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STARMER FORCED OUT

TIME FOR A WORKING-CLASS FIGHTBACK



TRADE UNIONS MUST LEAD

Keir Starmer has been forced out. He says he is looking forward to spending more time on the “most important job” of being the best dad he can. The failure of his government to do anything to help millions of parents do the same is one of the reasons he has become so hated.

The million families reliant on foodbanks, or the parents of the 150,000 kids in emergency

accommodation, or the 7 out of 10 dads who can’t afford even to take two weeks off when they have a new baby – all have good reason to be furious with Starmer.

Working-class anger is responsible for forcing Starmer out, but our class is getting no say over his replacement. It is now clear that Andy Burnham is going to be crowned prime minister without a Labour leadership contest, never mind a general election.

At trade union conferences this year, leader after leader of the unions affiliated to Labour argued that maintaining the ‘Labour link’ is important to enable unions to “directly influence Labour” as Dave Ward, Communication Workers Union general secretary put it, including by “giving our members a vote in the election of Labour’s leadership”, according to the GMB union. But the trade union movement has had no say in who Labour’s next leader should be or what they stand for.

True, to win the Makerfield by-election Burnham had to say he was standing for Labour to change, and called for an end to 40 years of neo-liberalism. Many workers will therefore have some hopes that Burnham will, at least, be better than Starmer, and the majority of national trade union leaders will use those hopes to argue for holding back on strike action while he is given ‘a chance’.

But meanwhile, the bosses are piling on the pressure to ensure that Burnham does their bidding. The lead editorial of the Financial Times, mouthpiece of British capitalism, demanded that Burnham make “tough choices” including “spending cuts”, “reining in welfare spending” and breaking the “triple lock on state pensions”. It could not be clearer that the capitalist elite want Burnham to impose a new round of brutal austerity on the working-class majority.

Starmer’s resignation is a sign of this

government’s weakness. The workers’ movement needs to take the opportunity to pile on the pressure in the interests of the majority, rather than the bosses pressure to maximise their profits. We need to build a massive national fightback to defend and improve workers’ pay and conditions and public services, including preparing for national strike action.



WHAT WE THINK

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theSocialist

formerly **Militant**

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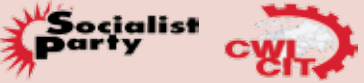
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"The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it."
Karl Marx

Workers' action as temperatures soar

“**R**eps are ringing up all day and I’ve had to repeat the same line again and again,” reported one Socialist Party member who works for a trade union: “There is no legal maximum temperature.”

Workers have had to take things into their own hands to ensure safe working. Unite the Union issued guidance to hospitality workers to “act collectively” to submit grievanc- es, and highlighted the right to walk out under Section 44 of the Employ- ment Rights Act (ERA) 1996, if there is “serious and imminent danger.”

“The women working in the can- teen in my college threatened wild- cat action if they weren’t allowed to take their hats and aprons off. The cater- ing manager quickly backed off” reports Duncan Moore in Devon.

Sheila Caffrey reports that “with temperatures hitting top-30s in Bris- tol, many schools and colleges an- nounced that they were closing. But some didn’t. In one, the National Education Union (NEU) rep used Section 44 of the ERA, sending in a letter, which she told the head oth- ers would be following. It was an- nounced the school was to be closed within half an hour.

“A SEND school that is profit- making refused to close. There is a very active union group. S44 letters started to go in. At 17 letters, there still wasn’t a response. The branch secretary sent in a letter suggesting that these fears may be shared in the media - the school was closed.”

A London bus worker says: “There’s been unbearable tempera- tures on the buses. When they manu- facture the buses they don’t put the best systems in place, to save costs. That’s because of the private com- panies. The Labour London mayor Sadiq Khan said the bus operators will not be penalised. But the opera- tors are telling drivers, when they’ve taken a 15-minute break due to the heat, you’ve got to go back into a hot bus. So you’re in and out, and that’s a lot of people waiting on a hot bus.

“The solution is we need to get rid of these private companies, we need to renationalise them. The mayor says he’s the son of a bus driver, but his dad worked under Lon- don Transport which was publicly owned. London bus drivers had the best terms and conditions and pay when we were under public owner- ship. We need to replace the mayor with someone who stands with the workers, not the bosses.”



LGBTQ+ liberation: Working-class unity against austerity and division

BASED ON THE SOCIALIST PARTY LEAFLET FOR PRIDE SUMMER

In a world dominated by crisis, none of the gains the working class have won through struggle are safe, and that is true when it comes to LGBQ+ rights. Despite winning many legal rights, many LGBTQ+ people still do not all feel safe to live our lives fully and freely.

Governments seeking to act in the interests of big business attack trans+ people - a warning that no wins are permanent while society is domi- nated by a handful of billionaires. To maintain their position at the top of society, and to protect their profits, the capitalists demand attacks on working-class people’s living stan- dards, and push divisions between different sections of society to try and prevent united action.

What we need is a campaign to unite the struggles of LGBTQ+ peo- ple with the wider working class, fighting for jobs, homes, and public services for all.

In the 6.5 million-strong trade unions, LGBTQ+ workers can join

with others to campaign to enact the Trades Union Congress (TUC) reso- lution agreed last September for the trade unions to build a huge national Saturday demo against Labour’s au- sterity. That would show how we can cut across division.

Resist Reform

Nigel Farage’s Reform UK has taken advantage of anger at Labour and the rest of the establishment parties that represent the interests of the elite. We need a new, mass workers’ party that stands for LGBTQ+ rights, as part of standing for the interests of our class, not the billionaires.

Reform councils have not gone unopposed. Union membership has shot up in areas where Reform won. When Reform councils took down Pride flags, workers covered their desks with rainbow flags in defiance.

When Reform-led Durham council cancelled its Durham Pride grant, the Durham Miners’ Association said: “Encourage the trade union move- ment to step up and do the right

thing, and stand shoulder to shoul- der with the LGBTQ+ community”. The event was put on with trade union donations, and was even bigger with more trade union banners than ever.

Defend trans rights

Under this Labour government, like its Tory predecessor, trans+ rights are not secure, while capitalists rely on scapegoating to maintain their rule.

But there is defiance. The number attending London Trans Pride 2025 doubled to a record 100,000.

The draft EHRC guidance will be tested in real life. Who decides how workplaces and public services are run?

Unions must engage in this strug- gle in the workplaces where it arises and nationally, fighting for resourc- es, defending trans+ members, op- posing discrimination, challenging homophobia and transphobia, and increasing awareness - uniting all workers against all the attacks from the capitalists.

End all oppression - for a socialist alternative

We must fight against any imme- diate attacks. That includes reclaiming Prides to be both celebrations of the hard-fought progress, and as protests showing we will fight.

To eliminate all oppression and prejudice, we must tackle their root cause - crisis-ridden capitalism.

Capitalism is incapable of over- coming LGBTQ+phobia, just as it cannot end the racism, sexism, or other forms of oppression built into its foundations.

