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the Socialist

Issue 1304

9-15 January 2025

formerly **Militant**

BILLS UP, PRICES UP



MAKE THE SUPER-RICH PAY

Build the socialist opposition



JOE FATHALLAH
CARDIFF EAST SOCIALIST PARTY

As if working-class people are not already struggling enough with rising bills and prices, from this April essential bills are set to increase by an average of almost £250 for millions of households.

Energy prices are projected to rise by an average of £47 a year, water by £86, and council tax in England by over £100. Water bills, TV licences, mobile phone and broadband contracts, and train and bus fares are also forecast to go up. For most of us, our pay is well behind where it was five years ago and with inflation creeping up again the future looks bleak.

Meanwhile, just days into the year, the income of an average FTSE 100 CEO has already far exceeded what most workers will earn all year. Britain has the largest wealth gap between the richest 10% and the poorest 10% of any major economy apart from the US. The

resources exist in our society to provide a good standard of living for everyone, but wealth and power is concentrated in the hands of the super-rich capitalist elite.

Clearly, a tax on these obscene riches could go some way to relieving the worst symptoms of this disease. However, while ownership of the utilities and the commanding heights of the economy remains in private hands, they will be run as money-making schemes for their shareholders. Socialists call for democratic nationalisation, with compensation paid only based on proven need, of the energy sector, utilities, railways, telecommunications, and

all the private companies ripping off working-class people for the benefit of the super-rich.

Keir Starmer and his New Labour government have made it clear they intend to serve the interests of the bosses' capitalist system. No wonder they are so unpopular. We need a new party of the working class to fight back against the cost-of-living crisis!

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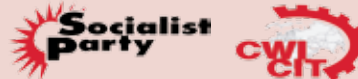
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"The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it."
Karl Marx

Labour betray WASPI women with compensation U-turn

CLARE WILKINS
NOTTINGHAM SOCIALIST PARTY

WASPI women have been campaigning for over a decade. Women born between April 1950 and April 1960 worked and paid National Insurance to qualify for their state pensions at age 60. They lost out when the previous Tory government increased the state pension age from 60 to 65, without being informed adequately or with enough time.

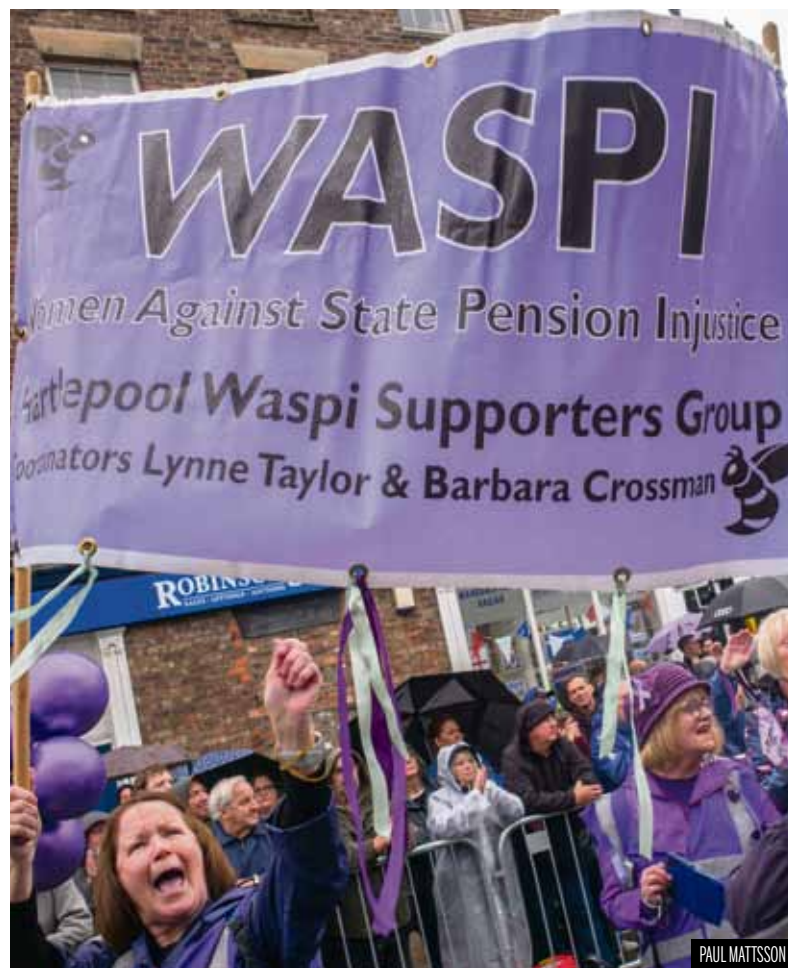
Because of this, the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman recommended in March 2024 that the women, who lost tens of thousands of pounds in pensions, be compensated between £1,000 and £2,950. Labour politicians supported the WASPI women when they were in opposition, happy to pose with campaigners to attack the Tories.

