

EUROPE ERUPTS

BUILD INTERNATIONAL YOUTH STRIKE 20 NOVEMBER

Europe is convulsed by protests and strikes. Driving the movements is anger at the relentless rise in the cost of living, the grind of austerity, and the lack of a future on offer for young people.

In France, the movement has been kicked off by school and college students, protesting against austerity conditions in education and the threats of more cuts to come. They have been joined by workers, acting to defend students from police violence and struggling themselves against the bosses' austerity attacks (see page 3).

In the south of Ireland, the biggest day of strikes in a generation took place on 14 October. There, working-class pressure forced trade union leaders to call a one-day public sector general strike (see page 6). In Spain and Italy one-day general strikes have been called. In Belgium, Austria and Albania, youth have taken to the streets.

In Britain, Socialist Party members are helping Socialist Students to organise student walkouts in schools, colleges and unis, as part of the 20 November International Youth Strike (see page 2).

Our members are to the fore in the trade unions too, fighting for the nationwide strike action needed to demand fully funded public services and decent pay. And putting the pressure on the Trades Union Congress to act on the policy passed at its September conference for a mass union-led demo against austerity (see pages 10-11).

The capitalist bosses in Britain are inevitably looking anxiously over the English Channel, and rightly so! The same conditions fuelling events in Europe exists here too.

Help us build mass struggles of workers and youth. Join the struggle for socialist change. Join the Socialist Party!



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

European youth organisations meet to plan mass walkouts for 20 November

ADAM POWELL-DAVIES
SOCIALIST STUDENTS NATIONAL ORGANISER

Amidst the mass youth movement in France, a Socialist Students delegation travelled to Paris on October 17-18 for an important meeting building towards the 20 November International Youth Strike. 27 organisations attended from eleven countries, to discuss next steps leading up to and after November 20.

This was the second in-person meeting of a Europe-wide network of youth, student and anti-war organisations that was initially formed at the start of this year to coordinate international action against war and militarism. The first meeting, held in Cologne on 14 June, launched the call for an International Youth Strike on November 20 (N20) under the slogan, 'fight for our future, not their wars'. This was the slogan proposed by Socialist Students members, who argued that the struggle against war should be connected to the wider fight against the capitalist bosses and their profit-first system, which robs young people of a future in all ways – whether that's through creating wars, fuelling climate change, or attacking our education and living standards.

'Fight for future'

Events since the Cologne meeting show why it was right to make the idea of 'fighting for a future' central to N20; it is a red thread running through all the movements that young people in Europe are now a key part of, which are spreading across the continent. That there were more than double the number of organisations in the Paris meeting than there were in Cologne is one indication that the idea is coming into its own. Reports to the meeting indicate that there will be at least tens if not hundreds of thousands of young people taking action on N20.

As one speaker from the Italian student organisation Rete della Conoscenza pointed out, a few months ago the youth fightback in Europe was being led by tens of thousands of German students fighting against the threat of conscription. Since then, they have been joined by hundreds of thousands more in many other countries. The political level of the meeting was raised by these ongoing events, in particular by the frontline reports from a number of organisations currently leading youth struggles in France, Spain, Italy and Germany.

The meeting also heard that an organisation in Albania had recently been in touch about joining N20, as had youth organisations in India, Indonesia, the Philippines and a number of other countries outside of Europe where there have also been massive youth-led movements. Delegates to the meeting



joined the massive demonstration in Paris on the Saturday afternoon (see opposite).

Given the shifting fronts of the youth fightback in Europe and internationally, with different specific issues being raised in different countries, there was an important debate over to what extent N20 should still be framed as an international day against war and militarism. The consensus was that 'fight for our future, not their wars' should continue to be used as the main overarching slogan across Europe, but with an understanding that different organisations can adapt this slogan to the specific issues that they feel can best mobilise young people in their own countries.

War and militarism

In response to some organisations who worried that this position meant diluting opposition to war and militarism, Socialist Students argued that an emphasis on 'fighting for our future' would in fact strengthen the fightback against war, as it would increase the potential for N20 to be picked up by young people as a means to take the fight to their own capitalist governments, who are the ones carrying out the drive to war and re-militarisation. A more narrow

focus on war and militarism, without exposing how these issues are connected to the entire capitalist system which attacks 'our future', would make it less likely for N20 to play a role in increasing the level of international working-class organisation and consciousness needed to end war and the crisis-ridden capitalist system that produces it.

What happens after?

Another important feature of the discussion was around what should happen to the current informal network building the International Youth Strike after 20 November. The consensus was that, while N20 has the potential to be a major day of international youth action, it should only be a start to a process of re-building international youth and student organisation. It was therefore agreed that all organisations currently involved should continue working together beyond N20, while attempting to expand the network further by reaching out to other organisations in our own countries.

The meeting agreed to hold an in-person conference in Italy in February 2027, which will be an opportunity to reflect on the experience of N20, as well as planning the next steps for re-building a European

and international youth movement against capitalism. Unlike the two previous in-person assemblies, which have been smaller and composed largely of representatives from the national leaderships of the organisations, the February conference is planned to be bigger and open to the wider activist layer within the participating organisations.

This movement is growing

Socialist Students members argued that the February conference should lead to an international socialist youth network, with some kind of basic founding statement clarifying why fighting against capitalism means fighting for a re-organisation of society based on need, not profit. But whether that is agreed or not, we emphasised that the main goal of the network should continue to be organising joint action between young people internationally, which could then be a starting point for allowing further discussion and debate between organisations on the way forward. As one concrete suggestion of future action, we raised the possibility of an international mobilisation to Britain on 27-28 November 2027, when the G20 groupings of capitalist powers is set to meet in Manchester.

MARTIN POWELL-DAVIES

Well over 500,000 workers and youth poured onto the streets of towns and cities across France on 17 October to take their latest step forward in the battle to defeat Macron and the French capitalists' attacks on workers' living standards.

The youth were again to the fore, with high school and university students making up a good proportion of the marchers. Workers and their families also came to the demos in huge numbers, although official trade union contingents were less visible than they should have been.

Filled the streets

In Paris, the march completely filled the streets behind the Place de la République as it made its way north, often coming to a complete standstill because of its size. There were thousands of home-made placards denouncing Macron, budget cuts, police violence, and demanding a decent education and a future for young people. Youth climbed street furniture and scaffolding to wave banners and flags, to enthusiastic cheers. Cries of "Macron démission" - Macron Resign! - filled the air, along with other chants against the far-right and the police.

Supporters of La France Insoumise (LFI) had also mobilised with banners and stickers demanding action on the cost of living and to build support for Jean-Luc Mélenchon's 2027 Presidential campaign. Big business has not yet managed to find a candidate that they can put forward to act reliably in their interests. The prospect of a run-off between Mélenchon and the populist-right's Le Pen adds to the bosses' fear at the rising tide of opposition.

From the very start, the riot police were even more aggressive than usual. Volleys of tear gas soon filled the Place de la République forcing people gathering for the march to scatter. Musicians who had gathered there to

France erupts in mass protests



play protest songs during the march had to flee. Even the fast-food sellers had to drive away, and we also had to temporarily abandon our stall to give our eyes and throats time to recover.

Macron, Le Pen and the right-wing

press had obviously decided on a strategy of trying to cut across support for the movement through hypocritical denunciations of 'violence'. Instead of reporting on the powerful mass demonstrations, media reports

have focused on the exchanges of tear gas and fireworks between a minority of protesters and the police, as well as the anger that a minority of alienated youth expressed through acts of vandalism.

In the age of smartphones, some of the more obvious examples of police agent provocateurs were filmed, including an attack on firefighters. Their divisive strategy will not succeed, because the growing anger at the attacks on living standards demanded by big business runs very deep.

Gauche Révolutionnaire (GR), the French section of the CWI, intervened energetically with leaflets and newspapers putting forward a programme to advance the movement. In Rouen, a youthful GR contingent, bringing together both existing members and new supporters, formed one of the liveliest sections of their city's demonstration. In Paris, high school students that I spoke to were keen on the idea that 20 November could be a day for a Europe-wide student strike.

What next?

For now, with schools and universities taking a half-term break, the next planned day of action is on 5 November, when the union federations have called another co-ordinated mass one-day national strike. Significantly, for the first time since 2023, this will involve not only public sector workers but private sector trade unionists as well, with the prospect that this could effectively become a 24-hour general strike.

This will be an important opportunity for the movement to take a further step forward by building a massive joint strike of both students and workers. GR is proposing this should be followed by a further escalation to a united two or three-day strike. The trade union and left leaders should take the lead in further strengthening the links between all the different sectors in struggle so as to build a movement that has the power to defeat both Macron and the bosses' austerity plans.

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Socialist Students delegation joins student bloc

SOFIA PANDOLFI

Socialist Students joined the youth contingent of the massive demonstration in Paris, led by student unions of university and school students. There was a mood of anger towards the French government and enthusiasm in standing together to fight for education.

The lack of support for Macron's government was loudly demonstrated in the chants led by the student bloc. We demanded public investment in schools and universities, against the austerity affecting both students and workers.

Despite the threats of violence

incited by the police, they did not succeed in intimidating students into not protesting. Instead, students' anger was fuelled against the repression of the police, showing young people will continue to fight for our voices to be heard.

The number of students and level of solidarity seen in the demonstration was extremely inspiring, it shows young people all over the world how we can take action together. On 20 November, students in Britain, France, and across Europe will be walking out to continue to fightback against the lack of future offered to us by capitalist governments internationally.

Fund the fight for socialism internationally Donate to the Socialism 2026 financial appeal

Socialist Party members have made solidarity visits from England and Wales to the mass protests in France and to the public sector general strike in Ireland. Our party fights for social-ist change here and internationally, we are part of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) – organising worldwide.