A socialist society would put wealth and resources, currently hoarded by a tiny few, into the hands of the vast majority, enabling us to democrati- cally plan society. That could mean a home for all, a decent standard of liv- ing, and a world not torn apart by war and environmental disaster.

We could make the gains we have won permanent, and liberate our- selves from all forms of oppression.

- Read more: ‘How do we fight for LGBTQ+ liberation in 2026?’ at socialistparty.org.uk, or meet the Socialist Party at Pride events across the country



Maternity services tragedy ‘Democratic trade union and community control must replace the heartless priorities of capitalist economics’

JON DALE

UNITE THE UNION NOTTS HEALTH SECRETARY

The review of Nottingham’s maternity services by the well-respected senior mid- wife Donna Ockenden makes grim reading. Over 2,500 fam- ilies were involved, their experiences mostly between 2010-2025.

500 families gave testimony, the review reporting in detail some har- rowing stories. Poor treatment led to catastrophic outcomes - stillbirths, maternal deaths, lifelong disabilities.

800 current and former staff were also interviewed. Outrageously, their concerns had been raised for years but swept under the carpet.

A staff member who left in 2016 re- called: “Worked 12-hour shifts with no breaks. Didn’t feel able to care for women properly. Caring for two women in labour at the same time with no support.”

Another said: “Stress caused peo- ple to behave badly to each other [with bullying] ... we started to turn on each other. I witnessed poor cul- ture, bad behaviour. Overwork was not being addressed when escalated.”

Black and immigrant women, in- cluding staff, were subject to racist mistreatment with sometimes tragic results.

Concerns were raised by the con- sultants: “In 2015 about capacity - approached Freedom to Speak Up

Guardian in August 2017 re inad- equate staffing, relationships, lack of continuity and approached again in 2021. Didn’t feel like anything changed after any of these. In 2021 they were 13 consultants short” In 2024 “... to deliver Continuity of Care would need additional 73 midwives.”

“In 2018, fears of the impact of staffing on safety led to 50 maternity staff from one hospital putting their names to a letter to the Chair of the Board... The lack of any meaning- ful response only reinforced the dis- connect between midwives and the Board. We heard from many that they felt ‘fobbed-off.’”

The Review summarised staff views. “Insufficient staffing is at the heart of unsafe practice, with insuf- ficient time to train, to review cases, to complete observations, to listen to women and to learn. Moreover, staff all agree that senior and executive managers have been routinely made aware of these challenges over many years, but have either ignored or have been unable to respond to the con- cerns being raised.”

As one staff member put it: “Per- ception is Trust was more concerned with finance.”

It was no mistake senior manage- ment (the Trust) put money before babies’ and mothers’ lives. They were carrying out policy dictated by suc- cessive governments, intent on cuts after the huge bank bailout in 2007- 09 by Labour.

Former Tory Health Secretary An- drew Lansley (in coalition with the LibDems) wrote to Trust Boards in 2011: “They must show that they are delivering high levels of annual productivity savings... I have a stark warning... The Secretary of State has the power to remove and replace management teams that fail to de- liver and I will not hesitate to use that power if needed.”

Nottingham families and burnt- out staff paid the real price for their unheeded stark warnings - not bank- ers, politicians or senior managers.

This maternity services report joins those on Morecambe (2015), Shrewsbury and Telford (2017) and East Kent (2022). Reviews on Leeds and Sussex are in the pipeline.

An immediate injection of funds is needed nationally to reverse past cuts and ensure full staffing. Staff need time for rest and for continu- ing training. Bullying management methods start at the top and need rooting out.

Throughout the whole NHS the voices of patients, their families and staff must be listened to. Democra- tic trade union and community control must replace the heartless priorities of capitalist economics.

- As we went to press, the Amos Review into maternity and neonatal services across England was published. For more on this subject see socialistparty.org.uk



Retired midwife: ‘Heartbroken and angry’

The report was only procured after an extensive campaign by families of mothers and babies who had been harmed or died under the care of Nottingham University Hospital (NUH) over a 14-year period.

This is not the only report into maternity services, we can all recall Morecambe Bay. Heartbreakingly, there were six external reviews of NUH maternity department from 2015-2022 . But findings were never acted upon. In 2018, 50 midwives collectively wrote to the Trust board with their concerns but were ignored.

The top issues identified in this latest external review were invisible,

unapproachable, unresponsive, bullying managers; poor staffing ratios and a theme of extremely poor governance.

As a retired senior midwife who strove for the best possible care, I am heartbroken and so angry. This report is so distressing to read. I don’t really believe anyone arrives at work to deliberately cause harm and yet this is what happened.

The crucial role of regulatory bodies is paramount but are they fit for purpose? At NUH junior midwives were routinely allocated the most complex cases with little support, a longstanding culture of fear to speak out existed, with

incidents of cruelty and bullying on a massive scale. There was no time to attend mandatory training.

Ironically, as I write, newly qualified midwives are unable to secure a job in England and Wales due to underfunding and austerity cuts.

The writing has been on the wall since Thatcher, turning the NHS into a business model was a big clue. Subsequent governments have continued to introduce changes that fundamentally assist them to destroy the NHS.

JUDITH BYRNE
ROYAL COLLEGE OF MIDWIVES REGISTERED MIDWIFE (RETIRED)

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Socialist Students attends Europe-wide youth assembly against war

Build for an international youth strike this Autumn

BECCA BAYMAN

DELEGATE TO THE ASSEMBLY AND LIVERPOOL SOCIALIST STUDENTS

On 14 June, members of Socialist Students attended a Youth and Student Anti-War Assembly in Cologne, Germany. Twelve organisations from eight countries across Europe took part, including socialist youth organisations, climate justice groups and anarchist student unions.

The initiative began in solidarity with youth campaigns against military conscription in Germany. As opposition to militarisation has grown across the continent, the discussion broadened into how young people and students can build a coordinated European movement against war, militarism and austerity.

Our invitation to the assembly reflected the work Socialist Students has carried out in Britain. We were able to draw on experiences from the student walkouts against Donald Trump's visit last September, alongside local campaigns, to contribute to discussions on how youth can organise effectively.

The urgency of building an anti-war movement was clear throughout the meeting. Last year, the UK government spent £66 billion on defence, while pressure from the capitalist class continues to mount on the Labour government to increase military spending even further. Across Europe, governments are preparing

for a new era of militarisation. The European Union has lifted debt restrictions for military expenditure while encouraging member states to impose austerity on working-class people to pay the bill.

Socialist Students argued that resistance to these policies is already beginning and that our task is to strengthen and develop this fightback. Young people face attacks on education, housing, and living standards, while the government tells us there is always money available for war. Therefore, we put forward the need to link the struggle against militarism to the struggle against capitalism at every level.

Socialist Students proposed the slogan 'Fight for Our Futures, Not Their Wars', which was adopted by the assembly. The slogan provides a common banner under which youth movements across Europe can unite while allowing organisations in different countries to connect the anti-war struggle to the issues facing students and young people locally.

