

Starmmer's Labour government can be beaten



PAUL MATTSSON

PILE ON THE PRESSURE!



SIMON DAWSON/NO 10 DOWNING STREET/CC

MARK BEST
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

May's election results were a disaster for Keir Starmmer.

Workers and young people expressed their discontent by voting in many different ways, but the overwhelming message is that Labour and the Tories – the two main parties of the establishment – can't deliver what is needed for working-class people.

Some Labour grandees begged

their MPs not to oust Starmmer now – the instability and chaos would not go down well with the bond markets. None of them were saying he should stay because he's doing a good job! Now Wes Streeting and Andy Burnham are preparing their own paths to power. (see page 3)

Eviction

Starmmer's getting a small taste of what it's like to live under the threat of eviction. Workers and young people experience a very different housing crisis. Which sits alongside a cost-of-living crisis that never truly went away, and over a decade of austerity.

A new phase in the cost-of-living crisis is unfolding. The prices at the

supermarket and the petrol pump have already started to increase, while our pay packets remain the same. Those at the top expect the working class to suffer the consequences of the economic turmoil Trump's war on Iran has unleashed.

The weakness and tumult at the top of government is an opportunity that the working class can make use of. We need to prepare now for the type of action that can win for our class.

We won't be made to pay for the bosses' crisis. Workers across the trade union movement can take steps now to prepare to fight to defend our living standards and livelihoods. Fight for the kind of serious

action that can maximise our power. The discussions at the National Shop Stewards Network conference (see back) can be a launchpad for this.

Put them on the spot

The thousands of new councillors can be put on the spot: will you stand and fight with us for the resources our area needs against a weak and rotten Labour government, or will you continue doing their bidding? Campaigns to defend and extend vital services can be linked together with bold demands to build the council houses we desperately need, reopen libraries and youth clubs, and more.

And if the system of the bankers and bosses can't afford what we need, then we can't afford their system. The lack of resources to invest in improving the lives of all is down to the billions and billions of profits that are sucked away into vaults or gambled on the financial markets.

There is an alternative to the doom spiral of the capitalist system and the endless attacks on our living standards. The working class in power owning and controlling the wealth and resources of society with a democratic socialist plan of production, in Britain and internationally, would guarantee an end to the poverty, war and destruction. Join us in that fight.

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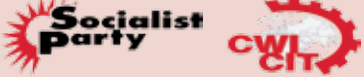
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"The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it."
Karl Marx



MARY FINCH

Milburn floats uni funding cuts – fight for fully funded, free education

SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Alan Milburn, the Blairite former health minister, has blamed too many young people going to university for the fact that almost 100,000 recent graduates are currently not in work or further study.

As part of his ongoing review into 'NEETs' (16 to 24-year-olds not in employment, education or training), Milburn will instead push the government to reallocate funding to technical and vocational courses, which he says would better suit the needs of employers.

Clearly there is an urgent need for more funding in further education. Some college leadership teams are warning they could turn away thousands of prospective students this September, owing to insufficient government funding. Staff in the University and College Union (UCU) have taken UK-wide strike action this year in response to more than a decade of cuts, demanding real pay rises that are fully funded by the government.

However, what Milburn is proposing is a moving-around of the existing inadequate funding across post-16 education – in his words, "a better balance" in terms of "allocating resources"; taking from "over-emphasised" higher education and giving to further education.

But why should more funding for further education come at the expense of higher education, which is already in a historic funding crisis? A fraction of the money currently sat in the bank accounts of the billionaires would be enough to fully fund both sectors. In contrast, Milburn's plans would be a green light for university vice-chancellors to go even further in their brutal cuts to jobs and courses, and would increase the risk of university insolvencies.

And how would a 'reallocation' of

resources be achieved in practice? More than half of higher education funding comes from students' tuition fees, with UK undergraduate fees set at more than £10,000 per year. In comparison, students at FE colleges below the age of 19 do not pay a penny, with over-19s still only paying a fraction of what university students pay each year for a degree.

There is a danger therefore that Milburn's recommendations to increase funding for vocational courses will envisage an even more marketised FE sector, in which student fees and private funding from big business both play a more influential role.

The reason that so many young people do not get a job after completing uni is because the capitalist bosses are increasingly not investing their profits back into hiring or training workers. Getting more school-leavers to take 'technical' courses is one way for the capitalists to make the government and individual students bear this cost of training. But it will not fundamentally change the lack of decent and stable jobs on offer to young people, across all educational backgrounds, which is a product of the capitalists refusing to invest in jobs during a time of crisis for their system.

What young people need is a real choice after leaving school. That means a fully funded and high-quality apprenticeship, training scheme, vocational course, or degree programme for whoever wants it – all with a decent job guaranteed at the end. That means fighting to take the vast wealth and resources, as well as the levers of power, in society out of the hands of the capitalist class, so that the needs of the working class could be actually reflected in a plan for how education and the wider economy is run.

Huge numbers turn out for Palestine demo and in opposition to the far right

BERKAY KARTAV

SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

On Saturday 16 May, Socialist Party members joined tens of thousands who flooded the streets of London to commemorate the Palestinian Nakba day - or 'catastrophe' - marking the systematic destruction of hundreds of Palestinian villages and the forceful uprooting of millions of Palestinians in 1948 at the time of the creation of the state of Israel.

The genocidal slaughter of Palestinians by the Israeli regime continues, with more attacks recently on the Global Sumud Flotilla, which aims to send aid to Gaza. The devastating war on Palestinians and peoples of the Middle East is a big mobilising issue for many. Coaches brought people from around the country.

This demonstration acted as a counter-protest to far-right activist Tommy Robinson's 'Unite the Kingdom' demo on the same day, called provocatively to coincide with Nakba day. The numbers on this demo, however, were smaller than the 'Unite the Kingdom' demo in September 2025. It was smaller than the pro-Palestine march.

The two demonstrations were separated by the police.

Prior to the demo, Socialist Party members argued that there should be a discussion in the trade union movement about the programme and strategy needed to fight racist division and the far right, as well as to beat back Reform, including how demonstrations are organised without relying on the police for safety.

We pointed out, both prior to the demo and on the day, that trade unions, the mass organisations of the working class, should take the lead in

building the working-class fightback against Starmer's Labour austerity, war and racist division.

Democratically organised defensive trade union stewarding is also key to make sure these demonstrations to oppose the far right are properly organised.

The demonstrations on Saturday showed that the forces the far right can mobilise are fewer than what the anti-war movement alone can mobilise. The Together Alliance demonstration in March, a quarter of a million strong, gave a taste of the numbers that can be mobilised when the leaderships of the trade unions put resources into building for a march. On that occasion, the organisers' slogan was an insufficient: 'love, hope and unity'. A trade union-led demo, uniting the struggles against war, austerity and racism - with demands to fight the cost-of-living crisis, for jobs, homes and services for all - could mobilise far bigger numbers still. Crucially, it would point the way towards the kind of working class-led struggle needed to cut across support for the far right.

Starmer's Labour has continued to attack the living standards of working-class people while their rich mates rake in billions. It was revealed last week that the leader of Reform, Nigel Farage, received a 'gift' of £5 million from a billionaire. These parties defend the crisis-ridden capitalist system and have nothing to offer working-class people.

Workers need a party of our own to take on the establishment parties. Our placards on Saturday's demo called for uniting all struggles against racism, austerity and war and for a socialist challenge to Starmer's Labour and cut across Reform.



STARMER'S GOVERNMENT FRACTURING AS BURNHAM BY-ELECTION LOOMS



WHAT WE THINK

'Ungovernable Britain' is the phrase coined by the capitalist press in the days since the 7 May elections. It refers to the fact that Britain could be on course for its sixth prime minister in seven years.

The Labour government is in turmoil, dealt a heavy blow by working-class anger at the polls. It is undermined by deep unpopularity earned by its first two years, in which it has attacked sections of the working class and continued to preside over crumbling public services and now the beginnings of a new cost-of-living crisis.

Clearly anticipating his future precarity, and in tandem with his purge of the Corbynism from Labour, in 2021 Keir Starmer actually increased the percentage of MPs required to trigger a leadership contest from 10% to 20%. So far that appears to have meant health secretary Wes Streeting was unable to find the required number of MPs to support his candidature.

Burnham's return?

Instead, Labour MPs are looking to a politician without even a seat in parliament as a way out of the mess.

Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham, having been blocked by Starmer loyalists from standing in the February Gorton and Denton by-election, has now been given the all-clear to contest for a by-election for the Makerfield seat in Lancashire. Burnham is not in Westminster and therefore has avoided the huge unpopularity experienced by most Labour figures. He gained his 'King of the North' moniker because he was seen as standing up to the Tory government during the second wave of Covid in Autumn 2020, although he soon retreated on his demand for extra funding.

Burnham may not currently be an insider in the House of Commons; he is not an outsider though. In fact he has previously served 16 years as a Labour MP including voting for the Iraq war, as a minister under Blair, as a cabinet member under Brown with a role in the Treasury, as billions of pounds of austerity cuts were sketched out in the 2007 spending review. He stood for Labour leader against Jeremy Corbyn in 2015, and campaigned for Starmer against the left in the 2020 leadership election, telling the Guardian: "Keir is a brilliant man."

As veteran Labour right-winger Margaret Hodge put it on Radio 4, referencing the Socialist Party's history as the Militant Tendency: "This

is not about a Militant presence. This isn't a squabble about ideology, it's about emphasis."

For Burnham to challenge for leader, he first has to win in Makerfield. The by-election could take place as soon as 18 June. But as recently as 7 May, Reform UK won 50% of the votes in the council wards that make up the constituency. For the best chance of winning he will have to present himself as being at odds with Starmer, arguing: "If you want Starmer out, vote Burnham." And to win a leadership election he, like any challenger to Starmer, would have to pitch left. Burnham is certainly presenting himself as to the left of Starmer, calling for council house building and to "put more things back under stronger public control".

