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the Socialist

Issue 1379 | 20 August - 2 September 2026 | formerly Militant

School and college students

FIGHT FOR OUR FUTURES

WALKOUT 20 NOVEMBER

READ WHY WE'RE WALKING OUT p8-9

Scrolling online, we see the horror taking place in our world.

From the onslaught on Gaza to devastating wars in Ukraine and Iran. Climate chaos, pollution in our rivers, fire and extreme heat. As our planet spirals into chaos, companies that sell weapons or pollute our planet make record profits, at the expense of our future.

There's little support for our mental health, made worse by repressive measures in schools and colleges, such as the locking of toilets or isolation, treating us like we're prisoners, when we should be learning. Underfunding means lack of support, fewer specialist teachers, our school dinners becoming lower quality and unaffordable, fewer school trips and broken facilities that go for months without being fixed.

Outside of school and college, the high cost of living means we have to pay more and more for stationery, transport and food. Our youth spaces are being closed, and leisure centres costing more has meant we have little to do.

But it doesn't have to be like this.

The super-rich have their political parties, media and organisations to further their interests. Workers have trade unions where they discuss issues and take collective action to increase their living standards. If others can organise, why can't we?

We need campaigning student unions in our schools and colleges, where we meet with our classmates and take action over the issues that affect us. Individually we can be angry but collectively we can take action.

We also need to organise against the profit-first capitalist system. Capitalism's main incentive is to create as much profit as possible at the expense of our futures. We need a socialist society where working-class people collectively run society for the needs of all and the environment rather than the super-rich.

This is why Socialist Students in this country is a part of international youth walkouts on Friday 20 November. Socialist Students calls on school, college and university students to walk out of their institutions on 20 November to send a message that we will fight for our futures, against this capitalist system.

There are over 20 organisations across Europe involved in the international youth strikes. Those in Germany led a strike of over 50,000 school students walking out against conscription earlier in the year, and in Italy there have been tens of thousands of students taking action annually. This time we can be part of it. There are many issues affecting our future, the point is to take action on 20 November to change it!

MEMBERS OF SOCIALIST STUDENTS

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Issue 1379
20 August - 2 September 2026

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

London bus workers take action over 'roasting' conditions



Barking PHOTOS: SOCIALIST PARTY

MOE MANIR
LONDON BUS DRIVER, UNITE MEMBER

On 14 August, over 1,500 Arriva North London bus workers walked out at eight garages, the first of 26 strike days running to October, on a 96% strike vote. The biggest bus dispute in London in nine years.

Cabs are hitting 40°C and more, while 'air cooling' units push hot air round in circles, cutting the temperature by two or three degrees at best. Drivers are collapsing, sitting in seats soaked with the last driver's sweat, and still getting punished for it: "...threatened docked pay or being put up for disciplinary for refusing to drive buses that are too hot," one driver told ITV News.

Talk, motions, taskforces and summits have all been tried and failed. Only organised, collective strength on the picket line has ever moved these employers, and drivers know it in their bones.

Since privatisation broke up London's bus network in the 1990s, there have been two all-out, London-wide strikes: 2012's Olympics bonus fight, and another three years later. They won us extra pay. The next London-wide strikes will be about survival.

This fight is about heat, filthy or non-existent toilets, and fatigue-inducing rotas, felt whatever operator's badge is on your chest.

London's Labour mayor Sadiq Khan told LBC that no driver would be penalised for refusing an overheated bus. But that's not true in practice. Operators are still fined for missing mileage targets in the heat, with the fine only discounted depending on the government's heat alert code that day.

As chair of Transport for London (TfL), Khan holds the statutory authority to set a maximum safe cab temperature but he hasn't used it, despite years of it being asked for.

This dispute sits inside Unite's Fight Fatigue Now campaign, fighting for demands including:
- **No disciplining drivers for reporting they're too tired to drive safely**
- **A guaranteed minimum 12-hour break between duties and consistent start times**
- **Decent, clean toilet and welfare facilities on every route**
- **Working air-conditioning across the whole fleet**

Bus workers are sending solidarity to the Arriva pickets, with plenty asking the obvious question: why isn't every garage out already? Passengers are on our side too - they feel the heat the moment they step on a bus.

Clapton and Dartford garages narrowly missed the turnout threshold, a reminder that Labour hasn't scrapped the Tory anti-union laws.

As Greater Manchester mayor, new Labour prime minster Andy Burnham built his reputation on 'public control' of buses through the Bee Network. But while routes and fares are set by the combined authority, the buses are still run for profit by private operators, mirroring TfL.

Sharon Graham has raised the alternative herself: "Maybe we should look at public ownership of buses. There's evidently profit in this system. Shouldn't that profit be put in to make sure that we're paying people properly and the conditions they work under are proper?" We agree. Unite should demand full public ownership, under the democratic control of the workers themselves, where drivers, engineers and reps decide the rosters, routes and standards.

And winning that demand from the Labour government and mayor won't come from goodwill. As well as lobbying and fighting industrially, Unite should take real steps towards building a genuine political voice for the working class, one that will fight for public ownership and decent conditions.
- **Coordinate the fight across every operator and every garage**
- **Build solidarity and hardship funds now**
- **Build elected, accountable strike committees, keeping the dispute in members' hands**

This is an edit of a longer article that can be found at socialistparty.org.uk



Wood Green

Onay Kasab, Unite national lead officer, said: "It is no use telling a worker, who works within a bullying management culture, that they have the right to a safe workplace in law – the point is how we implement it, how we make sure it happens. And that's what these workers are showing."



The temperature in one cab

Socialist Party members visited strikers at every garage:

At Grays, Essex, drivers talking to **Ciarán O'Donoghue** expressed serious anxiety about what would happen if they were to crash because they passed out due to heatstroke. "One driver was telling me he got through 2.5 litres of water and a litre of Lucozade on his shift yesterday. They wished the drivers from other companies in other parts of London, not just Arriva, were also out on strike."


Grays

Amnon Cohen reports from **Wood Green** that "one driver told me that they do have air-conditioning in the buses as they are quite modern vehicles. But they are not working. The belts are disconnected." At **Tottenham**, pickets told **Sam Smithson** the same thing: "Many of them think it is done on purpose to save fuel. Lots of people were talking about how more needs to be done on pay and conditions generally."



'Too hot to work'

James Ivens reports that at **Barking** he was told of "incidents including a driver passing out from heat and being taken to hospital, and another colliding with a lamppost. Everyone I spoke to was saying the buses have to go back into public hands, and that the Arriva strike should be a step towards action across the franchises in London."

Stop press
- As we go to press, the action drivers have taken, and the plans for many more days, have forced an offer from management. The strikes planned for 19 and 20 August are suspended, pending a vote of members on 21 August. Strikes will resume if the offer is rejected.

Socialist Party

WHAT WE THINK

Sharon Graham re-elected as Unite general secretary

Mandate to take industrial and political lead



Sharon Graham PHOTO: PAUL MATTSSON

Sharon Graham has been re-elected as Unite General Secretary in a decisive victory over her opponent, Simon Dubbins, Unite's Director of International and Research.

Sharon's victory, by 68,694 votes to 31,130, is a clear message that reps, members and activists want to maintain Unite as a militant industrial union, and correctly saw the challenge of Dubbins and the misnamed United Left group, who were prominent supporters of his, as a threat to this.

It is significant that members from a whole number of Unite disputes campaigned for Sharon Graham's re-election. This included leading reps from the heroic Birmingham binworkers, who have been on indefinite strike since March 2025.

Sharon Graham's victory came on the back of the left slate of candidates, including Socialist Party members, winning a majority on the Unite Executive Council (EC) earlier this year. This represents a renewed mandate for Unite to take the industrial and political lead, as Burnham replaces Starmer as Labour prime minister, and workers face the cost-of-living crisis and the bosses' offensive to make the working class pay for the capitalist crisis.

The Socialist Party supported Sharon Graham when she first ran successfully for Unite general secretary in 2021 because her programme of industrial militancy stood against that of the other candidates, including from United Left, who were backsliding to the position of partnership with the employers and the then-new Starmer leadership of the Labour Party and Labour councils.

No-cuts needs-based budgets

In the first Unite Policy Conference under her leadership in the autumn of 2021, the policy long campaigned for by the Socialist Party was finally passed – to demand that Labour councils stop implementing central government cuts and instead pass no-cuts, needs-based budgets.

Under Sharon Graham's leadership, her industrial militant programme has been borne out. In her first five-year term of office, Unite has been involved in over 1,800 disputes, involving 280,000 members and winning over £700 million in extra pay. Therefore, it was essential that the challenge by Dubbins and the United Left was defeated in this election, to prevent any retreat from this record.

However, Socialist Party members have always campaigned in Unite, including in the general secretary and EC elections, on our distinct industrial and political programme. During last year's Unite policy conference, the then-Labour council in Birmingham announced its intentions to brutally fire and rehire the binworkers. Socialist Party delegates, in conjunction with close allies, moved an emergency motion to support the binworkers, suspend from Unite membership the cutting Labour councillors and the then-deputy prime minister Angela Rayner – now secretary of state for Housing, Communities and Local Government under Andy Burnham. This motion, which was almost unanimously supported, apart from a handful of United Left supporters, opened up a discussion within the union about its relationship with Labour.

This debate must now take place in Unite. It has been posed even more sharply by Burnham replacing Starmer in No.10, as a vital part of arming the union and its members with what is needed right now.

2026 Unite GS Election

Sharon Graham: 68,694 Elected

Simon Dubbins: 31,130

The total number of votes cast was 100,089

2021 Unite GS Election

Sharon Graham: 46,696 Elected

Steve Turner: 41,833

Gerard Coyne: 35,334

The total number of votes cast was 124,147

Unite and Labour

Sharon Graham has talked of the Burnham premiership as the last chance for Labour. However, in reality, despite his populist messaging, he is still ultimately the representative of big business and their desire for some stable government in their interests. Therefore, Unite must take the lead in piling the pressure onto Burnham, which means demanding that the union movement organises and mobilises around an emergency programme to protect workers from the unfolding crisis.