By donating to the financial appeal at Socialism 2026 you can help us fund future solidarity visits, and of course build towards the biggest possible



Socialist Party, Socialist Students, and Gauche Révolutionnaire (CWI France) join the protests JAMES IVENS

mobilisation for the 20 November international youth walkouts. We have a target to raise £50,000 – 25% of which will go towards the work of the CWI.

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MIRA GLAVARDANOV

The Albanian masses have been on the streets for almost five months. Protests started in May when it became known that the prime minister, Edi Rama, was more than willing to give away a nature reserve on the beautiful Adriatic coast to foreign developers. Since then, there have been massive, peaceful protests every day in the capital, Tirana. In the last week, protesters were joined by students who walked out from the universities, with their own demands for better and more affordable education and better job prospects after graduation.

Students have brought about a new, angrier dynamic to the protests, which is not surprising. After five months of patient marches through the city, and after seeing radical student protests in many European countries recently, it was only a matter of time until Albanian students would organise and take the next step of their own. Student protests have spread to other cities.

Students' demands for lower university fees, and more available jobs after graduation, are only part of the demands against the high cost of living, in general. Housing, for example, in Tirana and other cities, is completely unaffordable to most people. But in a country with such high emigration, the student demands also mean that young people are determined to stay and build their lives at home. They are demanding a future in Albania.

Mass protests rock Albania



'Rama resign!' Marching in the summer PHOTO: ALBINFO/CC

This demand is coupled with the main slogan of the five-months-long 'Flamingo Revolution' - that 'Albania is not for sale'. A luxury tourist resort on the Albanian coast is a project dreamt up by Trump's daughter Ivanka and her husband Jared Kushner, whose company is responsible for some equally controversial developments around the world.

Albanian prime minister Edi Rama is still vowing that he will remain in

power. He knows that he is not under pressure to resign from the EU leaders, yet. Like many heads of unpopular regimes who lose all reasonable arguments, he is also claiming that 'foreign interests' are behind the protests; a ludicrous statement from someone who serves the interests of foreign capital against the Albanian people. Edi Rama attacked the protesters in a speech at the recent UN General Assembly. In a latest

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Austria: School students strike against headscarf ban

PHOTO: SOZIALISTISCHE OFFENSIVE (CWI AUSTRIA)



SOZIALISTISCHE OFFENSIVE (CWI AUSTRIA)

On 9 October, thousands of students, teachers, and others across Austria participated in school strikes and demonstrations against a headscarf ban. Many teachers joined the protests, highlighting alongside students the real problems in the education system: too few teachers, too few resources, and the early segregation of children along social and often ethnic lines. They pointed to a government that pours billions into military spending, spouts platitudes about 'democratic education', yet patronises girls. True women's liberation

isn't achieved by forbidding girls from wearing headscarves, but rather through an education system that provides all children and young people with an education that enables them to lead independent lives. However, this directly contradicts capitalist education policies, which prioritise producing the optimal workforce of the future over the interests and future of young people.

What thousands of young people in Austria have demonstrated, we also see in Germany, France, and many, many other countries: young people are not apolitical! They are ready to stand up against injustice and fight for their future. This frightens those in power. In France, they responded with brutal repression. In Austria, too, there have been attempts at intimidation and repression at some schools. Here, it is important not to leave affected students alone, but to fight together against any sanctions imposed by school authorities.

The school strike was called for by an alliance of various left-wing organisations, and action committees were formed at many schools. Sozialistische Offensive participated in the protests in three cities. Everywhere there was great interest in our flyers and our proposal: namely, to use the momentum of this protest as a starting point for further mobilisations like 20 November.

To try to prevent people 'at the bottom' uniting against injustice, they are divided. The headscarf ban and other racist measures serve precisely this purpose: to divide us so that we don't fight the major problems of inflation, anxieties about the future, and environmental destruction together. That's why it was so important that girls with and without headscarves demonstrated together during the school strike. An important start! After the school strike on 9 October, the youth strike on 20 November is just around the corner.



Protests and a general strike in Italy

As protests also erupt in Italy, the Italian trade union federation CGIL has announced a general strike for 20 November. The strike is intended to increase pressure on the government to allocate more funds in the budget for workers, retirees, and public services. On 17 October, 100,000 people took part in a CGIL-organised rally in Rome, including industrial workers, retirees, students, farmers, and truck drivers. The rally combined demands for higher wages and job security with calls to protect the healthcare system, education, the environment, and the constitution.

Madrid educators' strike

Thousands of educators took to the streets of Madrid on 19 October as they began an indefinite strike calling for smaller class sizes, reduced teaching hours, and increased resources for public education. A general strike has also been called on 11 November ahead of a general election on 29 November.

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Socialist Students hosted by the Socialist

No to attacks on young people's benefits - fight for a socialist future

ANNA BEISHON

YORK ST. JOHN'S SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Young people are being forced to take the brunt of capitalism's failures. We are told to find work and build a future - yet when capitalism fails to provide decent jobs, affordable housing or adequate support, the response from politicians is to punish the youth.

The parties of the capitalist establishment are looking at changing the way the benefits system works for young people. Andy Burnham has postponed publication of the Milburn Review into NEETs (young people Not in Education, Employment, or Training) until after the Budget on 28 October, but is clearly signalling cuts to the benefits young people can receive. Kemi Badenoch, the leader of the Tory opposition, proposes restricting Universal Credit for young people who have not worked continuously for six months.

This is viewed as the antidote to the nearly one million young people classified as NEET, because taking away vital support for struggling youth will apparently encourage them into work.

There is a narrative that today's youth are lazy and unwilling to work, when in reality, they face some of the bleakest prospects in decades: insecure work, stagnant wages, rising university costs and a worsening mental health crisis.

The pandemic hit young people particularly hard, with disrupted education, isolation, lost job opportunities and significant damage to social development, with many still suffering these consequences. We were told that these



PHOTO: PAUL MATTESSON

Youth take to the streets across Europe - build for walkouts on 20 November!

THOMAS BUTLER

LIVERPOOL SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Over the past weeks, hundreds of thousands of students and workers alike have spilt out onto the streets in France, with hundreds of schools blockaded and closed. This has sent a clear message: that the youth of France utterly reject the capitalist government's neglect towards services in favour of militarisation.

Much of the establishment media and politicians have sought to undermine this collective act of resistance by narrowly painting and propagating an image of general unrest, unbridled violence and chaos. However, what is truly radical and significant about the demonstrations that the big-business-backed media won't acknowledge is how powerful the collective force of working-class people can be in fighting for a better future.

It is important to highlight that the explosion of anger has not appeared spontaneously; you only need to hear it from the students demonstrating themselves. Chronic staff shortages, cockroaches in classrooms and collapsing ceilings are only a small insight into the sorry state of French education. Despite this, the French government has proposed a brutal austerity budget for 2027, amounting to up to 61 billion euros in service cuts. On top of this, however, they have managed to find more money to further increase military spending; the capitalist Macron government will have doubled military spending since coming to power in 2017.

This has been the spark that ignited the explosion of anger, with young people collectively expressing themselves in defiance, saying that working-class people cannot and will not tolerate further squeezes on their living standards. This brave act of resistance has not been an isolated incident; in Germany, tens of thousands of students took to the streets in a school strike in late September. The German capitalists have also demanded an increase in military spending despite the government pursuing austerity policies.

In Britain, the ruling class is singing from the same hymn sheet. The government has pledged to scale up military spending, while Burnham's ministers press on with the same old cuts, with one minister feeling it is their "moral crusade" to cut benefits for young and disabled people.

In these struggles, it cannot be overstated the important role the trade unions can play aiding the youth fightback. As has rightfully been said by some major French trade unions, "Their mobilisation is our mobilisation". Not for its own sake, but because the issues and struggles young people face are interwoven with those of the working class. Both face austerity, the threat of war, and squeezed living standards.

Workers and students

The Socialist Students constitution states the aim to "build links with trade unions and the wider workers' movement". The unrest in France has been rightly linked to the mass unrest it faced in 1968, when capitalism found itself on a knife-edge, beginning with student protests.

What truly brought French capitalism close to its demise was the 10 million workers on strike, with many occupying their workplaces. Unfortunately, the working class and young protesters were betrayed by the leadership of the mass working-class organisations.

Today, we have a chance to build new workers' parties that centre the organised working class and young people, with a socialist programme that will actually deliver young people a future.

Socialist Students is building for the 20 November youth walkouts with over 20 youth organisations across Europe. A chance to send a message to not just the establishment but the disenfranchised young working-class people that a socialist fightback can be mounted to fight for our futures and not their wars.

Get involved in Socialist Students today to join the youth fightback in Britain, and build - alongside young people across Europe - for big walkouts on 20 November.

PHOTO: NICK CLARE



Join the student fightback: join...

- Visit **socialiststudents.org.uk/join**
- or text **07403 057 140**

socialist students

Build international youth strike 20 November

Socialist Students has confirmed walkouts organised at more than

100 schools, colleges and universities across England and Wales on 20 November. Protests are expected in at least 50 towns and cities, with the main London demonstration taking place at 12 noon in Parliament Square. Socialist Students has been invited to have regular space in the Socialist to assist with its drive to build the biggest possible youth walkouts on 20 November.



IRELAND: 14 OCTOBER PUBLIC SECTOR GENERAL STRIKE - A NEW FORCE RISING

MILITANT LEFT (CWI IRELAND)

“We’re in a different country now than we were on 13 October”. This comment from a leading trade unionist and Militant Left member sums up the seismic impact of the public sector general strike in the Irish republic on 14 October.

It has indeed changed everything. For the well over 300,000 trade unionists that took part in the action, it was a day that will never be forgotten. For the first time in 17 years, workers in Ireland took part in a mass strike that completely shut schools, colleges, universities, hospitals (apart from agreed emergency cover), all council and civil services. Indeed, it was the biggest mobilisation of working-class power seen in the state since 1979-80.