The cost of Britain's government borrowing increased to its highest level since 2008 as Starmer moved closer to being faced by a challenge. A Financial Times feature on 'who do gilt investors want to lead Britain?' put Burnham as "the biggest threat to the gilt market among the frontrunners". Tellingly though, one investor said Burnham's apparent popularity might mean he is better able to "carry unpopular decisions on fiscal policy". Since, he has said, "I support the fiscal rules". He has also said that he wants to make Labour "a party that's solidly on the side of working-class people." The two can't be reconciled.

The crisis facing the capitalists is the choice between an extremely



Starmer and Burnham NO.10/CC



It is more important than ever for the trade unions to fight for independent political representation

unpopular prime minister in Keir Starmer, unable to command the support of his MPs to continue to rule for the bosses and attack the working class. Or an alternative, whoever it is, who they fear will be more vulnerable to working-class pressure and therefore less willing to attack the working class. Under the impact of this insoluble dilemma, Labour's current infighting could turn into splits and fractures.

Capitalist decay

The years of economic stagnation, brutal austerity and periods of rising cost of living have eroded illusions that the capitalist system can offer a decent future. That is at root of the collapse of support for the capitalist establishment parties, and the erosion of authority of all the establishment institutions.

It is more important than ever for the trade unions to fight for independent political representation. The number of motions and debates taking place at this year's union conferences to discuss unions'

relationships with Labour is an indication of the pressure union leaders are coming under. Undoubtedly in the main they will continue to bang the drum of lesser evilism, that it is necessary to continue to support Labour to defeat right-populist Reform. A new Labour leader pitching to the left of Starmer will be used as part of that too.

That strategy to beat Reform is destined to fail. Backing from the workers' organisations for a capitalist establishment party - discredited among huge sections of the working class and presiding over a system in crisis in which the working class is being made to pay for the bosses' crisis - undermines the authority of the trade unions and in fact rolls out the carpet for the right.

Working-class struggle

A trade union lead in a fight to defend living standards, uniting sections of the working class against racism and other attempts at division, is the best means to cut across support for Reform. The National Shop Stewards Network conference in London on 27 June, bringing together the most militant trade union fighters, is set

to discuss what strategy and political programme is needed to address the approaching new surge in the cost-of-living crisis.

As part of her campaign for re-election for general secretary of Unite, which Socialist Party members are supporting (see pages 5-6), Sharon Graham has raised the idea of the union developing its own workers' manifesto. That leads to the question of what kind of vehicle is needed to fight for those policies. Socialist Party members are raising the demand for the unions to organise a cross-union conference to discuss working-class political representation.

All capitalist politicians can be forced under mass pressure to make concessions to the working class, at least temporarily, even as the system compels them to attempt to roll them back. Whatever the outcome of a potential future Labour leadership election, the need for the trade unions to lead in the development of a mass workers' party – a decisive form of workers' pressure – remains, and under the impact of phases of capitalist crisis becomes ever more pressing.

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Wes Streeting's real record in the NHS

BEN GOLDSTONE

CROYDON AND SUTTON SOCIALIST PARTY BRANCH

Reading Wes Streeting's letter resigning from his post as health secretary, you would be forgiven for thinking the crisis within the NHS has been solved. That is until you actually have to get treatment or walk into an A&E!

Streeting bragged about beating waiting time targets – how, despite resident doctors' strikes, waiting lists fell by 110,000 in March, and ambulance response times for heart attacks and strokes are the fastest in five years. Other figures were brought out to show how good a job he supposedly has been doing. He didn't mention the millions of pounds more now going to private health companies who have benefited from Streeting's reforms.

Starmer responded to this in his own letter, by thanking Streeting for his work and for all he has achieved as health secretary. Starmer patted himself on the back too, saying these improvements are down to the government's choice to stabilise the economy, invest in public services, and reform the NHS.

The doctors' union, the BMA, has found that waiting times for

Two thirds of nurses believe current understaffing levels put patients at risk

treatment remain far higher than before the Covid-19 pandemic. 7.11 million cases are on waiting lists. Of those cases, 2.47 million have been waiting for over 18 weeks and 94,000 have been waiting for over a year. Despite a slight improvement, only 92.8% of people received their first cancer treatment within one month from decision to treatment, below the 96% operational standard. The number of patients waiting over 12 hours for an emergency admission was about 108 times higher in April 2026 than April 2019.

A recent YouGov poll found that 59% of the public rated NHS services as 'bad'. NHS workers have also been polled recently by YouGov, with 87% of them describing the NHS as being in a "weak state" and 66% of them feeling that Labour are badly handling the NHS. 53% believe that Wes Streeting was doing a bad job as health secretary. Increased demand, not enough funding, and shortage of staff were voted for as the top three causes of problems for the NHS.

The Royal College of Nursing, has said that the job is "far from done" and that "patients are still coming to harm in an NHS that has too few nursing staff to guarantee safe and effective care".

We need to fight for a properly funded and staffed NHS able to support and meet the healthcare needs of all! And that means building an alternative to the big business-supporting Labour Party.

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Wes Streeting between two health CEOs DEPARTMENT FOR SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY/CC



GARY ROGERS/CC

WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?

editors@socialistparty.org.uk

● Worcester: different parties, same cuts

Council tax payers in Worcestershire have every right to be bewildered. And to condemn all political parties. In the last 13 months they have been let down by a succession of capitalist lackeys and crooks. In May 2025, Reform won 27 council seats, two short of a majority, taking control from the Tories. They did this on a promise of not increasing council tax. However, in February this year, Reform raised council tax by 9% – aided by walk-outs from the Liberal Democrats and some Labour councillors.

In April, Reform council leader Jo Monk was removed by a vote of Reform councillors. This month, Labour, Conservative, Lib-Dem, and Green councillors combined to support a Green councillor as leader. Subsequently, the national Tory party removed the leader of the Conservative group on the council for making an alliance with the Greens. Reform leaflets saying: "Vote Tory, get Greens" have already been circulating.

The Green Party is now leading the council, with the new leader saying: "I'm sure we can make it work". No, he's not saying he will fight against the cuts in the budget and reverse the council tax hike – he means he can find a group of councillors who will make the cuts. How right were the Socialist Party and the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) to seek a commitment that Green candidates would fight against council cuts.

One thing is clear – there is no party in Worcestershire Council who will stand up to defend vital services, and fight for more money from central government. No wonder our street Socialist Party stall petitions are doing so well.

BILL REED
WORCESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

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Dirty water profit scandal

CLARE DOYLE

HACKNEY SOCIALIST PARTY

In Britain – an island surrounded by sea and with literally hundreds of rivers – it would be reasonable to expect outdoor swimming to be a widespread, healthy activity available for all.

But what do we have? A farcical situation in which, of thirteen more designated bathing sites in rivers, only one has water qualified as clean enough to bathe in! Even there – at Ham on the River Thames – seasoned swimmers were dubious about having a dip!

For a few years now there have been important campaigns against pollution – for an end to the treacherous practices of profit-hungry water companies and farmers.

In 2023, it was Irish singer, Feargal Sharkey, along with comedian/angler, Paul Whitehouse, who raised the alarm about Britain's rivers and exposed the big water companies' total defiance of the law. 'Surfers Against Sewage' was launched and has now logged no less than 6,709 serious sickness reports at 514 UK bathing spots since 2019.

Private water companies rake in billions in profits and pay vast sums to shareholders and managers, but leave bathing areas in our rivers and seas dangerously polluted by sludge and excrement.

A film on Channel 4 spelled out the way the precious chalk streams and bathing places in the Hampshire area have been all but wrecked in the interests of big business and profit.

Lives are being blighted, even lost, through the continued pollution of our rivers, lakes and seas! How many more tragic deaths will there be like those featured in recent TV dramas – one of a woman who spoke out at a meeting against a water company in Cornwall and another an eight-year-old schoolgirl on holiday with her family in Devon? Will those responsible ever be held to account?

The 'i' newspaper carries its 'Save Britain's Rivers' campaign when yet another water company transgresses but never will it call for renationalisation! In Scotland, water has remained in public hands but urgently needs control and management to be fully in the hands of elected representatives of the workers and consumers.

Generally, no private organisation should be allowed to take over places of natural beauty and recreation, let alone take payment from the public for enjoying them. This is

what happened when the Corporation of London took over the swimming ponds of Hampstead Heath. (They should be taken back into public hands without a penny of 'compensation'!)

The right to swim in all the country's rivers, lakes and beaches without charge and without fear of getting ill as a result should be guaranteed. This should stand alongside the unassailable 'right to roam', fought for by generations of working-class people.

The maintenance of rivers, pools, ponds and lakes is a vital public responsibility, to be carried out with the fullest involvement of workers. Fight for total renationalisation of water under democratic workers' control and management!



Part of Scunthorpe Steelworks GARETH JAMES/CC

Stop attacks on jury trials

THOMAS BUTLER

LIVERPOOL NORTH SOCIALIST PARTY

One of the pieces of legislation listed in the King's Speech that Starmer's government is aiming to roll out is the Courts and Tribunals Bill. Measures dressed up as 'criminal justice reform' and 'modernisation' include the removal of the right to a jury in criminal cases handled by crown courts, currently a guaranteed right for all defendants.

This is another instance of the Labour government infringing on civil liberties, and is a deeply unpopular move among the public and professionals within the courts.

However if it is so unpopular due to it being an obvious curbing of rights, why is Starmer pressing on with it? Because ultimately it benefits them.

One of the main pressing issues that has faced the entire criminal justice system, including the courts, is the chronic lack of funding. Since 2010, funding for the Ministry of Justice is 14% lower and, combined with population growth, is in reality 24% lower. With hundreds of courts closing due to austerity, it is hardly a shock that the court system as a whole is caught up in hopeless backlog.

