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the Socialist

Issue 1381 | 10-16 September 2026 | formerly Militant

BUILD A UNITED WORKING-CLASS FIGHTBACK



For a mass union-led demo in defence of our living standards - TUC back the PCS motion

Fight for jobs, homes and services against racist division

WHAT WE THINK

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nationalshop stewardsnetwork

Lobby the TUC

1pm Sunday 13 September

Holiday Inn, 137 King's Rd (seafront), Brighton, BN1 2JF

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

TUC MEETS: UNION-LED FIGHT TO DEFEND JOBS, PAY AND CONDITIONS IS LONG OVERDUE

Back the PCS motion for a weekend demo
For workers' unity against racist division

Socialist Party

WHAT WE THINK

This Sunday, 13 September, Britain's trade union movement comes together in Brighton for its annual congress. The Trades Union Congress (TUC) will be made up of delegates representing 6.5 million workers. It should be a council of war. It is the third Congress since Labour won the general election in 2024. The leaders of the overwhelming majority of TUC-affiliated unions campaigned for Labour in that general election, but the Labour government has not acted in the interests of the working class. Average household income is still below pre-Covid levels while the cost of living has continued to rise. Over seven million low-income households went without essentials in the past six months, and nearly four and a half million went into arrears on their bills.

It is overdue for the trade union movement to show its power and organise a serious fight to defend our jobs, pay and conditions. The National Shop Stewards Network is lobbying the TUC to demand exactly that. In particular, it is campaigning for the motion being moved by the civil servants' union, PCS, for the trade unions to "urgently call a national Saturday demonstration this autumn for investment in public services, against austerity and for pro-worker policies" and for "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."

Workers' unity

That fight should also be linked to a clear call for workers' unity and opposing racist division. Tied to this should also be the development of trade union stewarding organisations, to be mobilised where needed to defend the workers' and anti-racist movements against groups of far-right thugs, which - while still small - are clearly growing in confidence.

No doubt some in the trade union movement will argue that that the action proposed in the PCS motion is unnecessary now we have a new prime minister. But it would be an enormous mistake for the workers' movement to take the approach of 'waiting to see' what the Burnham-led government is going to deliver. Unfortunately, the basic facts are already clear. The new prime minister knows far better than Starmer did how to talk in the language of working-class people, but the fundamental approach of the government has not moved an inch.

John Healey, the new chancellor, was defence minister under Starmer until he resigned. He didn't resign over the cuts to the winter fuel allowance for pensioners or to disability benefits – he supported those – but because he thought military spending wasn't increasing enough. Now as chancellor he is singing exactly the same tune as Rachel Reeves. He has been quick to unequivocally rule out corporation tax rising above its current puny level of 25%. He has promised to "control public spending" but that doesn't apply to weaponry. Instead, he pledged to find the funds needed to meet Starmer's parting promises to increase military spending, even though that means filling a totally unfunded £4.7 billion gap, plus another £8.7 billion in cuts to other departments.

But while Healey sets out to prove how extremely reliable he intends to be in defending the interests of the capitalist class, there are no such firm pledges when it comes to improving working-class peoples' lives. On the contrary, there is nothing to see but U-turns when it comes to policies which would have any significant effect on lifting working-class living standards or rebuilding public services.

Burnham's talk of mass council housebuilding has been dropped. Rent controls have been ruled out, as has an increase in the level at which workers have to start paying tax. Even on the pension triple lock, Healey just ducked the question when asked. Yet capitalist politicians of all stripes have defended the lock for fear of the electoral consequences of doing otherwise. Healey's avoidance of the issue reflects the growing pressure by the capitalist class for the government to break the lock. Meanwhile, Burnham might have claimed to want Labour to stand for workers, but he has followed Starmer and so far left the 50% threshold on strike ballot turnouts on the statute books, a clear attempt to try and limit workers' power.

'Burnham bounce'?

No wonder that the well-known pollster John Curtice has declared that the 'Burnham bounce' in the polls is over. The limited number of council by-elections that have taken place since Burnham was crowned prime minister back that up. Both Labour and the Tories have seen a net fall in their number of councillors, while the Greens and Reform have made net gains.

Of course, at the moment there are still faint hopes that Burnham has to be at least a bit better than Starmer, perhaps particularly among trade union activists. Most of the national trade union leaders are doing all they can to fuel those hopes. However, the reality is that it is only by the trade union movement launching a determined struggle for working-class interests will any serious steps to improve our living standards be won. The TUC should act, but if it doesn't then a 'coalition of the willing' trade unions will be needed to spearhead a fightback.

That also poses the urgent need for the workers' movement to launch a discussion on how our class can have a political voice. At last year's Unite policy conference a motion for the union to "discuss" its "relationship with Labour" was passed almost unanimously. Beginning that discussion is now extremely urgent. Like other unions, the Unite executive voted to endorse Burnham for leader - although the Socialist Party and others did not support this move - and many Unite members will already be starting to think that in reality he is, like Starmer before him, acting in the interest of the capitalist elite rather than the working-class majority.

If the workers' movement does not act independently, putting its own stamp on events, other forces will step into the vacuum. Understandably many trade unionists sighed with relief when the 'Burnham bounce' put Labour ahead of Reform in opinion polls for the first time in over a year. The deluge of mainstream press stories about Reform's sleazy money grubbing have also helped, and are also a demonstration that the majority of the capitalist elite would prefer a Burnham-led government to have some breathing space, confident he will use it to defend their system. But any government that does so, including Burnham's, will suffer the same fate in the polls as Starmer sooner or later.

The increase in support for Reform in the recent period includes voters from different backgrounds, but has been highest - at 39% - among workers in 'routine and manual jobs'. The trade union movement could cut across that if it was prepared to launch a workers' party that put forward a socialist programme in the interests of the majority. Remember that in 2017, when under Jeremy Corbyn Labour had an anti-austerity programme, around a million voters for Reform's predecessor UKIP switched to Labour.

The potential for a genuine workers' party to gain mass support has been demonstrated repeatedly over recent years. Most recently, just over a year ago more than 800,000 people signed up to support the declaration for a new party from Jeremy Corbyn and Zarah Sultana. Unfortunately, that opportunity was squandered. Your Party, as it is now called, has not met its potential as a result of a top-down approach and a failure to orientate towards the trade unions. Those trade union leaders who stood aside last summer rather than give a clear lead for a new workers' party, are also responsible.

Holborn and St Pancras election

The result of this failure to act is the situation in the Holborn and St Pancras by-election triggered by Starmer's resignation as an MP, taking place on 8 October 2026. In the 2024 general election Andrew Feinstein, who was then already part of the Your Party pre-discussions and later of its launch, stood and got 18% of the votes, while the Greens got 10%. This time Feinstein has ruled himself out of standing, instead backing the likely Green Party candidate and party leader, Zack Polanski. Jeremy Corbyn has been MP in a neighbouring constituency for decades, yet Your Party is not 'a contender' in the by-election.

No doubt voters in Holborn and St Pancras wanting to protest against austerity will vote for the Greens on this occasion, and it is possible they could win the seat – demonstrating the extreme weakness of the Burnham bounce. However, the trade unions simply backing the Green Party does not, in the view of the Socialist, represent the way forward. The Greens are not a workers' party, not even having the same commitment to socialism in their rules as many trade unions do, and certainly not a broad socialist programme to transform society in the interests of the working class. Nor do they have a democratic structure through which trade unions could decide policy or hold party leaders to account. Building a workers' party does not mean deciding which political 'brand' the trade unions should fund, but instead the trade unions fighting for their own political voice.

What matters now, however, is to urgently begin a discussion on these issues throughout the trade union movement. That does not mean retiring to the 'debating chamber,' however. It should be combined with serious action, starting with a Saturday demonstration this autumn to launch a long overdue struggle against austerity and in defence of workers' rights, calling for workers' unity not racist division.



PHOTO: NICK CLARE

Dover far-right protest - workers' movement must respond



PHOTO: MADDIE ROONEY

ERIC SEGAL
KENT AND EAST SUSSEX SOCIALIST PARTY

Workers on the ferries, docks, railways, immigration services and border force in the Port of Dover carry out serious and crucial work. Their actual work can be dangerous and they have the right to work in a safe environment. The hate fuelled firebombing attack on a Dover immigration centre in 2022 remains fresh in our minds.

So it was a shock when hundreds of far-right protesters dressed in black and wearing black balaclavas and scarves marched through Dover on Saturday 5 September, blocking the roads leading to the Port of Dover, disrupting travel from Canterbury and Folkestone, demanding an end to immigration by small boats. A video of the event was shared online by far-right agitator Tommy Robinson threatening: "It's time! Protect our country!.. This is our warning!"

The police locally said that they had been unaware of the action which they classed as 'spontaneous.' Mike Tapp, the right-wing Labour local MP and a former immigration minister who is from a military intelligence background, said "…in this instance it would appear that the police didn't know about it". Contrary to his comments, it appears there was information that a mobilisation of the far right was going to take place in Dover and that this information was shared with the police.

Compare the treatment of the far-right mob by police and authorities with their treatment of peaceful protesters expressing support for Palestine Action, or the use of force and violence to break up climate protests by groups such as Just Stop Oil, for example.

Workers in South East Kent have the capability to defend ourselves from the far right, as we showed in October 1992 when a threatened rally by the Nazi-sympathising group 'Blood and Honour' in Folkestone was blocked by a well-organised campaign and demonstration of an estimated 300 trade unionists and people from the local community. That working-class campaign led by trade unions, including the rail unions, drove the fascists out of Folkestone for a significant period.

The trade union and workers' movement must organise to ensure that our members and communities are protected and defended. Workers in South East Kent have a proud history of fighting the far right, that needs to be built upon and linked with a struggle to defend working-class living standards.