Unite should support the PCS civil service union motion to the forthcoming Congress of the TUC (Trades Union Congress). The key demands from the left lay leadership of PCS call for a "national Saturday demonstration this autumn for investment in public services, against austerity and for pro-worker policies" and to plan coordinated strike action on public sector pay.

But another key element of maximising leverage on the new government is for workers to have their own political voice and their ability to support candidates who support union policy. Burnham has his feet under his Downing Street desk, yet the 50% strike ballot thresholds, brought in by Cameron's Tory government in 2016 and maintained by Starmer, despite his promise to scrap them, they are still on the statute book and still an obstacle to particularly national action. Also, the unelected Tory-appointed commissioners are still operating in Birmingham, a situation which Burnham could have changed immediately by removing them, along with the threat to the binworkers' wages.

Actually, Labour was thrown out of office in Birmingham in May, as in a whole swathe of local authorities. The Greens now hold the balance of power in Birmingham, and should demand the removal of the commissioners.

Moreover, the Greens now lead a number of councils, including a prominent group in London. Another opportunity to 'pile on the pressure' on the government over its local government austerity agenda potentially could be the summit hosted by the Green-led Hackney council on 9 September (see page 11). Unite should send an official representative, to demand Green councillors support the union's no-cuts budget policy.

The re-election of Sharon Graham and the left victory on the EC are now a platform to move forward in Unite.

> **"It is a victory that must be the platform for Unite to play a leading role, along with other militant unions, in this period of intense struggle**

The obstacles that the United Left placed in the way of rolling out the industrial militant agenda should not be underestimated. They had acted to paralyse the previous EC by walking out of a meeting when the voting margins were tight. That block has now been removed by the left election victories.

The opportunity is now there to really fully develop the lay member industrial combines, which bring more rank-and-file reps into sector-wide organising for action, and to democratise the union. Sharon increased her vote by 47%; now that the United Left has been decisively defeated there is a big opportunity to build on that and increase members' participation in the union, including the hundreds of thousands who have taken part in action, and further build the union's million-strong membership.

The forthcoming rules conference is an opportunity to consolidate these steps and to create real workers' political representation in Unite. But at present, this is scheduled for the summer of 2027, after next May's local elections for every council seat in Scotland and Wales, and potentially 7,000 in England.

A whole number of Unite branches and two regional committees have passed motions calling for the rules conference to be brought forward so that union reps and members can urgently discuss the political strategy that is needed, as Farage's poisonous Reform continues to look to exploit the political vacuum that has opened up because of Labour's pro-business policies.

Unite Broad Left

It is essential that the Unite Broad Left is built and really developed as a fighting rank-and-file left within the union, bringing together on a fighting programme the reps and activists who campaigned for the left in the EC and general secretary elections.

Socialist Party members will continue to play a key role on the left in Unite to fight for the industrial and political programme that is necessary. A vital part of this is to marry industrial militancy with the socialist programme that is essential in this period of economic crisis, war, racism and climate change. We will continue to argue that Unite, as well as the whole union movement, must have a working-class independent position from capitalist government and big business.

Policies such as socialist nationalisation are an absolutely indispensable element of the programme that is necessary in the sectors where Unite industrial membership is increasingly concentrated, and much of which is vulnerable to economic shocks. That is the only way to ensure that there can be 'Just Workers' Transitions' to socially necessary jobs and production, while guaranteeing workers' jobs, income, pension and communities.

The Socialist Party welcomes the re-election of Sharon Graham as Unite general secretary. It is a sign of the militancy of Unite members and their preparedness to fight, as they face the bosses' attacks. It is a victory that must be the platform for Unite to play a leading role, along with other militant unions, in this period of intense struggle.


Thames Water workers digging up the road PHILAFRENZY/CC

Water companies: we need nationalisation not mutualisation

ISIS SMYTH
LIVERPOOL SOUTH SOCIALIST PARTY

The years-long discussion over the potential nationalisation of Thames Water continues under Andy Burnham's premiership. While he has previously called for "public control" of water companies, Downing Street sources say there is no prospect of the immediate renationalisation of Thames Water. Burnham is reportedly concerned about accruing more government debt.

Labour MPs and mayors close to Burnham have reportedly been encouraging him to consider a 'third way': a 'mutualised model' which would see water companies transformed into not-for-profit organisations run by local people. They argue this could remove the potential debt Burnham is concerned about, while maintaining public control. They hope that Thames Water, close to financial collapse and currently looking for new buyers, could be a guinea pig. If it is deemed successful, they may hope these measures could be extended to other water companies.

The prospect of the mutualisation of privatised water will ignite hope in many workers. With the average household in England and Wales spending over £600 per year on water bills, any hint of a reduction would be appreciated.

But as usual, it's the bosses, even of failing businesses, and their profits that are being thought of. The 'mutualised model' is only raised in the context of letting Thames Water off fines and environmental obligations! The government wants to avoid having to put Thames Water under temporary government control with a Special Administration Regime (SAR). A SAR would mean appointing an administrator to pay off some of the debt and give compensation to shareholders before finding a new private buyer. If they did so, they'd have to face putting the rest of the sector on notice, and the contagion of SARs may spread. Already, Thames Water's creditors are gearing up to take the government to court if this deal fails, and Burnham is under huge pressure to bow down to big business.

So, between the two choices, mutualisation looks like a better choice from Labour's point of view. This would convert Thames Water into a cooperative and give shareholders compensation using shares rather than cash. So not real democratic public control – nothing would change for workers. The mutualised model would still be left with a huge pile of debt, paid for by us! Meanwhile, money would not be going towards repairing infrastructure and complying with hygiene standards.

We need real nationalisation, kicking the private vultures out of the water industry, taking control, ownership and profit out of their hands. We could run the industry democratically, with workers and local communities having a real say in what we need. Burnham's concerns of government debt upon nationalisation do not hold up. These fatcats should be paid no compensation, only those who have a proven need should get any cash.

The Socialist Party argues for proper nationalisation of water companies, under democratic workers' control and management, as part of a planned economy in which the wealth and resources of society are directed to improve all our lives not the balance sheets of a few. This would allow access to clean water while ensuring workers don't have to foot the bill.

During the latest heatwave, 10,000 homes in East London and Essex were without water for days as multiple pipes broke, with low pressure or no water on and off, for five days for some. Despite being in the middle of a heatwave, drought and hosepipe ban, water was running like a river down a street in South Woodford at one point, after a water main burst.

As the repairs dragged on, temporary bottled water distribution points were set up, but these were swamped and also inconvenient for anyone who doesn't drive. Anyone lucky enough to find bottled water in local supermarkets had to pay for them. As one fellow angry resident asked: "Are you going to give us a refund on the water we pay for?" Thames Water increased bills by 40% in April 2025.

The water supply disruption came the same week as it was reported that Thames Water paid its finance chief a £1 million signing-on fee in July, as the company struggles with a mountain of debt and faces temporary nationalisation. These infrastructure problems are nothing new, but even more unacceptable coming during a heatwave and drought, and throwing huge bonuses at the bosses isn't going to solve anything. Permanent, genuine nationalisation, under democratic workers' control and management, is the only solution.

Scott Jones
Loughton, Essex

The climate crisis is here, our public services aren't ready

ADAM TYAS
COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

Britain has experienced yet another extreme heatwave, the fifth of the year and one which has seen some of the worst and most drastic effects of climate change, combined with cuts, and severe lack of preparation from the privatised water network.

Almost three quarters of England and Wales are currently in drought, with sweeping hosepipe bans and water shortages. Five major reservoirs are at 'exceptionally low' levels, and total English reservoir levels are below 66%. Even more destructive, we've seen wildfires destroying acres upon acres of farmland, homes and communities, leaving the fire brigade stretched and unable to stop the damage.

These issues aren't just isolated to this sudden stint of high heat and low rainfall, the climate crisis is being played out in front of our eyes, in real time. Extreme heat, drought, and wildfires will become more likely year on year: we are entering a period where extreme weather is becoming normal, but our infrastructure and public services are still being run as though it isn't.

The most obvious example of this is that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) only has 20 of 6,600 staff working specifically on climate adaptation, around 0.3% of the workforce being dedicated to preparing for a crisis which is already affecting millions of people. This shows that while politicians may talk about climate change when there is a crisis in front of them, there has been nowhere near the level of public investment or preparation needed to actually deal with it.

The new prime minister Andy Burnham has taken some action, but nothing to properly deal with the long-term issues and impacts of climate change or the fundamental problems within the water industry. A ban on disposable BBQs, using the military to assist in operations, and calling an emergency response using the 'alert system' for the first time are reactive, almost desperate measures in the current situation – and wholly inadequate.

Research from the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) shows how fire services have been hollowed out by Tory and Labour austerity and cuts. Staffing shortages have meant some engines unable to respond effectively. Over 12,000 jobs have been lost since 2010. We need properly funded fire and rescue services, with the jobs and resources lost through years of cuts restored. This must be demanded of Burnham and the new fire minister.

The failures of the privatised water industry have shown what happens when water is treated as a commodity to be managed for profit. Around 2.87 billion litres of water are lost through leaky pipes every day across England and Wales! We need to bring the water industry into public ownership, to secure investment in the reservoirs, pipes and infrastructure that we need. Other measures include investment in good-quality insulated council houses and public buildings, and massive investment in public transport. We need a serious transition away from greenhouse gases, one which recognises that workers should not be made to pay for the climate crisis.

The climate catastrophe cannot be solved by asking ordinary people to make sacrifices for capitalism's crisis, while the infrastructure we all rely on continues to be neglected. We need investment, democratic public ownership, and properly funded public services to prepare for the extreme weather that is already here, while protecting workers and communities through the transition to a low-carbon economy. And we can't rely on capitalism to do this, we need to take the wealth and power out of the hands of the super-rich and democratically plan production to safeguard our lives and the environments, not big businesses' bottom lines.


A bowling green (or brown?) in Cornwall MUTNEV/CC

Jason Arday: A victim of a ruthless profit-driven system

PAULA MITCHELL
SOCIALIST PARTY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The death of Cambridge professor Jason Arday is a horrible personal tragedy for him and all his family, the cruel outcome of a cruel system.

Whether or not he plagiarised some of his work, or exaggerated some of his achievements, is not the point. Bell Ribeiro-Addy MP read out in parliament just a few names of well-known academics who have been accused of the same but not faced the same onslaught.