Within the last six years, the backlog of cases at crown courts has doubled to over 80,000. To alleviate this the government is aiming to cut juries out and mete out 'justice' at maximum speed. Many trials would be overseen and decided on purely

by the judge. Specifically, those in which 'a likely prison sentence of up to three years' is to be imposed.

It appears that this 'reformed' system is almost predicting a defendant's sentence before any trial has taken place. This predication is detrimental to whether one is allowed to be judged by their peers or not.

Attacks on our rights

There are also political ramifications to this bill. By eliminating a jury, it leaves the judges in full control. Recently we have seen increasing numbers of cases in where a jury refuses to convict individuals who have broken deeply unpopular laws. This has included people protesting against environmental destruction and the UK government's support for the Israeli state's war on Gaza. No doubt this has been to the frustration of the Labour government, seeking to represent the interests of the big bosses without ordinary people fighting back against them.

Judges are much more reliable agencies to carry out their laws, irrespective of public mood. Judges in crown courts sit under a British coat of arms in the courtroom, and act in the interests of the British capitalist state.

A dangerous precedent is being set which Labour will attempt to ramp up in the future to more easily trample over civil liberties to try and sustain their austerity agenda. It's no wonder clampdowns on our rights, including the right to protest, happen when struggle is increasing

British Steel nationalised: We need workers' control

BEN GOLIGHTLY

SWANSEA SOCIALIST PARTY

Keir Starmer is hardly a left-winger. But the capitalist state has been forced, in recent years, to step in and nationalise key parts of the economy to prevent the whole system collapsing.

This includes the Northern Rock bank during the crash 18 years ago. Today there is an ongoing return of passenger services. Now Scunthorpe steelworks, if it passes a 'public interest test', will become the first publicly owned steelworks since 1988. It was one of the announcements Starmer made after the disastrous May election results, for once announcing something popular!

The pompous 'UK Steel Strategy' announcement by government ministers is quite telling: "We have seen a long-running pattern of governments failing to act with a long-term vision, resorting to intervening as individual companies fail," they said, just as they resort to intervening in Scunthorpe!

Domestic steel production is affected by high energy prices and cheap imports, due to 13% 'overcapacity' in global steel production and increasing protectionism in the world market.

British infrastructure is suffering from decades of underinvestment as billions of short-term profits are extracted for shareholders. The shareholders are ready to dump everything in a heartbeat as soon as those profits dry up.

In this way, competitive British steel production is held hostage to the profiteering of the energy companies. Even the government's former head of strategy at the Department for Energy Security, Adam Bell, has called for nationalisation of gas plants.

The first domino?

But the UK government will be extremely fearful that one nationalisation will lead to another. If they can save Scunthorpe, why couldn't they save Port Talbot? If they nationalise energy, why not water? Why not take over every other failing firm to protect jobs – from heavy industry to Pizza Hut?

On the basis of capitalism – an unplanned system of competing companies and nations – there is only a cycle of crisis where the 99% are expected to foot the bill.

Socialist nationalisation

But crucially, rather than just stepping in to 'socialise the losses' in arms-length publicly owned companies – ready to be sold off when they become attractive to capitalist's balance sheets again – we need direct democratic working-class control and management.

Ultimately only a joined-up international socialist plan of production can meet the needs of workers, communities, and the environment. Taking the big businesses and banks that dominate the economy into public hands, kicking the bosses and managers out with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need, and running them for the vast majority of us would enable that.

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The Old Bailey's Justice statue ROBERT LAMB/CC

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UNITE GENERAL SECRETARY ELECTION: RE-ELECT SHARON GRAHAM

An election of importance for whole trade union movement

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN UNITE

The Unite general secretary election has been announced, and it comes at a pivotal moment for members of Unite and the whole union movement. Socialist Party members will be campaigning to re-elect Sharon Graham.

Given the political and industrial importance of Unite, with 1.2 million members and one of the largest Labour-affiliated unions, the outcome of this election will have huge importance as workers struggle against the brutal cost-of-living crisis, and as Starmer's Labour government implodes.

The general secretary election follows on from that for the union's Executive Council (EC), where the left 'Workers' Unite/Back to the Workplace' slate of candidates won a convincing victory. The result reflected the mood of reps and activists that wanted to defend and extend the militant industrial approach that the union has taken under Sharon Graham's leadership.

We supported Sharon Graham in the 2021 general secretary election because of her militant industrial approach; under her leadership Unite has strengthened its industrial action strategy, calling over 1,500 disputes, winning 83%. Those disputes have won £605 million for members.

Nominations will now open, but Simon Dubbins, Unite Director of International & Research, had already announced his candidature last year. He is supported by the United Left (UL) group who were part of the 'Members United' bloc that were defeated in the EC election. Previously, the UL used their narrow majority on the Unite Executive to obstruct Sharon's fighting position, arguing for a more pro-Labour approach.

Consolidate the gains

It is essential that the gains of the EC election are consolidated, that Unite continues to develop its industrial militancy and faces up to the political challenge posed by Labour's meltdown.

Faced by this weak and divided Labour government, Unite can take the lead in calling for coordinated action to fight for the above-inflation pay rises that workers need in both the public and private sectors as the cost of living spirals.

Socialist Party members stood on our programme on this left slate - with four being elected - along with fellow supporters of the Unite Broad Left (UBL). It included fighting shop stewards such as Danny Taylor, one of the lead reps in the heroic Birmingham bin strike, where workers have been on indefinite strike since March 2025 against the Labour council's vicious £8,000 a year fire-and-rehire attack.

That Labour council was thrown out of office on 7 May, with the cutting councillors sharing the same fate



Sharon Graham (centre) backing the Birmingham bin workers DAVID ELLIS

as so many other Labour representatives around England, Scotland and Wales, as the working class vented its visceral anger at this New Labour Mark II government continuing the Tory road of austerity and pro-big business policies. Despite being elected with a 170+ majority, two years in, the cuts continue, privatisation remains, and still the promise to scrap the Tory undemocratic 50% strike ballot threshold has not been carried out.

Unite's relationship with Labour

The lesson of the May elections is clear for Labour and all other political parties - if you represent this big-business system and the capitalist establishment, you will end up in crisis.

The Birmingham bin dispute has been a lightning rod in Unite and posed what is needed in the union, both politically and industrially. For

a Labour council to look to try to smash its workforce and its union, to use the worst Tory strikebreaking measures, including getting Unite fined £265,000, it has inevitably raised where now for Unite?

At last year's Unite Policy Conference, this clash came to a head. During the conference itself, Birmingham City Council announced its intention to fire and rehire the binworkers. Socialist Party members and close allies, who were all conference delegates, put together an emergency motion to build support for the binworkers and to suspend from Unite membership the councillors and the then-Labour deputy prime minister Angela Rayner. This motion was passed virtually unanimously, apart from a handful of delegates who support United Left.

The motion also agreed to open up a discussion in Unite about its relationship with Labour. That debate must now begin, which is why it is important that a statement agreed by the newly elected Executive Council on 15 May says: "Our members

will be given the opportunity to vote on whether they want to retain our link to the Labour Party. This will inform the Rules Conference next year, which takes the ultimate decision."

Rules conference urgent

The scheduled 2027 rules conference, however, would be too late for next year's council elections, where over 7000 seats will be contested, including in Scotland and Wales. Therefore, Socialist Party members in Unite argue that the Rules Conference should be brought forward so that union reps and members can urgently discuss the political strategy that is needed, as Labour has been exposed and Farage's poisonous Reform is looking to exploit the political vacuum that has opened up because of Starmer's pro-business policies.

We agree with Sharon Graham's conclusion from Labour's election catastrophe: "The working class have been abandoned and have delivered their verdict... We are stuck in a rigged system where everyday people always, always pay. Only fundamental, irreversible change will stem the tide. If the party does not shift decisively towards the working class it is finished."

New workers' party needed

But we don't think any hope should be put in a Labour resuscitation. When Sharon says "It is change or die. Now or never" it could be seen as putting off further what is sorely needed - not to wait for a new 'project' to weigh up hitching a ride with, but for the unions themselves, with their collective authority and their reach across all working-class communities, with Unite to the fore, to launch a political voice for the working class, a new workers' party, on a socialist programme.

This is particularly vital for Unite because a socialist approach, based on nationalisation of industry, is the foundation for a 'Just Workers Transition' in the defence and fossil fuels industries, as the only way to guarantee jobs, pay and pensions in moving to socially useful production.

This isn't about the personal traits of individual Labour leadership contenders. Showing her 'left face', Angela Rayner recently spoke at the Communication Workers Unions conference, just as Starmer was clinging desperately to No.10. But this is the same Rayner who was suspended by Unite last year for her role in attacking the binworkers in league with the councillors. And all those vying to replace Starmer are signed up to his pro-capitalist agenda at home and abroad, shamefully nodding through his austerity and backing up Trump and Netanyahu's brutal warmongering.

Undoubtedly, under Sharon Graham's leadership, Unite has been prepared to challenge Starmer's Labour government more than most unions. It played a leading role in successfully campaigning against the winter fuel payment cut and, of course, taking on Labour in Birmingham and Westminster over the bin dispute.

In the 2021 Unite Policy Conference, just weeks after Sharon Graham was elected, a motion was passed to enshrine into Unite's programme that the union call on Labour councils not to implement cuts, but to pass no-cuts needs budgets, a policy long-campaigned for by the Socialist Party. This March, in response to the one-year anniversary of the Birmingham bin strike, the Unite EC voted to cut its Labour affiliation fee by £580,000 to £900,000.



Socialist Party members in Unite will be campaigning to re-elect Sharon Graham, arguing for the industrial and political programme we believe is necessary

Workers' Manifesto

Socialist Party members argue that the union needs to go further, not down the road of non-political trade unionism, but to launch a political alternative for workers. Sharon Graham has reiterated the need for Unite to launch a Workers' Manifesto, contained in the new EC statement. We totally agree, and it could start with Unite policy on nationalisation, scrap the Tory anti-union laws, and needs-based no-cuts budgets. But what political party will carry out the manifesto that workers need?