Eye on the Greens

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

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



BRISTOL GREEN PARTY/CC

Lambeth unions demand Green councillors fight all cuts

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBER DELEGATES TO LAMBETH TRADES COUNCIL

Lambeth Trades Council was visited by Lambeth Green councillor and cabinet member Michael Chessum on 7 September, unveiling the Green council's new anti-austerity campaign 'Services Worth Fighting For,' set be launched two days later.

Michael explained that Lambeth council was facing 'agreed savings' of £53 million by 2030, pushed through by the previous Labour administration, and an additional cumulative shortfall of £93 million. The council's strategy: "To tell the truth to Lambeth residents, that we need to win more money from central government." The trades council was asked to support the campaign, including a public launch meeting on 15 October. Ultimately no decision was taken.

Any steps by Lambeth council to publicly campaign for more money from central government will be welcomed by thousands of working-class and young people who expect the Green Council to act differently from previous austerity administrations.

Lambeth Socialist Party members who are delegates to the trades council welcomed Michael's attendance but stressed the importance of the trades council maintaining its independent fighting platform, at this stage.

This is especially the case given that at the last trades council meeting, the Green council leader Martin Abrams refused to commit to not making further cuts. This is contrary to the democratically agreed policy of the three largest trade unions in local government – Unison, GMB and Unite – for councils to set no-cuts budgets as a means to mobilise a mass fightback for the funding needed.

Michael said that the Green council wants to 'give over' this anti-austerity campaign to the local trade union movement.

People's Budget

Much more important for the trades council to set the date for its own People's Budget meeting - bringing together delegates from local trade union branches, workplaces, community campaigns and youth groups to hammer out a needs budget. The Green councillors would then be faced with the decision on whether or not to support the demands of the workers' movement, fighting for the funding we need, starting with setting a needs budget.

Unfortunately, Michael concluded the discussion by saying that "neither the dented shield, nor the strategy of adopting illegal no-cuts budgets is the way forward".

But no-cuts budgets aren't illegal. It's the norm for councillors to use reserves and borrowing powers - as they have done for the best part of two decades while also wielding the axe against local services!

The Greens are in the leadership of five councils in London and take part in the administrations of 39 nationally. If those councils collaborated in taking a no-cuts approach, including pooling their reserves and borrowing powers for example, Andy Burnham would come under enormous pressure to cough up funds.

Unfortunately at this stage, the Lambeth Greens' anti-austerity strategy amounts to campaigning publicly against cuts, while making excuses that their elected politicians have no choice but to put them through.

How can we defeat austerity?

But how is that a means to win the confidence of trade unionists, workers, community campaigns and young people? Good luck trying to mobilise trade unionists and the wider community to back you up when you're increasing their council tax, rents and cutting already collapsing local services further!

The Greens' victory in the May elections could still be the start of a genuine anti-austerity fight, as many workers and young people across the borough are desperately hoping for.

But with the budget setting process fast approaching in January, as things stand the Greens will be a new administration presiding over cuts using more or less the same excuses Labour before them made.

It's vital that the trade union movement in Lambeth and nationally prepares for the struggle needed to defeat austerity in local government, no matter which party presides over it, including urgently taking steps towards forming its own working-class, anti-cuts political voice.

Hackney anti-austerity summit meets

Taking place after the Socialist goes to press, Green-run Hackney Council has organised an 'anti-austerity' summit, to which Socialist Party members have been delegated by their trade union bodies. (see 'Anti-Austerity Summit hosted by Hackney council' at socialistparty.org.uk)

Socialist Party members are taking the proposal that the summit "Reconvenes after the 28 October Budget, with the aim of bringing together representatives of at least ten councils committed to refusing to pass on cuts and to maintaining services, alongside delegates from trade union executives and branches, to plan a coordinated national campaign to win the money back from central government."

School walkouts 'Down Under', we can too!
Join the international youth strike on 20 November

TOM GIBSON
YORKSHIRE SOCIALIST STUDENTS

August saw thousands of students walk out of schools, colleges and universities in Australia against the reactionary right-populist politician Pauline Hanson.

Hanson uses dog-whistle politics against minority communities, particularly the Muslim and trans communities, while portraying herself as the only alternative to the establishment's hated two-party system; a familiar pattern.

Despite a recent rise in the polls, she is very unpopular with younger Australians, the majority of whom are repulsed by her reactionary social views and anti-working class economic policies.

The walkouts were organised by the National Union of Students in response to increasingly repulsive rhetoric from Hanson, and took place all across Australia. Thousands turned out, despite the 'Labor' government condemning the protests, summing up how the so-called 'progressive' capitalist politicians view actual resistance to far-right politics. This criticism did not deter the students, nor did Hanson's asinine comments about the students' action being funded by China.

On 20 November, students internationally will be walking out, protesting against the symptoms of the capitalist system: war, inequality, bigotry and climate disaster. Socialist Students is building for walkouts in Britain to be as big as possible.

The walkouts in Australia are yet another inspiring example of youth taking action worldwide.



JLR job cuts – Nationalise!

Jaguar Land Rover (JLR) has announced a whopping 4,000 job cuts over the next two years. The Labour government's response has been to say that they're in "close contact" with the company but ruled out "any form of bailout". So much for Burnham's 'greater public control.' And speaking down the road from JLR, Chancellor John Healey backed 'growth' but then ducked questions about JLR, grumbling about "fiscal instability".

But the lives of the estimated 250,000 people directly or indirectly employed by JLR, and all their families and the wider community, shouldn't be cast adrift in the sea of instability. Instead, JLR should be nationalised under democratic workers' control and management – real public control – to safeguard jobs and the lives of the city that relies on JLR, from lorry drivers to security guards, factory workers, engineers, and maintenance staff, who could be next following this cull of head office workers.


LAND ROVER MENA/CC

End draconian school 'exclusions' – Fight for fully funded services

ALFIE
HARLOW SOCIALIST STUDENTS

The percentage of pupils being placed in 'internal exclusions' has almost trebled from 5% to 13%, according to Arbor, the profit-making school management information system used by school staff to track student attendance, performance and sanctions. Internal exclusions are similar in practice to traditional suspensions, however students remain at school in separate isolation rooms, away from their peers. Students spend hours on their own doing work in solitary confinement, with no one to talk to, no teaching and bare walls to look at.

Over double the amount of students being placed in exclusion come from poorer backgrounds (22% compared to 10%); this demonstrates the social effect that poverty, and by extension the capitalist race to the bottom has on students and young people. Social services, youth clubs and other services are all facing further cuts by the Labour government, already decimated by over a decade of austerity. These cuts put young people in a situation where their needs are not being met, causing them to act out and be placed in exclusion.

The solution to this rise would be to increase the funding to both schools and youth services. With this funding, schools will be able to hire more teachers and teaching assistants to provide students with the support they need to learn and develop; decrease class sizes so more time can be spent on individual students; and raise existing teachers' salaries to increase retention rates. Youth services will be able to support young people with their personal lives if necessary, and provide them with clubs and social groups to spend their spare time in and use their energy for something productive.

On 20 November Socialist Students is part of an international youth walkout to "Fight for our futures, not their wars". When all the bosses' politicians can offer us are education cuts, climate change, and a drive towards war and destruction, we are fighting back. If you want to get organised in your school, college or university, go to www.socialiststudents.org.uk

Reform dodgy donor sting – all the parties are at it

CLINT HATCHER
BRISTOL SOCIALIST PARTY

Another Reform scandal is under way as two leading members of Reform step down pending an investigation. This comes after the recent release of an undercover Channel 4 investigation into Reform's dodgy political donations. James Orr and Dan Jukes's exit out of Reform after being caught out by undercover journalists posing as wealthy Americans. They were caught on film discussing plans for how money from a fake foreign donor could be funnelled into the party through his son.

All the establishment parties have piled on Reform following this potential breach of electoral law. All the establishment parties still do however receive eye-watering donations from rich backers. The Socialist Party holds no truck with political parties courting these uber-wealthy members of the capitalist class, wherever they are from.

We have recently seen Lord Sainsbury, the businessman who has given millions to Labour since the Blair and Brown years – pausing donations when Corbyn was in charge – making another massive donation to the Labour Party. His latest donation has coincidentally lined up with Burnham's recent push for people out of work to do some unpaid shifts at the supermarket Sainsbury's. Supermarkets are raking in greater profits year by year and now they will get a workforce paid for by our taxes. And yet the working class faces a crisis of living costs, climate breakdown and conflicts erupting all over the world.

For too long, working-class people have only ever had the choice of establishment parties and Reform is no different. We need a party fit for the working class, where MPs only earn the wage of a skilled worker and we have the right of recall to get rid of them when dodgy dealings like this take place. But this recent debacle with Reform is not the first or the last time it will happen as we currently live in a society where it's part and parcel for politicians to be 'bought' by the ruling class, through gifts and direct donations. We need a mass party that represents our interests, a new workers' party armed with a socialist programme that can take the power out of the hands of the super-wealthy and their politicians and put the working class in the driving seat.

Help fund a real fightback
DONATE
socialistparty.org.uk/donate

If you wanted to get an idea how the big bosses use the media and polling companies to get the people they want into power, the Channel 4 documentary gives a good example. Reform officials brag about how good value £30,000 worth of polls were when they get splashed across the front pages of the Times and Telegraph newspapers. A pollster is filmed explaining how journalists are delighted to get a good exclusive, not interested in the source of a poll's funding, as it is "good copy".