As soon as the clock ticked past midnight on Wednesday 14 October, pickets began to be formed at Dublin Port and some council departments. By 8am, tens of thousands of trade unionists had amassed outside their workplaces across the country. Union placards, flags and banners were to be seen everywhere.

In most cases, pickets were in place until 4pm. The more than 20 trade unions who were striking together had done a great job of ensuring the rosters were filled. As a Militant Left member from Cork explained: “The strike was solid and impressively organised. By 8am there were already hundreds of pickets outside the main hospital from across all the different unions. The same was repeated in dozens of picket lines across the city. Everyone seemed to have volunteered for a shift on the roster, meaning the pickets stayed solid all day walking with placards up and down the pavement back and forth past their gates, with cars tooting their support all day too.”

An outlet for massive anger

Yes, this strike was primarily about pay, and the demand for inflation-busting rises after years of effective pay cuts when taking account of inflation. But it was also an outlet for the massive anger at the out-of-touch political establishment, and a society that has seen huge profits for multinational companies and the super-rich at the expense of ordinary working-class people.

Time and again, striking workers told Militant Left members, that they had waited for this opportunity for a long time, too long. The majority were taking strike action for the first time ever.

Ciarán McKenna, a SIPTU NEC and Militant Left member, said the day after: “Yesterday was a momentous day to be a trade unionist. It was

Picket line at St James’s Hospital, Dublin PHOTO: MILITANT LEFT



a privilege to take part in strike action to defend the living standards of public sector workers... In our SIPTU section there has been zero, and I really mean ‘zero’, pushback against taking strike action. Instead, there is a huge and palpable determination to fight this for as long as it takes.”

The mass strike involved public sector workers, yet it was a strike for all workers. And was treated as such by the enormous enthusiasm garnered from the wider working class.

The arrogance of the government, who had let the previous public sector deal come to an end in June with nothing to put in its place, was exposed for all to see.

By the end of August and early September, trade unions were announcing unprecedented support for strike action. SIPTU and Fórsa members - the two largest unions in Ireland - voted by a huge 97% to strike. INMO, the biggest health workers’ union, voted by an incredible 99% to strike. The largest teachers’ union returned a 95% vote for action. And so it went on.

Decades of partnership working between unions, employers and the government was suspended in mid-air.

The action began with a work to rule from 30 September. The government twiddled its thumbs, perhaps naively concluding that the trade union leaders would find a way to call off the national action and enter talks. They could not have been more wrong. A power had been unleashed,

not only against the government, but also applying enormous pressure on the tops of the trade unions as well.

Too little, too late, the bosses’ coalition government of Fianna Fáil/Fine Gael realised that the action would go ahead. On the eve of the strike the minister pleaded with the unions to call it off. “Pay will be top of the agenda” in any talks, he promised.

These and other ideas were among the central messages that Militant Left took to scores of picket lines across the country. The headline of our strike bulletin was ‘Enough is Enough!’ And it summed up the mood of the vast majority that we spoke to.

‘We visited 150 picket lines’

Militant Left members visited over 150 picket lines, including in Letterkenny, Cork City, Drogheda, Dundalk, Dublin City, Tallaght, Balbriggan, Swords, Ballymun, Sligo, Manorhamilton, Monaghan and beyond.

We not only brought our solidarity, but we also raised the need for the trade union movement to build its own political voice in the form of a mass working-class party, and for a socialist society to replace rotting capitalism.

We distributed over 4,000 copies of our strike bulletin. Militant Left members also played a key role in helping to mobilise a NIPSA trade

union delegation from the North, which brought solidarity greetings.

The trade union movement and the working class is a mighty force. Wednesday 14 October proved that beyond any doubt. A turning point has been reached. And alongside workers and young people in France,

Spain, Belgium, Italy and across Europe, a new power is standing tall.

● **Since the publication of this article, public sector unions have suspended the planned strike action on 21 October following discussions with the government**

Eyewitness reports from Socialist Party members who took part in Militant Left’s intervention:

A group of striking nurses and midwives at St James’s Hospital today took our leaflets enthusiastically and were chatting with us. Then they started chanting “Enough is enough - we want fair pay”, borrowing the first part directly from our leaflet which they were holding. We decided to walk between the first and second picket lines we had aimed to visit, and came across picket lines on the corner of just about every road we walked down and every major building we walked past! **HANNAH PONTING**

We went over to Cork. I’ve never seen anything like it! The power of the working class was on display. At the first picket we visited there were 450 people outside the hospital. Different trade unions representing the different workers but they had all merged together. It felt like the whole public was onside. If anything, the constant sound of car horns in support was annoying! Any attempts from the bosses at divide and rule don’t seem to have worked. **COLIN WRAY**

It was early morning in south Dublin and the picket lines were out. Teachers, civil servants and museum staff all struck together. We leafleted over twenty of their picket lines. At every one there was a real sense of solidarity between the different unions. Workers marched up and down the streets chanting. They moved from one picket line to the next, signs held high, sharing tea and home baking along the way. I’m hopeful the Irish workers will win their dispute. And that it’s a sign of the struggles to come across the water in Britain! **ALEX GERROLL**

LABOUR’S ULTIMATUM TO THE GREENS



The campaign to bolster Andy Burnham’s premiership, by undermining its political opponents in the hope this Labour government can actually deliver the programme demanded by the big business capitalist class, continues. That is the context for the ultimatum presented to Green Party councillors by Burnham this week. In other words, this is a battle with class interests at play.

At Prime Minister’s Questions on Wednesday 14 October, Burnham said: “We cannot support a partnership with a party that holds the position that has recently been adopted”. The next day, the Labour Party ordered its local groups to “review” their coalitions with Greens and to end them if Green councillors did not disavow the ‘Zionism is racism’ motion. Labour and the Greens currently share in the administration of around 20 councils, including in coalitions involving the Lib Dems.

The Financial Times is a key mouthpiece for the capitalist class. It said: “The move is seen as an attempt to capitalise on tensions within the Green Party over the motion”.

To what end is not spelled out, but the article later says: “Jeremy Corbyn, the former Labour leader, was expelled from the party in 2024 after refusing to apologise for saying that accusations of antisemitism in the Labour Party during his leadership had been ‘dramatically overstated’ for political reasons”.

Jeremy Corbyn’s expulsion from the Labour Party on the basis of disproven accusations of antisemitism were the culmination of a sustained onslaught by the defenders of capitalism inside and outside the Labour Party. They were fighting to maintain the advantage they had gained through Tony

Blair’s transformation of Labour from a capitalist workers’ party into New Labour, a party fully committed to defending the interests of the capitalist class. Killing off any green shoots from which working-class representation could grow was pursued by any means necessary.

Both the surge to Corbyn’s Labour and Polanski’s Greens are in their own ways expressions of the search for a voice to fight austerity, and also war. 192,000 people have joined the trade unions, the biggest growth in years, which also shows a determination to find a way to organise to defend living standards. Young people are getting organised for collective action in defence of their future around the N20 international student strike with the slogan: ‘Fight for our future, not their wars’.

There is more than a whiff of familiarity about the attack on Zack Polanski. The representatives of big business are seeking to use their ‘winning formula’ of false accusations of antisemitism for the same ‘political reasons’.

Gaza mass movement

One difference they face today is that we are three years into a mass sustained Gaza anti-war movement. There is widespread opposition to the actions of the Israeli state in Palestine - and to Labour’s association with it. Burnham is seeking to present a break with Starmer’s obscene support for genocidal slaughter. But the interests of British capitalism remain the key motivation of this

government too - not solidarity with the suffering masses across the region, who under profit-first capitalist conditions will always be denied safety and the democratic right to self-determination, let alone decent lives.



PHOTOS: BRISTOL GREEN PARTY/CC AND LEBJLIBRARYNOW/CC



The building of a mass working-class party here that challenges Labour’s war, austerity, and capitalist agenda is a key task in strengthening the fight for Palestinian liberation. In defence of its interests, the capitalist class will fight tooth and nail to stamp out even partial political expressions of opposition to their agenda. And so, they have taken the opportunity to try to kill off Polanski’s leadership.

Corbynism

From the moment of Corbyn’s election as leader in 2015 - when his defeated challengers on the right included Andy Burnham - the defenders of capitalism inside and outside the Labour Party organised energetically to remove him. ‘Project Ananda’ was a strategy to undermine his authority. The Blairites launched the infamous ‘chicken coup’ attempt in 2016. But Corbyn increased his vote within the party on the historic 2015 result, again among them thousands who had seen the opportunity to fight for their interests by joining Labour and backing him.

The problem that the capitalist class faced was the enormous popularity of Corbyn’s anti-austerity programme. The 2017 general election manifesto gave a glimpse of free education, council housing, trade union rights, and nationalised utilities. In 2017 Labour’s vote under Corbyn increased by 3.53 million or 9.6%. That was the biggest increase

between elections by any party since the 1945 general election - in both the absolute number of votes won and the percentage share of the vote. The danger of a working-class political voice emerging meant the defenders of capitalism could not stand by.

Outside the Labour Party, the representatives and institutions of capitalism also played their part. In September 2015, for example, a senior serving army general was quoted threatening mass resignations and even mutiny if Corbyn became prime minister.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) gets described as an ‘independent’ body, but it played a role in the onslaught on Corbyn. It announced a report into antisemitism in Corbyn’s Labour in 2019 - just as he had the potential to defeat then Tory leader Theresa May. And today it is one of the bodies piling in on Zack Polanski, cynically using the weaknesses in the motion passed at the Green Party conference to ‘justify’ the deluge of attacks on him. The billionaire-owned press of course played its role amplifying the onslaught - then and now.