All this is on the line in the general secretary election. A victory for Dubbins and the United Left group would be a serious obstacle in maintaining and strengthening the union's militancy. The left victory in the EC election is the platform for building on the last five years: developing the industrial combines to bring more workplace reps and activists to the fore in the union; and, above all, for Unite to play the leading role in the fight against Labour austerity, the bosses' offensive and the threat of Reform, which requires facing up to the political and industrial challenges.

Socialist Party members in Unite will be campaigning to re-elect Sharon Graham, arguing for the industrial and political programme we believe is necessary for the union at this stormy time, while continuing to fight to build the Unite Broad Left into a fighting left organisation that can attract and mobilise the militant and socialist reps and activists in the union. We will work alongside other forces that agree that winning this election is essential in building on the victory won in the EC election. It is a vital step in defeating any attempt by those in the union who want to send Unite into retreat.

This is what is at stake in the forthcoming general secretary election.

PCS group conferences want a fightback against this weak Labour government

The PCS union, which organises government workers in the civil service and privatised employers, is holding its Annual Delegate Conference (ADC) as we go to press. Before it began, conferences took place of PCS members in different employer groups. The Socialist reported last week on the big win for the left in the PCS National Executive Committee (NEC) elections. Six Socialist Party members were elected, as part of the Broad Left Network (BLN), in a coalition with others who also want a fighting union. The previous leadership, the misnamed 'Left Unity' grouping, was ousted by the members due to its failure to mount a real fight against the Starmer government's attacks on pay and tens of thousands of job cuts.

Elections took place in the different groups within PCS as well. Unfortunately, in the DWP (Department for Work and Pensions), the Left Unity group maintained its dominance on the Group Executive Committee (GEC). In HMRC (Revenue and Customs), however, BLN supporters, in alliance with others, maintained leadership.

DWP: Fight for decent pay and more jobs

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN DWP

Even before DWP conference started, efforts had been made by the incumbent, now former, national president Martin Cavanagh to move motions off the DWP agenda and up to the main ADC agenda.

Thus, the BLN motion for a group-wide campaign on pay, jobs and hybrid working did not get heard on the basis of the final instruction allegedly not being appropriate for a group conference - even though it is already current DWP group policy.

The DWP group leadership lauded their work on pay over the past year, congratulating themselves for reaching the anti-trade union turnout threshold of 50% in the consultative ballot towards the end of last year, but cast the blame on reps and the postal service for not reaching the turnout in the statutory ballot at the start of this year.

The GEC pay motion, however, does give the group a reasonably fighting policy on pay, which Cavanagh explicitly said builds on the BLN-supported pay motion that passed last year.

2026's pay policy states that, among other things, any pay deal in the coming year must ensure that:

- All members receive an above-cost-of-living increase
- An element of pay restoration is included, to account for previous years of real-terms pay cuts
- A significant differential is built in between the grades, to end continuous pay compression across the department created by the yearly minimum wage uplift (In other words, staff in the DWP are so low paid that their pay has to go up when the minimum wage goes up or it would be illegally low - and the staff on the grades above have such small pay rises that their pay doesn't go up at the same rate.)

A motion was passed to launch a campaign for 30,000 new DWP staff - a longstanding demand which originally passed in 2022.

The BLN in DWP will be at the forefront of fighting for more staff in their areas, and will be fully backing the incoming NEC in the national campaign.



HMRC PCS members on strike in 2023 ROGER THOMAS

HMRC: Members get ready to fight for pay and against victimisation

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN HMRC

HMRC (Revenue and Customs) group conference had an optimistic air. Whereas last year many motions were simply moved, formally seconded and voted on, this year delegates were keen to contribute to the debates, giving the conference vibrancy.

The topics for discussion were important. 68 motions were debated, including motions put forward by BLN supporters. The two most crucial for members were on pay and victimisation of reps.

Conference agreed to demand a fully consolidated pay rise for 10% or £18 per hour, whichever is greater; London weighting of at least £5,000, a four-day working week, linking subsistence rates to inflation, and more. Socialist Party members support the group campaigning on these priorities, and believe these demands can

best be achieved through a strong union-wide national campaign that includes the HMRC group.

A theme throughout the conference was the disgraceful treatment of PCS reps by HMRC bosses. HMRC already restricts PCS's ability to organise effectively and communicate with our members. But now it is directly attacking reps themselves. These attacks take no account of the individual's position in PCS - every rep is potentially in the firing line.

Conference heard from a rep in Wales who was dismissed a few days before conference. Many more HMRC branches have stories of reps suffering warnings or dismissal. Even one story like this is one too many. Conference agreed an emergency motion for targeted industrial action where reps are sacked. This policy can be further built on by Annual Delegate Conference carrying motion A33 this week.

JOIN THE SOCIALISTS

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

- Visit socialistparty.org.uk/join
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SEAN FIGG

COMMITTEE FOR A WORKERS' INTERNATIONAL

Viktor Orbán conceded defeat in Hungary's parliamentary elections on 12 April, ending the first and longest 'experiment' in right-populist government in this era. The scale of Orbán's defeat is huge. In the party-list component of the election, his Hungarian Civic Alliance, known as Fidesz, contesting in alliance with the Christian Democratic People's Party (KDNP), lost over 800,000 votes compared to the 2022 elections, falling from over three million votes to 2.2 million.

In total, Fidesz-KDNP lost 79 seats in the 199-seat parliament. This was on an 80% turnout, the highest in the history of capitalist democracy in Hungary, introduced in 1990 after the end of Stalinist one-party rule.

The opposition Respect and Freedom party, known as Tisza, secured a super-majority of 136 seats, i.e. over two-thirds of the seats in parliament, giving it the power to amend the constitution. This was a position enjoyed by Orbán in all four of his parliamentary terms too. He used it to make substantial changes to the Hungarian capitalist state and its laws in order to build a so-called 'illiberal democracy'. However, the verdict on 'Orbánism' after sixteen years in power is that it failed to solve any of the fundamental issues confronting post-Stalinist capitalism in Hungary.

Why Tisza?

Tisza has been the beneficiary of an electoral revolt, driven primarily, but by no means exclusively, by the younger generations in the cities and big towns. Despite increases in average wages and a decline in unemployment during Orbán's rule, a cumulative inflation since the Covid-19 pandemic of 57% has weakened or wiped out many of the gains. Corruption scandals became more frequent and ever more scandalous towards the end of his rule while the wealth of a section of society with connections to the government was exposed. Linked to this there has been significant deterioration in public services.

All of this has led to a mood of frustration and anger which was able to coalesce around Tisza because it appeared 'new'. It positioned itself firmly against Orbán and Fidesz, but also against the established opposition parties. However, whilst Tisza was a new choice on the ballot paper, and its MPs will be new faces in parliament, the politics behind Tisza are anything but 'new'.

Péter Magyar, the leader of Tisza, is a former Fidesz politician and Tisza is largely a personal vehicle tightly controlled by him. This is a right-wing political project, at best 'Orbán-lite'. Tisza's election manifesto promised a domestic policy focused on tackling corruption, improving healthcare, education, welfare, child protection and transport.

It also included proposals on a wealth tax and tax cuts for those on low incomes. But Magyar sang from Fidesz's anti-migrant song sheet during the election campaign. He has also been silent on LGBTQ+ rights and whether a Tisza government would repeal Fidesz's anti-LGBTQ+ legislation.

Why did Orbán accept defeat?

Across capitalist governments of all political shades there has been a trend towards increased repression and attacks on democratic rights. This is generally sharper under right-populist governments, its politicians unapologetic about it, with some, like Trump, or Orbán, embracing their 'strongman' role. Understandably, many wonder how far this process can go, asking, "is this the road to a fascist government?"

When talking about capitalist democracy and democratic rights, right-populists use a political vocabulary sharply at odds with the well-established – and thoroughly hypocritical – ideas of universal freedoms and universal human rights used by their liberal capitalist rivals and even traditional conservatives, behind which the ruling classes have cloaked the dictatorship of capital for decades. This is a conscious political choice to emphasise right-populist parties' distance from the 'old' political establishment. Upon winning the 2018 elections, Orbán declared: "The era of liberal democracy is over." He continued, "We have replaced a shipwrecked liberal democracy with a 21st-century Christian democracy, which guarantees people's freedom, security." However, Orbán's acceptance of electoral defeat in these elections shows that, whatever he intended by his remarks, he was not declaring the end of capitalist democracy.

This did not of course mean that democratic rights were 'safe' under Orbán. Throughout his sixteen-year rule his governments gerrymandered, manipulated state institutions, appointed 'loyalists' to key public offices, and used the law and repressive apparatus of the capitalist state to intimidate opposition and attack minority groups. But as the CWI has pointed out before, right-wing populism does not stand for the destruction of the workers' movement or the abolition of democratic rights and elected governments in general. Using Fidesz's supermajority to replace capitalist democracy with a fascist dictatorship was never floated, despite the formal opportunity with the introduction of a new constitution in 2011.

This is not least because right-populism in Europe is primarily an electoral phenomenon. One of the roles that right-populism attempts to play in this era is to rally a social base for capitalism that the traditional capitalist parties have been incapable of maintaining. They do this with an appeal to conservative social and family 'values', nationalism and other backward ideas. Simultaneously, right-populists posture against out of touch 'elites', including capitalism's traditional political representatives, giving some outlet to the class anger in society. The strength of the different ingredients in this reactionary cocktail varies from country to country depending on the national situation.