To help the movement grow, the assembly agreed a federal structure. New organisations will be able to affiliate on the basis of agreement with the core principles set out in the assembly's manifesto, which outlines the political aims and common positions shared by participating groups.

A written contribution from the German youth organisation Die Falken will be published, incorporating amendments discussed during the meeting, to form the basis of further

debate and discussion among participating organisations. Working groups were also established to co-ordinate campaigning, communications and mobilisation work, with regular online meetings planned for the coming months.

Throughout the assembly, Socialist Students argued for the need for a clear programme against war and militarism. Opposition to war cannot be separated from opposition to the capitalist system. Therefore, we will continue to connect the struggle against militarisation to the workers' movement and fight to build links between young people and workers across Europe.

We are entering a period of deep instability internationally. As governments continue to inflict austerity and enforce militarisation, cooperation between youth and student organisations across Europe represents an important step forward. The challenges we face are international, and the struggle against capitalism must be international too.

By the end of the assembly, all participating organisations agreed on the goal of building towards a Europe-wide youth strike on 20 November. This proposal will now be discussed within each affiliated organisation as preparations begin.

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Attendees at the assembly including Socialist Students members

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National Shop Stewards Network conference debates the fightback in local government after May

The conference of the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) on 27 June invited various organisations that had stood candidates in May's elections to send representatives to discuss the fightback in local government now. The invitation was accepted by **Hugo Pierre** from the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) and **Ed Poole** on behalf of Greens Organise, a grouping within the Green Party. **Adam Harmsworth** reports. (See pages 6-7 for main NSSN conference report.)

Hugo explained that the Green Party has just won hundreds of local council seats and leads councils - largely an anti-austerity vote. What will they do now they have more political power? Hugo highlighted the socialist-led Liverpool City Council in the 1980s, when a small group of Militant-supporting Labour councillors (the forerunner of the Socialist Party) built a fight with the District

Labour Party and the trade unions in the city to mobilise a mass movement to resist cuts and win funding from the Tory government.

Ed said that the Greens' "nice policies" are not enough. Greens Organise had asked all Green candidates to sign a pledge "to hold an emergency national summit with councillors, MPs, community organisations and trade unions to build a cross-party mass campaign to restore local government funding". That pledge included "ending bad contracts" and "looking at the use of reserves and borrowing powers". It was signed by over a 1,000 candidates, and about 250 were elected.

A striking Haringey teacher reported that before the May elections, the Greens' leader had pledged to make helping to resolve the dispute one of his first acts. "Within days, the newly elected Green council wrote a letter explaining why, sadly, that would not

be possible". "This isn't an academic discussion. If this dispute is not resolved in the next three weeks, some staff will have lost their jobs." "To defend public services, we need needs budgets, and we need a working-class movement."

No-cuts budgets?

The Greens Organise summit will be hosted by Hackney's new Green council, and Ed said that trade unions will be involved. President of Hackney TUC, **Brian Debus**, asked Ed: "The summit document says the full restoration of local government funding should be a national priority. But would you support the demand for no-cuts budgets, in line with the service group policies of Unison, Unite and the GMB in local government?"

Tom Baldwin from Bristol reported how the Green council has passed £80 million of cuts over the

made up of delegates from Labour Party branches and the local trade union movement, representing tens of thousands of workers in the city - a real workers' parliament, where the class itself had collective control of the council."

Linda Taaffe, formerly secretary of the NSSN, welcomed the discussion. The Greens are now grappling with what they actually do in power, Linda explained, "that is class struggle!" The Greens have to decide which side they're on "otherwise you'll get hammered, and you'll disappoint a lot of people who've joined your party." "If you want us to help you, we will" she said, but if the Greens decide not to fight on the side of the working class, "we will oppose you with as much vehemence as we will support you if you're with us".

Tom also asked Ed: "What are the mechanisms within the Green Party to allow members to enforce upon the representatives of the party that they stick to an anti-austerity agenda? It's a decentralised party, different branches have different rules. So you can get in on a radical-sounding platform but without a mechanism for any democratic control. Compare that to 1980s Liverpool City Council - the policies were decided by the District Labour Party, a huge body

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Burnham will not govern on behalf of the working class

Socialist Party WHAT WE THINK

▶▶▶ CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

Will a Burnham government mean a change of direction? Any qualitative change in the class character of Labour would require an almighty struggle against the Blairite defenders of capitalism who have driven out all semblance of workers' control from the party or socialist policies.

For evidence of that, listen to Starmer's resignation speech. He began by claiming that he had inherited a Labour Party that was "politically, financially and morally bankrupt", and went on to describe his "hard work" in transforming Labour. This he claimed, had allowed Labour to win a landslide victory in 2024, compared to its previous "unelectable" state. Never mind that Labour, under its previous leader Jeremy Corbyn, won almost three million more votes in 2017 than it did under Starmer in 2024, and half a million more even in 2019.

So what did Starmer mean by describing Labour under Corbyn as "bankrupt"? He meant a party with an anti-austerity manifesto - that called for nationalisation of mail, energy and water, mass council house building, rent controls and free education. Starmer did succeed in making Labour once again a reliable party for the ruling elite, loyally governing to defend the capitalist profit system. Of course, any party that does that - in this era where capitalism means relentlessly squeezed living standards and crumbling public services - becomes hated. That was the fate of British capitalism's traditional party, the Tories, and now Labour is on the same path.

If Burnham is to restore Labour's fortunes in the polls, even partially, and temporarily, he cannot openly say he is 'continuity Starmer'. But he has proposed nothing along the lines of Corbyn's 2017 manifesto, and has said that Corbyn himself should not be allowed back into Labour.



PHOTO: LBJLIBRARYNOW/CC

Continuity Starmer

The fact that he will be elected unopposed, with the backing of the New Labour cabinet, including chancellor Rachel Reeves, foreign secretary Yvette Cooper, and home secretary Shabana Mahmood, tells you that he, like Starmer, will govern in the interests of the capitalist class. The point has been rammed home by the appointment of 'ultra-Blairite' James Purnell as his Chief of Staff and Jim O'Neill of Goldman Sachs

as an economic advisor, who previously served in Tory David Cameron's government.

Yet the weakened Labour left are not able to stand a candidate, and the trade union movement has no power within Labour's structures to get another candidate on the ballot. One of Starmer's anti-democratic measures was to raise the threshold for the number of MPs required to back a candidate for them to get on the ballot paper to 20%, which is currently 81 MPs, far more than the 24 MPs currently in the Socialist Campaign Group. Back in 2015 even right-wing MPs nominated Corbyn in order to allow a democratic debate. After he unexpectedly won, and engendered mass enthusiasm, the pro-capitalist leadership of Labour will not allow the same thing to happen again.

So Burnham will be crowned without any opposition. Initially, no doubt, there will be an improvement in Labour's current dire poll ratings. In the first New Labour era, when Gordon Brown took over from Tony Blair as prime minister, Labour's poll ratings initially went up by nine points. A year later they were five points lower than when Blair resigned because they both followed, fundamentally, the same pro-capitalist policies. The same fate is ahead for Burnham.