Like in Labour under Corbyn, the Green Party contains those who want a party that defends the capitalist status quo which ultimately means war and austerity - and those seeking to fight it. The situation is not the same. Even though ultimately the class character of Labour did not change under Corbyn, the potential existed for Labour to be transformed into a mass workers’ party. The Greens are currently picking up the votes of a

layer of left-leaning voters, but their anti-austerity programme is more limited than Corbyn’s was and, most importantly, they are not seen by significant sections of workers as ‘their party’ that represents their interests. Nonetheless, the representatives of the capitalist establishment inside the Greens - as the Blairites did - are fighting to maintain their party as one that can safely channel discontent over environmental issues and so on, without encroaching on the limits of existing capitalism.

Within minutes of the polls closing in the Holborn by-election, Caroline Lucas was on the airwaves criticising Polanski’s leadership. Lucas has form. In 2019, she proposed a female cross-party alliance - including the Tories! - as an alternative to Jeremy Corbyn.

The Socialist Party programme to carry out the potential transformation of Labour under Corbyn to become a workers’ party included democratic deselection and removal of the Blairites. We argued for the return of the trade unions, the main bodies of the organised working class, to their central role under the democratic control of their members, and for Labour to develop a socialist programme. We also called for Labour councils to commit to a no-cuts position.

Anti-cuts council programme

Labour had around 7,000 councillors running over 100 councils in 2015. But only 400 backed Corbyn for leader, reflecting that the majority were on the pro-capitalist right of the party. No Labour council had done what the socialists running Liverpool under Thatcher did in the 1980s, when they refused to implement the Tory cuts and won the funding to provide jobs and services instead. Unfortunately, Corbyn did not demand that his councillors do the same.

Had Labour councils, even a minority of them, taken the Liverpool road it would have powerfully shown millions more suffering cuts why it was worth joining the fight against the capitalist attacks and helped turn Corbyn’s 2017 vote into one that took Theresa May’s government down - not just her majority. That would have opened the next even greater phase of struggle.

Today, Green councillors are taking part in coalitions with pro-austerity, pro-war parties, and are implementing council cuts. But if even a few hundred of them instead committed to fighting cuts in action, it would form a powerful addition to building the anti-austerity movement.

The threat that Corbynism represented for the capitalist class was the potential that, from the experience of fighting for even the limited anti-austerity programme he put forward, the confidence and aspirations of the working class for a decent future would grow. Above all, bosses fear mass working-class organisations whose demands challenge the limits of their capitalist system.

Even one hundred councillors in a party committed to fighting war and austerity, uniting with the trade unions, anti-war movement, and youth on a socialist basis, could help break the current logjam on developing working-class political representation and lay the basis to realise the capitalists’ greatest fears.

MAY 1968: ALL POWER TO THE FRENCH WORKERS!

This article, written by **Peter Taaffe** as the revolutionary events unfolded in France, was initially published in *Militant* (predecessor of the Socialist) in June 1968.

One million workers out! Hundreds of factories occupied and controlled by the workers! Schools taken over by pupils and progressive staff! Capitalist newspaper lies ‘censored’ by printing workers! TV lies censored by reporters and technicians! Universities taken over! Docks, post offices, ships taken over - what a mighty demonstration of the invincible power of the working class when it begins to move! What a crushing blow to the cynics, sceptics and apologists for big-business, who have written off the working class as ‘apathetic’, ‘bought off’, etc - and to the professional orthodox economists none of whose arduous study of the complex mechanics of capitalist economics could enable them to discern the gigantic force beneath the surface of modern society: the creator of the new society to come, the working class. How clear it should be to even the most politically uneducated workers that their French brothers would be in power today, but for the cowardly policies of the French labour and trade union leaders!

The workers and the population of France were incensed by the brutality of the special police in their sadistic onslaught on the students. More particularly, they were impressed by the success of the students in gaining

their immediate demands without delay, through their determination to act. The vast mass of students came out in a general strike throughout the country, protesting at the intolerable overcrowding, impossible working conditions (for example 2,000 English students to four professors), against the enormous failure rate (20%) and the numbers forced to leave before graduation (50% of the remainder), and against the lack of opportunities afterwards. The Daily Express reported that 80% of the population of Paris was for the students.

The industrial workers - and particularly the young ones - were emboldened by the success: “The students came first. They acted as a spark. They caused the government to yield, they gave us the feeling that we could go ahead”, said one of them to a Times reporter. Immediately the workers outpaced their union leaders and refused to restrict their struggle to a harmless one-day strike. They proved that they would tolerate their grievances no longer.

A gigantic wave swept from one end of France to the other. Not only the industrial workers but the bank employees, white-collar workers have responded to the call to strike. While only 10% were unionised, over 50% of the labour force is involved, which is incontestable proof of the revolutionary energy and determination that has been unleashed. As in all revolutions, from the cracks and depths of society the formerly politically backward workers, the sweated and impoverished, the demoralised and cynical,

“” It is the working class which has the effective power in the factories, the ports, the mines and the streets

have been brought to their feet. The poor farmers have set up barricades around the city of Nantes and other cities “in support of the workers and students” (Times, 21 May 1968). Exemplary order is maintained and, as even the capitalist press has been forced to admit, the workers “check and grease factory machines that are lying idle”.

All the conditions for a successful overturn are there; the workers are determined to go the whole hog. The middle class, particularly its lower layers, look with profound sympathy on the strike wave and in many cases join in. On the ships “even the officers have joined the sit-ins begun by the crews” (Times, 23 May 1968).

A revolutionary situation

It is the working class which has the effective power in the factories, the ports, the mines and the streets. A classic revolutionary situation exists. Even the televising of the debate in the National Assembly was done only by the permission of the workers’ organisations, as a Gaullist MP was forced to admit. Those instruments of state repression which are still in the hands of the government, the police and the army, are completely unreliable.

The police themselves have been touched by the hot flares of revolt. Their union issued a warning to the government that “the police officers thoroughly appreciated the reasons which inspired the striking wage earners and deplored the fact that they could not by law take part in the same way in the present labour movement... the public authorities will not systematically set the police against the present labour struggles” (Times, 24 May 1968). In the event of a clash, many “serious matters of conscience” would arise, in other words, many sections, if not the majority, would go over to the workers. The army also would be split from top to bottom if the officer caste sought to intervene. This is shown by the comments of a national serviceman when he was “asked if he would fire on the students and workers and replied, ‘Never. I think their methods may be a bit rough but I am a worker’s son myself’” (Times, 21 May 1968). If ever there was a time when the working class could take power peacefully, that time is now.

In every shop, factory and workplace the workers’ councils would naturally be the dominant form of

organisation. Established at local level they would come together also in the districts and eventually at national level. The organised sections would be drawn in until they embraced all the toilers; a parliament of the masses where their will and demands would be exercised; real democracy as opposed to the sham democracy of the jugglers in the National Assembly. Taking up the demands of the workers, the farmers, and the middle class it would be possible to tie them together, feeling the common need for a drastic change, the need for a socialist society. Once in power, the workers’ councils, where all officials would be elected and subject to recall, from being instruments of struggle for power would then become the organs of management and control by the masses themselves.

This is what the French working classes are groping for, as the strategists of capital so cunningly understand. The only thing that stands between them and extinction are the leaders of the mass organisations. They will try to use the prevarication and treachery of the Communist Party (PCF) leaders at a later stage, not only to discredit the latter but, with them, the ideas of Marxism in the eyes of the masses.

The leadership of the PCF and the CGT, along with the Catholic unions and the ‘socialist’ Force Ouvrière, refuse to carry through what the workers have begun: the seizure of power. Gratified, the Observer remarked, “the Communist unions and the Gaullist government they appear to be challenging are really on the same side of the barricades”.

At first the students came in for vicious attacks in the pages of L’Humanité, the PCF daily newspaper. Later the PCF leaders attempted to prevent all contact between students and workers. They attempted to restrict the movement against its very nature to purely ‘economic demands’ - as though these could be met for any length of time under capitalism! In spite of the utter ineffectualness of any opposition to the workers, they warned against ‘provoking the government’, causing bloodshed etc.

What alternative do the Communist Party put forward? Over the heads of the workers they are supposed to represent they have agreed, in private negotiations with big business, to send back the workers they never called out in the first place on certain



Students and workers march in Toulouse, May 1968 PHOTO: ANDRÉ CROS/CC

compromise terms: terms which cannot be maintained under capitalism without causing inflation, crisis and unemployment.

The ‘Communist’ leaders put forward the idea of a Popular Front government. Far from being, as the PCF leaders claim, an “alliance with the middle class” it is in reality a bloc against them. By linking up with the leaders of the CFDT it is forming in reality a bloc with the political exploiters of the middle class who habitually sell out the interests of the small farmer, the shopkeeper, etc, to those of big capital. Only in action can these intermediate layers of society be torn away from allegiance to their traditional parties.

Programme

It is not in a Popular Front but in a United Front of struggle for power that these workers who retain allegiance to the other parties would be affected. If they agreed to a common struggle against capitalism, all the better; the Marxists would be able, in action, to demonstrate the superiority of their programme and methods.

Meanwhile the Popular Front will mean something different to the bosses. They will use the time to prepare the forces of reaction: the disillusioned poor farmers, students and middle class who will suffer from the inevitable devastating inflation and

run-down in the economy. These sections will come to the conclusion that the working class has let them down and they will rally to any pseudo-radical force that seems to offer actions

and an actual alternative. This is the basis of ultra-reaction. They are only able to do this because of the pusillanimity of the official labour leaders.

For the time being, they are prepared to eat into the enormous reserves they have piled up over the last ten years. Not the least of the effects of such a deal will be the undermining of the competitive position of French capitalism in the world market. What the bosses will be forced to give with the left hand - and they will have to do this or face the possibility of explosions which, despite the PCF’s role, could end their days - they will attempt to take back with the right hand tomorrow. Resulting inflation will be used in order to inflame the middle classes against the ‘excesses’ of the workers.