But right-wing populist parties are not engaged in charity work for the capitalist class. They are also building their own electoral base from which to wrest the management of capitalism from its traditional political representatives, the parties and politicians whom the right-wing populists hold as responsible for leading capitalism into crisis. An electoral mandate from

HUNGARY: LESSONS ON THE CHARACTER AND LIMITS OF RIGHT-POPULISM

'the people' is considered crucial by right-populists for their legitimacy as the real representatives of 'the nation'. This electoral legitimacy also serves as a social base, albeit a shallow one, that allows them to deal more decisive blows against their capitalist rivals than they could otherwise. Odi-ous as it is, attacks on the rights of minorities, such as migrants or LGBTQ+ people, and increasing repression against different anti-government protest movements, are used to rally and consolidate the 'real nation' as a social base for capitalism and an electoral base for right-populist governments in particular, not as a step toward the abolition of democratic rights and elected government in general. Gerrymandering and other forms of electoral manipulation, including intimidation and suppression, has always been a feature of capitalist democracy. It is increasing everywhere under the pressure of the crisis of capitalism and is firmly part of the right-populist 'playbook' too. But this has definite limits at this stage which are shaped by the balance of class forces in each country and globally.

Orbán, when in opposition, manoeuvred Fidesz into a prominent role in anti-government protests between 2006 and 2010. But like all right-populist politicians, and capitalist politicians of all ideological shades in general, he prefers politics to be limited to a spectator sport. Only the political elite are meant to play on the field. If Orbán had attempted to defy what was clearly a



Viktor Orbán on the campaign trail in 2026 PHOTO: ELENES ANDOR/CC



Budapest Pride PHOTO: ANDRAS MEYER/CC

decisive electoral revolt against his rule he would have guaranteed a pitch invasion by the spectators – in other words he would have provoked a mass movement. This is what happened in South Korea in 2024, stopping an attempted military coup.

In Hungary, Budapest Pride went ahead in June 2025, with over 200,000 attending, despite having been banned by Orbán's government. This mass civil disobedience would have been nothing compared to the response any attempt to defy the election outcome would have provoked. All mass movements have the potential to threaten the stability of capitalism and the wealth and power of the ruling class. In Hungary, this would have included that of Orbán and his clique. When it came to it, Orbán conceded defeat before ballot counting was even finished.

However, the CWI has warned that there is a 'grey zone' connecting right-populist parties and far-right and fascist groups. The latter do build their organisations with a perspective for eventually waging a 'battle for the streets' through mass mobilisations and the building of armed wings. Emboldened by the growth in electoral support for right-populist parties, these groups can lead an increase in

political violence and attacks on minority groups. The balance between the populist-right 'mainstream' and this far-right 'fringe' can, of course, change in the future as the crisis of capitalism deepens and class struggle escalates. In the 1920s and 1930s capitalist politicians of all ideological shades acted as handmaidens for the formation of fascist governments when the alternative was the overthrow of capitalism by the revolutionary working class. But this is not the balance of class forces in Europe at present.

Sixteen years of Orbánism confirms the CWI's analysis that right-populist government does not yet mean a qualitative change in the form of capitalist rule in the way that fascist regimes and Bonapartist police or military dictatorships do. However, Marxists do not deal in rigid and fixed categories. There are elements of Bonapartism in every capitalist democracy. These elements can become more dominant, producing regimes of parliamentary or presidential Bonapartism.

In these, repression plays a greater

role, democratic rights are more restricted, and the institutions of bourgeois democracy are increasingly sidelined, subordinated or neutralised. Orbán travelled a considerable way down this road during his sixteen years in power.

What happens next?

In the short term, Orbán's defeat is a boost for the pro-war European ruling classes' militarisation programmes and determination to wage war in Ukraine against Russian imperialism. Magyar is unlikely to continue with Orbán's policy of delays and vetoes to block military aid to Ukraine or additional sanctions on Russia. This did not mean that Orbán was 'the peace candidate', despite trying to posture as such during the election campaign, cynically playing on legitimate fears in Hungarian society. Orbán's policy toward the Ukraine war amounted to a backdated cheque for Russian imperialism's war of territorial conquest and an acceptance of its right to annex territory by force. This is not a 'peace' policy.

We are in an era where capitalist democracy is in crisis. Orbánism was both a product of that crisis and, during its sixteen years in power, accelerated it. One of the functions of capitalist democracy, as well as easing the tensions between the classes, is to allow the disagreements between the different wings of the capitalist class to be mediated. One of the means of doing this is changing governments following an election. In periods of relative capitalist stability, this was a relatively straightforward technical task governed by rules that all political parties abided by and facilitated by a professional cadre of capitalist technocrats. This is increasingly breaking down and changing governments is becoming an increasingly fraught and contested process. Rather than lowering the temperature of class anger and reducing the pressures in society, a change of government today can also pave the road to fresh political and constitutional crises.

This is just one of the many ways that right-populism is a source of instability from the point of view of the capitalist class. It also increases polarisation in society more generally, adding to the difficulties of achieving stable capitalist political rule.

Poland is another ex-Stalinist country that is today part of the EU and has seen a right-populist government come and go. The right-populist Law & Justice party (PiS) was in government for two terms between 2015 and 2023. Like Orbán, it too made substantial changes to the capitalist state and its laws before also stepping aside from government. However, the coalition of capitalist parties that replaced PiS failed to secure a supermajority and lacked the legal power to remove PiS loyalists from key positions in the capitalist state. Crucially, PiS still controlled the presidency and its veto powers. Their willingness to use these positions to frustrate the new government has led to political deadlock. Rapid disillusionment with the new government allowed PiS to retain control of the presidency for another five years in elections in 2025. This leaves the country hanging

on the precipice of a political or even a constitutional crisis.

Back in Hungary, Magyar has already called on Fidesz appointees in key positions in the capitalist state – including the highest courts and state prosecutor, the audit, competition and media authorities, as well as Hungary's president – to resign before their terms of office end. It is unclear whether they will heed this call. Fidesz may be out of office, but it may not wish to surrender all the reins of power it has gathered, especially with the possibility of an anti-corruption drive leading to prosecutions. If they do not resign, Magyar would be faced with the choice of accepting some level of political deadlock or using his supermajority to enact constitutional changes to make their removal possible.

However, this 'majoritarianism' is precisely the 'crime' Magyar accuses Orbán of! In every scenario, the Hungarian ruling class is unlikely to avoid some degree of political or constitutional crisis in the future as a legacy of right-populist government. As we have pointed out in relation to the US, in this era, control of the capitalist state – the executive committee of the ruling class – is contested between its different wings in a way not seen in generations. This is another potential source of major instability for capitalism. The social ferment provoked by political and constitutional crises – splits in the ruling class in other words – are fuel to the class struggle and can pave the way to mass movements and even revolutions.

For independent working-class political struggle

In Hungary, as elsewhere, the working class and middle classes are again dissatisfied, frustrated, and seething with anger. The same moods that swept Orbán and Fidesz into power have now swept them out again. Peter Magyar and Tisza will not be spared this anger either when their pro-capitalist policies inevitably lead to disappointment. Confidence in capitalist political parties and the institutions of capitalist political rule has been undermined everywhere. In Hungary and other ex-Stalinist countries these were introduced within living memory, their social roots shallower than in many other capitalist countries. It is the 'underwriting' of the profit system by the stronger European capitalist classes that dominate the EU that brought Hungarian capitalism into existence and sustains it.

The biggest factor keeping it alive is the huge political vacuum that could be filled by an independent mass working-class political party. The defence of democratic rights against the right-populists and other reactionary pro-capitalist political forces that can grow in their wake is crucial in this era. But this struggle needs to be conducted under the leadership of the working class, independent from all wings of the ruling class. Only a political alternative on this class basis is capable of solving the crisis of capitalism in the interests of the majority in society. This will require a programme for the replacement of capitalism by a democratic and working class-controlled socialism.





WHAT WE STAND FOR

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

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

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

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

WORK, PENSIONS AND BENEFITS

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

PUBLIC SERVICES

- A massive expansion of public services including the NHS and council services. Reverse all the cuts, kick

out the privateers. Bring private social care and childcare facilities into public ownership under democratic control, in order to provide free, high-quality services for all who need them. Expand services for all women suffering violence.

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

ENVIRONMENT

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

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

DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

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

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

- No to imperialist wars & 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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Students send letter to Haringey school head in support of teachers' strike against cuts



Highgate Wood School picket line 19 May PHOTO: AMNON COHEN

On 7 May, teachers and support staff in the National Education Union (NEU) at Highgate Wood School in Haringey, north London, began a series of strikes against a package of cuts planned by the school leadership. We publish a letter to the headteacher in support of the strike, signed by 20 students.

Dear Mr Cozier,

We, as current students and alumni of Highgate Wood School (HWS), are deeply concerned by the proposals laid out in your draft plans for the school budget. It is upsetting that teachers must resort to strike action, with limited opportunity for negotiation being presented to them.

We stand with our teachers, support staff, and the NEU and call for:

- No further increases to class sizes
- No reduction in curriculum offer, including protecting the arts
- No compulsory redundancies, including for teaching and support staff
- No increases to workload or contact time

We are proud that HWS has nurtured talent in the arts, with our alumni making active contributions to creative industries. We believe that arts and humanities subjects are the keystone of a rich and fulfilling education experience. In a world where students are worried about their future prospects, narrowing our educational opportunities would be incredibly damaging. Students should be able to leave school with a breadth of knowledge and skills which can only be possible by protecting arts funding.

A student's academic performance is contingent on their teachers' ability to plan their lessons and feedback with as much care as possible. Because of this, we believe in preserving teachers' PPA (planning, preparation and assessment) time. There is no doubt that our teachers care about our progress, but stretching them this thin won't help us at all.

Secondary school is already an emotionally and academically challenging time, and so by creating larger teaching groups, it is virtually impossible for teachers to guide students, give detailed feedback and use more time to explain difficult concepts. We appreciate that our teachers are guided by these procedures, but with unsustainably large classes, teachers won't be able to give the attentive care to every student that they otherwise would in a more manageable teaching group.

Despite the increase in class sizes after last year's negotiations, subject teachers stepped up and took on a 17% increase in workload for no extra pay. The teaching support staff have been the silent heroes offering a helping hand and supporting those who need it most. Without them, this arrangement wouldn't have been possible in the first place. Therefore, it is only right that we take a stand against forced redundancies of support staff.

