withdrawing from action. At the time of writing, four branches are still in dispute. While improved local deals can be achieved, a sustained improvement in funding from government can best be fought for by national action.

Start now

I brought a motion for the FEC to put to the sector conference at the union's congress in May, calling to start building now for an aggregate ballot in September. Against this were arguments from members of the 'UCU-Commons' faction, supportive of the current general secretary Jo Grady. Concerns were raised that this would not allow enough time, and that an aggregate ballot would not meet the 50% threshold. In 2023, an indicative ballot in FE did meet the threshold – proof that it can be achieved.

The motion was defeated 10:9, as was a motion tabled by the 'UCU-Left' grouping which did not specify whether or not the a September ballot should be aggregated, exposing the fact that Grady and her supporters do not want action.

The position of the (slim) FEC majority is therefore not to build for a continuation of our campaign in September, but instead to let branches fight alone. This as our sister education union in schools, the NEU, prepares a national strike ballot for a fully funded 6.5% pay rise.

In the absence of a fighting leadership, it will be up to branches to push the union into action from below, by submitting motions to the FE Sector conference calling for the fight to continue, and to be coordinated across all branches in an aggregated ballot.

Duncan Moore re-elected

Members' support for a fighting strategy was expressed by FE members in the NEC elections. This year, 67% of first preference votes went to left candidates in the UK elected seats. Duncan was re-elected with the second-highest number of first preference votes and a stronger percentage of the vote than when he was first elected two years ago.

Our campaigning material stood out with demands for an aggregated strike, and for the union to work with other unions in taking up the question of working-class political representation. However, overall the right-wing groupings have preserved their narrow majority on the FEC and on the union's wider national executive, primarily because of gains made last year.

Full analysis of the election results is to follow. It is clear that all those in favour of national action need to work together to put maximum pressure on the FEC and Jo Grady.

UCU activists step up the campaign for funding!



UCU adult education protest in November PAULA MITCHELL

MARCO TESEI
UNIVERSITY AND COLLEGE UNION (UCU) NEC MEMBER, PERSONAL CAPACITY

Around 30 education workers from adult community education centres, further education (FE) colleges and prisons met on 7 March to discuss how to advance UCU's Save Adult Education campaign.

Though formally organised by head office, this was in reality an initiative led by grassroots activists in UCU frustrated with the union's lack of drive in campaigning for funding. The government's budget for adult education has been cut by over 60% since 2010!

Where have UCU leaders been?

Last 19 November the same group of activists organised a lobby of parliament involving around 400 teachers, students and branch reps. Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell were among several MPs present. The lobby has not only given UCU members an opportunity to directly put demands on MPs, it has pushed the FE employers' body (Association of Colleges) to call its own summit to address the crisis. Even more importantly, it has lit a fire under our own union leadership, which has now announced a second lobby on 21 April, organised centrally.

Workers' election stand

On Saturday we discussed strategies for leveraging Save Adult Education's growing profile and resolved to step up the campaign. I said I would be using May's local elections, standing as an anti-cuts TUSC candidate in my college's ward in Hammersmith, to champion our funding demands. I also reminded attendees of UCU congress motion 63 (moved by Socialist Party members last May) calling on our union to seek alternative political representation to austerity-bent Labour. Lobbying your local MPs is all well and good, but what we really need is workers like yourselves standing in elections to represent our sector's demands directly!

'Are you hiding?'

Cwm Taf health visitors strike



JOHN WILLIAMS

Striking health visitors from Cwm Taf descended on the Senedd to try and meet Welsh health minister Jeremy Miles to demand fair pay on the correct pay band. But he hid away and refused to meet them. "Jeremy, Jeremy where are you? - Are you hiding? Shame on YOU!" they chanted outside the Senedd building. They have voted by 85% to extend their strike action for two months.

Socialist Party

WHAT WE STAND FOR

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

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

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

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

CWI CIT

WORK, PENSIONS AND BENEFITS

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

PUBLIC SERVICES

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

ENVIRONMENT

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

DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

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

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

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

Do you agree? Join the fightback!

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Socialist Party public meetings

South East London

South East London Socialist Party's public meeting included contributions about housing, the dual tasks of paid and unpaid labour, childcare, domestic violence, predatory beauty standards, unequal pay and an overall lack of service provision. It is clear that we cannot rely on Starmer's pro-capitalist Labour Party, or any other establishment party for that matter, to make life any easier for women and the working class as a whole.