Vague promises of ‘participation’ will not, as all the capitalist commentators agree, satisfy the French workers. One thing is certain: the Gaullist ‘invincible’ regime is finished. Whenever its demise comes, within weeks or months, its position has been irretrievably damaged. The French workers will not only have succeeded in bringing about its downfall, but also in beginning to undermine all the honeycombed theories of ‘social peace’ which have proliferated in the Western labour movement in the last twenty years.

Not by accident did the Times mournfully comment: “When Louis Philippe was driven from his throne in 1848 after a few brisk days of rioting in Paris and took refuge in London, there were revolutions all over Europe. Italy,

West Germany, Belgium and Spain are in trouble enough without the Mother of Revolutions once again setting a bad example” (22 May 1968). How well do the ideologues of capitalism, with devastating realism, understand the threat that faces them! And how timid and treacherous do the labour leaders’ vague and pious hopes sound in comparison! The diseased state of British capitalism too is preparing an explosion. The traditional parties in all the countries of Europe will be shaken from top to bottom.

Even if the PCF manages to sell the deal with De Gaulle to its own rank and file, this will not be without internal rumblings. No longer do the PCF leaders exercise the mesmeric effect or hold the fanatical devotion of the rank and file as in the 1930s. Already this is reflected in the resignation from the CGT of one of its leaders, a prominent PCF member, because he considers that the CGT is “not taking full advantage of the situation to overthrow the Gaullist regime”. In the event of a Popular Front, the PCF will precipitate a massive movement of opposition which could end in a split with the majority going over to the genuine programme of Marxism. The enormous sense of power, the gigantic steps forward in understanding, the combativity and ability to fight of many workers who have viewed politics as the preserve of lawyers and doctors in the past, will still be there. The French workers have unleashed a force that will yet end the rule of rent, interest and profit in Europe and throughout the world.



Socialism Today issue 118 - May 68 special

- 1968 - year of revolution'
 - The May events in France
- leftbooks. co.uk/product/socialism-today-118-1968-year-of-revolution
- £4 plus postage



Workers outside their factory in the south of France, with a sign reading 'Factory Occupied by the Workers' and a list of their demands pinned to the fence PHOTO: GEORGE LOUIS/CC

May 1968: the main events

- **Thursday 2 May:** Six students appear in court. Nanterre University closed in protest. French Communist Party (PCF) denounces students.
- **Friday 3 May:** Police attack peaceful demonstration at Sorbonne, 596 arrested. University Teachers' Union (SNE.Sup) calls a strike.
- **Sunday 5 May:** University strike spreads. Seven students are fined and imprisoned. Demonstrations in Paris are banned.
- **Monday 6 May:** The first university occupations start. Sixty thousand demonstrators are attacked by riot police, 739 are hospitalised. The first barricades since 1944 are set up.
- **Tuesday 7 May:** Young workers join the demonstrations. Strike at Sud Aviation against redundancies. Post office workers strike for higher wages. Students appeal for support from the factories.
- **Friday 10 May:** Latin quarter occupied and barricaded, police sent in with tear gas in the middle of the night.
- **Saturday 11 May:** The PCF-led trade union federation, the CGT, together with the ex-Catholic union federation, the CFDT, the Teachers' Federation and the left parties call a 24-hour general strike for the following Monday.
- **Monday 13 May:** 24-hour general strike with mass demonstrations of 50,000 in Marseille, 40,000 in Toulouse, a million in Paris.
- **Tuesday 14 May:** Workers occupy Sud Aviation, Nantes, locking the director in his office and appealing for solidarity.
- **Sunday 19 May:** Two million now on strike, including banks, all transport, nationalised industries, and the metal industry.
- **Monday 20 May:** Six million on strike, including Michelin, Peugeot, Citroën, department stores, all ports and mines.
- **Tuesday 21 May:** Eight million on strike, over half of the French labour force. Friday 24 May: Ten million on strike.
- **Saturday 25 May:** Talks begin between the government, employers and trade union leaders.
- **Monday 27 May:** Workers' mass meetings reject offers.
- **Wednesday 29 May:** CGT demonstration 500,000-strong. De Gaulle leaves Paris saying, 'The game is up'.
- **Thursday 30 May:** De Gaulle returns having been assured of support from General Massu, commander of 70,000 French troops based in Germany. Dissolves National Assembly, announces new elections and launches smear campaign against the 'threat of totalitarian dictatorship'. Tank and troop movements begin around Paris and right-wing demonstration attracts one million.
- **Friday 31 May:** Negotiations resume everywhere and, not without victimisation, a gradual return to work begins, encouraged by the PCF.

Leeds NHS theatre assistants strike over pay rebanding

IAIN DALTON
LEEDS SOCIALIST PARTY

Leeds Hospital Theatre Assistants organised in Unison have begun indefinite strike action in their long-running dispute over rebanding. The claim for rebanding has been going on for years and industrial action began in December 2025. Workers are upping the ante. Trust bosses promised to resolve this dispute earlier this year, following a mass lobby of the Trust Board during the last round of strike action.

Pickets are taking place daily between the two main hospitals in Leeds, and a 'mega-picket' was supported by local trade unionists on Friday 9 October. Strikers also took part in a national lobby of parliament by Unison, demanding increased public sector funding.

Socialist Party members have continued to support the pickets, and

Socialist Students members visited the mega-picket. Disputes over rebanding have been taking place throughout the NHS. Unison's Health Service Group should be looking at how the action in Leeds could be coordinated with other similar disputes.



Battles for rebanding happen around the country - here at Guy's and St Thomas's in London LEN HOCKEY

RMT LNER caterers strike over pay: Bring all contracts back in-house

LEEDS SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS VISITED PICKETS

RMT members working on the Gate Solutions catering contract with LNER (London North Eastern

Railway) began strike action on 16 and 17 October, after the company failed to increase their pay to keep up with the 'real living wage' they had previously received. Pickets were angry that another contractor for LNER, OCS, which employs cleaners, has increased wages.

Given that the Labour government had promised the 'greatest wave of insourcing in a generation', workers are asking why they remain outsourced and back on the minimum wage, when LNER itself has been taken under government control.



Lancet NUJ strike: 'Low wages - no pages'

NIALL MULHOLLAND
CHAIR, NUJ LONDON MAGAZINE BRANCH

Journalists at The Lancet, the 200-year-old medical journal, took three days of strike action from 19 October in a fight for fairer pay.

Members of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) face rising

workloads and falling living standards, with many worse off than five years ago. Meanwhile, the journal's owner, publishing giant Elsevier, made an adjusted operating profit of £1.035 billion in 2025.

Despite these huge profits, Elsevier has refused the workers' pay demands and walked away from negotiations.

After the strike, NUJ members will begin working to rule, causing significant disruption to the journal's operations.

The 42 workshops at Socialism 2026 include:

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UCU university delegates reject leadership's approach and vote for UK-wide dispute

TILDE RESARE
DELEGATE TO UCU SPECIAL HE CONFERENCE

The University and College Union (UCU), representing 120,000 academics and support staff at higher education (HE) and further education (FE) institutions, held an emergency HE conference (SHESC) on 14 October.

This followed a motion passed in 23 UCU branches demanding it be called, to debate launching a dispute with the Secretary of State for Education over the current funding model of HE. 24 universities are currently at risk of insolvency and more are in dire straits.

The campaign for a special conference happened because the UCU HE Committee has so far refused to implement the decision of the HE conference in May for a sector-wide campaign.

The SHESC was held online, and was tightly chaired by the HE Vice President. In just over three hours, three motions were heard and voted on.

Motions 1 and 3, both for sector-wide action, were amended to explicitly include the participation of private HE providers. The growth of private providers in the HE sector in many places actively undermines the industrial strength of the union since they aren't part of existing nationwide bargaining schemes for pay and pensions, and they need to fight to gain the protections already won in the public parts of HE.

The first motion called to

immediately open a dispute with the Secretary of State (SoS) over the funding model, with an all-member consultative ballot to gauge appetite.

This goes directly against the will and advice of the 'UCU Commons' majority on the HE Committee, supporters of general secretary Jo Grady. They want the fight to be slower paced and more moderate, primarily focused on lobbying rather than industrial action.

But the sector is in crisis. Years of disputes at individual institutions (such as the six years of disputes at the University of Sheffield where I'm based) haven't turned the crisis around, but have merely slowed it down at those institutions. This shows the need to bring all the fights together, and for a change to the current funding model.

Arguments about legality

A UK-wide dispute could mobilise the UCU as a fighting trade union.

Several delegates acknowledged that there are risks in this type of action, but delaying or taking a more moderate approach is tantamount to doing nothing.

Those arguing against constantly reiterated the legal risks in pursuing this strategy - claiming it would be 'political' and that only 'industrial' disputes are legal, and that devolved nations could be at risk of being classified as illegal 'sympathy action'.

Legal risks should not be taken lightly, but a leadership that wants to lead a fight can frame a dispute that is legally robust. Lack of funding

means cuts, job losses and low pay, all clear industrial issues. The current UCU leadership essentially wants to avoid a fight.

Motion 1 was moved by a member of the UCU 'rank-and-file' group who said: "There is a clear chasm between members and leadership, that's why we've included a members-wide ballot". This can give confidence that there is wide support for a fight in UCU. The motion was passed with 66% in favour. Motion 2, against a ballot, automatically fell.

Unfortunately, the third motion, moved by supporters of the UCU Left grouping, also fell because the vote was tied. Motion 3 was not counterposed to the strategy of a dispute with the SoS in Motion 1, but advocated fighting on this year's pay claim as well, as a quicker way to a fightback. Socialist Party members supported both motions.