His death came after more than a year of relentless public scrutiny, attack, ridicule and humiliation. At first, and continually, by 'race realists' – ie right-wing 'academics' and others determined to take down a black professor, no matter the personal cost, to prove their racist theories of white superiority.

But not only them. The so-called mainstream capitalist press had a field day. It is reported that there were over 200 articles about Arday in the UK printed press over the last year; 60 in the Times alone.

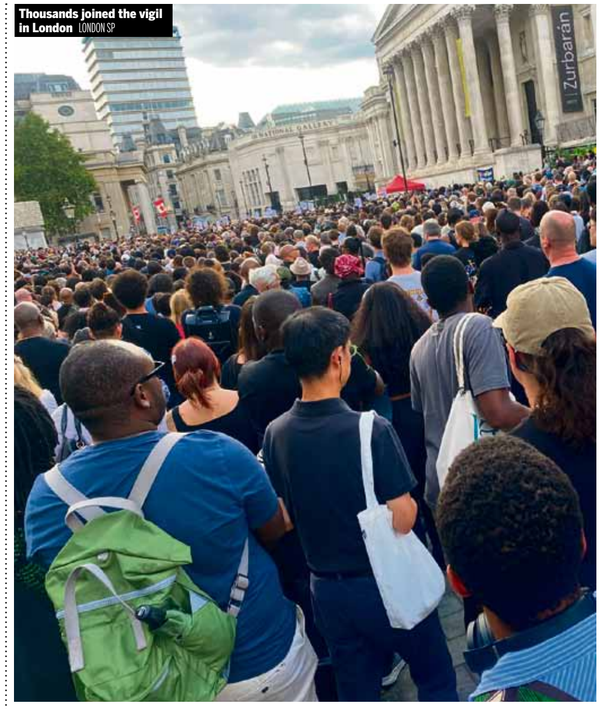
And what of Cambridge University itself, that 'bastion of the establishment,' with its centuries' long history of privilege and prejudice, its almost total absence of leading black academics, deciding to burnish its anti-racism credentials by raising up and displaying its young black prodigy?

The right, of course, blame 'woke' 'Diversity, Equality and Inclusion' (DEI) for promoting someone who they have decided was not worthy. His death will be exploited by all those who want to argue that DEI and Black Studies etc should be abolished.

The mood that led to the big Black Lives Matter movement still exists, and is coupled with fears about Reform and the far-right. Mass protests could erupt again. If the trade unions were to take a lead – in this instance starting with the unions most directly involved in the media and higher education, such as the UCU, NUJ and Bectu (the University and College Union, the National Union of Journalists, and the Broadcasting, Entertainment, Communications and Theatre Union) – a movement could be built with demands that unite the working class to challenge racism and undermine those who champion it.



Jason Arday in 2024 CONIFEROUSFOREST19/CC


Thousands joined the vigil in London LONDON SP

Education and the media

The elite universities play a vital role in capitalist society in the production and propagation of ideas, and in the creation of the next generation of bosses, top managers, judges, MPs etc. Racism – along with sexism and all other forms of discrimination – is inherent in all capitalist institutions, including the big business media and the top universities. Both these institutions are the creators and purveyors of capitalist ideas and ideology, including the 'divide and rule' necessary for an unequal and oppressive system to protect itself.

But they are only able to play that role if there is a level of social support. So it is also inevitable that, while racism and division runs through their veins, universities will also develop ideas and promote areas of study which help capitalist society to cover over that reality. Individual institutions will also feel the need to occasionally demonstrate their alleged liberal face. Cambridge wore Arday like a badge.

And both the billionaire press and the universities are institutions driven by profit.

From the Editors Code of Conduct brought in after Princess Diana's death in 1997, to the 2011-12 Leveson Inquiry into the 'culture, practices and ethics' of the press, the billionaire press has been more or less left to 'mark its own homework' – and, not unexpectedly, the brutal pursuit of profit at the expense of human lives has gone on unabated. The only way to deal with the press is for the profit motive to be removed, and for media facilities to be democratically nationalised under workers' control (with political parties' coverage being allocated in proportion to the popular vote at elections). That would both enable democratic checks on practices, and allow genuine investigative journalism to develop free from the pressure to compete in the chase for mega-bucks.

Meanwhile the university system, starved as it is of public funding, is more and more driven by the need to make money. While it has always been the case that some ruthless top academics embedded in the establishment have used and abused the work of those under them, the pressure on students and academics alike has only increased as the drive to sell the product increases. It is no wonder that some – perhaps many – succumb to cutting a few corners.

This is why it is essential to fight for full funding for post-16 education; for the eradication of marketisation and the pursuit of profit from our education. Genuine democratic control and management of educational institutions by the staff, trade unions and students is necessary in all aspects of the system - from appointment and support of all staff; access, support and resources for students; and the quality and content of the education and research itself.

It is through full funding and democratic control and oversight of all practices that the pressures on staff and students can be overcome, genuine equality and inclusion can begin to be developed, and the racism and division embedded in the system can be challenged.

Unison local government pay ballot

Members reject 3.3% but leadership did not build campaign for action

HUGO PIERRE
FORMER UNISON NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBER

Unison members in local government were offered a pay increase of 3.3%, just matching CPI-inflation in April, despite submitting a claim for £3,000 or 10%, whichever was the greater.

A selective ballot of the local government and school membership took place during July. 81.8% of Unison members voted to reject that offer, as pay rates are way behind the level in 2009 - reflecting the considerable anger over the way the cost-of-living crisis is affecting them.

However, Unison's NJC committee, which negotiates the claim and decides whether or not to take action, looks set to accept the offer as the proportion of members voting in the strike ballot, at 28.4%, was below the Tory strike ballot turnout threshold of 50%.

The NJC specifically targeted branches that had previously got within 10% of the threshold in two previous national member ballots for strike action. In those ballots, two branches with more than 1,000 members got over 50%, but this time there were none. In fact, this time in only one employer over 500 did over 50% of the members vote.



Local government workers need better pay BASILDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Members let down

Unison members will again feel let down that they did not get the turnout needed for serious action. Activists have reported a lot of support for action where they've been able to contact members directly.

However, it does highlight the lack of confidence in the leadership of the union, which has a right-wing dominated National Executive Committee but a left general secretary, Andrea Egan, from the Time for Real Change grouping (TFRC).

The pay rise should have been agreed by 1 April, but most members would have been unaware of the pay claim, let alone a pay campaign, at that stage. The union's negotiators were entranced by the employers 'feet-dragging' tactics. They planned no campaign while the May council elections took place, when they could have geared up members to take a pay campaign to all the candidates!

The right-wing-dominated NJC committee has failed to mobilise support for those branches that had previously shown they were keen for action. The pay campaign only started with the ballot for strike action!

Left needed to fight for a serious campaign

The strategic leadership of the dispute didn't implement measures that could have made a real difference. Starting the ballot at the beginning of and then ending it within the school summer holidays, instead of continuing for a week after the end, probably affected turnout. Members also want their pay rise fully funded, with extra money into local government, fearing that otherwise their pay rise could lead to job cuts.

The TFRC majority on Unison's Local Government Service Group Executive (SGE), and the general secretary, gave a commitment to back up balloting branches with resources from staff. However, many branches were left on their own and even those targeted with help found it was not best coordinated with the work of branch activists. The biggest organisational obstacle is the lack of workplace reps.

The left-led SGE should have applied pressure to the NJC members to demand a bold campaign, starting early – and could have campaigned themselves. With a new prime minister in place, Unison should have been demanding Andy Burnham reopen the pay talks and pledge extra funds for local government.

Tory thresholds still in place

This result re-emphasises the need for Andrea Egan to maximise pressure on Burnham's Labour government to bring about the immediate scrapping of the Tory's anti-union strike ballot turnout thresholds. Starmer reneged on his promise to do it within his first 100 days in office and Burnham mustn't be allowed to get away with not doing it now. Why not demand that Unison's parliamentary group of MPs table a motion in parliament when it returns on 1 September?

Andrea should fight for Unison's existing policy for a national demonstration against local government funding cuts, as part of a trade union-organised fightback against austerity this autumn.

The union's leaders, in particular Unison's left TFRC grouping, must not wait for Burnham to deliver for Unison members, but have to start a serious mobilisation that enthuses activists to fight for pay 'back to 2009 equivalent' and no to cuts.

Next year's National Executive Council elections will be a fight for the left to win leadership of the union, alongside a TFRC general secretary. Socialist Party members will help build for that. If members see a serious fight from the top, that could help to transform Unison.

East London housing workers fight fire and rehire



TOWER HAMLETS SOCIALIST PARTY

PETE DICKENSON
TOWER HAMLETS SOCIALIST PARTY AND UNITE COMMUNITY BRANCH

East End Homes (EEH), a big provider of social housing in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, has launched a major attack on its employees. Over the years there have been numerous small changes to their contracts. Some staff were transferred from the London Borough of Tower Hamlets when former council estates were transferred to EEH.

EEH has now taken the statutory legal step to start the process of 'firing and rehiring' its workers. EEH's intention is to replace the existing 'final salary' pension schemes with an inferior version in which staff, many of whom have been planning for their retirement for several years, will lose thousands of pounds a year. They are also claiming they have never recognised Unison.

Due to changes in employment law, it will be much harder to carry out this cynical manoeuvre after the end of this year. Daniel Killian, EEH chief executive, has blatantly told staff he intends use the remaining period this year to force through his attack. The management's outrageous behaviour has forced Unison, which represents the staff, to take industrial action from July, which has now been escalated effectively to an all-out strike for the month of August.

This escalation was provoked by Killian, at the start of this month, starting the legally required consultation period to sack the staff. Throughout the dispute, Unison members have been absolutely determined to fight this vicious action by the employer. All EEH's residents have been leafleted by Unison to explain why they have been forced to take action and asking for residents' support in their struggle.

Local MP, Apsana Begum, has reportedly raised the situation with the government, but it appears with no response. Andy Burnham, who is on record as opposing fire and rehire, should use his power and influence to stop this management abuse.

Members of Tower Hamlets Socialist Party have been actively supporting the strike from the beginning.