Our teachers are the beating heart of the HWS community, and we expect that at the very least they are afforded the appropriate levels of non-contact time, as limited as it is in the first place.

We urge the school to engage with our teachers' concerns. Students have noticed that the issues highlighted by the HWS NEU last year have re-emerged in this year's disputes, but in a much uglier form. We can no longer accept this as the norm, and call for you to lay out a strategy of how you intend to cooperate with the union and the measures you are taking to minimise any harm to teachers' wellbeing and student outcomes.

We would be grateful for your urgent acknowledgement and response to this letter.

- See 'Haringey school strike against cuts' at socialistparty.org.uk for more

UCU conference Starmmer in crisis: Step up the fight for post-16 education

DUNCAN MOORE
UCU NEC MEMBER, PERSONAL CAPACITY

Starmmer's government is in crisis. Now is the time to pile on the pressure – we can win for post-16 education if we mount serious national action, and fight for our own independent political voice.

Universities announced more than 12,000 job cuts last year. 24 institutions are now at risk of insolvency. A recent Education Select Committee report stated: "Currently, there is no clearly understood protocol for how the government might respond to a situation of a provider at risk of imminent insolvency, which is a very serious problem." Indeed!

Yet the Labour government remains adamant: there will be no bailouts. Rather than abolishing the fees funding model, the only inadequate measure the government took was to re-index fees to inflation.

Further Education (FE) colleges also face a massive funding shortfall, after the government announced just a 0.5% increase to the national per-pupil funding rate for 16-19 year olds. 32,000 new students are unfunded. This would mean further falls in real pay, staff retention and increasing workloads. Adult and Community Education is even less well funded and hit by cuts to local authority spending.

This crisis looms over the congress of the University and College Union (UCU) this year.

At the FE sector conference, which takes place mid-UCU congress, several branches have submitted motions calling for an aggregate ballot.

In November's FE ballot, 62 colleges returned a 90% 'Yes' vote for action on a 50.6% turnout nationally.

But the UCU leadership opted for a disaggregated ballot and not every area got over the 50% turnout threshold, scandalously still in place nearly two years into a Labour government.

The leadership delayed action till January, before which many branches accepted local pay offers. 29 colleges took action, and then it was left to individual branches to decide a way forward. Congress 2026 gives us an opportunity to reset: we need aggregated strike action in the autumn term.

In universities, many branches have taken audacious strike action to protect jobs and defend pensions. Those branches could already be co-ordinating action, especially if a lead was given by UCU general secretary Jo Grady and the Higher Education (HE) Committee.

Coordinate the strikes

The voice from many picket lines is: coordinate the strikes; the fight for our universities is national, not local; don't leave us on our own! But this mood is not reflected in the motions on the HE Sector Conference agenda. Last year, conference voted to return to national action; this year, the only motion on industrial action strategy calls for disaggregated ballots by default, at least while the 50% threshold applies.

A national aggregated ballot took place last autumn, but while members voted overwhelmingly for action, turnout fell short of 50%. Even Jo Grady's reports acknowledge the lack of effective leadership - she says members wanted to fight, but they wanted to know what the strategy was!

The motion for disaggregation is perhaps an attempt to ensure some coordinated action can take place. While best tactics at any stage should

be discussed, we should not agree to disaggregate as a default position. The existing policy should remain - but it needs to be implemented.

The scale of the crisis poses the need for UCU to have a serious strategy that links the fight against job cuts and attacks on conditions with the fight against marketisation and the fee-based model.

Lots of motions at congress are about combating Reform and the far right. Our union must do this by mounting a serious fight on funding, jobs and pay, and Grady must go to the TUC General Council to demand it calls a national demonstration against Labour austerity and racist division, as agreed at TUC Congress last year.

This also underlines the need for an independent political voice. Speaking on BBC Question Time last May, Grady said: "Not a single political party in the UK is offering solutions to the issues that we face."

At conference last year, delegates passed the motion from West London College, moved by Socialist Party member Marco Tesei, for the UCU to take steps towards trade union-based political representation. It agreed to invite MPs who say they are on our side to discuss how our union's demands could be fought for in parliament, and encourage our own members to stand.

This has yet to be implemented. A parliamentary group of MPs for UCU has been created, though according to Grady, this was on the initiative of the MPs! A motion this year from West London College calls for membership oversight, regular meetings between the NEC and the MPs, and for UCU to take the lead in a cross-union conference to discuss political representation.

JAY COWARD
EQUITY CONFERENCE DELEGATE AND
SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBER

Just two days after both establishment parties were smashed at May's polls, performing arts union Equity voted to start a process which could establish a political fund for the first time in its 96-year history.

Conference opened to a hall in Durham preoccupied by the new political landscape and hungry for action on arts workers' needs. This developing mood was evident in the run-up.

A tremendous 99.6% 'yes' vote in December's indicative ballot - for action short of strike over AI in film and TV - brought the employers' association to the table. There is an upcoming indicative ballot for strikes in West End theatres, to build on the gains of 2023's pay dispute. Collective agreements have been won with Pride employers for the first time this year, in Manchester then Durham.

The Durham agreement followed the right-populist Reform council cutting its already pitiful £2,500 Pride funding to £0. Left general secretary Paul W Fleming called Reform the



PHOTO: IAN PATTISON

"biggest threat to our industry" - that it would make arts funding "disappear". Reform is a real threat. But where is the working-class alternative? I made this point from the floor in the 'Fighting the far right' fringe meeting – that the Together Alliance has apolitical rhetoric of 'Love, Hope and Unity', alongside the involvement of politicians like Sadiq Khan, Mayor of London, who oversees austerity conditions - and also asked about trade union stewarding of counter-demonstrations.

Labour

Meanwhile, Labour is in government directing austerity nationally. Recognising this, many reps stayed in bed for the opening speaker of the final day, Durham's Labour MP Mary Kelly Foy. Even TUC general secretary Paul Nowak admitted to conference that Labour is "a party with a huge majority and no public support" - but had no answer.

Our motion on workers' political representation followed. The evening before, Paul Fleming alluded to it as a "watershed moment for the union", and said Equity's long tradition of apolitical trade unionism had failed.

The key question is: political trade unionism on whose terms? Proposing the motion, I was clear that in no way did it call for Equity to become a timid lapdog to unaccountable political parties, pumping money into a black hole that offers us nothing but cuts.

It was the most contentious motion of the weekend and produced the longest discussion by far. Many reps argued it is vital for the union to establish political tools to further our aims and hold government to account. The motion passed overwhelmingly.

Equity Council, the union's executive, is now charged with beginning "a process of discussion at all levels of Equity" including "establishing a dedicated political fund... that could selectively support political candidates fighting for Equity policy."

Alongside approaching "the executives of other unions" for "discussion on a political voice accountable to trade unionists", this motion must be the start of real efforts by Equity to help bring together a working-class political alternative to Labour, Reform, and all the bosses' politicians.

'Water pollution makes me sick'

Nationalise private vultures

JOE WATERS
DEVON SOCIALIST PARTY

During April, waters around the beaches in Teignmouth on Devon's south coast were exposed to significant pollution from a leaking sewer, operated by private company South West Water.

The issue was first noticed and reported by local campaign group Friends of the River Teign (FORT) on 29 March. Pollution warnings issued by the Environment Agency were in place for the most of the school holidays. But sewage spilled into the water for over two weeks before repairs were completed by the water company.

South West Water reported six-month after-tax profits of £54.7 million. But, in another incident in 2024, 40,000 customers around Brixham

were exposed to a parasite outbreak. 100 become seriously ill.

The other private water companies across Britain are no better. In 2025, there were 290,000 recorded sewage discharges nationally.

Despite the consistent failure of the industry since privatisation to make the investments necessary to protect the environment or improve water quality, bills are sky-high and continue to rise.

Bills

When water was first privatised in 1989, the average annual bill was £36.60, equal to about £100 today. But after almost four decades of private ownership, the estimated average bill for 2026-27 will be £639.

Protests against the pollution issue took place in dozens of coastal locations on 16 May, organised by

campaign group Surfers Against Sewage. 150-200 attended in Teignmouth.

Homemade placards carried slogans like 'Boo to Poo', and one held by a young girl read 'Water Pollution Made Me Sick'. Placards held by the FORT campaign demanded, 'Clean the Teign'. Socialist Party members in conversation with protesters found general agreement with the idea that the water companies drive for profits was the cause of the problems.

We handed out leaflets calling for the nationalisation of water, under democratic workers' control, with no compensation paid to the bosses who've only ever enriched themselves off of an essential resource. And we invited those protesting to come to a meeting and discuss with us about how the demand for publicly owned services can be fought for and won.

Review of 'The Singing Strikers' at Hackney Archives History Festival 2026

EVE REDMOND
HACKNEY SOCIALIST PARTY

With the 100th anniversary of the 1926 General Strike and the results of the recent local elections fresh in people's minds, people in Hackney descended on Dalston's CLR James Library on 9 May to partake in a musical rendition of 'The Singing Strikers', part of the Hackney Archives History festival.

Pankhurst Players

The short musical was introduced by Peter Jarvis and Eric Segal, directed and produced by Eilis Mulholland - all Socialist Party members - and performed by the talented Sylvia Pankhurst Players. It paid homage to the hundreds of east London women garment workers in 1928 who downed tools over pay, hours, working conditions and union membership.

Immersion was at the heart of

this production. Singing Strikers appeared marching and handing out copies of the 'Red Needle', a paper dedicated to the minority movement, as well as song sheets to members of the audience. When the performers reached the stage, the audience had gained a newfound confidence and began singing along!

Irish and Jewish diaspora

Initially backed by the National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers (NUTGW) these women, predominantly from the Irish and Jewish diasporas of Hackney, took to the streets armed with solidarity, spirit and song to demand better working conditions. They reinvented popular songs from 'Mary had a Little Lamb' to 'It's a Long Way to Tipperary', infiltrating the lyrics with the harsh realities of the workers' struggle. These songs not only acted as a morale booster, but further funded their activism through both their

performances in the pubs of London and dock areas, as well as the publication of their 'Strike Songs' book.