Channel 4's exposé centres around arrangements to hide the source of money commissioning polls that are favourable to Reform. To allow big business owners to give their support to the right-wing party, without being exposed as doing so. The millionaires and billionaires backing Reform, and all the other establishment parties, aren't doing so for charity – they will expect a return with business-friendly reforms when in power.



GAGE SKIDMORE/CC

What role could a left-led PCS union play?

DAVID SEMPLE
PCS DEPUTY PRESIDENT, PERSONAL CAPACITY

Keir Starmer was booted out due to his immense unpopularity following the Labour government's continuation of Tory austerity. Despite his pronouncements, in reality Andy Burnham, with the backing of all the Blairites and Starmerites in the Labour Party, is offering essentially the same.

There is a new left leadership elected to the National Executive Committee (NEC) of the PCS civil service union. What potential role can a left leadership play in this situation?

Few workers have had pay rises to even keep up with the rise in prices. For this reason, members of multiple public sector unions have rejected the pay offers made in local government, to teachers and to civil servants. Andy Burnham's government is continuing the attempt to cut tens of thousands of jobs in the civil service, and the NHS, school and universities face a huge funding crisis.

Rejection and rhetoric from leaders are not enough, however. The unions need to gear up for a fight. The left majority on the PCS NEC can play a critical role.

Left-led PCS role in 2011

In March 2011, at the beginning of the Tory-LibDem government's savage austerity programme, the biggest trade union demonstration in British history took place, three-quarters-of-a-million strong, called by the TUC (Trades Union Congress). It laid the basis for a strike of two million public sector workers on 30 November.

At that stage the PCS had a left leadership, both the NEC and general secretary. That meant PCS, alongside other left-led unions, was able to lead the call, putting demands on the TUC to act. It was also able to act as part of a 'coalition of the willing,' following the March demonstration with a strike in June with the education unions (NUT, ATL and UCU), which helped to build the pressure more widely towards the massive action on 30 November.

PCS potentially could play that role again.

TUC Congress meets 13-16 September. Motion P34 on the agenda is submitted by the PCS. It seeks to challenge the government industrially, by coordinating campaign action, and by demanding the TUC calls a national Saturday demonstration in the Autumn, to mobilise workers against Labour's austerity and for the funding we need.

Passing this motion at TUC, and mobilising a major campaign in the Autumn, would put enormous pressure on Burnham and the Labour government to offer concessions to workers.

This is not the view of major parts of the leadership of the trade unions, who want to 'give Burnham time.' Time to do what? Burnham hadn't promised much to workers.



PCS and Prospect members on strike at the Victoria and Albert museum - see facing page PHOTO: ROB WILLIAMS

Fighting for a real lead from PCS

Even getting this motion onto the TUC agenda was a battle within the PCS union. Because although there is a left majority NEC, the general secretary, Fran Heathcote, has not so far wanted to build a national fight that would challenge Burnham's government.

Socialist Party members on the NEC rewrote a motion proposed by the general secretary, to include concrete proposals for coordinated action and a national demo.

This approach, of delay, of proposing nothing concrete, of shying away from a fight, has been ubiquitous in PCS, especially since 2020 during Covid, when the union's leadership under Mark Serwotka and Fran Heathcote shelved a national campaign on pay, jobs and pensions in favour of 'national unity' with the Tories. During the 2022-23 strike wave, the biggest action in Britain for 30 years, PCS called very little national action and settled prematurely for an inadequate pay offer.

Since Labour won the general election, this determination to go soft on the government, instead of demanding (with industrial action) that the government go soft on our members, is all the more visible.

Since May, Fran Heathcote has tried to derail the newly elected left NEC. Despite the PCS conference and then the NEC agreeing a national campaign back in May, the general secretary published a misleading web article celebrating the 3.5% average pay rise offered by Labour, then collapsed the NEC with a walkout on 11 June. The NEC got back up and running in July, but since then, everything has been a grind (see socialistparty.org.uk for reports).

Despite this, the left-majority NEC remains committed to PCS conference policy of launching a major campaign, including statutory ballot, on pay, pensions, jobs and to fend off the attacks now besetting whole swathes of the civil service, and calls on Fran Heathcote to do the same.

This battle at the top of the PCS matters, so that we can help build the fight in the public sector and working class more widely.

Union coordination

The NEC has instructed the general secretary to contact other unions, and to seek to work through bodies like the TUC's Public Sector Liaison Group and the TU Coordinating Group of unions. The motion to TUC is the first real effort to do this.

We must appeal to the other unions to join forces – and it is clear that there is something of a mood, with the leadership of the National Education Union being overturned at an executive meeting, under the pressure of the members who want a fight. Members in the University and College Union too are pushing their leaders for a campaign. As well as actively mobilising our members, our left NEC must publicly seek to work with the other unions – even calling a meeting of those who want to fight across the unions.

Political strategy

In addition to preparation to deploy industrial muscle, there must also be a political strategy.

PCS has a parliamentary group of MPs, who get briefings from the union on what's happening at the coalface of the civil service and in devolved and privatised areas. Some of these ask parliamentary questions on the union's behalf, to highlight problems or matters about which members care. Some have consistently campaigned for the union's key demands.

This is important, and we should continue to work with those who support our demands. The NEC could call all those MPs in the parliamentary group, and any others who say they are on our side, to a discussion with the NEC, where we lay out our union's demands, to ensure we have a parliamentary group that fights for PCS policies. A group like that could voice workers' struggles in parliament and that would be a step forward in helping Labour MPs to feel the hot breath of workers down the back of their necks.

But that alone won't get the job done. At PCS conference 2026, in May, delegates agreed that, if the government won't implement pro-worker policies, including a definitive end to austerity and social programmes like housing that could cut across the rise of the far right, then PCS and other unions should call a conference to discuss the building of a political vehicle for workers.

If the government won't shift on our demands – including for restoration of lost trade union rights and terms and conditions – they are continuing the austerity agenda. It is clear that Labour cannot protect us from the far right, if they cannot protect workers from the cost-of-living crisis.

We should offer Andy Burnham and Louise Haigh, the new Cabinet Office minister, every opportunity for a serious discussion about how to support half a million civil servants, plus devolved and privatised workers, that work for the government.

But the PCS national executive must gear up members, gird our allies in other unions, and we must fight – industrially and politically. The struggle in PCS against those that obstruct that aim is an essential part of that fight.

> **In 2011, PCS had a left leadership, both the NEC and general secretary. It was able to lead the call, putting demands on the TUC and acting as part of a 'coalition of the willing'**

> **As well as actively mobilising our members, our left NEC must seek to work with the other unions**

PCS and Prospect strike at the V&A museum - for wages and water!

ALEXIS EDWARDS
LONDON PCS ARMS SECRETARY, PERSONAL CAPACITY

What a brilliant, enthusiastic bunch of young workers, striking for the modest demands of a real living wage - and water!

Along with two other members of the PCS London retired members' (ARMS) committee, I took solidarity greetings to the picket lines at V&A East (one of the sites of the Victoria and Albert museum). This is joint action by PCS and Prospect unions, fighting for pay that keeps pace with the cost of living, Real Living Wage accreditation, and safe working conditions.

There were over 40 on the picket line at the Storehouse site, chanting and dancing, with Dolly Parton's '9 to 5' ringing out on the sound system and their beautiful William Morris-themed banner in the background. Meanwhile, the director was hovering across the road photographing the picket line.

At the Storehouse site, strikers heard from chair of the National Shop Stewards Network Rob Williams, and Chip Hamer, PCS National Executive Committee member and also Culture Group Executive Committee, known to many as the 'Poet on the Picket Line.'

Rob said he had heard mention of management making 'welfare calls' to staff. If there was genuine concern, they would ensure safe working conditions and access to water during excessive heat!

Chip reported on the PCS national cost-of-living campaign and that the majority on the NEC is pushing to make this happen.

We then moved on to join strikers from The Young V&A, chanting all the way - they heard us coming! The rally heard the PCS and Prospect general secretaries, but by far the most impressive and passionate speeches came from the strikers themselves.

All these sites were closed and staff were told to report to the V&A at South Kensington, where members are, at this stage, taking action short of strike. Following the two-day strike, action short of strike will continue indefinitely at all sites.

- On the Saturday at V&A East, both Rob Williams and Adam Gillman from Socialist Students addressed the strike rally

Unite bus workers win 'hot buses' victory

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBER IN UNITE

Unite members at Arriva London North have won a huge victory following strike action to protest the appalling temperatures on buses.

Unite national lead officer Onay Kasab said: "This is an excellent win for our members, who stood together on picket lines to fight for and win an agreement that means that drivers are not simply expected to sweat it out. Unite members have once again shown the value of collective union action."

Hot working temperatures are not a new problem. But this is the first time that bus workers in London have taken strike action and won a groundbreaking agreement.

It is also an example of how trade union action, through strike action, can fight the impact of climate change in the workplace. This win provides the platform for a campaign for a wider debate about the role of unions and climate change, while at the same time making a huge difference to workers.

The key parts of the deal are that drivers will be able to return vehicles after 35 minutes of driving, should the air-cooling system or air-conditioning not be working. At present, drivers are just expected to drive on. Should drivers feel unable to return the vehicle to the depot, they can park up after 35 minutes.

Defective buses will not be put back out on routes until repaired. At present, when they are returned, buses have simply been allocated to another driver.

The agreement includes a written commitment for all buses to be fitted with air-conditioning by May 2027.

The 35 minutes only applies to diesel/hybrid buses. Electric vehicles have been accepted as only needing a few minutes. Importantly, the agreement also covers cold buses – at present drivers must do an hour. The agreement will mean auditing and repairs carried out through the year.

Drivers have made clear that they have no trust in the employer. Further, the target date of May 2027 for the retro-fitting is a tight one. For both reasons, the union is not cancelling the strike mandate.