But on 17 December, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) minister Liz Kendall announced that not only would there be no compensation but also that there had been sufficient notice from DWP, and there was no real evidence of significant detriment to the women. This completely contradicted the findings of the ombudsman's report. Cynically, she left it till the eve of the Christmas recess to make the announcement.

The Labour government says that compensation would be a 'detrimental cost to the taxpayer' but 9 million of 12 million pensioners are taxpayers and, with tax thresholds frozen till 2028, almost all state pensioners will be paying tax. The tax burden is concentrated on poor pensioners and low-paid workers rather than those who salt their riches away in tax havens, or the big companies who pay little to no tax.

Our state pension is the lowest in Europe and you have to have 35 years of National Insurance payments to qualify in full. Only 2 million pensioners get the full amount. Pensioners who qualified for state pension before 2016 receive the 'basic state pension', lower than the 'new state pension'. Over 2 million pensioners live in poverty and DWP figures show that the cut to the winter fuel payment will plunge up to 100,000 more into poverty.

We need a liveable state pension at an age that enables everyone to have a decent and dignified life in older age. And instead of the false choice between pensioners and workers, take the wealth out of the hands of the super-rich bosses to pay for it! As none of the parties will stand up for us, we need one that will - a mass workers' party armed with a socialist programme.



PAUL MATTSSON

Voter turnouts down Fight for a real socialist alternative

ADAM GILLMAN
PREVIOUS TRADE UNIONIST AND SOCIALIST COALITION CANDIDATE

Only one in two adults living in the UK voted in the 2024 general election - the lowest since universal suffrage. There is a massive gap between the proportions of younger and older people voting, and a widening gap between homeowners and renters. The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) has warned the new Labour government, already unpopular with shallow support, that low turnouts approach a 'tipping point' of the political system's legitimacy.

There is growing disillusionment amongst working-class and young

people. Many see that there are no mass workers' parties fighting for a mass building programme of high-quality council housing and an end to austerity. And the only parties they see just offer more massive cuts and privatisation of our public services, then who can blame them for not voting?

Parties of all different colours have cut our services and driven down living standards, and people are sick of it. Not voting is one expression of working-class anger at the establishment.

The capitalist establishment is concerned that these low turnouts and turnout inequality will delegitimise governments that act in the

interest of the bosses and continue to attack the living standards of working-class people, spurring mass discontent and anger at the system.

The Socialist Party fights to build a real alternative: a democratic mass workers' party with a socialist programme that fights for an end to austerity, for the nationalisation of rail, mail, energy, the banks and the big monopolies under democratic workers' control. If that was an option on the ballot, that would enthuse young people. That's why I stood as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition as an 18-year-old in last year's election - to offer a socialist alternative.

Hundreds of thousands of young people joined and campaigned for the Labour Party when Jeremy Corbyn was leader. His programme, including free education and council house building, electrified the situation. This shows what's possible. If you're interested in fighting back against the capitalist system then join the Socialist Party today!

Saatchi for socialism?

Such is the rottenness of capitalism today that even some of its most enthusiastic advocates from the 1990s are turning to Marx to try and explain its miserable reality.

Over Christmas, Maurice Saatchi of 'Saatchi and Saatchi' - the advertising agency that made a fortune helping Thatcher to victory in successive elections - actually wrote a piece in the i newspaper where he expressed his shock that he had "accidentally helped to create a world of staggering inequality as in the US where the average pay of a CEO is 440 times the average employee". Perhaps, he concludes, "Marx was right."

Much more important than the disillusionment of retired Thatcherite advertising executives is the deep-seated anger about the consequences of capitalism in the working class, and the inevitable mass movements that will result.