FE ballot update

UCU has agreed to a UK-wide aggregated ballot of members in Further Education. Socialists on the FE Committee have fought hard against the attempts of supporters of the general secretary to delay and water down the dispute.

A special meeting of the FEC takes place on Friday 23 October to consider legal advice and Socialist Party members and others will argue for immediate implementation of a bold campaign to mobilise members.

UCU day of action on N20 - link up with youth strikes!

After the conference, UCU general secretary Jo Grady sent an all-members email to promote the leadership's "Education, It's Ours" campaign, announcing a day of action on 20 November. This is probably an attempt to present the leadership as fighting, while actually trying to avoid a sector-wide strike. The sudden announcement is likely a direct response to pressure from members. It shows we should keep the pressure on to shape the policies of our union.

The more conservative reps in the union are likely to try to tell their members that the correct way to organise the day of action is to focus their efforts on appealing to MPs, MSPs, MSs etc to join their constituents in the campaign.

However, there is a better way. This day of action coincides with the international youth strike on 20 November, "Fight for our futures, not their wars", which Socialist Students is a key part of organising in Britain.

All students who are organising a walkout should reach out to their local UCU branch for support and to organise a joint rally. Demand an end to militarisation on campus and across Europe, and an end to profiteering in education.



Lots of universities are fighting - here in Northumbria ELAINE BRUNSKILL

BUILDING FOR COORDINATED PUBLIC SECTOR STRIKE ACTION AND A NATIONAL TRADE UNION DEMO

Napo AGM: Probation workers prepare to fight on pay and workloads

Vote to strike in probation; Vote against the Cafcass pay offer!



In 2014, Napo successfully fought against privatisation of probation. National action can win! PAUL MATTSSON

ADAM HARMSWORTH
NAPO NATIONAL VICE-CHAIR FAMILY COURTS, PERSONAL CAPACITY

From the start, the AGM of Napo (trade union for probation and Cafcass workers) had a fiery mood, driven by members' anger over poor pay offers and ongoing high workloads in probation and Cafcass (family courts).

Both national chair Ben Cockburn and general secretary Ian Lawrence urged probation members to vote for industrial action in the ballot that opened on Monday 19 October.

Ben stressed that Napo has been left with no other option. Probation bosses and the Labour government have ignored the anger of probation workers and the unions for years, instead leaving the service grossly underfunded and understaffed. The early release of prisoners just weeks before the AGM, worsening workloads and the stress and exhaustion of staff, only added to members' anger.

Several probation leadership figures addressed the conference, including the Chief Inspector of Probation, an HMPPS (HM prisons and probation service) Deputy Director, and interim Director of Probation HMPPS, who all agreed to take questions too. The Lord Chancellor, Alex Norris MP, also addressed the AGM,

possibly the first time a Lord Chancellor has in the union's history. Napo's ballot and media campaign clearly got their attention!

Members' anger not appeased

But if these senior figures thought they could appease members' anger, they were mistaken. Norris repeatedly told AGM that he had been a Unison rep and was a lifelong trade unionist - reminiscent of Starmers' line about his mother the nurse and his father the toolmaker! Norris was trying to act like 'one of us' while also talking about 'difficult decisions'. Members grilled him and the probation bosses, making it very clear they didn't buy any of the excuses for poor pay and worse work conditions.

The interim Director of Probation HMPPS, Jim Barton, was laughed at from the floor for repeatedly claiming probation leadership cares about its staff. From official figures - likely far lower than the reality - workloads are at 118% capacity and there is a shortage of 3,500 staff. Nothing has been done to end the culture of bullying and discrimination in HMPPS.

The AGM had a panel discussion on workplace safety, after some serious recent attacks (including life-threatening) in probation offices led Napo to demand more be done to

protect staff. A young Napo branch chair who was the victim of an assault at work was among those on the panel. His speech about HMPPS failing staff raised the temperature and helped solidify the anger of members.

Members do only have one option left to get any immediate improvement in probation or in Cafcass - we have to fight. Both the consultative ballot on the Cafcass pay offer of 3.23% and the industrial action ballots for probation on pay and workloads are now open. Vote against the Cafcass pay offer, vote to strike in probation, and build the industrial campaign to win funding off the government.

A successful ballot by Napo, along with civil service union PCS which is balloting at the same time, could be a lever to push more of the trade union movement into action - including the other probation unions who should join the fight!

Napo should also join the voices urging the Trades Union Congress to set a date for a national demonstration against austerity. More unions fighting together to demand public sector funding is restored could force serious concessions from the Burnham government. It's time the trade unions led the way in locking up austerity for good!

TUC: Call a national demo against austerity!

The General Council of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) meets on Wednesday 21 October, just after this issue of the Socialist is published.

Trade union branches and trades councils around the country, the National Shop Stewards Network and the Socialist Party have campaigned for the TUC to immediately implement the PCS motion that was passed overwhelmingly at TUC Congress, to "urgently call a national Saturday demonstration this autumn for investment in public services, against austerity and for pro-worker policies".

The NSSN's model motion said: "This union organisation/trades council calls on our union to demand that the TUC General Council on 21 October 2026 agrees to enact Motion 34 and name the date for a 'national Saturday demonstration' before the end of this year."

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PCS STRIKE BALLOT OPEN

Vote 'yes' for strike action and 'yes' for action short of strike

PCS BROAD LEFT NETWORK SAYS:

PCS members are facing another year of inadequate pay whilst prices are going up. Fuel prices will more than wipe out the 3.5% pay increase this year. That's one of the many reasons we demand a fully funded 10% pay rise, with an £18-an-hour minimum. We want restoration of the pay lost through years of freezes and caps. We want national pay bargaining.

Job cuts, office closures, under-staffing, increased workloads, stress levels at their highest. Members face unacceptable penalties for sickness, increased bullying and harassment, and performance management systems that penalise not support. This is why we are fighting to protect jobs, including on the use of AI, and stop compulsory redundancies. No office closures without union agreement.

The Cabinet Office is playing fast and loose with our pensions, outsourced to private company Capita. Thousands of members and their families are suffering severe hardship and massive stress and worry as a result of bad decisions and outsourcing. PCS must campaign to bring pensions administration back into the civil service.

On top of this, the Civil Service Pension Advisory Board recommended in 2019 to cut 2% from our contributions. This is still being

blocked by government and members have been overpaying for seven years.

We're fighting for better annual leave and sick pay, workload protections, and improvements to HR policies, especially on flexible working rights, hybrid working and all aspects of equality, including trans and non-binary support.

In 2023, over 100,000 PCS members took strike action and forced the government to put more money on the table. It wasn't enough, but it shows that if we fight we can win.

The Broad Left Network has consistently argued for a serious national campaign. We have won that policy at consecutive national union conferences. We have fought to ensure that all our members can stand together to fight for the pay, jobs and conditions we all need.

We must get over the 50% turnout threshold. Members are angry. The best way to demonstrate that anger is to vote, and vote yes/yes, to increase the pressure on employers and win more money, better conditions, and protect jobs and pensions.

● The ballot runs 20 October to noon on 1 December

● Socialist Party members participate in the Broad Left Network which, alongside others, forms a left majority on the PCS National Executive Committee



Many groups in PCS have been forced to fight over pay and cuts - here workers at parliament. The national ballot brings them all together LONDON 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.

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,
- 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

Do you agree? Join the fightback!

JOIN THE SOCIALISTS

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

Help fund the fightback!

DONATE TODAY

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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.

UK drought a symptom of capitalist climate chaos

HUW JAMES
ALDERSHOT SOCIALIST PARTY

The drought situation in England has continued to worsen over the past two weeks. According to the Environment Agency, reservoir levels are exceptionally low and are continuing to decline in many areas. On 15 October, the government declared severe drought in parts of southern England, and there are growing concerns that farmers may not be able to refill water storage reservoirs over the winter.

The ongoing drought is caused by a combination of persistent low rainfall, record-breaking high temperatures, accelerated soil and water evaporation, and long-term infrastructure pressures. Historical underinvestment in new reservoir capacity and high rates of pipe leakage have left water supplies extremely vulnerable during dry spells.

This was the year that, for many, the climate threat became real. Human-caused climate change has shifted seasonal weather patterns, making hotter, drier summers and extreme heatwaves significantly more frequent and intense. As a recent leader in the *New Scientist* points out, we would be fools not to prepare our infrastructure now for future severe weather.

Despite an increased demand for water, no new reservoirs have been opened in the UK since 1991. The main reason for this is the privatisation of the water industry, which shifted focus toward short-term profits and away from long-term investments. Privatisation created a fragmented industry where no single

actor has either the resources or motivation to invest in large-scale infrastructure projects.

Leaky pipes are also a major issue in the UK, with three billion litres of water lost daily across the grid. This is not just a waste of water; it also creates other issues such as structural damage to buildings, health hazards caused by mould, and water contamination. Again, the lack of action in fixing this issue is down to the prioritisation of profits over infrastructure improvements.

The problems outlined above all have the same underlying cause. Capitalism is causing climate change and is incapable of shifting from fossil fuels to renewables. It is an unplanned system run to maximise the profits of a tiny few. Opening up sections of the economy to profit was the reason Margaret Thatcher privatised water in the 80s, the reason for our ageing infrastructure.

We need to immediately renationalise the water companies, with no compensation for the fat cats who have got rich from our bills – only those with proven need. We need to take into public hands the banks, big businesses and polluting industries. Then we could democratically draw up a socialist plan of production that protects the environment and our livelihoods. It is only through socialist change that we will prevent climate catastrophe and build a world which is habitable for all.



Hertfordshire in southern England this month BEA GARDNER

Don't just tax the banks, Nationalise them!

TOM PORTER-BROWN
LEICESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

An example of the country's enormous wealth gap is the mega-profits of the banking industry. The top four British banks generated a combined total of £29 billion of profits in just the first half of 2026.