While the strike dates already given have been lifted following the members agreeing the deal, the strike mandate remains for another eleven months, so that should the employer renege on the agreement, then ten days' notice can be given for further strikes (rather than a reballot).

The task now will be to use this brilliant win by calling an industrial combine of all Unite bus reps, to take up the issues of temperatures and the wider driver-fatigue issues. And continue to campaign for buses to be brought back into public ownership.

But in the immediate, this must be recognised as a significant win and one that would not have been achieved without strike action.



PHOTO: EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Lockwood Haulage workers at Ardagh Glass strike against 1% pay offer



PHOTO: ALI MANSFIELD

ALI MANSFIELD
YORKSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY

Forklift drivers and machine operators at Ardagh Glass, employed by Lockwood Haulage, have begun all-out strike action. The workers, organised in Unite, have rejected a pay offer of just 1% after three years without any increase in pay, and are asking for 2.5% to keep up with the rising cost of living.

Lockwood management plead poverty, despite the company recently acquiring West Transport Group and purchasing a majority interest in freight company S&R Smith and Son.

Management demands that any pay increase be 'self-funded,' ie paid for by attacks to terms and conditions. There have been threats to reduce sick pay from 90% to just 45%.

Workers on the picket line complained of management interference since being transferred to Lockwood from their previous employer, GXO, last year in a 'TUPE' deal meant to protect terms and conditions.

The workers had to go on strike to win union recognition after Lockwood took over and it's clear why the bosses didn't want it. Individual workers have been put under pressure to sign a new contract which would undercut TUPE protections, clearly preparing for further attacks on conditions.

Lockwood management have shown they undervalue the workers' skill and expertise; this was graphically demonstrated on day two of the strike, when staff they recruited at short notice to cover the strikers' work dropped multiple pallets loaded up with glass bottles, causing havoc and sending collection lorries away empty-handed.

SPS Technology workers fight on pay

STEVE SCORE
LEICESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

"The shareholders make millions from us, and we get bananas on a Tuesday!" said one of the striking workers on the picket line at SPS Technology in Leicester. He was referring to the fact that they regularly have fruit handed out on a Tuesday by the company.

On Friday 4 September, Unite members walked out on indefinite strike. By the second day of action the management had come up with an improved offer, which was voted on by members in a ballot that afternoon.

Sean Smith, senior shop steward, said: "We were out trying to secure a fair pay award. We had been negotiating since October 2025, but there was a lot of obstruction from the senior management.

"We got 4% for 2026, and another for 2027. But this isn't just about money. We're still looking for an agreement from the business to actively engage with the shop floor to address the issues that we've got across the site.

"And we've also sought agreements on protections for workers when it comes to implementation of new technology, AI and automation. We're happy to pick up the new tools and keep making stuff with pride in the skills we have. But we would like the business to also support us."



PHOTO: STEVE SCORE

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PHOTO: PUBLIC DOMAIN

UKRAINE WAR: A NEW PHASE SHAPED BY A MULTIPOLAR WORLD

SEAN FIGG
COMMITTEE FOR A WORKERS' INTERNATIONAL (CWI)

The war on Iran has again shifted the global context within which the war in Ukraine is being fought. The disruption caused to global oil supplies delivered a substantial financial shot in the arm to the Russian state as the oil price soared. Some sanctions were temporarily suspended to allow more Russian oil to flow into the world economy. Additionally, the massive aerial bombardment of Iran depleted US munitions that otherwise might have made their way to Ukraine.

Since March, the Ukrainian military has been targeting Russian oil infrastructure with an increased intensity. The likely aim, given the timing, was to cancel-out the Putin regime's 'Iran war dividend' and prevent it feeding through to the Ukrainian frontlines. The new intensity of the Ukrainian military's drone attacks on Russia is unprecedented in the four-and-a-half-year-old war and signals a new phase in the conflict.

Alongside the changed global context, the escalation in the aerial war is linked to the intractable situation that has developed in the ground war. Russia's military momentum has slowed in the course of this year to very incremental territorial gains. Grinding to a virtual halt in one theatre, the Russian military has also increased the intensity of its aerial bombardments of Kyiv and other cities. At least 437 civilians were killed in Ukraine in July alone. This is the highest number of civilian deaths since May 2022.

The Ukrainian military's targets inside Russia have recently expanded to include the warehouses and distribution hubs of the massive online retailers Wildberries and Ozon. According to Reuters, these two companies control nearly 70% of the online retail market in Russia. In 2025, this amounted to combined sales of over US$121 billion.

The Ukrainian military's shift in targets is an attempt to transform the political stakes for the Putin regime by disrupting day-to-day civilian life across Russia to a degree not yet seen. The Zelensky regime will be hoping to stoke a political crisis in Russia. Domestically, Putin has insisted on referring to his invasion of Ukraine as a "special military operation". The new Ukrainian tactics make it virtually impossible to maintain this fiction, already strained beyond credibility.

The war has dragged on longer than World War One with no end in sight. The scale of army recruitment, conscription and returning casualties has already touched every corner of Russia. As of June, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) estimates two million Ukrainians and Russians killed, wounded and missing. Russian military deaths are estimated at over half-a-million. This is three times more than Ukrainian military deaths, showing the cold calculations of the Putin regime and its meat-grinder tactics. Now, Ukraine's attacks on Russia's oil infrastructure have forced petrol rationing to be introduced in and around Moscow. Civilians filling up their cars face long queues in some areas. But motorists are not the only ones facing disruption. Wildberries and Ozon have an estimated 121 million 'active' customers and over one million small businesses trade via the two platforms.

The growing gulf between the regime's rhetoric and the reality of living in a country engaged in a major war can discredit and undermine it further. Growing mass dissatisfaction can increase the pressure on the ruling elite, even without major protests developing, and open splits in the regime. In such a situation, fearing for its survival, the Putin regime can look to escalate the war, or threaten escalation, in the hope of diverting attention, rallying support around the regime and restoring its authority.

The threat of escalation has been a recurring feature of the Ukraine war. So-called 'red lines' have been tested multiple times by both sides. 'Transgressions' are then assessed by the warring sides for their impact on their ability to continue fighting. As long as this is not fatally compromised, the 'red lines' have been allowed to shift. This recurring 'brinkmanship' is a dangerous and not entirely predictable feature of the war.

Splits in the 'Allies'

The attempt in November 2025 by US president Trump to impose a '28-point peace plan' - drafted with some degree of collaboration with the Putin regime - was dead before the year's end. The Zelensky regime refused to consider it, backed and encouraged by the pro-war European powers (the 'Coalition of the Willing'), especially Britain, France and Germany. As a result, the proposal was substantially revised and the '28-points' became '20-points.' This made it unacceptable to the Putin regime.

Ironically, the very fact that the Trump administration spent its first months in office calling into question US imperialism's commitment to the NATO military alliance prepared the ground for the European ruling classes' later refusal to cooperate. This forced the European capitalist powers to develop a more independent policy toward the Ukraine war. Initially they were reluctant to formalise the schism with US imperialism, at least over the Ukraine war. But having been forced down this road, the European powers were better prepared to defy its unreliable 'ally' when it demanded they limit their specific class ambitions in the Ukraine war. These are not identical to the interests of US imperialism. Ultimately, they flow from the particular crisis of European capitalism as it falls further behind US capitalism and China.

For the European ruling classes, as much as for the Russian capitalist oligarchy, the Ukraine war is being fought to decide who will occupy first position in exploiting the workforce, resources and markets of Ukraine and the countries on Russia's borders, as well as commanding the geostrategic advantage in the region. These are the real war aims for which the working classes of Europe are expected to sacrifice their living standards, and that Ukrainian and Russian soldiers are expected to sacrifice their lives.

The huge concessions to the Putin regime that Trump's '28-point peace plan' contained threatened to tie the hands of the European capitalist classes for years to come. The changes between the original plan and the '20-point' revision - on the size of the Ukrainian military, territorial concessions, NATO and EU membership - reveal the class calculations being made behind the scenes.

Crisis of US imperialism

Despite all of Trump's bluster, US imperialism has in practice found it impossible to implement a fundamental change in its policy toward the Ukraine war. During its eighteen months in office, the Trump administration has maintained the sanctions introduced under the previous Biden administration. In October 2025, possibly as a bargaining chip for the then-soon-to-be-revealed '28-point peace plan,' it introduced its own sanctions for the first time. The White House supported another raft of sanctions in July. The nearly US$200 billion agreed by the political representatives of US imperialism under Biden has continued to be disbursed.

The biggest change in US policy on the Ukraine war under Trump has been to shift the military costs to other NATO members - first and foremost the European powers. US weapons continue to flow to Ukraine but are now paid for via the Prioritized Ukraine Requirements List (PURL) managed by the US Department of Defense. The industrial, technological and military muscle of US imperialism remains firmly behind the continuation of the Ukraine war.

US imperialism is caught in a snare. Every move by the Trump administration to reinforce US imperialism's declining global position pulls it tighter. Notwithstanding fleeting 'successes,' such as the intervention in Venezuela earlier this year, the decline of US imperialism is accelerating. This has been confirmed again by the quagmire into which Trump has marched US imperialism in the Middle East with its war on Iran.

SOCIALISM TODAY



Monthly magazine of the Socialist Party *September issue includes..*

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The Trump administration's policy toward the Ukraine war has strengthened the multipolar character of world capitalism. Despite the crisis of European capitalism, the European powers have been forced to re-emerge as a more independent pole on the world stage. Their policy on the Ukraine war is an open-ended determination to continue it. Massive funding has been made available to the Zelensky regime to make this possible. Western capitalist media abounds with reports of plucky Ukrainian defence 'start-ups' building drones and helping their country 'innovate' its way to victory. However, it was the massive support of the European powers that made the Zelensky regime's unprecedented new scale of aerial attacks possible.