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Adam (second right) campaigning in Reading

STRIFE IN STORE FOR STARMER IN 2025 Build the socialist opposition

Socialist Party WHAT WE THINK

2024 saw the historic defeat of the once-most successful capitalist party in the world. The Tory Party vote at the general election collapsed, leading to the worst result in its 200-year history and its lowest-ever number of MPs.

We carried the headline "Tories smashed", and with it the immediate urgent task for the workers' movement: "Build the socialist opposition."

In its first six months, Keir Starmer's Labour government has shown again and again that its priority and purpose is to serve the interests of the capitalist class and to defend the profit-based capitalist system. While business figures complained about the National Insurance hike and other extra costs, its first Budget was welcomed by the International Monetary Fund and Financial Times as being in the interests of the system as a whole.

Starmer's government was elected with the votes of just 20% of the electorate - the lowest support base of any government since 1918. Elected with little enthusiasm, the Labour leadership is distrusted, with even some Labour members calling it 'dishonest'.

Just two weeks after the election, Starmer faced his first rebellion in Parliament with seven Labour MPs voting against keeping the two-child benefit cap. All seven currently sit as independents, suspended from the Labour whip.

Cost of living

As we celebrate the new year and resolutions are being made, the ghost of the cost-of-living crisis haunts us. The headlines in the capitalist press on 1 January were all about energy bills going up. It is expected that on average households will face a £240 bill jolt.

Everything is going up - bus and train fares, mobile and broadband charges, council tax, water, food, tv licence - the list goes on. As the cold winter and snow set in, many working-class families will be put in an impossible choice between heating or eating. The cutting of winter fuel allowance for 11 million pensioners puts them at risk of freezing this winter. Price increases are further fuelling an already acute housing crisis. Almost one in eight private renters faces the threat of eviction this winter.

We don't need Starmer's New Year message to tell us things are going to get worse, working-class and young people are experiencing it.

But it's not all bad for everyone. Bankers are set to receive even bigger bonuses, some ten times their



NUMBER 10/CC

salaries in payouts, after the removal of the bonus cap. Energy companies continue to make record profits. Just 20 energy companies have made a staggering £457 billion in profits since the start of the energy bills crisis.

Rigged system

Increasingly, working-class and young people are drawing the conclusion that the system is rigged against us.

The memory of the highest level of strike action since 1987 is not forgotten, including that strike action can win. Since August 2021, Unite the Union members have won £430 million in increased wages, from 1,250 disputes, with over 200,000 workers taking action - over 80% of them wins. That's just in one union.

Other unions have also had an increase in membership, and with new layers of reps and activists developing. There is a layer of workers who are drawing the conclusion that we need to fight!

Working-class pressure is mounting on individual Labour MPs and councillors. Some fear not getting re-elected and are shedding crocodile tears. Others could be forced to take a stand at odds with the Starmer leadership.

At a parliamentary level, the election of Jeremy Corbyn and four other independents for Gaza shows the possibilities of how this government will face opposition to its left in future polls. As the suspension period of the 7 MPs is coming to a head, their fate in the Labour Party is in question, particularly if they stand up for the interests of the working class.

On a local level, a number of councillors are leaving the Labour Party to sit as independents.

Broxtowe independents

The latest to join them are 20

councillors in Broxtowe near Nottingham resigning from Labour and accusing Starmer of abandoning Labour's values. Summarising the situation today, they were denounced by the former Conservative MP for Broxtowe Anna Soubry, who argues that the current Starmer Labour MP 'deserves the support of everyone in Broxtowe'.

Now the biggest group on the council, the Broxtowe Independents could use their position to spearhead the fight against Starmer's austerity, including by continuing their stated policy of opposing cuts in this year's council budget.

The Socialist Party welcomes the steps the Broxtowe councillors have taken and is encouraging them to organise a local conference and invite trade unions, anti-cuts campaigners and other socialists and activists, to discuss how to build the strongest working-class challenge at the upcoming local elections in May for Nottinghamshire County Council. (Broxtowe Borough Council does not have elections this year.)

Nottinghamshire Trades Council, which covers Broxtowe, could invite the councillors to discuss with its delegates what kind of political representation the working class needs.

May's elections will be the first major electoral battle under Starmer's government. The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), of which the Socialist Party is a part, is hosting its conference to discuss plans for a working-class stand this May, taking place online on 2 February.

TUSC is a banner under which socialists and independent anti-cuts councillors can stand - clearly identifying themselves as trade unionists and socialists, and distinguishing themselves from the whole spectrum of 'independents' of various political backgrounds. There are, for example,

existing independents on Broxtowe council, not part of the new group and not on the left.