PCS NEC agreed major national campaign strategy – but the general secretary refuses to implement it

FIONA BRITTLE
PCS NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBER, PERSONAL CAPACITY

At the time of writing, it is almost three months since the National Executive Committee (NEC) of the PCS civil service union, with its left majority, agreed to launch a national cost-of-living campaign at its 29 May meeting.

However, reps and members would be forgiven for not knowing about any campaign, because the general secretary, Fran Heathcote, is not implementing what has been agreed. Decisions of the NEC are being delayed, or simply ignored.

PCS Annual Delegate Conference in May voted for a fighting strategy and to build a serious campaign to tackle pay, protect jobs, sort out the pension crisis, and improve members' terms and conditions. Almost simultaneously, members voted for a left majority on the NEC, a coalition which includes supporters of the Broad Left Network, in which Socialist Party members participate, not least because it stood on a platform to build that campaign.

Members have now instructed the union leadership to build a serious fight, and to ballot for strike action if there is not enough progress in talks, at three consecutive conferences.

They recognise that is the only way to fight and win our demands against a government still rooted in cuts and passing on austerity to the public and its own employees. Andy Burnham's ascendency does not mean better pay, jobs protected and the pension crisis solved. No amount of waiting around to see if Burnham delivers will change that. The 3.5% pay remit is still 3.5%. Job cuts are still taking place, and our members in FCDO (Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office) and elsewhere are still bravely fighting on to defeat these in their areas. The pensions crisis with private company Capita goes on, with thousands still suffering hardship, delayed pensions and delayed retirements, with no commitment to bring pensions administration back inhouse. Our offices are still threatened with closure.



FCDO members on strike against cuts LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

The left majority on the NEC remains determined to build and deliver a serious strategy to win. To not do so is a serious betrayal of members' interests.

We must apply pressure to Burnham to deliver. Many trade union leaders may wish to give Burnham 'a chance', but all we have seen so far is yet more 'machinery of government' changes for the civil service, and vague announcements about devolution without any guarantee of job protection for our members. Our members can't afford to wait.

It is clear that general secretary Fran Heathcote and her supporters in the misnamed 'Left Unity' grouping, will do everything possible to undermine the national campaign. Far from "holding the employers' feet to the fire" - her election pledge when she won the general secretary election with a below 800-vote majority - she has done the opposite. Instead, she is covering for a Labour government that does not "respect" civil servants as promised.

Undermining the national campaign

She has not even published the decision of the conference to members – not even that we consider PCS to be in dispute. There is no social media or website announcement, which if done, would have put not only the whole of PCS on a war-footing, but would have sent a very clear message to the employer, just in advance of the publication of their paltry pay remit, that our union was serious about building a campaign for more.

Despite repeated instruction from the NEC, there are no branch briefings to announce the new policy to fight, or advice and information for reps. We have instructed her to provide proposals for giving lay reps access to members' contact details in order to communicate with them directly. We have agreed members' meetings and a plan to work with all of our lay structures to build the campaign necessary.

None of that has been done. In fact, when deputy president Dave Semple produced specific website articles to rally members, he was told this was "disrespectful" to the general secretary and that she would arrange communications through the full-time structures - so where are they? There have been multiple social media posts, emails and articles on other issues, but a deafening silence on the national campaign.

As a result, to most reps and members this NEC will look no different than before. This is not an accident. She hopes to make the NEC majority look ineffective, so that members will continue to be disillusioned. She hopes this will keep voter turnout low in the next NEC elections in spring 2027, to increase the odds of returning her allies to power.

Left Unity members have made it clear that they want to see the outcome of pay talks in each employer area before even building for a campaign. This is a nonsense when we already know what the remit is, and that anything above that will only be in exchange for selling off members' terms and conditions. Even the 3.5% isn't fully funded, with only the first 2% coming as new money, so departments will have to find the rest from within existing budgets. That means staffing cuts, recruitment freezes, and mounting workloads.

We need to organise in our branches and groups to apply pressure to the general secretary to implement what has been agreed.

Young workforce at Greenwich Royal Museums on strike

JAY COWARD
SOUTHEAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Members of Southeast London Socialist Party went down to Greenwich upon hearing about Prospect union members at the museums entering industrial action.

Their demands are:

- London Living Wage accreditation
- A return of their Christmas annual leave
- Paid breaks and better bank holiday pay
- A dedicated development budget beyond basic training
- Proper clarity and consistency for fixed-term contracts

This was a few of the strikers' first experience of industrial action but they were driven to it by the circumstances. One striker expressed how difficult it was to make ends meet under current pay conditions, and how they had slight hopes in the new Green council in Lewisham - but only slight!

A young workforce was on a picket spanning multiple locations around the Greenwich Observatory and Cutty Sark simultaneously. Spirits were high and organisation was watertight. Front-of-house staff were out, preventing some sales of eclipse glasses for the solar eclipse the following day.

Among the workers at Royal Museums Greenwich, a few expressed immediate recognition when I brought up similar practices at the Tate Modern, where PCS union members were fighting for sick pay, holiday leave and the like. One said that it's a similar story at the V&A (Victoria and Albert museum) and that all museums should strike. I replied all public sector workers should strike, period!

Workers on these pickets could easily feel the potential power that they hold, and knew they had to fight for change as they can't rely on any of the mainstream politicians - Burnham, Polanksi or Farage. The need remains pertinent for our own voice to be represented – we need a new working-class party.


Picketing the Cutty Sark SOUTHEAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

FIGHT FOR OUR FUTURES, NOT THEIR WARS

PHOTOS: PAUL MATTSSON AND SOCIALIST STUDENTS



WALKOUT 20 NOVEMBER

Many young people growing up today are rightfully recognising that the capitalist system cannot offer us a future. In 2021, polling from the pro-free-market think tank the Institute of Economic Affairs showed that 78% of 16-to-34-year-olds blamed capitalism for Britain's housing crisis, and 67% said they would prefer to live under a socialist economic system.

And this should come as no surprise. For young people today, the world often feels as if it is moving in only one direction – and that direction is not a positive one. With the rapid shifts and compounding crises of this era, it can feel like the living conditions of millions across the world are deteriorating day by day.

The genocidal war on the Palestinians – waged at the behest of the Israeli regime and backed by Western capitalist powers – has left a lasting imprint on an entire generation. Outraged, many young people have turned to mass protest, joining university campus encampments and the massive weekend demonstrations across the country.

The US-Israel war on Iran typifies this era of capitalist crisis. Despite overwhelming global opposition to the war – especially among young people – Donald Trump, serving as the naked face of declining US imperialism, attempts to shore up the interests of American capitalism abroad. By doing so, this war continues to trigger severe economic shocks and crises, doing nothing for the interests of workers and young people alike in America.

Because of the global nature of capitalism, even if Britain is not directly involved in the war against Iran, its consequences will be felt here, too. The British housing crisis has only worsened since 2021, and there are now over one million young people not in education, employment, or training (NEET).

And how does the tiny capitalist elite try and stay in their position? They promote divisive ideas to try and hide who the real enemy is – the super-rich. The disgusting rhetoric of the likes of Trump, Farage and more as they seek to protect their rich mates has spurred us into action. We have protested against racism, transphobia, sexism and more.

All of this is occurring while the world is on fire – and not just politically. We have witnessed devastating wildfires across Europe, even as capitalist politicians like Trump deny the reality of climate change. We can see that politicians are liars who do not rule on their behalf. It is the billionaires controlling the oil industry, AI, and Big Tech whom Trump and his ilk seek to defend.

This explains the wave of youth protests and revolts worldwide. Whether it is the 55,000-strong school strikes against militarisation in Germany or the recent 'cockroach' movement in India, young people are increasingly understanding that capitalism offers nothing but war and austerity for them, while offering wealth and prosperity for the ruling class.

Young people and students have no choice but to get organised. Capitalism has proven that it offers us no future. This is why I am joining the international youth walkouts on 20 November, organised by various youth organisations across Europe, including Socialist Students in England and Wales. These November walkouts provide a vital opportunity for young people to express our discontent and anger. Fighting for our futures requires organisation, which is why Socialist Students is campaigning to make 20 November as large as possible. We believe that socialist change is the solution to war, climate chaos, and unemployment.

We will be organising both before and after 20 November to help provide the leadership needed in this age of capitalist decay. We want 20 November to be a first step towards building an international youth movement to fight for a socialist future. Join us.

JOE WOOLFALL
LIVERPOOL SOCIALIST STUDENTS





WALKING OUT... ...TO FIGHT CLIMATE CHANGE

The world is burning. We can see it burning on TV. We can see it burning outside our homes this summer.

What is being done? In November, world leaders will meet again, this time at the COP31 climate conference in Turkey.

But every year, nothing is done, and climate change gets worse. These world leaders all defend a capitalist system that is about putting short-term profit first.

Oil giants Shell and BP have just recently doubled their profits. Even new Labour 'change' prime minister Andy Burnham is thinking of expanding North Sea drilling.

On the basis of capitalism, we don't have a future. But workers are fighting back.

The Fire Brigades Union has just beaten service cuts in Kent – saving jobs, engines, and stations.

Bus drivers in Unite the Union, where I live in north London, are striking against the unbearably hot conditions they work in all day. On the picket line, one driver showed us 48°C in their cab! (see page 2)

If workers are fighting back, we need to fight back too. Young people will be walking out to fight for a future free from climate catastrophe.

Because there is an alternative. Socialist Students says the big polluters and big business needs to be democratically nationalised. With socialist change we can meet the needs of our society, people, and planet.

PAUL ILKLEY, ENFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

...FOR HIGH-QUALITY, FREE EDUCATION

Over one million young people aged 16-24 years old in the UK are NEET, meaning 'not in education, employment, or training.' One tenth of these are university graduates. The capitalists have been scratching their heads as to what the reason might be; everything from smartphones to mental health diagnoses have been thrown out as suggestions.

What they won't consider, however, is the gutting of the education sector that has taken place over the last 20 years at their own hands.

The National Education Union (NEU) warns that there will be a £630 million real-terms cut to school funding in the coming year. As much as the Burnham government pays lip service to the importance of apprenticeships and technical skills, without funding these subjects will have to be dropped by schools.