Hemmed in by the capitalists' demands for more austerity, and the desire of the working class for change, he is currently avoiding much in the way of policy. Nonetheless, he will strive to find a few measures to show he is different to Starmer. He has said he wants to oversee a mass programme of council housebuilding. Trade unions and socialists should demand that councils, especially those Green councils elected in May on an anti-austerity programme, begin work to immediately implement such a programme in their areas and

present 'Andy's government' with the bill.

'Seeking the ear' - or working-class representation?

On the other hand, Burnham's vague statements about devolving aspects of welfare to the local level as a means to "reduce the welfare bill" smack of governments once again expecting local authorities to implement austerity, with a danger of a return to a version of the Victorian poor laws. A new trade union-led fight for the right to a real safety net for all those who need it is clearly going to be required under a Burnham government as part of a general struggle on pay, jobs and conditions.

Above all, it is already clear that Burnham will not make Labour into a party of the working class as he promised. Sharon Graham, general secretary of Unite, has praised Burnham's Manchester launch speech for being in 'listening mode', while also saying 'we need to see the detail'. One of the details Unite members want to see immediately is Burnham announcing he will remove the government commissioners from Birmingham City Council and meet all the Birmingham bin workers' demands.

But in fact, what the working class needs is not just politicians who sometimes deign to 'listen' to representation from the trade unions. Labour was originally founded as a conscious break from trade union leaders' previous approach of 'seeking the ear' of capitalist Liberal politicians. Rather than passively joining the queue of interest groups seeking to influence those in power, there is a need to actively build independent working-class political representation. The experience of 'Burnhamism' is only going to drive home the need for the trade union movement to begin to build a mass workers' party with socialist policies.

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North West health workers striking and winning

UNISON STEWARD

Health workers taking industrial action at the beleaguered Northern Care Alliance are winning their disputes - and some are continuing.

Critical care staff have accepted a deal from the employer that meets their original demand, which is having the option to be paid for overtime under the rates agreed in their national terms and conditions, and not be forced to a secondary employer at lower rates.

The staff in the Theatres have the same dispute and took strike action on 26 June, with another two days of action planned for 2 and 3 July.

Other groups of workers and branches from other regions have been liaising on what is evidently a national issue.

What is clear is that health workers have realised that they need to stand up for their rights, and the continued short staffing across all areas has made them realise that not striking for patient safety issues is not resolving the daily problems of safe staffing.

They have reached their tipping point, and it certainly looks like they are prepared to fight for their jobs and terms, as well as for the NHS to be sufficiently funded to deliver to the public.

nationalshop stewardsnetwork 20th conference

‘This is not the time to wait - trade unions must mobilise’

The 20th National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) conference was a huge success. In the centenary year of the 1926 General Strike, just days after Keir Starmer’s resignation, and after a week of stifling heat, over 200 trade union delegates assembled in London to discuss “We won’t pay for the bosses’ crisis!” and how the fightback can be organised. Socialist Party Executive Committee member **Chris Thomas** reports.

In opening the conference, NSSN chair **Rob Williams** outlined the key battles that the NSSN has been involved in over the last 20 years: “Where there has been strike action, where there have been workers victimised, where unions have been under attack by Tory and Labour governments and councils of all party colours - the NSSN has always been there and always will be.”

The NSSN is now on its ninth prime minister, and the seventh in a decade: “The lesson is that whatever party rosette you wear, if you stand for the system that puts profit before workers, their families and communities, and if you carry out their austerity, you will be in crisis!”

“Starmer has been booted out of office because his Labour government has barely changed a thing. The cost-of-living crisis is bearing down, we are still waiting for the inflation-proof pay rises we need to keep our heads above water and for the 50% strike ballot threshold to be scrapped.”

This is the situation that the new Labour prime minister, likely to be Andy Burnham, will walk into: “The union movement has a decision to make. Some want to wait for Andy to be crowned and then to decide what he wants to stand for. But in this period, in this crisis, we can’t wait for anyone because waiting creates a vacuum which Farage and the far right are trying to fill with divisive poison.” “How can you face up to the massive pressure coming from the bosses who want us to pay for their crisis, unless we mobilise the mass of the trade movement in united coordinated strike action?” “The unions must put a choice to him - it’s us, the working class, or the capitalists?”

● **Conference unanimously voted for an action programme of demands to fight the cost-of-living crisis, to take into every workplace, union branch and trades council and onto every picket line. See socialistparty.org.uk**



Sarah Woolley PHOTO: ROBERT THOMAS

Steve Wright, FBU general secretary, said that firefighters will not be just waiting and sitting idly by while there is a coronation of Andy Burnham. The number one issue firefighters are facing right now is cuts to the front line. The FBU will be getting on the front foot, demanding that firefighters are not sacked, and fire stations are not closed. Burnham needs to be bold on the economic front including introducing a wealth tax and making sure that the likes of gas, water and energy are taken back into public ownership.

Sarah Woolley, general secretary of the BFAWU bakers’ union said it was disgraceful that in one of the richest countries in the world, 100 years after the General Strike, workers are still fighting for the right of working-class people to live decent lives. Food poverty is not a food problem but an income problem, a power problem. And the answer cannot simply be more food banks. It means rebuilding the power of working people because every advance that we have won has been fought for.

Angela Montgomery, assistant general secretary of the Prison Officers’ Association (POA), explained that it has been 32 years since the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act banned the union from striking and they are still battling to get back the right to strike.

Rhys Harmer, president of the London Transport Regional Council

of the RMT, was pleased to see the NSSN, which the ‘late, great RMT general secretary Bob Crow’ helped set up, flourishing so much. He spoke about the union’s campaign against outsourcing: “With Keir Starmer on the way out and a new prime minister likely to be Andy Burnham on the way in, we cannot allow an inch of space for Andy Burnham to not make the right decision.”

Vice president of the PCS, **Dave Semple**, spoke about the battle that the new left leadership of the union is waging to ensure that conference policy is carried out and a national ballot for strike action is called in September, despite obstacles placed in their way from the union’s general secretary. PCS conference voted to ballot knowing that strike ballots were also likely in local government and in schools. “We have to build that fight across the entirety of the trade union movement and that battle has to start now.”

“But if we are going to take that united strike action, if we are going to put maximum pressure on this weak government, if we are potentially going to sweep this government out of the way, then we need to have something to put in its place. And that is why the debate has to be had across the trade union movement for a political alternative, for a new workers’ party that brings together the trade unions and those people desperate for change.”

Uniting the struggles

One of the themes running through the conference was the need to unite the strikes, to not leave individual workplaces to fight on their own, and to coordinate struggle within and between unions.

Schools

Conference received a message of support from **Zoe Franklin**, a Unison shop steward, on behalf of striking teaching assistants at Richard Cobden School in Camden - striking for pay. Over the last 16 years, in real terms, pay has been cut by 25%. “We are sick and tired of being underpaid and undervalued.” “Goodwill does not pay my bills.” “We now have Primrose Hill School joining us with their own strike and picket lines. More schools are in the process of joining the fight.”