Fighting for working-class political representation, a party for our own class that defends our interests, remains a priority as we start the new year. But we don't need to wait for a new party to be formed to win gains for the working class right now.

Socialist Party members will continue to support workers taking action, help organise local campaigns, push for councils to set no-cuts needs-based budgets and fight for the socialist programme needed to get rid of capitalism.

If you agree capitalism is rotten, and things need to change - we agree! We can change and fight for rights now not tomorrow - join us today.

Fund the socialist opposition

The Socialist Party is the most determined fighter helping to build the socialist opposition. We will be taking to the streets with leaflets, posters, papers and more - all pointing the way forward for how the working class can take on Starmer's government and making the case for socialist change.

We need all the fighting strength we can get to prepare for our stand in May's local elections, and to support our members battling to transform the trade unions into democratic, fighting organisations by standing in crucial union elections too.

To fund our campaigning activities, we set a target to raise £25,000 nationally every quarter - made up of donations from supporters we meet campaigning, and other fundraising organised by local Socialist Party branches. What can you do to help us reach the target this quarter?

● Visit socialistparty.org.uk/donate

Unite executive discusses the challenges under a Labour government

SUZANNE MUNA

UNITE EC MEMBER, PERSONAL CAPACITY

December's meeting of Unite the Union's Executive Committee (EC) was informed that, since the election of Sharon Graham as general secretary in 2021, the total number of disputes the union has embarked on has now risen to 1,551. These have involved nearly 215,000 members, with a win rate of 84%, worth over £480 million in members' pockets.

That alone illustrates the importance of fighting to retain and strengthen the industrial militancy of the current leadership in the round of elections now starting in Unite. In coming weeks, members will be electing workplace and branch reps; then in spring, regional industrial sector and equality conferences will elect their respective regional committees, which in turn elect reps to the relevant national bodies.

The EC was again informed of the political pressure that Unite has applied to Labour to deliver for working-class people – with the strong showing for Nigel Farage's



Sheffield Veolia bin workers, members of Unite, in their 20th week of strike action for trade union recognition, picketing the Lumley Street depot. ALUSTRATICE

Reform an urgent concern. The winter fuel allowance cut has been one of the issues to the fore in Unite's campaigning.

It was reported that Unite is demanding a move toward green energy production at the threatened Grangemouth oil refinery, and for the government to be the 'investor of first resort' on steel at Scunthorpe. Discussions are taking place with government over the Stellantis Luton site.

Demand nationalisation

In all such cases, Unite should be leading the call for nationalisation of these vital industries to save jobs and skills, and to enable planning and investment for a green transition that protects the needs of the workforce and communities.

Local authority debt is still a huge concern with lots of councils having declared or on the verge of declaring 'bankruptcy'. Unite's policy for

no-cuts needs-based budgets, and to demand the funding needed from government, is therefore crucial.

There have been announcements of the renationalisation of rail and we need to keep up the pressure for full democratic nationalisation, not just piecemeal as contracts expire.

The EC discussed that upgrading the National Grid has to be raised as a priority also – again raising the need to demand nationalisation.

It was raised at the EC that we cannot accept that, with its Employment Rights Bill, the Labour government has fulfilled its promises on repealing anti-union laws. Many anti-union and worker-hostile laws could have been repealed immediately and in particular we must argue for immediate repeal of the Tory turnout thresholds.

Political strategy

We need to consider further our political (and thus economic and industrial) strategy. Reform is attempting to build itself as the voice of the working class and if Labour won't answer workers' needs then we have to be prepared to find another political pathway. There was a question at the EC on whether Unite is working with the seven suspended Labour MPs and Corbyn's group of independent MPs, and a question about when Unite's plan for Political Forums would be set up. These are urgent steps that would help build a pro-worker bloc in parliament, and could help developments towards a working-class political voice.

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What's at stake in the PCS elections

Civil service cuts are coming: prepare for the fight!

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN PCS

It is clear after six months whose side Keir Starmer is on, and it's not ours. His Labour government has already signalled its intention to cut thousands of civil service jobs.

The Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS), which organises civil servants and outsourced workers, must gear up for the fight now.

The union's National Executive Committee (NEC) elections in April, the first in PCS under Starmer's government, will be a crucial step. There is no room for complacency: only a determined, socialist leadership, with a proven socialist president at the helm, can lead this fight.