University students are not only being fleeced by ever-increasing student loans, but they are paying for a worse product as university services keep getting shut down. The University of Gloucestershire, in my area, is currently selling off one of its campuses, which includes an extensive library. The staff are not taking this lying down, however – earlier this year they went on strike for fair pay, not having had a real-terms pay-rise in 17 years.

Compare these cuts to Labour's proposed £15 billion increase on military spending, a number which the Tories say isn't high enough! Worse yet, a 'Defence Universities Alliance' has been set up by the Ministry of Defence, which aims to 'build the highly skilled workforce needed to support the UK's future defence capability.'

It is clear that the capitalist class doesn't care to invest in our education, and young people need to join the fightback against them to make our voices heard.

I'm building walkouts to fight for a future which has high-quality free education for all, fully funded and democratically controlled so its not big companies like in the defence industry calling the tune.

BILLY JONES, GLOUCESTER

...AGAINST THE COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS

Like everyone in the country, young people today are facing soaring food prices amid the worsening cost-of-living crisis. Even for those that have found work, inconsistent hours and low pay mean that the bulk of our income goes on the basic essentials.

As a full-time student in part-time work, maintaining a healthy, balanced diet is a constant struggle. Quality ingredients are expensive and time-consuming to prepare, not to mention a long bus journey away. I often find myself defaulting to a diet of baked beans, meal deals and frozen pizza.

Supermarkets continue to rake in huge profits, with Tesco reporting an increase of 8.5% over the course of 2025. Food prices have risen in turn by roughly 38% since 2020. Anger over this surge prompted the Labour government to suggest a voluntary price caps on essentials, which was predictably met with frenzied resistance from the bosses.

Our food security is being undermined on multiple fronts. Domestic food production has taken a hit, with wheat yields falling by over 10% due to the extreme heat and widespread droughts.

Internationally, Trump's war on Iran and the resulting closure of the strait of Hormuz has cut off an essential trade route for both fertiliser and food. Ukraine, crucial for global food production, has cut grain export forecasts by 12% due to Russian attacks on seaports.

Production costs will continue to rise, being passed on to consumers in order to maintain the profits of billionaire shareholders.

For those not born into wealth, this country has nothing to offer besides a failing welfare system, unstable work and skyrocketing prices on essentials, disproportionately affecting young people. While we can barely afford to put food on the table, the wealthy are diverting billions to fight their wars. It's time to take our future into our own hands and take the wealth off the super-rich. Walk out on 20 November!

DANIEL BASSEY, YORK SOCIALIST STUDENTS



...FOR REAL JOBS

Young working-class people today face an unprecedented situation where our living standards are lower than that of the previous generation.

Record levels of youth unemployment (16.4%) paint a grim image for prospects for young people leaving education. This stat doesn't even show the full image, many young people also find themselves in exploitative zero-hours contracts. We are the majority of zero-hour workers overall. Despite the promise to ban zero-hours contracts, the Labour government is still dragging its feet (see page 10).

We need decent jobs and decent pay. The money being poured into military spending could be put to use on things we actually need. Socially useful jobs fixing our crumbling infrastructure would be a start.

THOMAS BUTLER, LIVERPOOL SOCIALIST STUDENTS





GET ORGANISED AND FIGHT FOR SOCIALISM →

Join the international youth walkout on 20 November

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

To fight for our futures, and all the reasons to walk out, we can't do it on our own – we need to get organised. Socialist Students have groups at universities, colleges and schools across the country. We are campaigning and want to build the types of organisation we need: campaigning, democratic, and linked up with others across the country.

For those of us at school or college, that might mean building a fighting student union. A student union is a group of students who discuss the issues affecting them and collectively take action to change things.

This means democratically discussing and deciding what issue to campaign on and what actions to take collectively to do so.

Student unions could call for an end to repressive measures, like unfair uniform policies. Demand affordable prices for canteen meals and school trips. Support education staff when they take strike action. Protest against racism, sexism and all attacks on young people.

The first step could be calling a meeting, either at a break in the canteen or after school in a local café. You can then discuss with your classmates about the next steps, like organising a campaign stall and how to start building support for the 20 November walkouts.

To fight for our futures we need to fight for socialism

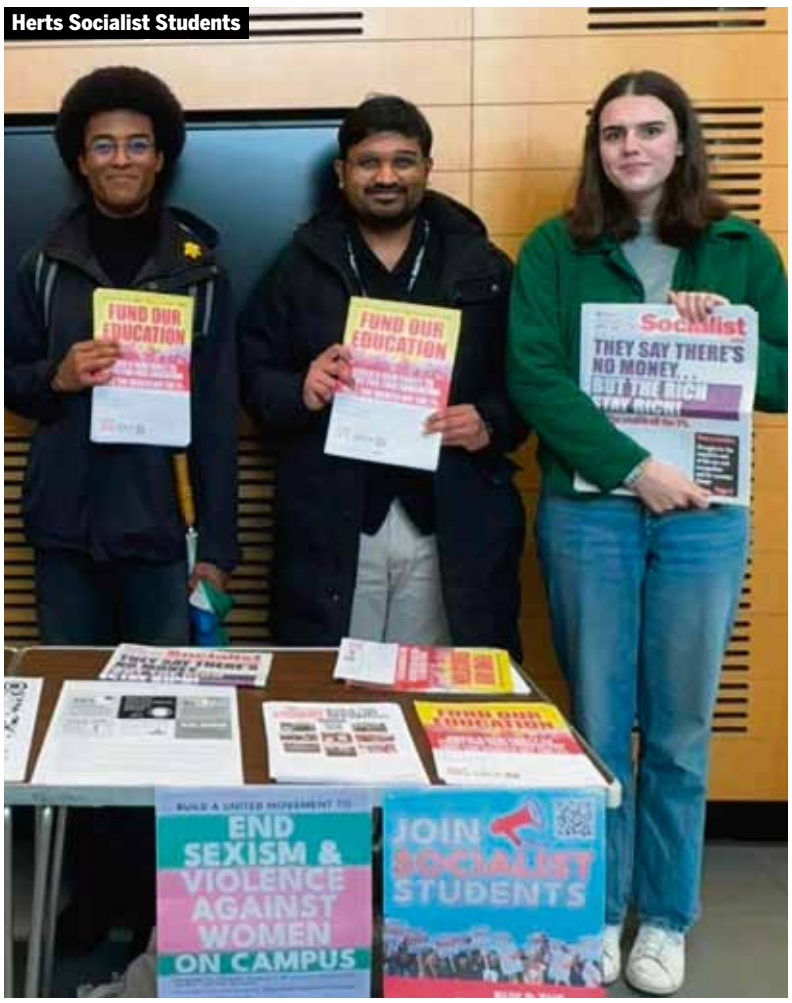
Capitalism puts the interests of a tiny few and their short-term profits above the expense of our futures. As capitalism goes further into crisis, our living standards are on the chopping block. We need to organise for a socialist alternative.

Under socialism, the working class, which makes society function, would take control of the vast wealth and resources, and democratically plan what we produce and how it is distributed for the needs of us all, rather than what makes the most profit for the super-rich.

This means we could make sure that everyone's needs are met, with high-quality genuinely affordable council housing, free public transport and so much more.

If you want to get organised in the fight for socialism at your school, college or university then get in touch with Socialist Students today.

ADAM GILLMAN



Herts Socialist Students

A Level results: We need fully funded, high-quality free education

SOFIA PANDOLFI
LAMBETH SOCIALIST PARTY

Following this year's A-level results day, hundreds of thousands of students will begin their university studies in September and enter a higher education system that is facing a severe crisis. For many, lack of funding is nothing new, with colleges and sixth forms across the country having also had massive cuts.

Worsening gap

One consequence of this funding crisis is shown by the widening performance gap between 'independent' and state schools. This year, over 48% of grades awarded to privately educated pupils were A*s and As, compared to 25% of grades for students in state schools. This disparity is not caused by an intelligence gap but is a product of the government's lack of investment in high-quality free education. Students are taught in overcrowded classrooms, without access to subject-specialist teaching, creating overwhelming conditions for both students and staff. It is no surprise that independent schools outperform state schools when working-class students do not have anywhere near the same access to educational support and resources.

Once they start university, students experience their courses being scrapped, staff redundancies, and increasing living costs. Once they leave, students face thousands of pounds in debt and uncertainty over guaranteeing graduate jobs.

Higher fees no solution

Meanwhile, university bosses blame the insufficient income on the decline in international students following the new international student levy, and call for even higher fees instead of calling for a completely different funding model. Despite what the Labour government claims, increasing tuition fees and prioritising profits above all else is no solution to the crisis in higher education. It is this funding crisis that drives universities to seek funding from arms fairs, polluting fossil fuel companies and other damaging capitalist companies.

Students and workers can fight back against cuts and redundancies to build a movement for free fully-funded education at every level. If you're a student in school, college, or university, join Socialist Students in organising walkouts on the 20 November to fight back against a system that invests in war over our education and futures.

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

No watering down of the Employments Rights Act

JOHN WILLIAMS
UNITE EXEC (PERSONAL CAPACITY) AND SOCIALIST PARTY



Hospitality workers in Unite the Union protesting over their working conditions SOCIALIST PARTY

Labour's Employment Rights Act sounds great, doesn't it? Fire and rehire and zero-hour contracts both scrapped; compensation for scrapped shifts; no age exemptions for the minimum wage; guaranteed hours. Now, all we have to do is wait for Labour to get in and deliver and we're all quids in!

This was probably the response from some just over two years ago when they were desperate to see the back of the Tories and get the 'biggest overhaul of workers' rights in a generation.'

But since then, the promised reforms have been delayed again and again while 'consultations' have taken place. This has been done deliberately: radical reforms were promised, then years of consultations let big business pile on the pressure and fearmonger that it will crash the economy, requiring the laws to be watered down.

Unite the Union has made clear that the legislation must not be watered down in any shape or form. Newly elected general secretary Sharon Graham described the workers' reforms package as having more holes in it than a piece of Swiss cheese, in part because of the delays and consultations, and was the only trade union leader not to endorse the Labour Party manifesto in 2024 because of this.