Sean McCauley, a branch secretary in the National Education Union (NEU), asked why, if Labour had pledged to increase teacher numbers, there have been more rounds of redundancy and school closures than ever before. The NEU has seen a huge increase in local disputes, to

record levels. The leadership calls this ‘lighting fires’ but it is more like fighting fires. “The vast majority of these disputes relate to issues that are at root national - job cuts, workload, privatisation and underfunding”. Under pressure from below, indicative ballots for national action were successful, and support staff turnout outstripped that of teachers. “We need maximum unity between the trade unions... we have a duty to exert pressure on our leadership to resolve any differences so we can work together to organise the unorganised and fight together to win for all education workers.”

Higher education

Christina Payne, University and College Union (UCU) National Executive Committee member, spoke about the strike at London Metropolitan University, where she is branch chair. Lecturers have taken 16 days of strike action and are now in the middle of a marking and assessment boycott against the threat of 120 redundancies - a fifth of the staff. The strikers have had excellent support from the students who face the scrapping of support services. Christina pointed out that university staff are facing redundancies all over the country. 24 universities are at risk of closure: “So what we need is a national UK-wide dispute in UCU”. “We’re having

problems getting our national leadership to do that... so we need to force them.”

Further education

Scott Hunter explained how Socialist Party members are battling in UCU to get national action over pay and funding, despite attempts by the union leadership to delay it. “As myself and other people on the left argued [at national conference], if we delay till 2027, there won’t be a further education sector”. “We all know that the government is incredibly weak. It’s not going to get any stronger, despite the hopes of some in Burnham. And now is the time to push.” “Hopefully we can join the teachers and the university workers in a full-on education-wide sector battle, which is what is needed”.

Health

A message of support was received from union reps at the Unite strike at Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board. There was also a Unite delegation at the conference from Barts NHS trust.

Sally Griffiths, assistant branch secretary of a Unison health branch spoke about the three different groups of health workers who have balloted for strike action. “It seems to

our branch that health workers have reached their tipping point. They are ready to be organised, they are recognising their power”. “But starting little fires everywhere is not the way. Had the 50% threshold been removed as Labour had promised, we could’ve dealt with it all at once.” “We need a national industrial strategy, not just for Unison, but across all the health unions. We need a ballot on pay. There is a huge opportunity for a national fightback.” “We are reporting all the same issues. Job cuts, pay cuts, privatisation. So we need the TUC to call a national demonstration for jobs, homes and services for all against austerity and for workers’ unity.”



Sally Griffiths PHOTO: MARY FINCH

Bin workers

A delegation of striking Birmingham bin workers received a standing ovation from the conference. “It’s 18 months now we’ve been out on strike”, said convenor **Matt Reid**. “The determination from our members has been amazing and the support we have received from our trade union, our general secretary Sharon Graham and everyone else within the movement has been absolutely fantastic.”

“Now the Labour Party is destroyed completely in Birmingham. They had 65 seats out of 101, now they’ve got 15.” “We’ve got a coalition in place, of Lib Dems, Greens and Independents, who were very supportive before, but it’s all words until we see action from them.”

Onay Kasab, national lead officer for Unite, added: “To the Greens, we say this. If you claim to be the party of workers, then now is the time to stand forward and show that”. “You are now in charge. It’s not officers that tell you what to do. You’re the elected politicians. You instruct the officers to get the deal done. That’s how it works”.

In his opening speech **Rob Williams** had sent a message to Andy Burnham: “If you want to show workers you’re on their side, just go up the M40 to Birmingham... reinstate the terms and conditions and pay of the Birmingham bin workers. Give them back the £8,000 a year that’s been robbed of them.”

Fighting racism and the far right

Padraig Mulholland, deputy general secretary of NIPSA - the largest union in Northern Ireland - brought fraternal greetings to the conference. He spoke about the fantastic community and trade union response to far-right attacks that had resulted in people being burned out of their homes. Tens of thousands of workers and anti-racists came into the centre of Belfast, and the trade unions were front and centre of the anti-far right protests. But he warned that the danger has not gone away. What is needed is an anti-sectarian, cross-community resistance network that can implement disciplined self-defence of communities under attack and fight for decent homes, jobs, public services and living standards for all, “because

we recognise the poverty and degradation in communities is the ground that the far right are using to build their forces”. The trade unions should be ready to call for a general stoppage of every single workplace if necessary. NIPSA will continue to play its part in building the anti-racist, anti-far right struggle.

Seema Saeeda from the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants addressed the conference: “I know that every one of you represented here today ... has the power together to defeat the far right”. “I don’t see a weak trade union movement but people prepared to stand up for migrant workers, to stand up against racism and to defeat the billionaire class and capitalism.”

Nationalisation

A London bus driver told conference about the successful four days of industrial action that bus workers at the Lea Interchange garage took against the victimisation of union reps. Union membership went up from 60% to 98%. But this is quite typical behaviour on London buses because of privatisation and unscrupulous employers who are also negligent on health and safety: “We need to renationalise so we don’t have this situation.”

Jason Wyatt, branch secretary for the Unite staff branch in Tata Steel in Port Talbot, described the crisis in the steel industry “always teetering on the edge of disaster, like a house of cards ready to come crashing down”. “We’ve had enough of warm words and we’ve had enough of empty promises... we need nationalisation in steel. Only this will safeguard our jobs, ensure investment and rebuild capacity in our industry.”

International solidarity

Conference began with a message of support from Turkish trade unionist Mehmet Türkmen who was jailed for speaking out about serious workplace health and safety abuses resulting in workers’ deaths and loss of limbs. Mehmet was recently acquitted at trial.

Contributions were made on important issues such as fighting disability cuts, sexual harassment, for trans rights and more.

RALLY AND LOBBY OF THE TUC
Sunday 13 September at 1pm
at the Holiday Inn, Brighton
Seafront 137 Kings Road, BN1 2JF
more details at shopstewards.net



Rob Williams PHOTO: ROBERT THOMAS

We need maximum unity between school support staff unions

Unison, Unite and the National Education Union (NEU), all with school support staff members, have decided to ballot their members for strike action to win a decent, fully funded pay rise rather than facing even more cuts and redundancies in schools.

We need maximum unity and co-ordination between the unions to ensure that action is as strong as possible. But, following a complaint from Unison, Unite and GMB, the TUC General Council is looking to take disciplinary action against the NEU, on the basis that it is breaching previous TUC decisions.

GMB and Unison local government conferences have passed motions against the NEU campaigning among support staff. However, while that might be the lead given from the top, in practice this is out of kilter with the mood of members on the ground who, when it comes to a struggle, will want to fight in unity. At Unison conference a third of the conference voted against the motion.

Unison delegate Saffy Hill-Chambers said at the rostrum:

"The NEU has a presence in every school and far more reps than we do in schools but they are not allowed to collectively bargain for their 65,000 support staff. How will this motion seek to benefit those members? Do we not have a duty to think of the interests of the trade union movement as a whole, of the working class as a whole? If the NEU can't nationally organise for their support staff, we are potentially creating 65,000 strike breakers, which doesn't only betray them, but every one of our support staff members whose industrial action will be shot in the foot as a result.