Services face cuts across the board, and none of the establishment parties are willing to provide the funding needed. We discussed how sexist ideas are part of the capitalist system, and that its insidious roots go into the foundations of all aspects of the establishment's institutions.

In order to build a fairer, more just society for women and all other marginalised groups we must build a political voice for all those struggling against oppression as part of a mass workers' party which works in the interests of all.

CHLOE LESLIE

Leicester

Leicester Socialist Party's meeting included introductions from a student who joined the party in 2025, and a long-time member with a history of fighting for the rights of the working class. We discussed an array of issues which affect working-class women today, including economic disparity, gender-based violence and sexual harassment, and systemic inequality and how many of these issues are a symptom of the capitalist system we live under.

This tied in nicely to the discussion on the origins of International Women's Day and the wins for women's struggle in the past, notably the female textile workers who fuelled the 1917 Russian Revolution which paved the way to legal equality, voting rights, and access to education, pioneering early gender reform. We shared ideas and experiences as well as learning about local projects we can collaborate on, reflected on how recent world events have exacerbated women's struggle, and what we can learn from the past going forwards.

ALANAH CAREY-PEACHER



Liverpool protest

We joined the demonstration making its way through the city centre of Liverpool. The demo provided an opportunity not only to show our support, but also to distribute leaflets along the procession and sell the Socialist.

We ran out of hundreds of leaflets stating that Starmer and sexism have got to go, and sold lots of papers. At the end of the march, we gathered around to listen to speeches, one of which was given by me (above), stating how in order to eradicate the systematic oppression of women and girls across the world, we must first remove the capitalist system that perpetrates it.

JESS O'SHAUGNESSY

SOCIALISM TODAY



Magazine of the Socialist Party

March issue includes...

- **Women's movements** For International Women's Day 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 voting patterns of young men and women

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International Women's Day 2026 – 8 March
Fight for fully funded domestic abuse services



Marching against violence against women in Northampton in 2025 PHOTO: EAST MIDS SP

ELEANOR DONNE
ESSEX SOCIALIST PARTY

Twenty months into a Labour government, women's refuges and related support services are living pretty much the same 'hand-to-mouth' existence that they were under the Tories. Women's Aid, UK charity for domestic abuse survivors, reports that in 2025 government investment fell short by £321 million of what was needed. 15% of respondents to the annual survey of service providers closed or reduced an area of work due to limited funds. Other providers used reserves to avoid cuts this year but will likely run out of money next year. The Labour government has chosen to impose austerity on the most vulnerable in society in order to meet self-imposed 'fiscal rules'. This has led to women sleeping rough whilst waiting for a refuge place or worse, staying with their abuser for lack of any other choice.

Domestic abuse survivors are spending longer in refuges, 'blocking' desperately needed spaces. They can't move on to a stable home because of a chronic shortage of genuinely affordable housing. Labour councillors have failed over decades to mount a fight for the resources they need to build council homes in their areas. The Labour government's pledges on house building are largely focused on home ownership. Just 2,260 council homes were built in 2024-25, according to a report from the Common Wealth think tank. The report also claims that eight times that number of council homes will be sold off in 2025-26! What is needed is an end to 'right to buy', and above all a mass programme of council house building.

Women's Aid is also concerned that 'cash strapped' local councils are trying to save money by moving to more generic domestic abuse services rather than specialist refuges. Their 2025 survey found that services specific to Black and minoritised women are less likely to be commissioned by local authorities. Outreach services raising awareness of domestic abuse, including lesser-known areas such as financial abuse and coercive control, have been 'soft targets' for cuts too.

The Socialist Party campaigns for local councillors that stand up for their communities and resist cuts to jobs and services. Councils should not be imposing cuts on any services! Councillors need to fight for resources from the government to provide housing and decent services for all that need them.

Women's Aid demands a minimum funding settlement of £516 million per year from the government. They say this would ensure early access to specialist domestic abuse services in England and prevent the constant threat of closure that hangs over refuges. Existing Green, Independent and left Labour councillors should add their voices to Women's Aid's demand. They should commit to voting against service and job cuts, and instead fight for needs-based budgets using reserves and borrowing powers where necessary this year to avoid cuts, and build a campaign for these life-saving resources.

On 7 May there will be local elections in 136 council areas, as well as to the Welsh Senedd and the Scottish Parliament. Socialist Party members will be standing for election as part of TUSC - the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition - and are appealing for others to stand too. TUSC candidates pledge to vote against cuts and job losses, and to reject council tax, rent and service charge increases for working-class people.