Current system

As the room reflected on the legacy of these women, it became difficult for the mind not to venture into what we are now faced with under the current capitalist system and political climate. With Reform making huge gains across the country in the recent local elections, the embodiment of everything these brave women stood for - workers' rights, feminism and solidarity with migrant workers - seems more important than ever.

The times we find ourselves in may feel confronting and bleak, but if sitting in that brightly lit room with the diverse community of Hackney singing these songs of struggle almost 100 years later can teach us anything, it's that the heart of the workers' movement is alive and beating. And solidarity? Solidarity is forever!



BRIAN DEBUS



Herts uni plans to cut every humanities course

MORGAN TRITTON
HERTFORDSHIRE SOCIALIST STUDENTS

The University of Hertfordshire has informed staff that it will be cutting humanities undergraduate courses - English Language and Linguistics, English Literature, Creative Writing, History, and Philosophy. A petition against the cuts already has over 3,000 signatures.

The uni has not responded to requests from staff regarding the security of their jobs, or how this will impact current students. Prospective students have not been told whether their offers to study the cut courses next term still stand. The University and College Union (UCU) says that staff were denied having input into the decision-making process, and were not given timelines for the cuts.

What's the truth?

The university says that humanities courses are "no longer financially viable". The uni vice-chancellor then wrote to staff, assuring that the university is financially stable, and the actions are "not being taken in response to an immediate financial crisis".

Staff and students say that, by the university's own admission, these cuts are not being driven by financial necessity, but by management falling in line with the wider marketisation of UK higher education.

In cutting humanities, the

university will also create a 'cold spot' for these courses in Hertfordshire, meaning higher education will become less accessible to local, working-class, prospective students. Staff have called out the university's hypocrisy in being a 'widening access' institution.

What do we actually need?

Staff and students at the University of Hertfordshire work and study on what feels like a perpetual building site. Management are narrowly focused on so-called profitable courses, and the perception of a successful university to attract international students, rather than actually delivering what students and staff need and demand.

Many Herts students recognise that the UK university funding model is broken, when we see that management treats education as a business first, prioritising reputation over student experience on campus, and the conditions and job security of staff.

Herts Socialist Students stands in solidarity with staff and the UCU in fighting these cuts. And students will be meeting with the vice-chancellor to demand answers.

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

Birmingham socialists discuss how we can stop Reform

Bin striker – ‘Reform didn’t support us, but you did!’

ALEX ASTON
BIRMINGHAM SOCIALIST PARTY

Birmingham Socialist Party hosted a public meeting to discuss the recent council elections, and the need to build a working-class alternative to Labour. At the meeting, some asked how Reform had attracted so much support, and how socialists should respond.

During the election, Socialist Party members spoke to many Reform voters who, unsurprisingly, felt abandoned by the mainstream parties. Reform channels this frustration towards immigrants, while issues such as council cuts, nursery closures, low pay, and collapsing local services are sidelined.

Picket lines

Matt Reid, Unite the Union convenor for the Birmingham bin workers, spoke about the ongoing strike, and the role Socialist Party members have played on the picket lines. Matt said that through consistently turning up and supporting workers, Socialist Party members had helped shift the mood among bin workers.

Matt noted: “Farage and

other Reform MPs didn’t turn up to the pickets to support us, but trans activists with Palestine flags did”. He said that’s how you cut across support for Reform among workers.

When socialists speak to working-class people directly, many agree that the real problem is not migrants or other workers, but councils, government, and bosses for falling living standards.

Labour and Greens

The meeting also looked at the continued failure of Labour councils, imposing austerity, as well as the role of the Greens. At the meeting, there was strong engagement from Socialist Party members and other members of the public, with contributions in addition to the introduction by Birmingham Socialist Party member David Ellis on how socialist policies and campaigning can offer a real alternative for local people.

The Greens now form the second-largest group in the council. Questions were raised, based on the Greens’ past positions, on whether they would adequately fight austerity, and how we can challenge them and other independent councillors to fight for an alternative to cuts.

The meeting highlighted that working-class support is won through solidarity, direct involvement in local struggles, and offering a socialist alternative that speaks to people’s real conditions.

The bin strike dominated the Birmingham local elections



Community stops family eviction

SAMANTHA LIPUMA
TOWER HAMLETS SOCIALIST PARTY

London Renters Union mobilised eviction resistance in Tower Hamlets on 16 May. The family facing the eviction had lived in the same house for more than 40 years. Yet, the greedy housing association was refusing to pass down the tenancy from the family’s late parents, and instead was attempting to make the young family homeless.

Neighbours described the family as a vital part of the community,

whose eviction would be deeply felt. Our goal was to ward the bailiffs and landlord off, to buy the well-loved family more time to challenge the eviction, and prevent their kids from having to lose their home and move schools.

Ready to stand up

When I and another Tower Hamlets Socialist Party member arrived at 7:15am, there were already around 20 people ready to challenge the greedy landlord and complicit bailiffs. The energy was inspiring.

The organisers began by describing the situation the family was left in, and showed us how to resist. The front line stood locked arms-in-arms, with the back two lines providing support behind, in the case of confrontation.

The formation was impenetrable and the solidarity glaring, as many bystanders and neighbours looked at us. Around 10:30am, the bailiff and landlord appeared, and just as quickly left, once seeing the solidarity of the community.

The mobilisation succeeded in

preventing the eviction, and proved to landlords that they cannot act without facing the resistance of the community.

Pride



Swansea BEN GOLIGHTLY

Swansea socialists challenge Reform and Labour scapegoating

RHYS CASTLEY
SWANSEA AND WEST WALES SOCIALIST PARTY

The Socialist Party marched with hundreds of people for Pride. The crowd ranged from lifelong campaigners, to young people attending their first Pride, to trade unionists standing in solidarity with LGBTQ+ people.

Those in attendance were angry about attacks on LGBTQ+ people from the media, the Labour government, and political parties like Reform, who openly wish to strip protections and rights away from minority groups. Big corporations, who are seeing record profits off the backs of the working class, were marching alongside those very working-class people in a false show of solidarity.

Socialist Party members distributed a new leaflet, pushing for the need to organise against attacks on LGBTQ+ rights, and the need for socialism to stop capitalist scapegoating of minorities. The people we spoke to were rightfully angry and frustrated that the Labour government keeps attacking LGBTQ+ people and our right to live as we wish.

People were also scared of the growth of Reform UK in the recent English council and Welsh Senedd elections. Reform pose a clear threat to LGBTQ+, especially transgender, people.

Reform has pledged to eradicate “woke and transgender ideology” from schools, and restore “traditional

values”, which in practice means attacking and punishing anyone they believe they can scapegoat for capitalism’s failings.

We pushed the point that LGBTQ+ rights are never secure under capitalism, and our message that Pride is political.

Cheltenham – hundreds protest again

BILLY JONES
GLOUCESTERSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY

Hundreds joined the Pride march. There is still a lot of anger over last year’s Supreme Court ruling being used to attack transgender peoples’ right to self-identify. After that was announced, a spontaneous protest in Cheltenham drew hundreds of people.

Gloucestershire Socialist Party set up a campaign stall at Pride, and spoke to attendees. While the event was not explicitly political, passers-by were definitely open to our message.

Under capitalism, policies that benefit the working class may be occasionally dished out by the government. In the 2010s, establishment political parties tried to portray themselves as pro-LGBT.

But what is given can be quickly taken away. In search of a scapegoat to blame the current crisis of capitalism on, LGBTQ+ people, particularly transgender people, have been thrown under the bus by the ruling capitalist class.

The reality is that the capitalists

themselves are to blame for the crisis that we’re in. As workers, we cannot let the divide-and-rule tactics of those in power distract us.

We need to organise collectively to effectively combat the system. Only a socialist society will provide the necessary services and security that LGBTQ+ people need.

Socialist ideas to cut across Reform

Billy also describes other recent Socialist Party campaigning in Cheltenham.

Behind Cheltenham’s shiny veneer of wealthy horse-racing enthusiasts, there are many working-class areas that have been ripped apart by decades of austerity – and our socialist programme can have an impact.

When we hold Socialist Party campaign stalls in the local square, almost all passers-by stop for a chat. One time a group of kids on bikes rolled up and asked us what socialism is. We often hear that no political parties ever visit the area.

One woman I spoke to opened by saying she was a Restore Britain supporter, a recent far-right split from Reform UK. Still, we kept talking.

When I raised our policies of no cuts to council services, she was in full agreement. She also revealed she had campaigned as part of Women Against State Pension Inequality (WASPI), which I told her the Socialist Party has supported.

When we present a material programme for change, working-class people can be won over from reactionary right-wing rhetoric.



SOCIALIST PARTY FIGHTING FUND

AREA	£ RECEIVED	£ TARGET	Q2: APRIL-JUNE 2026	DEADLINE: 30 JUNE 2026
Wales	1,539	2,400	64%	
London	3,105	5,000	62%	
North West	703	1,200	59%	
Southern & SE	1,256	2,400	52%	
Eastern	670	1,300	52%	
South West	831	2,100	40%	
Yorkshire	862	2,650	33%	
East Midlands	621	2,050	30%	
Northern	159	800	20%	
West Midlands	433	2,700	16%	
Other	5,901	2,400		246%
TOTAL	16,078	25,000	64%	

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60 years ago, the ‘Cultural Revolution’ began in China. Here we carry an edited version of an article written by the late Socialist Party general secretary **Peter Taaffe** for Militant (predecessor of the Socialist) in February 1967.

Within the last month, events within China have taken a dramatic turn. Reports of fierce clashes between forces for and against Mao Zedong, strikes, allegations of ‘sabotage’, etc. have been splashed across the pages of the capitalist press.