This is still an unfolding process. The European powers are still highly reliant on US-produced weapons and technology in the short-term. But the direction of travel is clear. Trump's dismal failure to make good on his boast to end the Ukraine war "in a day" upon entering office has shattered any lingering pretences that US imperialism can unilaterally force other capitalist powers - whether enemies or allies - to tow its line. There is no longer a power capable of playing the role of an unchallengeable global policeman. Trump is reminded of this every day that the crisis in the Middle East continues and every day that the war in Ukraine continues.

Class struggle

Given the imperialist character of the war, any peace will be an imperialist 'peace' without the independent intervention of the working class. In Trotsky's 1934 work, War and the Fourth International, he pointed out that "…a modern war between capitalist nations carries with it a war of classes within each of these nations…" This remains true in the current era of capitalism. The absence of independent mass working-class parties armed with an independent class programme on war does not mean the class struggle is not central to perspectives for the war in Ukraine.

In 2025, protests in multiple Ukrainian cities forced the Zelensky government to shelve reforms that were perceived as weakening anti-corruption safeguards. Protests developed again last month when Defence Minister Mykhailo Fedorov, a figure perceived to be firm in combating corruption, was dismissed by Zelensky. These protests were not huge, with neither movement bringing much more than 10,000 onto the streets on any particular day. That they took place at all under a regime of martial law in which strikes and street protests are outlawed is significant however. This is not the only dissent in Ukraine. National Police figures recorded 341 attacks on army recruiters in 2025, compared with just five in 2022. A staggering 620 attacks were recorded in the first four months of 2026.

In Russia, the Putin regime has sharply tightened repression, largely pushing opposition underground. However, in 2022 the initial response to the so-called "special military operation" saw protests in multiple cities. Other protests, for example around conscription, and other symbolic signals of opposition have also remained a feature. In the final analysis, the Bonapartist character of the Putin regime reflects its narrowing social base.

> **The CWI campaigns in all existing workers' organisations, such as trade unions, for the adoption of an independent working-class policy toward the war**

The European powers' militarisation policies will generally be funded through attacks on working-class living standards via cuts to public services and jobs. Countries without military conscription are openly debating its reintroduction. In other cases, incremental steps are already being taken toward it, as in the case of Germany. This is setting the scene for major class battles in the months and years ahead. The already deep polarisation in US society is set to deepen, and the class struggle will, sooner or later, further escalate there. All of this will impact the ruling classes' war policies.

Programme

The role of Marxists in this situation is to link the impact of the class struggle on the ruling classes to a definite and independent working class programme. This needs to answer the question, 'war or peace in Ukraine?' from an internationalist and class perspective, making clear demands on the belligerent capitalist governments in order to mobilise the working class against the war. Without an organised working-class movement with definite demands, the ruling classes will be able to manoeuvre endlessly to deceive the working class and continue the war.

The CWI campaigns on a programme that includes: an immediate end to the fighting on all fronts - ground, air and sea; rejection of all imperialist 'peace' plans negotiated behind the backs of the people living in Ukraine and Russia; the immediate withdrawal of the Russian military from Ukraine; the immediate end of arms shipments to Ukraine from the US, European and other powers; and, for democratic, unhindered self-determination for Crimea and the Donbass region and the defence of the rights of national minorities.

But a programme needs a vehicle for its implementation. The CWI campaigns in all existing workers' organisations, such as trade unions, for the adoption of an independent working-class policy toward the war. In the US and the European countries, we point to the connection between the looming class struggles against austerity and the war policies of the governments. We argue that opposing austerity and defending the interests of the working class requires overturning their war policies. The need to build independent working-class political organisation - workers' parties - is therefore an integral part of the struggle against war. It is a necessary first step towards forming alternative workers' governments that fundamentally break with predatory imperialist policies in favour of working-class solidarity and internationalism.

In Ukraine and Russia, a struggle to defend and restore democratic rights will be necessary to force open the space to campaign and win the working class to such a programme. This will mean confronting the regimes of repression and martial law constructed to suppress the class struggle and secure the 'home front' behind the war aims of the ruling classes. Workers and their organisations will at a certain stage need to defy prohibitions on strikes and protests to defend their interests. The role of Marxists will be to help consolidate this as a first step on the road toward the working class emerging as an independent factor able to influence the course of the war in the countries engaged directly in the fighting.

This will not be easy in Russia or Ukraine. Ukrainian Trotskyist and anti-war activist Bogdan Syrotiuk, for example, was sentenced to fifteen years in prison this month for a handful of online articles putting forward similar ideas. Nevertheless, it is the only road that can prevent an imperialist war turning into an imperialist 'peace'. Both sacrifice the fundamental interests of the working class, and the latter always contains the seeds of future wars.

The basic task of Marxists in this era is to assist the working class to rebuild its ideological, political and organisational independence. The CWI is committed to this task under all conditions, including conditions of imperialist war.

CWI CIT

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

socialistworld.net

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.

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Nottingham NEU action forces concessions over safety

NOTTINGHAM SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS

Teachers and teaching assistants (TAs) in the National Education Union (NEU) took 24 discontinuous days of strike action at Forest Fields Primary School.

The strike was about safety for pupils and staff because of inadequate staffing levels and the way the school was being run.

Pickets explained that the head-teacher did not listen to staff, parents and carers. They said there has been a staff turnover of over 90% since she started in 2021 - eight left at the end of last term.

This school year started with an inset day on 1 September, and NEU members struck that day and all week. They were not in school for the statutory 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' training, required for staff to work in the classrooms, showing the school and local authority that they were determined to win the needed changes for real safety. The union held two meetings for parents and carers.

On the Thursday, there was a meeting between the NEU, the head and the local authority. A strikers' meeting agreed to suspend the strike after the Friday, as they had won concessions.

Strikers told us the demands that have been agreed: maternity leave cover to be provided; redeployment of TAs with increased support staff focused in the classroom; redeployment to be carried out at Key Stage level not by the head; cover for planning, preparation and assessment time; no detriment to anyone taking strike action. The statutory training will be delivered.

The strike has been suspended for four weeks. Members want to see the agreement put into practice and will be monitoring the situation. But dates have been set for the week commencing 5 October if management doesn't deliver or if progress is not made on the still-outstanding issues.



Discussion on the picket line in Nottingham GARY FREEMAN

Liverpool school strike over workload and wellbeing

JOE WOOLFALL AND DEAN YOUNG
LIVERPOOL SOCIALIST PARTY

Members of the National Education Union (NEU) at St Margaret's Academy in Liverpool have taken strike action over what they describe as a longstanding failure by management to address serious concerns over workload, staff wellbeing, and health and safety.

"We're genuinely distraught," a union rep us. "Our intention on the first day of term is not to be standing on a picket line instead of teaching."

The dispute follows repeated concerns raised over the past year. Two 'staff stress' surveys, conducted six months apart, produced exceptionally poor results. A 26-page report has also been produced, detailing the causes of workplace stress and the action they believe is needed.

But NEU members on the picket said little had changed. "When staff tell you they're under unsustainable pressure, and then six months later tell you that nothing has changed, that isn't a failure of communication. It's a failure to act."

Among the issues raised are protected planning, preparation and assessment time, safe working arrangements, and access to basic facilities. Some are expected to work for up to five hours without access to a toilet.

The poor conditions that staff are expected to put up with inevitably affects the students. "We're not striking because we care less about our students. We are striking because we care deeply about them, and because we care about the staff who educate and support them."

A reply to the Economist's lies and slander

A fighting socialist programme like Militant's would be popular!

The Economist 15 August published an article, 'What Britain can teach Democrats: How to stop extremists from making a party unelectable', in which it refers to Militant - the Socialist Party's predecessor - recycling well-worn slurs used by Militant's capitalist opponents. Socialist Party National Committee member **Steve Score** replied in writing. So far, he has received no response and his letter has not been published.



The great anti-poll tax movement that brought down Thatcher was led by Militant PHOTO: DAVE SINCLAIR

Despite its assertion that socialist policies are unpopular, actually the column represents a fear of socialism gaining support.

If the idea of socialism is unpopular, why have we seen the rise of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA)? The argument that they have gained because "not many people vote in primaries" is blown out of the water by DSA member Zohran Mamdani winning the Mayoral election in New York City with more than a million votes, in an election with the highest voter turnout since 1969.

It is above all the collapse in living standards for the majority, while the minority continue to make themselves super-rich that is driving a search for socialist ideas. That's why, according to a recent Cato poll, 53% of Americans under the age of 30 look favourably on socialism.

The system the Economist defends, of free-market capitalism, is increasingly unpopular, and so it is trying to undermine its most effective opponents.

The article tries to draw parallels between Militant in the Labour Party in the 1980s and the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) today. It appears to advocate a similar approach by the Democrat establishment today to that of Neil Kinnock, then Labour leader, attacking Militant and beginning a purge of "hard left extremists".

He did not make Labour more electable as claimed in the article, he lost the subsequent general election, with the Tories winning their fourth in a row, despite huge anger and a mass movement in response to the hated Poll Tax brought in by Margaret Thatcher.

That movement of millions, featuring mass non-payment of the tax, was led by Militant supporters and ultimately led to the downfall of Thatcher.

What Kinnock did achieve was beginning a process, completed by Tony Blair, of transforming the Labour Party into a party that thoroughly represented big business interests rather than those of the working class, as it had been established to do. The Labour Party was created by an alliance of trade unionists and socialists including a recognised input from Marxists. In fact, one of Blair's aims was to make Labour more like the big business Democrats. I imagine this is seen as a good thing by the Economist's editors, not so much by many others though.