"In Surrey, we have a great relationship between Unison and the NEU, working together for our members against the employers that do not care what union the members are part of. Creating resentment and



Support workers in Unison, NEU and GMB fighting together in Tower Hamlets in 2025 HUGO PIERRE

driving a wedge between our unions will do nothing to support our members. We need solidarity and unity in schools to fight for all school staff."

Sheila Caffrey, NEU National Executive member, says, in a personal capacity:

"The NEU has engaged in talks with the other unions in good faith and wants to continue to do so. But the NEU should continue to stand firm in fighting for all its members - this is not detrimental to the trade

union movement but strengthens it, as thousands of previously unorganised workers have joined a union and become activists in schools.

"We're in the middle of a battle over pay and funding, with the risk of thousands of support staff members losing their jobs - now is not the time to cause confusion or step back from that battle. Our indicative ballot results and vote at the special conference are the mood of our members.

"We must not fall into the trap of pitting members of different unions

against each other - we are seeking a united struggle and appeal to members of the other unions to all stand together. The best way to work through all that is through discussion and collaborative campaigning, including being together on the picket line.

"Maximum unity as a position can be won at the TUC Congress. We need to reach out to other unions and wider membership and explain that this isn't about division, but about maximum unity."

A statement was published by Unison, Unite and NEU national and service group executive members on Wednesday 17 June, which invites other union members to add their names

"Instead of taking measures against the NEU, Unison, Unite and GMB members would want to see a major joint campaign of action, not only for the pay rise but also to demand the funding to pay for it.

"If this decision stands, it undermines the very purpose of trade unions: to bring together workers to fight to defend pay and conditions, as well as to fight to win better for all. The suggestion that union leaderships should be able to prevent other unions recruiting unorganised, low-paid workers to fight for better conditions is detrimental to the whole union movement and a threat to all union organising.

"We need maximum unity not division.

"The NEU has the right to appeal the decision of the General Council at TUC Congress, and we call on our unions to support that appeal and cease demanding disciplinary measures.

"We appeal to all unions that a joint meeting of Unison, Unite and NEU national and sectoral executives be urgently set up to resolve the issue in a constructive manner."

● **The full statement can be found at socialistparty.org.uk**



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 £15-an-hour minimum wage for all, 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



Socialists safeguard UCU members' call to fight in Further Education

MARCO TESEI

UCU NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBER,
PERSONAL CAPACITY

At the Further Education Sector Conference (FESC) of the University and College Union (UCU) in May, delegates voted decisively for UCU to prepare for national action in the 2026-27 academic year (see 'UCU Congress votes for nationwide strike action' at socialistparty.org.uk). Translating conference decision into strategy and action was the key task of the first meeting of the new Further Education Committee (FEC) on 26 June.

It is becoming increasingly clear to UCU FE members that a bolder, more concerted effort is needed to win the funding FE needs, and that the strategy presently on offer from the union leadership is not up to the job of winning for post-16 educators.

FE workers face a deepening desperation as pay continues to fall behind that of schoolteachers during a cost-of-living crisis already affecting all workers. Ever-increasing workloads have caused unprecedented levels of sickness this year.

Conference decisions

In the heated debate at the conference, National Executive Committee (NEC) and Socialist Party member Duncan Moore moved one of three motions calling for an aggregated ballot for industrial action in 2026-27.

In contrast, supporters of the general secretary, Jo Grady, and the union's head of FE argued – as they have for years – that 'now is not the time, branches are not ready, first we have to build local density' and so on. The conference emphatically rejected that; delegates voted against a motion that postponed any further decisions until 2027, and voted for an aggregate ballot.

Of course, establishing a policy is



Adult education strikers were part of the FE strikes at the start of 2026 LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

not the same as implementing it. Anyone fighting to ensure that step is actually taken beware – it may mean a migraine or two along the way!

With some foreboding, Socialist Party members on the FEC, which is dominated by supporters of general secretary Jo Grady, submitted a motion "to begin preparations for an aggregated autumn ballot immediately, allowing industrial action in the autumn term".

Our allies in UCU Left presented a similar one, although motion 1, which I moved, went beyond calling for our democratic processes to be

respected. As well as explicitly calling for an aggregated ballot, it spelt out that what is most needed now is a "strong national lead with a clear strategy", alongside a dynamic ballot campaign beginning immediately.

Outrageously, the papers circulated a few days before the FEC – after motions had been submitted – included recommendations which in essence repeated the argument rejected by conference delegates that branches are not ready and postponed balloting until Autumn 2027. This was nothing less than an attempt by the union leadership,

supported by the officialdom, to overturn the decisions of FESC – and in doing so scupper the chances of tens of thousands of workers taking collective action for another twelve months. Please use your own word to define an act of that sort!

However, the contributions of determined left committee members saw both motions pass and the 'recommendations' rejected. We argued that in June the Association of Colleges (the employer body) warned that without significant increases in funding, "a very low pay award, possibly zero" may be recommended.

Yet we have an extremely weak government and Andy Burnham likely to become prime minister. We must step up the pressure. The NEU is also preparing a formal ballot for October. Now is the time for our union to act.

Socialist Party member Duncan Moore also moved a third motion calling on FEC to "approach other teaching trade unions, including the National Education Union, to organise a national Saturday demonstration calling for more funding for education." This carried too.

This is despite the left's minority position on the FEC. It shows that there are those who stood for election on the 'UCU Commons' and 'Campaign for Union Democracy' slates, traditionally most supportive of the general secretary, who can be pressured by the arguments – and by the prospect of having to face the membership!

Still need to keep up the pressure

Following the FEC, our industrial action strategy is in a stronger position. However, we will need to continue fighting at every stage for the proper and timely building of national action this autumn.

Jo Grady's strategy has exposed itself for what it really is. Not a thought-out game plan at all, but simply a timid abdication of responsibility that, as pressure to act grows, is prepared to ignore democratic decisions to push the will of members back.

To keep on the pressure, members and reps need to organise and campaign to get the ballot under way and to get over the line, without further setbacks or being undermined. That should include organising branch and regional meetings, and coordinating sending motions in support of the strategy and to demand a special FEC to set ballot dates.

For strike action of all FE England colleges before Christmas!

the level of rent. Fair rent decisions should be made by elected bodies of tenants, housing workers and representatives of trade unions. For cheap low-interest mortgages for home buyers. Nationalise the privately owned large building companies, land banks and estates.

ENVIRONMENT

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

insulation and energy transition plan for existing housing stock.

- Agribusiness to be taken into democratic public ownership. For a food processing and retail industry under workers' control to ensure that standards are set by consumers, small farmers, and all workers involved in the production, processing, distribution and retail of food.

DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

- For united working-class struggle to end discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, disability, sexuality, age, and all other forms of prejudice and oppression.
- Repeal the anti-trade union laws and all others that trample over civil liberties. For the right to protest and to strike! End police harassment. For the police to be accountable to local committees, made up of democratically elected representatives of trade unions, local community organisations and local authorities.
- For the right to choose when and whether to have children – for the right to access abortion, contraception and fertility treatment for all who need it.