The TUSC banner is available to all those prepared to take that fighting stance, and can be a way to bring together hundreds of socialists, trade unionists and anti-war activists under the same electoral banner to 'get socialism on the ballot paper' on a nationwide scale. (see tusc.org.uk for more info)

- **See also 'IWD: End the gender health gap' at socialistparty.org.uk**

TUC Women's Congress discusses workplace struggles

MICHELLE GREB
WTUC DELEGATE (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

The annual TUC Women's Congress (WTUC) was held in Bournemouth from 3 to 6 March. With roughly 300 delegates, it was an eye-opening experience, dealing with issues working-class women face in their workplaces.

Every trade union that touched on healthcare had horror stories of not just their own members, but of women in the care of their members. And yes, being born female, I have experienced similar through a long life, and it grates! Lower pay, fewer hours, zero-hour contracts, being at the beck and call of emergency scheduling, to the point the needs of family and childcare come a far-distant second. Delegates raised safety issues in high physical stress jobs, where women workers are barely considered, while it's so easy for men to get safety equipment to fit male bodies.

I spoke to a WASPI Women motion, to garner more support for the plight of some 73,000 women who have died since the Ombudsman's report came out in 2024. There are millions of women who have died since the first change to the retirement date without recompense for their lost years of a pension plan into which they paid. The motion passed with no nays or abstentions, from PCS policy to WTUC policy.

Through the event I was able to talk with individual delegates, raising socialist ideas, and this was well received. Perhaps in the future, it will be possible to organise a socialist fringe event outlining how the fight for socialist change is part of the fight for women's rights and equality.

FIGHT SEXISM STARMER & THE SYSTEM

The Socialist Party says:

- Fully fund refuges and domestic violence services. Build a mass campaign, mobilising the working class to win the resources we need from a Labour government. This includes standing as many candidates as possible in the May local elections committed to no-cuts, needs-based budgets
- Fleeing domestic abuse should not mean losing a secure home or living in poverty. Build a campaign for a mass council house building programme to meet need. Right to Buy must end
- For a real living wage of at least £15 an hour, with no age exemptions, and living benefits. Scrap the benefit cap
- Cut the rent. We need rent controls set by democratically elected and genuinely representative committees
- Build a united struggle for zero tolerance of sexism and sexual harassment in workplaces, schools and colleges. Trade unions should play a key role campaigning for domestic abuse policies in the workplace, including paid domestic abuse leave
- Campaign for trade unions to stop funding Labour and instead help to build a political party that represents the genuine interests of their members, and the whole working class
- Fight for socialist change in Britain and internationally to end the unequal and exploitative capitalist system that promotes sexism, misogyny and violence against women

Scan to see International Women's Day public meetings

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Energy bills set to rise

WE WON'T PAY THE PRICE FOR BOSSES' WAR AND CRISIS

End their profits, nationalise!

KATE BLANCHARD
WEST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Households across the UK are once again bracing for a rise in energy bills. This time, the rise is being blamed on the escalating US-Israel war with Iran and across the Middle East. Oil prices have soared as global supply chains have been thrown into disarray.

So far, household energy bills have been predicted to rise by around £160 this year, pushing the typical annual bill to around £1,800. The impact has already been felt at the petrol pumps, and will only become worse the longer the war on Iran continues.

Energy companies and government ministers claim that increases are an inevitable result of rising global energy prices due to the conflict. They say that the UK's heavy reliance on gas for electricity generation means households must expect to pay more when prices surge. This comes just days after Keir Starmer bragged in parliament that his government was bringing energy bills down.

Bills never seem to fall

But working-class people have heard this story before. The reality is that bills have been rising for far longer than this latest conflict. Whether it is war or another global crisis, there is always an excuse. Yet, even when pressures ease, bills never seem to fall and private shareholders reap the rewards. For millions already struggling with a cost-of-living crisis that has now spanned several years, this £160 rise will be yet another blow.

For the super-rich bosses, energy is a commodity to profit from, and huge multinational energy companies are determined to protect their profits and satisfy shareholders. When profits rise, they keep the gains, and when costs rise these get passed on to the rest of us. But the working classes did not create this global crisis and should not be forced to pay for it.

We need to take energy companies into democratic public ownership, with no compensation for the fat-cats, only on the basis of proven need. If the Labour government introduces subsidies to try and limit the impact of rising oil prices, that's money that will go straight into the back pockets of the bosses.

A nationalised energy system, based on democratic workers' control and management, could plan production, invest in renewables and guarantee affordable energy, putting the needs of the working class before the profits of a few, while protecting the environment.

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

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