A recent article in the Financial Times claimed that certain measures in the Act will mean £3 billion more in the pockets of workers (for them a bad thing!), with £1.2 billion of that money compensation for cancelled shifts. That's not as much as it sounds, given the population of the UK and the fact that our wages have stagnated since the financial crash of 2007. But any hits to their profits are enough for big business to whip up opposition to it.

Big business or workers?

But we aren't there yet. The devil is in the detail, and it's likely the government will want to water it down even further. Business secretary, Jonathan Reynolds has said businesses, the government and trade unions will have to find a compromise. Will Burnham's new government compromise in the interests of big business or workers?

What will we see then? The government wants to give guaranteed minimum hours, with the threshold for 'low-hour contracts' between 8-20 hours a week. Unions are pushing for the new rules to apply up to 48 hours per week and to any worker on a variable contract. Amazingly, big businesses have said this is bad because it will include student and seasonal workers. Yes, exactly! We want the most exploited to have more rights and enough money to live on.

There's been no promise of full compensation for cancelled shifts either. Any hospitality worker will tell you the pain of this. Coming into work or being told on the day that you're not needed means a full day's pay gone. This gets even more expensive for workers who might have paid for transport and childcare costs. This doesn't get any easier if you're told to go home halfway through your shift either.

Who decides?

Another issue is rota changes. This can happen on the day, the day before, the week before. But we need to plan our lives. There's already supposed to be 'consultation' on rota changes, but the reality is in un-unionised workplaces the law doesn't apply. The same with holiday days being used without permission to subsidise guaranteed minimum hours.

There's also the issue about how the guaranteed minimum hours is worked out. Should it be worked out by the average hours a worker has had in the past week, month, year etc? Business will no doubt lobby to make the method for how the hours are worked out is done to ensure the workers will get as little as possible. And possibly change the rotas way in advance to get the average hours down.

It's up to us

Even if we get some good things from legal changes, like full compensation for cancelled shifts, it will ultimately be up to workers ourselves to fight for full and fair implementation. And that means joining and building unions that will fight for our rights at work.

With Andy Burnham and his new government promising radical change, now is not the time for a wait and see approach. We need to fight for the full implementation of the Employments Rights Act, and for workers control of any new legislation that comes in. That means fighting for the trade unions to organise and mobilise and take the action needed to hold Burnham's feet to the fire.

Anti-Austerity Summit hosted by Hackney council

Councils could refuse to make cuts and spearhead a fightback

SARAH SACHS-ELDRIDGE
SOCIALIST PARTY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

"A national, cross-borough anti-austerity cuts campaign, demanding that local council funding is fully restored, so that we can deliver the essential services - from youth clubs to adult social care."

This commitment in the Hackney Green Party manifesto for the May election struck a chord. The Greens went from having two councillors to winning 42 of the 57 seats! Labour on Hackney council was destroyed by a revolt against austerity at the ballot box.

The Green surge in May was not the first attempt to find a way to fight austerity. Since the banks were bailed out after the 2007-8 world economic crash, workers and young people have sought avenues of resistance.

There was a one-day public sector general strike in November 2012. In 2015, a surge into Labour elected Jeremy Corbyn as an ani-austerity leader, and his anti-austerity general election manifestos in 2017 and 2019 won more votes than Starmer in 2024. Half a million signed up to the Enough is Enough initiative of the trade union leaders in 2022 during the strike wave. Last summer, 800,000 signed up to an appeal for a new party from Jeremy Corbyn and Zarah Sultana.

With which vehicle to fight austerity is not a settled question. The Greens were seen by many as a means to fight the austerity establishment in May's elections. But their vote fell by 90% in the Makerfield byelection in June when Andy Burnham presented himself as the best means to get rid of Starmer, pledging to end 40 years of neoliberalism.

Burnham

Unfortunately, Burnham's 'vibe' has not found any meaningful expression in policy. Instead, we have his new chancellor pledging more cuts. A struggle is still needed.

Hackney Green Mayor Zoe Garbett pledged in May that: "A Green-led Hackney Council will host a summit of anti-cuts councils to coordinate a nationwide campaign to pressure the central government for overhauled local government fiscal powers and funding that truly meets need."

The Emergency Anti-Austerity Summit, taking place on Wednesday 9 September in Hackney Town Hall, could be an important moment in the battle against austerity and the cost-of-living crisis if a serious strategy is put forward to build a movement to take on a government determined to defend big business interests.

Even with the limitations on time to build for it and it being a work day, a bold lead would give confidence to working-class people, including the hundreds of thousands of workers planning to ballot for strike action in the autumn, and the young people planning student strikes on 20 November. Even after Burnham's rhetoric has allowed Labour to inch ahead in the polls, the Greens still lead among 18-24 year olds.

The Greens have a powerful position. In May they won four London boroughs and now lead nine councils. The number of Green councillors rose by 400 to over 1,300. The Greens now participate in almost 50 council administrations.

Councils can already do a lot. This autumn, bills and food prices are expected to rise, but councils already have power to help families struggling to heat and eat. They could use the government's Crisis and Resilience Fund to provide grants and send the bill to Burnham. They could use existing resources – open up school canteens to students' families, and use council buildings to offer warm, or cool, spaces.

Council homes

Housing is a major ingredient in squeezed family budgets. The Manifesto pledged that a Hackney Green council would: "Make building new council homes a core priority." During his by-election Burnham said he wanted to "oversee the biggest council housebuilding programme since the postwar period".

The Hackney Green manifesto says that "this requires the central government to rapidly invest in a mass programme of public housebuilding." But councils could start building now.

It is not true that nothing can be done without government initiative. Councils in England, for example, control budgets totalling almost £150 billion, over one fifth of all public spending. If initially only the nine Green-led councils combined their borrowing powers for capital spending to begin a mass building programme of eco-friendly affordable council homes - as proposed, for example, in Jeremy Corbyn's 2019 manifesto - it would show what was possible.

Our movement

They would face a tsunami of attacks from those who defend the housing market system. But in London alone there were over 300,000 households on local authority waiting lists in 2024. Around 4.5 million people nationally struggle to pay their rent in the private sector. The potential to mobilise a mass movement in defence of councils that build council homes (and create decent jobs for young people) would be enormous.

Hackney deputy mayor Dylan Law correctly said in May's Green Manifesto: "The council implements the majority of things in Hackney that impact our day to day: from planning permissions to education and healthcare plans, but they also have a special ability to resist when national decisions aren't in the community's best interests."

Dylan is right. Councils can fight for the funding needed. Even before they face an organised struggle, the government has agreed to provide 30 councils with support to manage financial pressures via an 'Exceptional Financial Support process.' With the potential for anger to grow even further, the government has relaxed the rules on council borrowing. In other words, councils determined to refuse to make cuts and to fund public services can find a way.

But none of this means it is simply a matter of finding a clever way to work within the existing rules. They are set up to maintain the status quo. The big business capitalist class will fight to defend its interests with all the power it has, including saying there is no alternative to cutting public spending which they deem necessary to ensure the long-term profitability of British capitalism.

Remember that even though Jeremy Corbyn's manifesto did not represent the transfer of decisive control of the key levers of the economy to the working class, he was mercilessly attacked by the defenders of capitalism. He faced the wrath of what Zoe Garbett calls a "political elite who are more interested in serving the interests of private corporations."

The lesson is that an organised and powerful counter-movement is required against the millionaires, mobilising and organising the strength of the multi-million working class, around a socialist programme to win the funding necessary from the clutches of the ever-increasing riches of the capitalist class.

What could be

When Liverpool council defied Thatcher in the 1980s, winning the equivalent of £250 million in today's money, they built 5,000 council houses, opened nurseries, and created apprenticeships. Crucial was the role of the organised working class.

Liverpool District Labour Party was made up of well over 400 delegates from party branches in every ward, trade unions organised in workplaces, and from the Labour Party Young Socialists.

It democratically debated and decided the course the councillors should take, and organised mass action as part of the battle – including huge demonstrations and a city-wide general strike. That is part of the model for how a workers' party could fight today.

Imagine the impact if not just one council but all the councils claiming to be anti-austerity were to spearhead such a fight.

There are over a million workers employed in local government. The main unions representing them already have a democratically agreed position of fighting for no-cuts needs-based council budgets.

The Green Summit could be a mobilising call to cohere these forces into the movement we need to take on central government and fight to end 40 years of wealth transmission from the working class to the capitalist exploiters.

- **Emergency Anti-Austerity Summit**
Wednesday 9 September,
Hackney Town Hall



South Gloucestershire council workers in Unison striking over pay in 2023 ROGER THOMAS

"This could be an important moment in the battle against austerity. Green councils could show what is possible."

Eye on the Greens

What's your experience of Green councillors, or young Green campaigners on campus?

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

Socialist Party

WHAT WE STAND FOR

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

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

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

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

WORK, PENSIONS AND BENEFITS

- A trade union struggle for the immediate implementation of the TUC demand for 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!

JOIN THE SOCIALISTS

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

to find out more today!



Help fund the fightback!

DONATE TODAY socialistparty.org.uk/donate



JACK WALKER
SOUTH EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

On 7 August we had a fantastic fundraiser at the Deptford Junction.

Three bands played for people cheering, dancing and moshing to the music. There were also Socialist Party t-shirts and donated books sold, which were very popular.

We had a speech from Onay Kasab, national lead officer for Unite the Union, who talked about examples of strikes his union had led, such as the bin workers in Birmingham and the Woolwich ferry strike, to a crowd of over 70 people, the majority of whom were young. For many of them, this would have been their first time hearing a trade unionist speak, and hearing examples of what unions can do when people such as themselves get organised.

There was also a speech from Geoff Goss on behalf of the University and College Union strikers at Southbank University, that half the ticket sales went towards. Geoff described the restructuring of workers' contracts, with many staff being fired and pensions being changed. Again the crowd showed solidarity through their applause at the end.

The bands agreed to play because they support the cause. We got people to the event through leafleting in the local area and bringing friends. The fundraiser made £689 in total, including ticket sales, book sales, merch sales and donations.

Yorkshire discusses international socialist event

LOUIE NARDINI
YORK SOCIALIST PARTY AND SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Socialist Party members in Yorkshire attended the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) event in Berlin. There were attendees from 17 countries, including every continent. On 15 August, we reported back to other members in Yorkshire.