The article includes the ludicrous claim that Militant had a "secret agenda". In fact, it always explained that socialism could not be achieved by simply reforming away capitalism. It needed a mass movement behind a programme of complete socialist transformation of society.

Neither did Militant supporters "infiltrate" by hiding our ideas. We were notorious for always selling our paper (Militant) and published material. People always knew when we were there!

The article cannot but repeat a few of the smears used at the time against Militant. The implication that Pat Wall, not just a candidate, but later one of the elected Labour MPs who supported Militant, called for "civil war... and bloodshed" turns reality on its head. He warned that the ruling class would be prepared to use bloodshed and civil war if it felt it necessary to protect its system and profits, such as had happened in Chile in 1973. Rather than advocating violence, he argued for a strategy that could prevent it.

A few other slurs are thrown in for good measure. Unable to find any evidence (because it does not exist) for the accusation that Militant thought "homosexuality was 'a problem which will disappear under socialism'", the Economist resorts to quoting an opponent's slur against Militant. We are proud of our record supporting LGBTQ rights.

It is claimed the result of Militant's leadership of Liverpool City Council in the 1980s was "lawlessness, fiscal ruin and endless scandal". In fact, the Militant-led council built 5,000 council homes, seven leisure centres and new parks, creating 2,000 new jobs. The real result was jobs, homes and services.

Liverpool City Council defied the Thatcher government's cuts in financial support for local councils and mobilised a mass movement to support it. Where else in recent years have we seen mass demonstrations, not against but in support of a council?

Consequently, far from being unelectable, despite the attempts to demonise the heroic 47 Liverpool councillors from all wings of the establishment, backed up by Kinnock, Labour's vote in Liverpool actually increased when elsewhere it fell.

Since the 1980s, local government has been devastated by cuts, and services pared back to the bone. The idea of building mass support for a no-cuts budget is one that councils such as the Green Party-led ones would do well to look at today. A no-cuts budget, using reserves to balance the books to buy time to build such a campaign, is possible today.

As the article points out, there are differences between the policies and programme of the DSA and Militant. But another is that we believe that in the US, as in Britain today, what is needed is a new mass working-class party. Although only a minority of Militant supporters were expelled during the Labour witchunts, we took the decision to leave Labour in the early 1990s because Labour's policies and structures were changed to obstruct the influence of the working class from below. It was no longer a party of the working class, epitomised by Blair's removal of the socialist clause in Labour's constitution.

There have been missed opportunities to create a viable party along those lines, such as Bernie Sanders not standing independently for President after being defeated in a rigged 2016 Democratic convention, and more recently the failure of Jeremy Corbyn's 'Your Party' to capitalise on massive initial interest. But other opportunities will arise because millions of people correctly feel the traditional parties do not represent their interests.

Through mass workers' action in Liverpool, Militant won £60 million from Thatcher (worth £202 million today), and later led over 18 million people in refusing to pay her hated Poll Tax, ultimately leading to her demise.

The Economist is correct to fear increasing support for socialist ideas, and to fear an organisation that can win mass support for those ideas with a fighting strategy and programme.

● *A shortened version was sent to the Economist*



The real history of Militant

Read the Rise of Militant by Peter Taaffe, £11.99 available at leftbooks.co.uk

Labour must not close the ten Caerphilly libraries

MARIAM KAMISH
CAERPHILLY TRADES UNION COUNCIL SECRETARY

High Court judges do not like to overrule local authority decisions. Library campaigners have been discussing the fact that we couldn't rely on the courts.

Still, for most people, the ruling against us was a shock. Not least because it came in the middle of the summer recess. The judge was meant to be on holiday until October.

Was someone trying to wrongfoot our campaign? If so, they haven't succeeded. We'd already been travelling around all ten libraries, gathering footage for a DIY documentary to boost public awareness and involve more people in the ten areas.

BBC

When the BBC came calling after the court ruling, a number of people from the affected areas came at very short notice with banners and placards.

We met more people on the day at Nelson library – where the BBC chose to film – outraged at the threat to their library, and keen to get involved in the campaign.

Elle, who runs the nearby café, has offered to make it the local base for the campaign. Her dad, John, worked at Trelewis Drift Colliery. He spent ten months during the miners' strike travelling around picketing, including taking part in the occupation of the cranes at Port Talbot. John is full of ideas for the campaign. And he's volunteering for action.

Devastated

Ten-year-old Everett told the camera: "I love Nelson library. I'll be devastated if they close this. I mean, where'll we get books from?"

In my interview, I issued a challenge to Jamie Pritchard, the Labour leader of Caerphilly Council.

"Come around all ten libraries with the campaign. Meet the people involved. See what these lovely spaces are all about."

"We don't want you to close anything else or cut anything else to keep the libraries open – and you don't need to. Caerphilly Council's reserves are the largest in Wales.

"We stand on TUC (Trades Union Congress) Cymru policy. We call on councils to set needs-based, no-cuts budgets. If you were to take that position, Jamie Pritchard, you'd be the most popular person in Caerphilly."

In closing, I told the BBC: "We are going to fight this, and we are going to win."



MARIAM KAMISH

The more you read the Socialist, the more you realise everything is political!

Selling the Socialist

Just some of the events where the Socialist newspaper was sold in the past week...

LAURA HULLAH
LEEDS SOCIALIST PARTY

Lots of different types of people read the Socialist. Socialist Party members, people who are sympathetic to our aims, even members of other political parties.

Some buy a copy regularly. Others may not think of themselves as explicitly 'political,' but will buy the Socialist if there is an article in it that is of interest, or something that is personally relevant to them – young people, students, and workers.

Often on a Socialist Party campaign stall, we set a table up, and lay out our campaign material. But I also carry copies of the Socialist on me wherever I go.

I have sold the paper whilst sat in my own garden, at live events, at work, and even whilst on holiday. I strike up a conversation wherever I go, because there is always talk of politics. People may not be 'political,' but bread-and-butter issues matter to people – everything is political.

Carry the Socialist with you everywhere, and read it everywhere too. Read the Socialist at the bus stop, whilst eating your lunch on a bench in the local park, on the train, in your workplace, and in the pub.

People are naturally curious. They will ask what you are reading.

They may even buy a copy from you there and then. So make sure you carry spare copies!

I know from experience how important accessibility and inclusion is. You do not gain supporters by excluding a group of people for who liberation from capitalist oppression is a matter of life or death.

The Socialist Party is a revolutionary party. We always remember when writing for and selling the Socialist, 'if it is not accessible, it is neither radical nor revolutionary.'

Help fund us

I am sight impaired. Ideally, the Socialist should be printed in alternative and accessible formats, such as braille or large print. So help us sell the Socialist, and raise fighting fund on top, so we have the resources to reach as many different people with socialist ideas.

A few people now buy the Socialist regularly from me. After they have bought so many issues on a regular basis, then I raise whether they would be interested in taking out a subscription. That way Socialist supporters can help fund, shape, and promote its publication, and the Socialist Party behind it.

- There are so many ways to follow the Socialist, listen to the audio version – socialistparty.org.uk/the-socialist-audio

Life on the Doncaster Socialist Party campaign stall

CHARMAIN SMUTS
SOUTH YORKSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY

Every Friday and Saturday, the streets of Doncaster come alive with conversation, debate, and community spirit at the Socialist Party campaign stalls. These stalls offer a space where ordinary people can engage with the issues that affect their daily lives.

Giving people a voice

At the heart of our work are petitions that give people a direct voice. Whether it's to save our NHS and rebuild Doncaster Royal Infirmary; stop the energy price rip-off; demand the nationalisation of the water industry; fund welfare not warfare, saying no to Trump's oil plunder; for working-class unity not division by demanding jobs, homes, and services for all to fight racism; yes to self-identity for LGBTQ+ people. The public are eager to stand up and be counted.

Alongside petitions, we distribute leaflets explaining what the Socialist Party stands for, and how our policies relate to the current challenges facing working people. Our socialist material often sparks meaningful conversations, as people share their concerns, frustrations, and hopes for change.

Working-class perspective

We also sell the Socialist newspaper, which provides in-depth analysis and reporting from a working-class perspective. Many people choose to support our work further by making a voluntary donation to our 'fighting fund,' which helps sustain and grow our campaigning efforts.

But perhaps the most valuable aspect of the stalls is the discussion. There are countless honest, thoughtful exchanges with people from all walks of life. Some come with questions, others with strong opinions. Many simply appreciate someone willing to listen.

Over time, the stalls have become a recognised and trusted part of the local community. Regular passersby now stop to chat, sign petitions, or pick up a Socialist paper. The positive feedback and encouragement we receive reflects a growing awareness and appreciation of the work we do.

Like what you've read?
SUBSCRIBE TO THE SOCIALIST
socialistparty.org.uk/subscribe

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

SOCIALIST PARTY FIGHTING FUND

AREA	£ RECEIVED	£ TARGET	Q3: JULY-SEPTEMBER 2026	DEADLINE: 30 SEPTEMBER 2026
South West	2,819	2,100		134%
Northern	633	800	79%	
Wales	1,745	2,400	73%	
East Midlands	1,216	2,050	59%	
London	2,786	5,000	56%	
Yorkshire	1,466	2,650	55%	
West Midlands	1,466	2,700	54%	
North West	581	1,200	48%	
Southern & SE	1,042	2,400	43%	
Eastern	363	1,300	28%	
Other	763	2,400	32%	
TOTAL	14,880	25,000	60%	

Socialist 'mega-day' campaigning

Haringey – water chaos

AMNON COHEN
CAMDEN AND HARINGEY SOCIALIST PARTY

A massive water main had erupted earlier in the week, turning one street into a raging torrent, flooding people's homes. At the same time, Thames Water is imposing a hose-pipe ban.