Andy Burnham may use the upcoming October Budget to try to garner some support by implementing a mild tax increase on the banks, but any measure he takes will be confined to his 'fiscal rules' (the same as his predecessor Keir Starmer). And the banks themselves are arguing that increased bank taxes would "risk making the UK uncompetitive" and therefore driving out foreign investors.

But what investment?! Our public services have seen nothing but cuts and austerity for sixteen years: healthcare, transportation, education, housing. If that £29 billion was taken from the banks it could be used to reverse cuts to public services and then expand them!

The TUC (Trades Union Congress)

is arguing for an increase on taxes for the banks, with its general secretary Paul Nowak stating: "It's common sense and the right thing to do." But winning the funding for our services, infrastructure and futures, will take more than a moral compass and steeper taxes on the banks.

The bank bosses are right that anything resembling a wealth tax could drive foreign investors out of the country, but that's why the wealth generated by those banks needs to be nationalised and owned democratically by the working class.

The working class needs to be mobilised and armed with a political programme that prioritises their needs over the bosses, which also includes the workers in the banks themselves, who could be won over to a socialist programme if the unions fight for it.



Protests in France PATXI BELTZITZ/BERRIA EGUNARIAR.OCC

Fight for a real alternative, reject the politics of hate and division

● Build the N20 youth walkouts!

In several towns and cities on the weekend 17-18 October, workers and young people gathered to oppose far-right activists marching, or otherwise took part in 'unity' rallies that trade unions had played a role in organising.



Socialist Party member Rhys, speaking at the anti-racist counter-protest ALEC THRAVES

In Swansea, Socialist Party members took part in a local anti-fascist counter-protest, that had been organised by Stand Up To Racism. Socialist Party member Rhys addressed the crowd:

"The rise of the far-right isn't born out of thin air, it is born out of desperation. People are desperate for a political alternative. When Labour fail them, as they have been, when Keir Starmer passes the cuts and Andy Burnham follows suit, people are desperate for an alternative.

"It is integral that we as anti-racists and anti-fascists do not let Reform and the far right become that alternative.

"Across Europe, people have been standing up. Students have been standing up to austerity and cuts that their capitalist governments have been passing. On 20 November, we are standing in solidarity with them. We are calling on college students, uni students and young people to walk out in support of ending war, against austerity politics, and against the politics of the capitalist system.

"The French students have been in an incredible struggle against their government. The German students have also been in this struggle. It has

kicked off across Belgium, Spain, Italy and it will come here on 20 November.

"Join us on 20 November. We'll be outside Fulton House at Swansea uni Singleton campus and at Gorseinon College gates for 12 noon. I encourage everyone to take part. Say no to the politics of hate and division!"



Spreading socialist ideas across Cambridge

PHILLIP
COLLEGE STUDENT IN CAMBRIDGE

Socialist Students attended this year's Cambridge University Freshers' Fair to build for the 20 November youth strikes, as well as to collect sign-ups for a potential official Socialist Students society.

Students were receptive to the anti-war messaging on the flyers and quick to express support for the slogan 'Fight for our future, not their wars!' Over twenty students left their details, many of these attend Anglia Ruskin University and the surrounding colleges, as well as from the

University of Cambridge itself. This raises the possibility of having multiple societies in the city.

Funding not fees

People we met leafleting attended our meeting later in the day and others expressed interest in attending future meetings. Discussions showed that there is a range of concerns including over the involvement of universities in companies like Palantir and the rising cost of tuition fees. Even in well-funded institutions like the University of Cambridge, there is still dissatisfaction with the way that funding is being handled and a

desire for more support for students and their futures.

Plans have been made for a follow-up meeting to establish an official Cambridge group and to organise for the 20 November youth walkouts. This will unify students in the Cambridge Universities and colleges with others internationally in advocating for socialist change.



Budget consultation reality check for Lambeth Greens

STEVE NALLY
LAMBETH AND SOUTHWARK SOCIALIST PARTY

It was a case of 'Welcome to the real world' for Lambeth's Green Party councillors at their public budget consultation event on 15 October. Over 150 trade unionists, community activists and local people made it crystal clear that more cuts and austerity are not an option, and made that clear to the Greens who form part of the new leadership of Lambeth council.

Socialist Party members and others highlighted the reality of life in

our battered working-class community, and the urgency of developing a borough-wide campaign to fight for a needs-based budget. This also included full support for the Trades Council's forthcoming People's Budget Conference in January 2027.

Accept cuts or not?

It became clear that Lambeth's Green councillors were hoping to use this event to get some kind of acceptance for more cuts. This was confirmed when they proposed that those present should go away and set up a campaign against cuts, that presumably they would then lead! They even invoked the 1970s to explain that the labour movement was much stronger then - ignoring the big battles against Thatcherism that had occurred in Lambeth during the 1980's.

Eye on the Greens

What's your experience of Green councillors, or young Green campaigners on campus?
● editors@socialistparty.org.uk



A Tale of Two Healeys

Lessons from Britain’s Sterling Crisis 50 years on

KEVIN PARSLOW

Two Chancellors of the Exchequer with the same surname Healey – current Chancellor John and former Labour Chancellor Denis (1974-79). Both Labour MPs for Yorkshire constituencies. Both previously Secretary of State for Defence. Both became Chancellor in the midst of a Middle East crisis affecting the price of oil. Both dealing with precarious economic and financial situations for British capitalism.

The similarities between the looming financial crisis facing the Burnham government and that which faced the Labour government of the late 1970s are not just those of personalities but also in which class’s interests those figures govern, and what that means for workers’ struggles and a fightback against cuts and austerity.

The last few weeks have been dominated in the serious media by debate on the efforts of international finance capital, through the bond markets, to put pressure on capitalist governments to reduce their debts. The United Kingdom is not alone in this. In France, the cost of government borrowing is ratcheting up, even in the US the Trump presidency is under pressure.

British capitalism has been in relative decline for decades. In up-swings, economic growth is generally weaker than in other countries, while the downturns are stronger. On occasions, these weaknesses develop into full-blown crises. Since 1976, these have included the European Exchange Rate Mechanism crisis of 1992 and the world slump of 2007-09. On each occasion, the working

class is made to pay for the capitalist crisis, through attacks on their living standards.

Labour in the 1970s

The Sterling Crisis of 1976 followed this pattern. Labour was elected to office in 1974 on the back of the miners’ strike that defeated the Tory Ted Heath government. It promised in the February election to end the strike, but also reforms including nationalisation of aerospace and ship-building. These were underpinned by the ‘Social Contract’, an agreement between the Labour leaders and the Trades Union Congress (TUC) to effectively put its weight behind the government.

But Labour was only a minority government from March 1974 until the second election of they year in October, when it gained an overall majority of just four. This was seen by the capitalists as a chance to put pressure on the government to scale back its manifesto pledges in the interests of big business.

Behind the capitalists’ pressure was a worsening economic position. The Heath government had expanded spending to fund concessions to the working class following the crisis over the Pentonville dockers, the miners’ strike of 1972 and a general increase in worker militancy. But on a capitalist basis, this increase in expenditure worsened the government finances and raised the cost of living. This was inherited by Labour and, to exacerbate the situation, the Middle East war of October 1973 saw a huge spike in oil prices. Inflation massively increased, to 25% annually at one point in 1974. In reality, the world postwar boom, that had seen rises



in living standards for most working-class people, was ending. The new period would see almost constant attacks on both the working wage and the ‘social wage’. Nevertheless, workers continued to take strike action to defend their living standards.

By 1976, Sterling was beginning to slide on the currency markets, a decline that would lose it about 30% of its value against the dollar. The fiscal deficit was 9% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Interest rates remained high. All these factors increased the pressure on workers’ wallets. Recognising the gravity of the situation, Prime Minister Harold Wilson resigned in the Spring, to be replaced by James Callaghan.

Workers vs the bosses

The dangers impressed themselves on the government but they were also facing the anger of working-class people.

This was reflected in the Labour Party conference of that year. The left, including delegates who were supporters of Militant, predecessor of the Socialist Party, demanded socialist policies to end the hardships working-class people were facing. Pat Wall, later the Marxist Militant-supporting MP for Bradford North and representing Shipley Constituency Labour Party, gave a fighting speech saying that the Social Contract had resulted in an 8% fall in living standards: “None of the successive wage policies,” he said, “has done anything to strengthen the economy or help the low paid. Only the taking over of the commanding heights of the economy could achieve the manifesto aim of a fundamental shift in the balance of wealth and power in favour of working people.” He received a tremendous ovation.

Instead, conference delegates got Denis Healey warning them that

rejecting fiscal discipline and espousing left-wing policies would only cause deeper unemployment, worse inflation, and ultimately hand power to a Tory government (which happened anyway in 1979, with the election of the Margaret Thatcher Tory government). Healey was booed, heckled and shouted down for capitulating to the bond markets. Thirty minutes later, Callaghan told the Conference: “We used to think that you could just spend your way out of a recession, I tell you in all candour that that option no longer exists.”

Healey and Callaghan were preparing the way for big attacks on the public sector. In December 1976, the government went cap-in-hand to the International Monetary Fund for a loan. They negotiated an advance of \$3.9bn (£2.3bn and \$22.1bn in 2025 values) but this in turn led to £2.5bn in cuts (around 2% of GDP). And most of the trade union leaders, under the guise of backing a Labour government for fear of something worse, accepted pay restraint for their members.

Trade union action

While most trade union leaders backed the Labour government, however anti-worker it had become, this wasn’t the attitude of many of their members. And some were prepared to act. A number of public sector unions called a demonstration and lobby of Parliament. Alan Fisher, General Secretary of the National Union of Public Employees, a predecessor of Unison, put his name to the front-page article of Militant that was sold at the demo, which was attended on a weekday by 60,000 workers!