At the CWI event, we tackled the issues surrounding the EU, Latin America, and China, and its class character, as well as the age of capitalist crisis the world is in.

At our Yorkshire meeting, we discussed how capitalism means war and climate destruction. Deaths, massacres, and bombing also mean austerity at home for workers and the dismantling of supply-chains. The only way to offset a system of declining profits, stagnation, and austerity is through an independent working-class alternative that puts internationalism at the forefront.

When we meet international students at freshers' fairs, with our programme to fight capitalist austerity, profit, and warmongering, and mobilising for the 20 November international student walkouts, we are building the Socialist Party and CWI.

Committee for a Workers' International
FIGHTING FOR A SOCIALIST WORLD
socialistworld.net

Homes – too hot in summer, too cold in winter

JAMES IVENS
LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Clarion Housing tenants protested outside the housing association's head office on 14 August, organised by the Social Housing Action Campaign (Shac). On top of excessive and opaque service charges, and many other problems, homes are overheating in the summer heatwaves, and too cold in winter! Shac's demands include that Clarion open the books on the charges, and carry out urgent temperature management upgrades.

A-level results day – 'fight for our future'

GCSE results day next

We organised campaign stalls at schools and colleges on A-level results day, 13 August. We spoke to students collecting their marks about the international 'fight for our future' youth walkout on 20 November.

Socialist Student and Socialist Party members in the West Midlands explain what happened below. We're doing the same on GCSE results day, 20 August.



Campaigning in Wolverhampton on A-level results day WEST MIDLANDS SOCIALIST PARTY

Nuneaton – already in debt

EESHA
COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY AND MANCHESTER SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Outside King Edward VI College, we spoke to Year 13s who had just received admission into university. Despite this, they were far from excited at the prospect.

Already, they were knee-deep dealing with exploitative student landlords, grappling with the recent hike in tuition fees to £9,790 annually, and shocked to hear about 32 universities' new partnership with the Ministry of Defence as a means of raising revenue.

If students and young people are to have a future, we're going to have to fight for it. Our rights to education, employment, and affordable housing continue to be under attack. Even under Andy Burnham's new Labour government, which claims to be delivering "change".

Our party and Socialist Students mobilise young people who have been demonised and exploited by the capitalist system. We must link our fight to that of the wider working class. This is fundamental to working towards the socialist change that is necessary.

Wolverhampton - £15 an hour, no exemptions

ALEX HUTTON
BLACK COUNTRY SOCIALIST PARTY AND WOLVERHAMPTON SOCIALIST STUDENTS

The main topic of discussion on our campaign stall was our call for £15-an-hour minimum wage, without exemptions. This was supported by a broad range of the public, from secondary schoolers to retirees, with only one or two dissenters. Even they were not particularly ardent in their criticism.

We received plenty of signatures on our petitions, donations, and we even sold out of Socialist papers. We met six young people interested in learning about the Socialist Party's broader platform.

Hopefully we'll see them at the Black Country Socialist Party's next meeting, where we'll further be discussing the issues facing us youth today.

Coventry – system fails us

NOAH WALKER
COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY AND SOCIALIST STUDENTS

We had a campaign stall concerning the issues of getting a £15-an-hour minimum wage, regardless of age, advocating for free education, and more affordable housing for everyone.

People who came up and signed our petition spoke about their worries over the cost-of-living crisis, not being able to find work or housing, and fears over the benefits system failing them when they're trying to improve their situation.

Worcester

BILL REID
WORCESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

Our leaflet was popular with young and old alike. 10 people bought our Socialist paper, donating at least £15 to our fighting fund, and three people want to explore joining us.

Stoke-on-Trent – people's need, not what's profitable

LEON TURNER-DENHAM
STOKE SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBER, JUST GRADUATED FROM UNI

We set up in Newcastle-under-Lyme town centre. Many young people getting their grades had concerns about their place in the world, and an inability to find jobs or apprenticeships after their study – concerned that they won't be able to support themselves financially.

These problems aren't failures of the individuals. They are the product of the capitalist system that abandons young people facing rising costs and a lack of work opportunities, while wealth is concentrated in the hands of the few. We fight for a future where education, housing, and a decent living are provided based on what people need, rather than what's profitable.

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

Cannock's dying high street
Reform carry on Labour and Tory decline

ALEX JONES
CANNOCK CHASE RESIDENT, SOUTH EAST STAFFS SOCIALIST PARTY, AND LIVERPOOL SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Cannock Chase Council has had plans to redevelop Cannock town centre since it was awarded £20 million government funding in 2021. The previous Labour council committed a further £17 million, and anticipated a further £7 million from the private sector.

With the government grant spent, where has it all gone? Half of a multistorey car park demolished, and the beloved Prince of Wales Theatre next on the chopping block, leaving a massive eyesore right in the middle of the historic market town.

Outrage

Residents are rightly outraged. On a Socialist Party campaign stall, we received an incredible amount of support.

Elderly residents are sick of seeing Cannock left in the dust, shop owners terrified for the future of the dying high street, and young people angry there is nowhere for them.

The current Reform council must answer to the people of Cannock. We campaign for the plans to be resumed, using the council's £16 million reserves. That's what a council that stands for the people would do, as Reform claims to be.

Austerity

We demand the money from Labour prime minister Andy Burham in order to pay for 16 years of Tory and Labour austerity that has destroyed our beloved town centre, and so many like it.

We need more facilities for youth, more investment by the council, and the relocation of our Prince of Wales theatre.

The old establishment parties have failed Cannock. And what has changed while Reform has been in control of the county and district councils? We need a new mass party to represent working-class communities like ours.

Mega socialist campaign stalls
5 and 6 September

Socialist Party members take to the streets to fight back against the crises created by this rotten capitalist system, that puts profits before people.

Join us to campaign to end the cost-of-living nightmare, housing crisis, poverty pay, and the other relentless attacks on working-class and young people. While the rich get richer, millions struggle to make ends meet.

Capitalism has failed. It cannot provide secure homes, decent wages, affordable essentials, or a future.

We need a fighting socialist alternative that can transform society, defend our livelihoods, and tackle the climate crisis. The wealth exists. It's time it was used in the interests of the many, not the few.

Join the fight for socialist change, and our special day of action – 5 and 6 September – to help us raise the funds we need.

ISAI MARIJERLA
SOCIALIST PARTY TREASURER

Help fund the fightback
DONATE
socialistparty.org.uk/donate

GRUNWICK STRIKE 50 YEARS ON – LESSONS OF AN EPIC BATTLE



PHOTO: AJ PAXTON/CC

PAUL KERSHAW

The summer of 1976 was unusually hot, and conditions in workplaces were often close to unbearable, helping to bring work tensions to a head. The official report on the Grunwick strike makes reference to lack of air conditioning in the 'dog days' of August. Many will recognise that in the experience of the heatwave this summer.

On Friday 20 August, one worker at the Grunwick Film Processing Laboratories was sacked for allegedly working too slowly. Three others walked out in protest. Later that day, another employee, Jayaben Desai, was dismissed after preparing to leave work at the end of her shift rather than doing compulsory overtime. She and her son joined the walkout. On Monday 23 August, the six workers began picketing outside the factory, and many more walked out. This began an epic struggle for better pay and for union recognition which attracted support from the workers' movement nationally and lasted for nearly two years.

The workforce of the north London photo processing plant was low paid and subject to arbitrary discipline. Many of the workers were Asian women. The bosses had consciously employed recent female migrants because they thought they could be pushed around and exploited more easily. This was a strike by a mainly ethnic minority workforce (80% Asian and 10% Afro-Caribbean) at a time when racist attacks had been on the rise.

'We are lions, Mr Manager'

Asian women in saris may have conjured up for some a 1970s stereotype of meek behaviour, but the strikers showed a confident determination that got a huge response from the ranks of the trade union movement. That spirit is captured in the words of Jayaben Desai, who became a leader of the strike, addressed the boss: "What you are running here is not a factory, it is a zoo. In a zoo there are many types of animals. Some are monkeys who dance to your tune. Others are lions who can bite your head off. We are those lions, Mr Manager."

Throughout the 1970s there had been a rising tide of strikes to improve conditions, and a high level of trade union consciousness. Action by miners, car workers and other traditionally well-organised workers inspired others to get organised. The capitalist class saw this a threat that had to be crushed, and Grunwick became a test case. Sir Keith Joseph, who Tory leader Margaret Thatcher called her closest political friend, explained that Grunwick could be "all our tomorrows" if the workers forced their employer to recognise their union with the help of solidarity action and picketing; it was a 'litmus test.'

Joseph spoke of "red fascism" and other Tory MPs campaigned for the employer, while shady groups such as the 'National Association for Freedom' organised legal support for the bosses as well as covert activities to undermine solidarity action. The Tories drew on the experience of Grunwick when drawing up the anti-union legislation they introduced after they won the 1979 general election, and which still hampers workers' organisation. Labour's recent extremely limited trade union reforms leave key aspects, such as banning solidarity action, in place.

Solidarity action and Militant

In this pre-digital time, negatives from cameras were posted to photo processors such as Grunwick to be developed into printed pictures, which were returned by post. Local postal workers put their jobs on the line to boycott Grunwick in solidarity with the strikers. The company made a partial retreat and said it would engage with the government conciliation service Acas, while also making legal threats. The leaders of the postal workers union responded by instructing their members to drop the boycott.

I remember going from workplace to workplace with other Militant (the forerunner of the Socialist Party) activists to discuss the question of wider solidarity action with local shop stewards. Some wanted to discuss how to publicise the issues with their members, others wanted to organise to get clear official support from their unions. Every union rep I spoke to was keen to support the strikers.

The call of a minority of union leaders, such as Arthur Scargill of the Yorkshire miners, for mass pickets got a huge response. Workers from around London, miners from Yorkshire, Kent and Wales, car workers and engineers from around the country and others thronged the small suburban streets of Dollis Hill.

On one occasion, they not only succeeded in stopping the scabs' bus getting in but also repulsed a cavalry charge by thirty-six mounted police. On one of the biggest pickets, 243 picketers were treated for injuries, including 12 broken bones in a single day.