So, on our Socialist Party campaign stall, we used the petition calling for nationalising water and energy. Passersby, who are struggling under rising bills, were enraged when we told them about the £20 billion debt Thames Water has taken on, the £7 billion paid in dividends, and the £1 million signing fee paid to the new chief finance officer. People were queuing up to sign our petition and donate.

Panos, a Socialist Party member who joined two weeks ago, was selling the Socialist, raising fighting fund, while asking me what to do with the bank notes he was given. Farhana was working the petition boards and engaging the more interested people in discussion.

But the highest fighting fund by far was raised by Majbritt. She met us at a Socialist station sale this week, came to her first meeting later that day, and approached every passerby with boundless, infectious enthusiasm.

Exhausted by the endless barrage of interested people, we tried to pack up the stall, only to be interrupted by a young woman who insisted on buying a Socialist paper. Finally, we retreated to a local cafe, where the barista also took a leaflet for Socialism 2026 in November.



Amnon (right) and the Socialist Party in Haringey campaigning for nationalisation to combat rising water and energy bills

North West – "Burnham's just a 'northern Starmer' trying to be relatable"

DEAN YOUNG
NORTH WEST SOCIALIST PARTY

The Socialist Party organised a national mega-stall campaign on the weekend of 5-6 September. Across the north west, some Socialist Party branches got two stalls out, rather than one. Others made our usual stall longer.

Does your Socialist Party branch have a good spot? Is there a market? Do you have numbers to cover multiple different locations?

I noticed a generational divide on the question of Andy Burnham. Young people are far more sceptical. "He's just a 'northern Starmer' trying to be relatable", was quite typical. Those over 40 were more likely to say something like: "He seems alright, let's give him a chance. It's too early to tell what will happen."

The stalls in the north west at the weekend saw us meet 37 new people who left their phone numbers for us to contact them about our Socialist Party meetings. Every person we meet who expresses interest, we get them to leave their details, and ask: "Can we contact you about coming to one of our weekly meetings?" Liverpool South Socialist Party doubled the duration of the stall, meeting 25 of the 37 new people we met across the north west.

Our members live in working-class communities. We are a point of reference when people think of 'socialists.'

Whether it's picking a good spot at a monthly market, a town or city centre, outside a busy shopping area, or anything else, it is quite simple – be seen and speak to people. Being seen leads to one Manchester passerby saying: "Bloody hell, Militant are back."

Come to a Socialist Party meeting near you

If you would like to participate:
- socialistparty.org.uk/events
- Or text 07958 032 071 with your name and postcode

SOCIALISM 2026
www.socialism.org.uk

How can youth take action against war and climate change? International youth strike – 20 November

Hackney – 'you're not going to get far'

ADAM GILLMAN
EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Young people were curious about how they can change the world on our Socialist Students stall outside Capital City College in Hackney.

The principle came out and said: "You aren't going to get very far with your activism, they don't care about politics". This was after two staff members said they supported the youth strike on 20 November.

Many young people took leaflets, asking how they could take action against war and climate change. The issues of unemployment and low pay came up too.

A couple of students asked if we were going to be here next week, so we could discuss further about the youth strike and socialist ideas. One passerby took a leaflet, and said he was going to give it to his daughter.

Young people are ready to fight back. We need to build student unions to discuss these ideas and a socialist alternative in schools, colleges and universities. If you're interested, join Socialist Students, and alongside 20 other organisations across Europe, start building for the international youth strike on 20 November.

Join the international youth walkout on 20 November

Preston

PENELOPE DAWBER
PRESTON SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Socialist Students has done three campaign stalls at Cardinal Newman College in the last week. We have handed out over 400 leaflets in support of the 20 November international youth strike.

Several students have already scanned the QR code and given us their numbers, so they can get involved. We'll return soon to help grow the movement amongst college students even more.

Wolverhampton

JOSIE SHELLEY
BLACK COUNTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

Even students who saw themselves as 'non-political' agreed with our ideas on fighting for education, jobs, housing, and services – especially on the struggles they will face as young adults.

We had a lot of interest in our campaign stall outside Wolverhampton College. It was the first day of term, so the atmosphere was lively.

We gave out loads of leaflets, and also sold our Socialist paper. All in all a very positive response.

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

Leicester Pride attendees "scapegoated and under threat"

STEVEN COLES
LEICESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

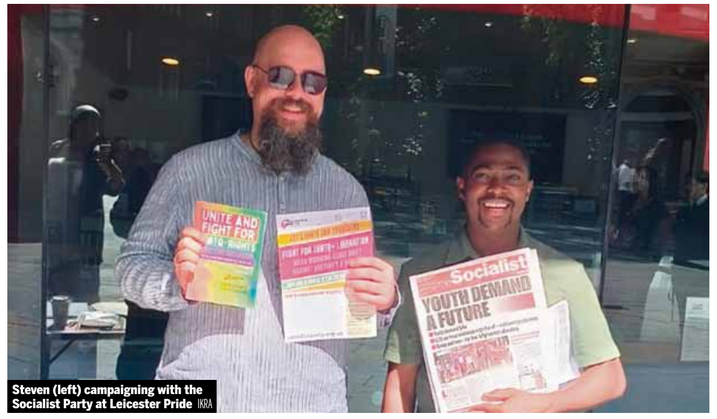
The Socialist Party spoke with attendees at Leicester Pride's vibrant march and festivities. Many we spoke to were feeling under threat and scapegoated. They welcomed the Socialist Party's solidarity, and were open to our ideas.

Oppression has increased against the LGBTQ+ community, particularly against trans people. As environmental, social, and economic crises created by capitalism run amok, billionaires and the establishment have hardened their tactic of divide and rule over the working classes.

For some at Pride, the Green Party and their advocacy of a wealth tax gave them hope. Others were disillusioned entirely by the status quo of politics.

Opinion was split on new Labour prime minister Andy Burnham. Many were unaware of his rolling back on promises around nationalisation of water companies and housing. People were open to our ideas of working people running the economy and taking power from the elites.

Pride was a vibrant and joyous event, but one where the corporations have embedded themselves. We heard calls from some marching that 'Pride is protest,' rather than 'corporate pinkwashing.'



Steven (left) campaigning with the Socialist Party at Leicester Pride IKRA

GAINS FOR RIGHT-WING AFD IN GERMAN STATE ELECTION – THE TASKS FOR SOCIALISTS

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

In the first of a series of state elections in Germany, the right-populist AfD won the largest number of votes, but short of an absolute majority in Saxony-Anhalt. As we go to press, they are in negotiations to run the state. Written before this election, **Tom Hoffmann**, a member of the Sol (CWI in Germany) federal executive, looks at the political earthquake unfolding.



AfD lead candidate Ulrich Siegmund (centre) holding an election rally in Magdeburg PHOTO: ROY ZUO/CC

Germany is facing a political earthquake. In the state elections in Saxony-Anhalt and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, the right-populist AfD is likely to emerge as the strongest force by a wide margin. In Berlin, this is also a possibility, albeit by a narrower margin as currently local opinion polls show that the left party, Die Linke, has a small lead. These elections will shake the CDU-SPD-led coalition national government, which has made it its mission to carry out the most severe social attacks on the working class in decades. However, they will also pose a challenge for Die Linke and the trade union movement, which must respond to the class struggle being waged from above and the threat from the far right. This will only succeed if they adopt an independent class standpoint.

The root cause of these political developments is systemic. Since 2019, German economic output has been stagnating. The primary reason for the crisis is the intensifying competition on the world market, particularly between the US and China, resulting in the German economy – which is heavily dependent on exports – losing its markets. Under capitalism, there is essentially only one way to solve these problems: to intensify the exploitation of the workforce. That is why capital and the government are demanding longer working hours and drastic cuts to social benefits, whilst companies are cutting hundreds of thousands of jobs.

For years, the German business newspapers have been calling for far-reaching 'reforms' to improve the profit conditions of German banks and corporations. From the perspective of those in power, the drastic changes in relations between capitalist states also demand a level of rearmament and militarisation that is unprecedented in the history of the Federal Republic.

The previous Social Democrat, Green, liberal 'traffic light' coalition government had already taken the lead with cuts and rearmament. Ultimately, it collapsed in November 2024 due to differing views on how these sacrifices should be imposed on the working class. Faced with rampant public dissatisfaction, it had exhausted its own capacity to implement such a programme.

The subsequent conservative/Social Democrat coalition government led by Friedrich Merz (CDU) and Lars Klingbeil (SPD) began its rule by using the outgoing parliament's members to approve a massive re-armament package, because they feared that the newly elected parliament would not pass the measure with the majority needed to amend the constitution to allow this extra military spending. Among other things, tax breaks for capitalists and billions in cuts to the health service were merely the first steps in making the working class foot the bill. Now the retirement age is to be raised and the so-called 'pension at 63' abolished, housing benefit and parental allowance cut, working hours extended and many social benefits reduced.

It is therefore no wonder that the federal government and the Chancellor are facing record-low approval ratings. Between 75% and 80% of the population are dissatisfied. The only reason these figures are not even more disastrous is that the full extent of the government's attacks has not yet sunk in. The fact that this dissatisfaction has not yet manifested itself in widespread resistance on the streets and in workplaces is because, regrettably, the trade union leaderships are obscuring the nature of this head-on attack.

The same DGB (trade union federation) leader, Fahimi, who as recently as June spoke of "completely misguided" reform plans, claimed in July that the coalition's decisions sent "the right signals for employment, growth and relief".