- For the right to asylum – with democratic community control and oversight of emergency funding resources. No to racist immigration laws.
- Expand democracy. For the abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords. For all MPs to be subject to the right of recall by their constituents at any time, and to only receive a worker's wage. For proportional representation and the right to vote at 16.
- For the right of nations to self-determination. For an independent socialist Scotland and for a socialist Wales, both part of a voluntary socialist confederation of Wales, England, Scotland and Ireland.
- Oppose the dictatorship of the billionaire owners of the media. For the nationalisation of newspaper printing facilities, radio, TV and social media platforms. Access to these facilities should be under democratic control, with political parties' coverage being allocated in proportion to the popular vote at elections.
- For a new mass workers' party, based on the trade unions, and drawing together workers, young people

and activists from workplaces, and community, environmental, anti-racist and anti-cuts campaigns, to provide a fighting, socialist political alternative to the pro-big business parties.

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

- No to imperialist wars and occupations!
- Take the wealth off the super-rich! For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and the banking system that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working-class control and

management. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need, not to the fat cats.

- A democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, and in a way that safeguards the environment.
- No to the EU bosses' club. Organise a campaign with European socialists and workers' organisations to use the talks on post-Brexit relations to tear up the EU pro-capitalist rules. For a real collaboration of the peoples of Europe on a socialist basis as a step towards a socialist world.

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WOULD WORKERS BE BETTER OFF

HELEN PATTISON

SOCIALIST PARTY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Today, 13% of young people are NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training), it's the latest headline-grabbing crisis for British capitalism.

On top of this, millions are worse off in real terms than they were in 2008. Over 3 million people claim in-work benefits because of the predominance of low pay while the cost of living cranks up, pushing households further into poverty. Public services have been cut to the bone but, at the same time, the cost of long-term government borrowing has hit its highest level since 1998.

The 'Brexit' referendum on whether or not Britain should leave the European Union (EU) was ten years ago, and the vote to leave won 52% to 48%. Given how close the vote was, but also because political figures have come back to the question of EU membership again and again, it's understandable for people to speculate if working-class people would be better off if 'Remain' had won.

A Remain vote would have allowed Britain to continue to have access to free movement of goods and labour to and from EU states. Many capitalist commentators argue that would alleviate today's youth unemployment crisis, giving students the chance to work visa-free throughout Europe, as well as improving Britain's economic growth with tariff-free trading and investment.

The official Remain campaign, with Tory then-prime minister David Cameron at the helm, said our public services would be better off inside the EU and a Leave vote would mean cuts in NHS spending. It wasn't as if his party, under his leadership, had been in power since 2010 and led an austerity assault on the NHS and other services!

'Free movement'

Posed as one of the most progressive elements of the EU was its allowing for 'free movement', which means that people in the EU could travel throughout the area without a visa. Young people today, trapped in the unemployment cycle, might wish they could travel to EU countries for work. But for young people in Spain in 2013, the reality of free movement felt like a different kind of trap rather than an opportunity. Their then immigration minister claimed that thousands of young people emigrated from Spain each week to other EU countries because of their 'adventurous spirit'. The reality was that people were trying to flee the youth unemployment crisis which had reached 55%.

The ability to move for work didn't fix the problem though and young people responded in protests across the country, as well as in other European cities. Hundreds of Spanish youth brought their suitcases into the streets under the slogan of 'We're not leaving, we're being forced out.'

In London, many Spanish young people had ended up working in the super-exploitative hotel industry, forced to clean rooms in record times on the lowest pay. Today Britain's youth unemployment crisis is hovering around the same as the EU average. It isn't EU membership or not which will end the youth unemployment crisis. This will need a programme of investment in education at all levels, including free university education, and into public services to create good jobs.

It also wasn't representatives from the EU who tried to prevent this super-exploitation, including bosses, who took advantage of workers for whom English wasn't their first language. But Unite the Union does organise hotel workers, and in the 2010s fought to grow the union in the industry in London, including having multilingual material and meetings.

The ability to work anywhere is not a real freedom when work is scarce, on low pay, and bosses can count on workers from other countries not being unionised or potentially less informed on legal protections.

The EU treaties weren't simply written to allow for workers to travel for work, they were written in the interests of big business and so specifically ignore national trade union agreements. This was the background of the Lindsey Oil Refinery workers' strike in 2009. 1,000 UK workers at the refinery all had their pay, terms and conditions protected under a national agreement, but new workers from Italy and Portugal were to be hired under the EU's Posted Workers Directive, and therefore without the much more favourable terms of the UK workers. This wasn't 'internationalism', this was profit-hungry bosses looking to super-exploit migrant workers.

Not only were these workers hired on worse terms and conditions, they were made to live on a barge in Grimsby dock to be bussed into work each day. Cynically, politicians from all corners, including Labour then-prime minister Gordon Brown, attempting to sow division, called for "British jobs for British workers". Initially taken up by some of the strikers, this was soon replaced - with the intervention of leaders in the strike committee, including Socialist Party member Keith Gibson - with leaflets and placards translated to appeal to the EU workers to join the union and fight together.

The employers were segregating workers based on their nationality and using divide and rule, as well as EU treaties, to try to drive down pay and conditions. The strike ended in a victory with no one losing their job. Instead, the trade union-agreed protections of the UK workers were extended to the Italian and Portuguese workers.

Well in advance of the EU referendum being announced in February 2016, establishment politicians had already begun a campaign of whipping up nationalist and racist division. A 2014 survey found that as many as 81% of Polish people in

PHOTO: XAVIER HAPE/CC



Both the official Leave and Remain campaigns whipped up divisive ideas, particularly around migrants living in the UK. The official Leave campaign was headed by Tories and ex-Tories. But the Remain campaign, largely headed by David Cameron, also focused on immigration

Britain had experienced verbal or physical abuse or knew someone who had. Establishment politicians had no answers to falling living standards and public services other than to use EU workers as a scapegoat, blaming issues like 'health tourism' for growing queues in the NHS, and the unemployment crisis on workers from the EU.

During the referendum, both the official Leave and Remain campaigns whipped up divisive ideas, particularly around migrants living in the UK. The official Leave campaign was headed by Tories and ex-Tories; like the Remain campaign,

it received a £600,000 grant during

the referendum. But the Remain campaign, largely headed by David Cameron, also focused on the need to control immigration as a way to defend living standards. The board of 'Britain Stronger in Europe', which became the official Remain campaign, included disgraced arch-Blairite Peter Mandelson, Green then-MP Caroline Lucas, a retired British army officer, several Tories, and former TUC leader 'Lord' Brendan Barber.

The only way that the racist division could have been cut across, was through the independent involvement of the working class and its representatives into the political debate.

HAD BRITAIN STAYED IN THE EU?