While most reports have exaggerated the picture, what is certain is that the current purge in China is spreading its tentacles to ever more layers of the ruling stratum and indeed is reverberating throughout the whole of Chinese society.

These upheavals are but the latest culmination of the so-called Cultural Revolution. For almost a year now a ceaseless campaign has been conducted by Mao Zedong against the opponents of his ‘thought’.

In the process, numerous ‘heroes’ of yesterday have been demoted to ‘capitalist agents’ today. Thus Peng Zhen, former boss of Beijing, along with a host of other luminaries, has been cast out of the charmed circles of the ruling elite. Even the president, Liu-Shaoqi, is currently under attack.

Alongside this has gone the attempt to deify Mao Zedong to the level of god. Bent on stamping his imprimatur on all things, the 22 million-strong Red Guards have run amok

within Chinese cities denouncing anything and everything remotely connected with ‘western culture’ or that which faintly conflicts with the omniscience of the ‘leader’.

Culture

We have seen the Red Guards, in the most hooligan fashion and in direct opposition to the Marxist attitude towards culture, destroy priceless books and paintings. Shakespeare, Pushkin, Bizet and Beethoven have all been condemned as “ideologues of the exploiting classes”.

How to explain these upheavals within China? This cannot be done by mere reference to the personal quirks of one man, (irrespective of how all-powerful he may appear) as is the fashion with the capitalist press. On the contrary, these events indicate a profound social crisis which afflicts the very vitals of Chinese society.

In fact the present regime in China has been one of crisis right from the outset. This is reflected in the periodic eruptions in the state, the bureaucracy, agriculture, industry and all aspects of life. It has been characterised above all by a constant policy of

zig-zags, a violent veering from one expedient to another.

Given the march to power, and the birth and evolution of the present regime, this could not fail to be so. Unlike the Russian Revolution, the Chinese Revolution of 1944-49 saw not the working class but the Red – predominantly peasant – Army, headed by Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai and their entourage, play the dominant role.

The Chinese Stalinists displayed the fear of the bureaucracy towards any independent movement by the working class. In their eight-point peace programme they unashamedly warned the working class: “Those who strike or destroy will be punished... those working in these organisations (factories) should work peacefully and wait for the takeover.”

And true to their word, any independent action by the working class was met with the most ruthless repression. Contrast this attitude with that shown by Lenin and the Bolsheviks in the Russian Revolution. The Bolsheviks looked towards the working class as the main agent of change and urged “the land to the tillers and the factories to the producers.”

Mao Zedong and the Chinese Stalinists trimmed their ‘Marxism’ to fit the needs of a Bonapartist clique at

the head of the peasant armies. They only came to power because of the peculiar combination of forces which came together at that time.

Having learnt his lessons well at the school of Stalin, Mao Zedong, in the fashion of Bonapartism, manoeuvred between the classes and from the beginning constructed a state based in fundamentals on the totalitarian system in Russia.

Nevertheless, the destruction of landlordism and capitalism ensured that the Chinese economy could develop with seven league boots. A tremendous impetus was given to the building of roads, industry, chemicals and all sections of the economy.

In the language of steel, concrete and cement and, to a certain extent, the living standards of the people, nationalisation and a plan demonstrates its superiority over the outmoded system of capitalism; this despite the existence of a parasitic bureaucracy from the beginning.

But given its isolation, the triumph of the revolution was bound to lead to contradictions on a higher plane. The Chinese Stalinists based themselves on Stalin’s conception of ‘Socialism in one country’.

But from the time of Marx, genuine socialists have always viewed socialism as realisable only on a world scale. It is international or it is nothing and, moreover, must be based on technique and production higher than that achieved by capitalism. Marx himself pointed out: “Where want is generalised... all the old crap must revive.”

First and foremost among this ‘crap’ is the state itself. “Want is generalised” to a great extent in China – and with it the unrestricted growth of the bureaucracy. With the masses denied the right to discuss the aims, methods and details of Chinese economy, all the mistakes of Stalinist Russia have been committed on a monumental scale. This accounts for the ceaseless convulsions of which the Cultural Revolution is but the latest.

A number of factors have come together to provoke the present crisis. The severe dislocation resulting from the so-called ‘Great Leap Forward’ caused conflict within the top echelons of the Communist Party.

From the top

Ordained from the top by Mao Zedong, the Chinese nation was dragged into the lunacy of “backyard steel production”, when workers and peasants were instructed to set up their own furnaces. The result: virtual stagnation in the economy for years.

Such was the case also in the field of agriculture. With the forced march towards complete collectivising of agriculture, they have succeeded in aiming crippling blows at production. Unheeding the lessons of Stalin’s debacle in collectivising Russian agriculture, the bureaucracy brought about a standstill here as well.

The ‘communalisation’ was carried through with the primitive tools used on small plots of land for centuries and without the large scale machines and technique necessary for the working of large units. The peasants reacted to the move with hostility: the consequence being a loss of self-interest and a plummeting of output.

The result of all this has been that grain production is still at the level of 1956 and the bureaucracy has been forced to make a partial retreat in allowing the cultivation of small plots to the extent that the Economist reports: “80% of pigs and 90% of poultry are raised” in this way and “account for more than half of peasant incomes”.

Only a real plan of production drawn up by the masses themselves would be able to develop the economy in harmony, bring about the necessary balance between agriculture and industry, and demonstrate in practice the superiority of nationalisation.

Added to this has been the collapse of the ‘international’ policy of the Chinese Stalinists. Despite the demagoguery of Mao Zedong, their policy has been based on furthering the national interests of the bureaucracy and not on the interests of world socialism and the working class.

As with the Russian Stalinists, they have attempted to court the support of the national capitalists throughout the underdeveloped world. Thus they were silent at the time of the east African mutinies, which were put down by their friends President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, President Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, etc.

In Indonesia, in a situation that was rotten ripe for the overthrow of capitalism, the Chinese bureaucracy instructed the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) to tail-end President Sukarno, the representative of the national capitalists. Upwards of half a million PKI members were slaughtered. The biggest Communist Party in the world outside of Russia and China was sacrificed on the altar of the diplomatic interests of the Chinese Stalinists.

Crisis

These factors among others have provoked the present crisis and are reflected within the Chinese state, among the bureaucracy and in sections of the people themselves. Meeting opposition from a layer of the bureaucracy, Mao Zedong brought into being the Red Guards as a club by which to beat down and destroy the opposition.

Thrown into a national shell and as the supreme arbiter, he has leaned upon a more backward and younger section of the bureaucracy. As The Times put it: “The conflict... lies between an elite newly established to run the Cultural Revolution, and the old guard bureaucrats entrenched in the Communist Party.”

Like Stalin before him, he has issued quite a few denunciations of the worst excesses of bureaucrats against the “restriction of democracy” – all the better to preserve the position of the bureaucracy as a whole. In turn, Liu Shaoqi leaned on a section of the workers, utilising their discontent and demands for better conditions which provoked the formation by Mao Zedong of the Red Rebels (the Red Guards’ adult counterparts) and vicious denunciations of ‘economism’.

In this is revealed the substance of the Cultural Revolution. With sugar-coated words, Mao Zedong and the bureaucracy are willing to use the working class and the peasantry in

“Only a real plan of production drawn up by the masses themselves would be able to develop the economy in harmony, bring about the necessary balance between agriculture and industry, and demonstrate in practice the superiority of nationalisation”

Mao (centre) with Red Guards PHOTOS: PUBLIC DOMAIN



the inter-bureaucratic struggle. But let them once advance even their own limited economic demands and this is “sabotage” and is attacked as the “vile road of economic struggle.”

Similarly with the question of democracy. It is conveniently forgotten that the Communist Party has held only two Central Committee meetings in four years while the Congresses have been convened only twice since 1949! What hope then is there for the masses to have a say in deciding their own fate under the present regime?

The present massive rallies in Beijing and elsewhere are not socialist democracy. On the contrary, as Leon Trotsky pointed out some thirty years ago, “The democratic ritual of Bonapartism is the plebiscite. From time to time the question is presented to the citizens: for or against the leader.”

Any independent action by the working class was met with repression. Contrast this attitude with that shown by the Bolsheviks in the Russian Revolution

Genuine socialist democracy means the democratic control and management of the economy and the state by the working class and the people themselves. It means elected delegates subject to recall and with a clearly defined maximum wage, an armed people instead of the standing army, the right of all working-class tendencies which accept the nationalised property to be represented in the workers’ councils, and all the factors which make for real Soviet power.

None of these exist in China at the present time. Hence the convulsions, contradictions and mismanagement of the economy by the bureaucracy.

With the cancer of a bloated and privileged elite battenning itself onto the necks of the Chinese people, the upheavals involved in the Cultural Revolution will be perpetrated and even increased. There is no final solution so long as the bureaucracy maintains its stranglehold. For while it is possible for the Chinese economy to develop despite the blight of the bureaucracy, far from the social antagonisms disappearing they will grow apace with the growth of the economy itself, so long as the present regime exists.

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the Socialist

Issue 1368

21-27 May 2026

formerly **Militant**

NSSN CONFERENCE 2026

20th annual conference

SATURDAY 27 JUNE
11am-4:30pm

Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL

The NSSN was initiated 20 years ago by the RMT rail and transport union under the leadership of the late, great Bob Crow. We have a proud history of supporting striking workers, and organising for the action that's needed against the bosses and their political representatives.

AGENDA

10am-11am: Registration

11am-1pm: We won't pay for the bosses' crisis! Discussion on how we fight for our rights and to defend our living standards

1pm-2pm: Lunch

2pm-4:30pm: Forum: the fightback in local government after May's elections

Scan here to register to attend the conference.
£10 attendance fee payable on arrival



WE WON'T PAY FOR THE BOSSSES' CRISIS!



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WHAT WE STAND FOR: THE SOCIALIST PARTY'S MAIN DEMANDS >>> see column on p10



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