Crisis among those in power

Nevertheless, the federal government is far from being crisis-proof. The days when the CDU/CSU and the SPD could be described as a 'grand coalition' are long gone. This erosion is linked to the deepening crisis of German capitalism and the inability of the capitalist parties to implement any fundamental improvements in the interests of the broad masses.

The CDU/CSU and the SPD are under pressure from all sides. From above by capital: large corporations such as Audi and Siemens, together with business associations, demanded in an urgent letter that the announced reforms be implemented "as quickly as possible and without any compromises". From below, by the working class and the middle classes, who are continuing to turn away from the parties in the polls.

Who's who?
SPD: social democrats
Die Linke: The left party
AfD: the populist right
CDU/CSU: conservative
Sol: CWI in Germany
DGB: Trade union federation

Consequently, from the right by the AfD, which benefits most from this discontent and is able to channel it into electoral support, even though its programme would amount to even greater attacks on the population. From the left by Die Linke, which is within striking distance of overtaking the SPD in the polls.

State elections

It is against this backdrop that this month's state elections in Saxony-Anhalt (6 September), Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania (20 September) and Berlin (20 September) take place. They will serve as a barometer of the dissatisfaction and polarisation in the country and will exacerbate tensions within the government.

The AfD will, without question, be the main beneficiary of this. Its rise has not come out of nowhere; rather, it is able to capitalise above all on the frustration felt in parts of society that life is becoming ever harder and that people's social security is increasingly under threat. Even though more of its voters have recently stated that they vote for the party out of conviction, the main motive remains giving 'those at the top' the middle finger. The AfD channels this justified frustration towards minorities, such as refugees and LGBTQ+ people, rather than towards the capitalist system and the true causes of social inequality, the housing crisis and the numerous problems in public services.

Marxists, however, also point out that elections are merely snapshots and can only reflect certain deeper-rooted processes in a distorted and limited way. It is difficult to say exactly how the elections will turn out and what consequences they will entail. In Saxony-Anhalt, a key question will be whether the AfD, which is currently polling at over 40%, can secure an absolute majority of seats. This would give it the opportunity to form a single-party government.

There are signs that this risk – and the fact that it becomes all the more likely if the SPD and the Greens fail to clear the 5% threshold – is mobilising voters to cast their votes for these parties with a clenched fist in their pocket, in order to keep the AfD out of government.

This could then lead to complicated coalition-building processes – as in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, where an absolute AfD majority is unlikely. This could prove a real test, particularly for the CDU/CSU, which formally rules out cooperation with the AfD and Die Linke – even though such cooperation with Die Linke is already being practised tacitly at state level in Thuringia and Saxony, amongst other places. Admittedly, the so-called 'firewall' against the AfD no longer exists in many local authorities either. However, there are strong indications that those forces within the CDU/CSU who do not yet want this at state level – and who have no interest in renewed mass protests such as those last spring, when the CDU/CSU passed anti-migration resolutions in the Bundestag together with the AfD – will prevail.

Nevertheless, the elections will heighten tensions within the governing parties, and it cannot be ruled out that they will result in a deeper political crisis. At the same time, the governing parties – and capital itself – have absolutely no interest in seeing their coalition fail. From capital's perspective, 'the job is not yet done' and there is no viable or practical alternative constellation. From their perspective, new elections threaten to strengthen the AfD and Die Linke.



Protest against the AfD PHOTO: ZINNMANN/CC

"The central task of Die Linke and the trade unions is to focus on the social and political causes of the AfD's rise and to counter the class struggle from above with a class struggle from below

Die Linke

In Saxony-Anhalt and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Die Linke will likely face the question of how to respond if the election of an AfD Minister-President looms, should it fail to put forward another candidate. If, in such a situation, the party once again enters into agreements or alliances with the CDU, or repeats its participation in government with the SPD in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, it will not halt the rise of the AfD, but rather fuel it. Past state governments involving Die Linke - or its predecessor the PDS's tolerance of a red-green government in Saxony-Anhalt in the 1990s - have shown that this leads to Die Linke being viewed as part of the political establishment, thereby giving the AfD scope to present itself as a supposed alternative. In Thuringia, the AfD has gained seven percentage points since the last election; in Saxony, eleven. Sol (the CWI in Germany) is therefore fighting within the party to ensure that the socialist banner is not lowered in the face of the AfD's strength, and that the policy of participating in governments with pro-capitalist parties – or of carrying favour with the establishment – is brought to an end. Instead, a militant, socialist left would be the best remedy against the AfD's continued rise.

In Berlin, Die Linke has the chance to become the strongest political force. This reflects the left-wing aspect of social polarisation, and many people associate it with the hope that this would lead to more social and just policies in the capital. However, the party leadership has set a course of sacrificing fundamental left-wing positions for the sake of the mayoral office and a red-green-red coalition government.

Class struggle from below is the right path

The outcome of the state elections will influence one another and the public debate. It is quite possible that there will once again be major protests against the AfD, a right-populist party with fascist elements. When millions took to the streets in recent years, this was an indication that, despite high approval ratings for the right-wing populists, we were not dealing with a one-sided shift to the right in society but rather with polarisation. However, these protests were neither sustainable nor successful, because they did not address the root causes of the AfD's rise.

The central task of Die Linke and the trade unions is to focus on the social and political causes of the AfD's rise and to counter the class struggle from above with a class struggle from below.

Should trade union leaders, out of fear that a fall of the federal government triggered by mass protests might strengthen the AfD, tone down their resistance against the latter and the government's all-out attack on the working class, they would not only be doing the struggle against the far right a disservice. They would also make it clear that they prefer to use their influence and resources to (supposedly) 'stabilise' the capitalist system, rather than fulfilling their responsibility to build a political alternative for the working population. The CDU/SPD coalition and the AfD would benefit because the former would be granted a breather and the latter a fresh opportunity to present itself as the only opposition representing ordinary people.

Such a scenario – AfD successes, social protests with the handbrake on, and further successes by the Merz-Klingbeil gang in making our lives a living hell – could heighten a sense of frustration and demoralisation amongst some activists for a time. This is particularly true if corporate job cuts continue to be implemented without proper resistance. That is why militants must unite within the trade unions and fight for a change of course.

In such a situation, Die Linke must make it clear what class politics means. Instead of seeking an alliance with parties whose policies strengthen the AfD, it should draw up a plan on how resistance to the federal government's policies and the threat from the far right can be successful. It should also take this plan into workplaces and trade unions. Nothing would be more disastrous than if Die Linke was once again to take the path of supporting pro-capitalist forces or seeking political alliances with them.

The social protests and the nationwide DGB (trade union federation) day of action on 26 September should be used to highlight the link between austerity policies, job cuts, rearmament and the rise of right-wing populism, and to unite the struggle against them. But it must not stop there, for demonstrations alone will not stop Merz and Klingbeil, nor the AfD.

After 26 September, the trade unions and the Left need a clear plan for the further development of a movement of the working people and a political alternative. If such a plan were pursued courageously and resolutely, it would have the potential to turn the country and the entire political situation on its head. What is needed, for example, is a nationwide demonstration before the end of this year, a march on the Chancellery in Berlin; proper strikes against job cuts and in the upcoming collective bargaining rounds; extraordinary works council meetings, right up to political walkouts against the government's attacks and its planned 'horror budget,' and possibly a 24-hour general strike; alongside the building of local, regional and nationwide alliances.

This must be combined with a programme that not only rejects cutbacks but also sets out how fundamental improvements for the majority of the population can be achieved. A programme that shows how society could be fundamentally restructured beyond the logic of capitalist profit.

The AfD has only become so strong, and the government has only been able to push through its attacks in this form, because there is no strong representative body, no socialist mass party of the working people. In times of capitalism's multiple crises, of social and job cuts, wars and climate destruction, building such a force is becoming ever more urgent.

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YOUTH WALKOUT AGAINST WAR ON 20 NOV!



Since the start of September, the US has carried out further bombing on Iran. A recent strike hit a residential building and a wedding ceremony, killing four people and injuring more than 60. This isn't an isolated incident, but an increasingly regular occurrence in the era of war which we live in today. The ongoing slaughter in Gaza is another stark example, so too the brutal attacks on Palestinians in the West Bank, and the many casualties in the Russia-Ukraine war (see pages 8-9).

In Gaza, hundreds of people have been killed this year, despite the so-called 'ceasefire'. On top of this, Itamar Ben-Gvir, Israel's minister of national security, demonstrated the cold callousness that capitalist politicians are capable of when he posted an AI-generated video on social media, depicting Palestinians being transported on a conveyor belt into a detention camp, alongside the caption 'We promised - we delivered!'

Young people today are entering adulthood in a world characterised by instability and increasing wars. At the same time, the climate crisis is only getting worse, driving disasters such as the dreadful flooding in Nepal. In Britain, bus drivers have been forced to take strike action to win action over extreme working temperatures (see page 6). Rents have also reached unsustainably high levels, with many young people unable to afford to move out of their parents' houses, and with the idea of owning their own home growing increasingly out of reach.

These crises are not separate. They are symptoms of a system that puts profit above everything else, and therefore at the expense of everything else.

Climate change, war and division are all a result of the reckless destruction of the capitalist system. Therefore, we must fight for an alternative.

That is why Socialist Students is working with a growing number of youth organisations across Europe to build for a coordinated day of student walkouts and youth strikes on 20 November. We want to make it clear that we won't stand for capitalist chaos, and are fighting internationally for our futures, not their wars.

HANNAH PONTING
SOCIALIST STUDENTS

JOIN THE INTERNATIONAL YOUTH WALKOUT

PAUL MATTSSON

Join the student fightback
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