And workers began to fight back against the limits on pay rises. There were already strikes of very low-paid workers taking place, most notably

at the Grunwick photo processing plant in north west London. In the winter of 1977-78, the Fire Brigades Union went on strike to try to break the pay policy. By the Labour Party conference of October 1978, the line could not hold any more. Ford workers were striking to make up for lost spending power as the conference opposed the pay policy. This led to the 1978-79 ‘Winter of Discontent’ led by largely low-paid workers fighting for better pay. Workers showed that they could force their leaders to back their struggles and win.

Now, we have Chancellor John Healey preparing his Budget for 28 October. The financiers are circling, hoping that the government will cut public spending to soothe the markets and, at the same time, increase funding for war. This will only be at the expense of public services and their employees, as it was in 1976.

This time, however, the trade unions have already passed motions to fight austerity, including – two years running – for an anti-austerity demonstration. If the TUC General Council won’t lead, then a ‘coalition of those willing’ to defend their members and our services must act.

History is full of lessons for the working class, both in defeats and victories. What is unacceptable are leaders who do not learn from those lessons and repeat the same mistakes. We have no Social Contract but we still have leaders who fear opposing a Labour government will lead to the election of a right-wing government. But the alternative must be to fight industrially and politically, to give workers a socialist programme to fight around, which is the only real alternative to all the big business parties.

● Read more: the Rise of Militant by Peter Taaffe



TV documentary review: Aberfan: The Village That Fought Back

The 60-year fight for justice by a heartbroken working-class mining community

SCOTT JONES

It was a foggy morning, but after days of heavy rain it was sunny above the mist in the village near Merthyr Tydfil, South Wales, and the children were in good spirits on the morning of Friday 21 October 1966. It was the last day in school before half term. After singing ‘All Things Bright and Beautiful’ in assembly they returned to their classrooms at Pantglas Junior School just before 9.15am.

Some would say later they had heard a roar like thunder, then a crash. In no time at all there was nothing but silence. Over 100,000 tonnes of slurry from a coal tip had slid half a mile down the mountain, engulfing the school and several houses, killing 144 people, including 116 children, in minutes. It would take years, decades in some respects, to get justice. But following the tragedy, Aberfan was the village that fought back.

The documentary shows the women of the village joined by miners from up and down the Valley as they tried in vain to find survivors, but none were found alive after 11am. We see images of the devastation illuminated by floodlights as day turned to night, narrated by newsreel footage from the time, as the reporter sums it up saying: “Tonight is a night of absolute tragedy, I have a feeling that tomorrow will be a day of anger.”

‘A man-made disaster’

Through unimaginable grief the community knew they “had to fight”. We

hear one father at the time say: “We accuse the National Coal Board (NCB) of nothing less than murder”, while arrogant NCB chair Lord Robens treated it like an accident and turns up in the village lying about the spring and stream underneath the tip. But it was “100% a man-made disaster” as one former miner says. As early as 1963 concerns had been raised locally. One letter was headed: “Danger from coal slurry being tipped at the rear of Pantglas School, Aberfan.” The inquiry found violation of tipping regulations.

A survivor who lost her sister says: “The village lost half its children, the community was crying out for help and the services we needed to try and rebuild, there were homeless living in caravans.” The NCB initially offered just £50 compensation if you lost a child – not per child – only £50 even if you lost two. A disaster fund was started, raising millions from donations worldwide. It came under the control of the Charity Commission, but the community felt it had to go cap-in-hand to get access to it. A leaked memo to workers even said: “Ascertain whether parents had been close to their children” before giving money. One bereaved father ended up getting arrested for campaigning for control of the fund. “Everyone let us down. And on top of all that the tips remained.”

The NCB still refused to remove the tips, citing costs. The government backed the NCB and both ignored letters and meetings of the local grassroots Tip Removal Committee. The community had had enough of

the contempt and being ignored. A coach of a hundred people travelled to meet the Welsh Secretary at his office in Cardiff, after he again told a delegation that the tips would remain. Inspiring footage shows the crowd bursting into the building and dumping a sack of slurry and coal waste on his desk! This documentary is brilliant because it is the first which fully shows all these fights.

Eventually, relieved and vindicated, the community celebrated the government finally relenting and agreeing to remove the tips, but as one says now, “we should have known it was too good to be true.” The cost would come out of the Disaster Fund which was meant to be used for the community, not to right the wrongs of the government and coal board. After further years of campaigning the money would only be repaid, not allowing for inflation in 1997 and then fully in 2007.

The legacy of Aberfan, like coalmining as a whole, looms large in South Wales. We’re all told about it as children and know people in our communities connected to it in some way. Infrastructure and other reminders remain, like many of the tips that still pose a danger, despite legislation. As climate change worsens, some tips have slid into communities in recent years like in Cwmillery in 2024. It’s estimated it will cost £600 million to make them safe.

That cost is still placed ahead of human safety and that man-made tragedies like Hillsborough and Grenfell still occur shows that capitalism will

always prioritise profit over everything else. That is why we need to fight for socialist change, with real nationalisation (unlike the NCB) under the democratic control and management of workers and working-class communities, so future man-made disasters can be avoided.

Aberfan: The Village That Fought Back aired on BBC Two and is on iPlayer now

● Read ‘Aberfan: a disaster that should never have happened’, which includes an interview with a survivor and later miner at socialistparty.org.uk

SOCIALISM TODAY

Monthly magazine of the Socialist Party

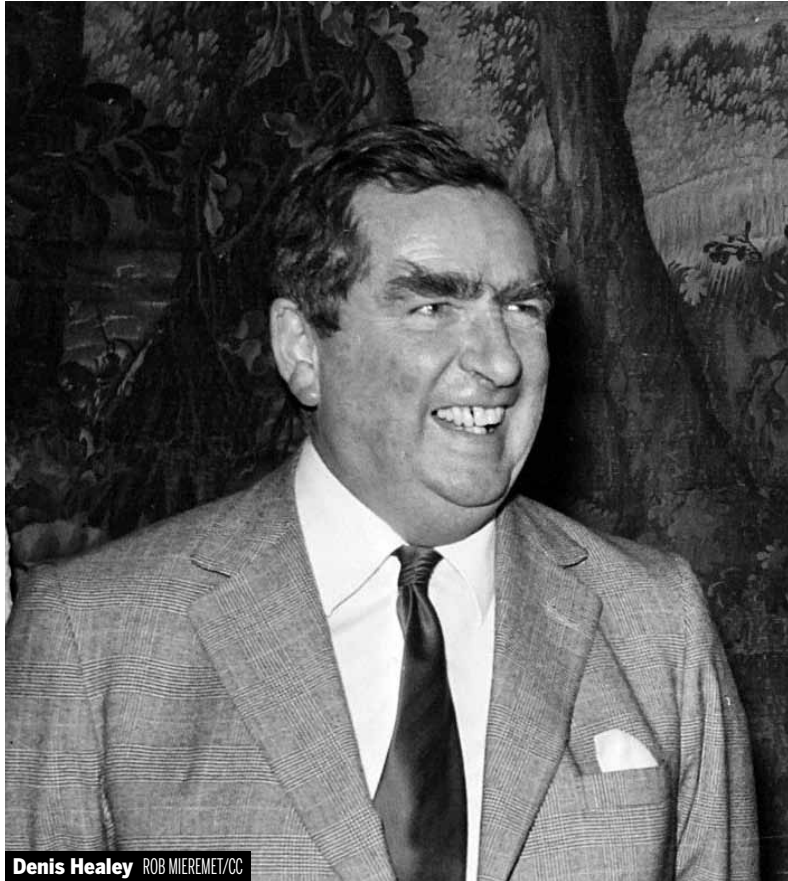
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- Fighting racist ideas
- Degrowth debate
- Unions and the sex industry



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the Socialist

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formerly **Militant**

Labour government set to be worst for cost of living

WE NEED ACTION

TUC name the date for trade union demo

EIRA EKENBERG-JONES
RHONDDA CYNON TAFF SOCIALIST PARTY

28 October will mark the release of the **2026 Autumn Budget**, the first with **Andy Burnham** as prime minister. Despite radical-sounding language that this Budget will 'move money and power out of Westminster', **Labour Chancellor John Healey** described his budget as being built on "financial discipline".

Previous Budgets have shown us what Labour sees as 'financial discipline' - leaving the bill for capitalist dysfunction and greed at the feet of the working class. Last year's Budget saw £26 billion in tax rises, with no improvements to council, NHS, or other vital services - we've instead seen quite the opposite! It's no surprise then that 67% of people in 2025 reported fears that the economy would worsen - a prediction that has evidently become true.

Labour's tenure is set to become the worst parliament on record for living standards, a recent report by poverty charity the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) found. JRF predicted that in 2029-30, real household incomes will be between £440 and £770 lower than when Labour first came to power. Even the lower end of this range would represent the biggest decline in living standards since the 1960s! This is a direct result of Labour's fiscal policies, which JRF warned will require "bold policy action" to undo.

Burnham has commissioned two government taskforces to create a ten-year plan to improve living standards. But working-class people who are struggling to get by haven't got ten years to wait! More than seven million families are already skipping necessities like food and toiletries to get by, and four million children are living in poverty.

Ultimately, we didn't need a report to notice the sharp decline in our living standards. Despite hopes amongst some that Burnham will somehow be kinder than his predecessor, all signs point to more austerity. The only remedy to this financial crisis is mass working-class mobilisation to win the resources back out of the hands of the super-rich. Under the pressure of members for action, three unions are preparing to ballot for strikes nationally in the public sector.

The TUC (Trades Union Congress) passed a motion to organise a mass demo against Labour austerity. A demo built for by the over six million-strong trade union movement would give workers a chance to feel our collective strength, and pile pressure on Labour. We need an end to benefit cuts, funding for our NHS, our councils, and other vital services.

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