Workers form across Europe, including the RMT union, march against EU austerity in 2010 PHOTO: PAUL MATTHESSON



David Cameron resigns as prime minister the day after the referendum PHOTO: TOM EVANS/CC



What the Socialist said

SOCIALISM TODAY

Monthly magazine of the Socialist Party

June issue included...

- The socialist approach to the EU: Ten years on from the referendum on the UK's membership of the European Union, we reprint an article by CLIVE HEEMSKERK, first published in Socialism Today No.201, September 2016, it argues the case for a socialist approach to the EU.

Read and subscribe at socialismtoday.org / 020 8988 8777

- Paper subscription £3.50 a month, e-subscription £3.30

At the time of the referendum, the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) campaigned against UKIP or any of the capitalist austerity politicians being granted leadership of the official Leave campaign, pointing out that they would see it as a green light to whip up anti-migrant ideas. It would also have undermined the official Remain campaign.

In the event, the whole of the referendum was dominated by capitalist politicians and figures wedded to Leave or Remain for their own class interests.

There is no doubt that leaving the EU has had an impact on the UK economy. Britain now sits

outside of any major trading bloc, which would allow easy access to large markets for trade. The transition from within the EU to outside also had an impact. In 2021, DPD paused deliveries going by road from the UK to Europe because of confusion over the new paperwork that was required. Some estimate that the UK economy is 6-8% smaller than it would have been, and as many as 20,000 small businesses have stopped trading with the EU since the new regulations came into place.

But a bigger UK economy doesn't necessarily mean that working-class people would be better off. And

actually, there are more small businesses in the UK today than in 2012.

Since the economic crisis in 2008 and the election of successive austerity governments, our services have been strangled of funding and across much of the public sector there has been pay restraint. Those attacks started while Britain was in the EU and continued after it left.

But in the recent period there has been one thing that has pushed back against the diet of a real-terms pay squeeze. The biggest strike wave in a generation took place in 2022-23 with around 3.6 million days lost to strike action. Some of the winners from that strike wave were nurses, midwives and paramedics who won an improved offer in the NHS despite the Tory then-prime minister Rishi Sunak saying there wasn't any money. University lecturers, teachers, BT workers, all won improved pay offers. Members of the RMT, outsourced workers in BEIS government department organised by PCS, bus drivers for Arriva, Stagecoach and Abellio, all got improved local or departmental offers too.

Today government debt is 93.8% of GDP. If that was a few percentage points lower because of stronger growth and, as a knock-on the price of government borrowing was a bit cheaper, the government would not simply be willing to offer public sector workers a fully funded real-terms pay rise!

Capitalism in crisis

Inside or outside of trading blocs such as the EU, capitalism has been in a historic crisis, many countries teeter on the edge of recession. Improvements in living conditions can and have been won, at least temporarily before the bosses try to claw them back again. But they have been achieved through the working class using its collective strength and its willingness to take action.

The 2022-23 strike wave also came at a time when the whole of the political establishment was increasingly unpopular. The EU referendum was part of this process too. David Cameron's Tory Party was already deeply unpopular. In 2015, just a year before the referendum, he had won a 12-seat majority in parliament, winning votes from just 24% of the electorate. A lot of the Leave vote was a kick-back against the majority of the capitalist politicians and figures who supported both Remain and vicious austerity. The EU negotiations and vote both helped splinter the Tory Party. Although it held itself together and in office for another eight years, in big part because of the fear that united sections of the capitalist class of a Jeremy Corbyn-led Labour government coming to power.

Most of all, the EU referendum - with the official Leave and Remain campaigns headed by

pro-austerity politicians - exposed the need for the working class to take an independent political approach. The Socialist Party fought for this consistently, during the EU referendum and since.

Corbyn had won the leadership of Labour in 2015 and the Socialist Party put forward at every stage how he could have used his position to fight for a Leave deal in the interests of working-class people. For example, arguing to retain any positive EU legislation, such as around either workers' rights in regards to migrants and the environment, while rejecting the drive for neo-liberalism or a leave deal in the interests of the rich.

Looking back ten years, it is easy to wonder if the EU referendum represented a turning point towards right-populist ideas. But actually, polling at the time showed that 75% of supporters of UKIP (led by Nigel Farage) wanted renationalisation of the railways, a policy forbidden by EU treaties but also put forward by socialists and left-wing campaigners.

Corbyn was able to win almost a million votes from UKIP at the 2017 general election, because of his anti-austerity programme which included the demand to bring back public ownership of vital services so they could be run for need and not for profit.

Building a workers' voice

Today there is no mass political voice fighting in the interests of working-class people. A new wave of working-class and trade union activists are fighting for the building of that independent voice.

The fight for workers to be better off will not be determined by membership or not of the EU, but by struggle. The task of socialists is to help strengthen workers' organisations, in the workplaces through the trade unions and with a party too. And to win over the mass of the working class to support for a socialist political programme based on nationalisation and democratic planning to meet need - linking to the struggles of the working class across Europe and internationally.



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NO JOBS, NO PAY, WAR & DIVISION

...LABOUR'S OFFER TO YOUTH

Socialist Students marching against racism ALEX SMITH



SOFIA PANDOLFI
SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Young people in Britain today experience the bleak reality of what capitalism has to offer us – almost one in six young people not in education, employment or training. Amidst the crisis of youth unemployment, those who do find a job experience low pay and poor conditions.

This Labour government offers no solution to this crisis. Instead, it has backtracked on its promise to give 18-20 year olds the full minimum wage, arguing that employers will not hire young people if they are paid the same as workers 21 and over.

With no evidence that a rise in pay leads to higher unemployment, it's no surprise that the government is prioritising the profits of the capitalist bosses over our needs.

Labour has also announced a plan to introduce new 'work placements' for young people. We will

receive only benefit payments, not pay, for work under these schemes.

Continuing to be underpaid – or in some cases not paid at all – will not resolve the issues of employment, housing, and education faced by young people.

Nor will these issues simply be resolved by changing the Labour Party leader, despite attempts to present Andy Burnham as a left-wing alternative to Keir Starmer. We must organise, campaign, and demand that Andy Burnham implements the policies that young people need.

Our voice

What we need is a real political voice, a party that does not attack our living standards, but instead fights back with young and working-class people. This includes taking action to demand an increase in the minimum wage to £15 an hour, regardless of age, as a step towards a real living wage.

Trade unions can play a crucial role putting forward this demand, and mobilising young workers to

take action for better jobs, training, and opportunities for all of us.

Over the summer and into the academic year, Socialist Students will be campaigning in schools, colleges, and universities. Young people look with frustration at the future of low pay, debt, and unaffordable housing that awaits us.

A few weeks ago, Socialist Students also met with other youth organisations from eight different countries in Europe to discuss how to build the anti-war movement (see page 4). That meeting agreed to organise an international youth strike on 20 November across Europe – building the youth fightback internationally.

Through a widespread youth movement, we can mobilise young people against war, division, and austerity. Whether you're a young worker or student, by getting organised we can fight for better jobs and opportunities, for public investment in our education and services, and for the socialist change we need.