It is clear that with solidarity action and mass pickets the workers could have won. Willingness to support from fellow workers was demonstrated repeatedly despite the role of their leaders. But union leaders were keen to direct the dispute down legal channels. Roy Grantham, the particularly right-wing leader of the striker's union, APEX, called for pickets to be scaled down and threatened the strike committee with withdrawal of support if they would not agree.

Strike leader Jayaben Desai explained her view: "I have no faith in the legal position. I only believe in the power of the trade union movement. Nothing happened for forty-four weeks. We played cricket. The mass picket brought the issue to a head, and the mass picket will win it."

The Labour government set up a commission of inquiry under Lord Scarman and in return the pickets were called off in mid-July 1977. Two months later the Scarman Inquiry recommended reinstatement of the strikers. Grunwick refused to do this, and the leadership of APEX encouraged hopes that the government conciliation service, Acas, would somehow come up with a solution.

Strikers resisted attempts to wind down the strike, even organising a hunger strike outside the TUC headquarters. Their union's response was to suspend their strike pay for four weeks.

Lack of leadership

The ruling class was determined to crush this movement of highly exploited workers using all the weapons it had, including the law. The employer was vulnerable to solidarity action, the response to calls for mass pickets was huge, there was a Labour government which had been elected on a claim that it would carry out a fundamental and irreversible transfer of wealth to the working class, and trade unions had never been bigger. But the strike was defeated by the trade union leaders determination to force the struggle into a legal straight jacket.

At one point Desai, who was 4 foot 10 inches tall, was arrested for allegedly threatening the owner's son, but there was no enforcement action when the employer was instructed to recognise the union. The experience of Grunwick has many lessons for today and a crucial one is that the law is far from neutral between workers and capital.

Don't blame the kids - kick out the parasites

LINDA TAAFFE
WALTHAM FOREST SOCIALIST PARTY

Whatever next from this Labour government? First, we had more powers to mayors without any talk of funding, then £2 bus fares, and other 'breathing space' measures, all in the name of helping workers a little bit with the cost-of-living crisis - or more aptly the cost-of-capitalism crisis. In other words, do or say anything except face up to the big real threat to working-class people - the billionaires and oligarchs.

NEET stands for those young people not in employment, education or training. Alan Milburn, who has been given the task of investigating this sorry situation and coming up with some answers, has now placed the blame squarely on the NEETs themselves, saying the risk of a child becoming a NEET can be traced back to primary school. Blame it on the kids themselves, or their teachers, or their families!

So how are these little kids going to be identified as a potential NEET. Don't ask teachers to add this to their workload or it might be the straw that breaks the camel's back. It's hard enough to get the right support for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities.

It is not education that decides the jobs' market. In whose hands lies economics? Once upon a time young people with few or no academic qualifications could come out of school and get a job in the shipyards, docks, mines, engineering factories or climb up telegraph poles for BT. The employers financed apprenticeships. That was when Britain was an industrial capitalist system. Then Thatcher broke up public services and closed down industry to make Britain a so-called modern financial services centre; another period of high unemployment.


Labour's plan for youth unemployment? Blame primary school kids!
PHOTO: NUMBER 10/CC

Today we are in a desperate situation with an ailing capitalist system where those with wealth to invest are just not investing. They've got such little faith in their own system. We are now an economy based on property and all its related spin-off services together with some financial services.

For those who are around 20 years old today their babyhood was during the 2007-08 crash when the government decided they were not going to penalise the big company perpetrators but rather bail them out - and make those growing up over the next 20 years, and other workers, pay for them. It's alluded to as the austerity years (yet another euphemism); same with the Covid economic downturn. Spending on schools was frozen for 14 years; youth services axed by £1.3 billion. Now this generation today are poorer than their parents. Meanwhile the rich have got even richer.

Let's bring this tiny handful of the super-rich under public scrutiny by our young unemployed. Open the books. Let the rich explain to those young people living in poverty why the rich need so much wealth; and let us socialists help unemployed young people come to the conclusion that we need a revolution to kick these parasites out of power so we can plan for what is needed by all. Many reforms have been introduced under the threat of revolution.

Let's start with getting a protest demonstration; call on the Trade Union Congress to organise all unions to come onto the streets. Young people can't live like this, with no real future. And us older people are not going to stand by either and let all that we, our own parents and grandparents fought for, be taken away from our grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Obituary: Alan Turner 1948-2026 - a fighter and Marxist to the end

Alan and I joined the Militant, the forerunner of the Socialist Party at the same time in late 1974. Alan already had a good understanding of Marxism, the term we used then was an 'unconscious Trotskyist'. He was simply looking for an organisation which would be the best route to a socialist society.

Unfortunately Alan was plagued with back trouble all his life and this had curtailed his rugby league playing career. He played for Bradford Northern, now Bradford Bulls, but he once said to me that he was "never big enough for a forward or fast enough for a back".

During the fall of the Apartheid regime in South Africa he was one of our leading speakers. He toured Yorkshire branches explaining the latest developments, always explaining the importance of the South African labour movement taking an independent class position, raising the question of a socialist transformation of South Africa to replace Apartheid.

He was branch secretary twice in Leeds. Alan was meticulous in making sure we always had a speaker and meetings were well planned and organised.

After stepping down because of health issues he attended meetings online, and displayed his encyclopaedic knowledge of facts and figures, especially in relation to world debt.

For example, in 2007-08 he told me about the coming crisis in the US housing market and explained what a sub-prime mortgage was, months before the term was used on the TV or in the capitalist press.

Alan was always interested in international events, particularly the work of the Committee for Workers' International (CWI), and after each congress he would demand a full report on how each section was developing.

In his final days in the hospice he was determined to finish the centre page article in issue 1377 on world debt, but kept being interrupted by nurses. With his typical dry stoical sense of humour, he said "I'll finish this article before I die" - and he did, passing away on 4 August, a fighter and a Marxist to the end.

KEVIN PATTISON
LEEDS SOCIALIST PARTY

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Game review: Still Wakes the Deep – workers vs bosses


PHOTO: THE CHINESE ROOM

CIARÁN O'DONOGHUE

Still Wakes the Deep is a 2024 horror video game set on a 1970s oil rig in the North Sea. The game has some particularly scary moments and is pretty masterful in its use of body horror. It has a pretty on-the-nose political message about the disregarding of the safety and welfare of workers by bosses in their pursuit of profit.

The game follows 'Caz' McLeary, an electrician on the rig as the crew accidentally unleashes an 'eldritch' creature dwelling deep in the North Sea. For the sake of the avoidance of too many spoilers, this article will only briefly discuss the very beginning of the game, before the accident.

The player can talk to other crew members about their work on the rig. The player overhears a conversation with 'Trots', the rig's union rep, discussing planning strike action due to how dangerous the rig is.

One of the secondary antagonists is the manager of the rig, Rennick. Rennick prioritises profit over safety and throughout the game the consequences of his mismanagement of the rig become painfully clear.

The political messaging of the game is very commendable and one could also say frighteningly relatable. Although our bosses hopefully won't inadvertently unleash lovecraftian horrors through their pursuit of profit and disregarding of safety, it is a story that is based in the all-too-familiar everyday experience of workers across the world.

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LOBBY THE TUC FOR A TRADE UNION FIGHT AGAINST AUSTERITY

With TUC Congress in Brighton less than a month away, trade union activists will be starting to pore over the congress motions that will form part of the discussion about the industrial and political strategy needed as workers face the brutal cost-of-living squeeze.

Since the Covid pandemic, prices have continued to rise, with food and energy inflation soaring. More pain for workers is on the way as the economy stagnates, and as Trump's instigated crisis in the Middle East threatens yet more instability.

Starmer was forced out of office by the anger and frustration of working-class people, reflected in Labour's electoral wipeout in the May elections.

But it's essential that the union movement doesn't just 'wait for Burnham' but sets out a real emergency programme that makes it clear that workers won't keep paying the price for the bosses' crisis.

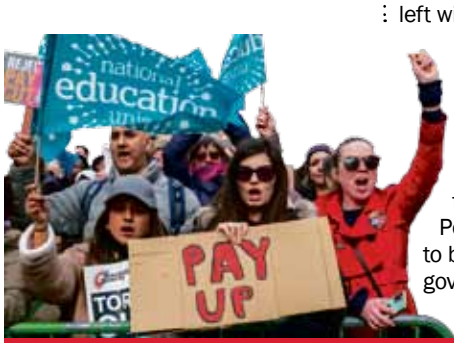
We've got to keep demanding that Labour finally delivers on its promise to scrap the undemocratic 50% strike ballot thresholds. This was reneged on by Starmer, and Burnham's new 'Code of Practice on Workplace Electronic Balloting' makes no mention of it!

As National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) Chair Rob Williams says: "We've had enough of the constant 'too much month left without any money!' At our annual conference at the end of June, the NSSN debated the strategy and programme we need, and unanimously passed an action programme to defend workers from the cost-of-living crisis. Policies such as these need to be demanded of Burnham's government to counter the wishlist of big business, which no doubt is being tabled as you read this.

"That will be outlined by CEOs in skyscrapers in Canary Wharf and the City of London, and in the likes of the Financial Times and the Economist.

"But the NSSN will be bringing hundreds of union reps and members from workplaces to Brighton, along with congress delegates, to listen to militant union leaders and striking workers, and then to discuss with all those attending TUC Congress.

"We are delighted that the PCS motion to TUC Congress '34: Public sector pay' includes key themes in our action programme such as the need for real pay rises to protect workers from the cost-of-living crisis by reopening "talks on public sector pay for 2026-27". And, as part of the strategy to fight for this, "a national Saturday demonstration this autumn for investment in public services, against austerity and for pro-worker policies" and "urges all public sector unions to join a united campaign on pay, and, if needed, to plan for coordinated industrial action to secure real gains for workers".



nationalshopstewardsnetwork
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1pm SUNDAY 13th SEPTEMBER
Holiday Inn, 137 King's Rd (seafront), Brighton, BN1 2JF
LOBBY THE TUC



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WHAT WE STAND FOR: THE SOCIALIST PARTY'S MAIN DEMANDS ►►► see column on p12

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