Build the struggle to stop civil service job cuts

5% cuts to government departments, on top of the 2% already demanded in the autumn Budget, 5,600 jobs to go in the Ministry of Defence, redundancies in the Department of Transport, plus another 10,000 job cuts. Cuts that will have a devastating impact on PCS members, including the knock-on impacts to those in devolved governments and in outsourced government contracts, including Mitie, Interserve, ISS and G4S.

Announcements were made over Christmas by the Cabinet Office, posing further threats to already-eroded pensions.

PCS must put down a marker of resistance now, or this will be the first, not the last, set of cuts this government inflicts on hard-working civil servants.

The Labour government openly said that the 5% pay remit for the civil service last year, along with similar pay awards in other sectors, was set in order to avoid more strikes. It was an improvement on years of pay freezes and pay restraint, but did not repair the damage done by rampant inflation and a decade of austerity. And now the talk of pay awards of less than 3% in the NHS and schools is a warning of what's to come for the civil service.

It is vital for members' jobs, pay and pensions that we win a fighting PCS leadership in the upcoming elections – one that doesn't cover up for this austerity government but fights for members.

What has happened since the last union elections in May 2024 shows the importance of this year's elections.

Members rejected the previous NEC majority in favour of a fighting leadership

In the 2024 national elections, members ousted the previous 'Left Unity' leadership from their NEC majority. Together with a grouping called the PCS Democrats, Left Unity had been in power for over 20 years. During that time their fighting spirit has deteriorated, shown by the lack of a serious fight on pay over the last two years, despite the determination of members.



PCS outsourced workers on strike December 2024. ROB WILLIAMS

A new left majority was elected, with 19 to 16 seats on the NEC. Supporters of the PCS Broad Left Network (BLN), including Socialist Party members, were among those elected, alongside other left activists, in a 'coalition for change'.

The election was won by campaigning on issues that matter to members, including serious preparation for national action, and for union democracy:

- a 10% pay increase and £15-an-hour minimum wage, working towards restoration of pay lost under austerity
- defence of jobs, pensions and redundancy compensation payments
- extension of members' control and elections

This campaigning approach was supported by the union's annual conference, which rejected the outgoing Left Unity leadership's defeatist strategy (see 'After PCS conference the new left executive must get to work' at socialistparty.org.uk).

President and general secretary hijack PCS democracy

Although the left won a decisive NEC majority, this did not include the presidency, which was retained by Left Unity member Martin Cavanagh. He, together with Left Unity member Fran Heathcote, who won the election for general secretary in 2023 by fewer than 800 votes, have consistently blocked the new leadership's mandate.

Cavanagh has effectively run the NEC by presidential decree, challengeable only by a two-thirds majority vote, which the new executive does not have. This has been his go-to means of denying motions and decisions by the new executive.

At the first meeting of the new executive, which took place in June during the general election, the new left majority argued that the mandate for strike action won in areas covering over 22,000 members should be exercised, to send a warning to whatever government was elected that PCS remained serious about winning on pay. This was vetoed by the president.

And, instead of preparing the ground for a campaign to win more on pay, Fran Heathcote welcomed the 5% pay remit! Efforts by the NEC majority to instruct the general secretary to pursue the demands agreed by PCS conference were repeatedly blocked by Cavanagh and Heathcote.

Attempts to wreck campaigns

At every NEC meeting, Heathcote and Cavanagh have stood in the way of a relaunch of our campaign on pay, jobs and pensions.

The previous NEC, that was ousted in May, had implemented a strike levy, to support members taking paid action on behalf of the whole membership. The NEC majority has, on three separate occasions, attempted to implement a review of this levy, to protect the lowest-paid members, but recognising that if we are serious

about a campaign to protect pay, jobs and pensions, we must build up our strike fund. Cavanagh and Heathcote have done everything they can to obstruct this.

Then in December, the general secretary told the NEC that the union's fighting fund was overspent – but demanded the end of the levy entirely.

This came two weeks before Cavanagh and Heathcote were due to meet with the Cabinet Office about pay – a meeting from which the NEC majority were excluded by the president and general secretary. Imagine the signal sent to the employer – cancelling the levy immediately before talks! Therefore no campaign, letting the employer off the hook!

Who runs the union? Calls for special delegate conference dismissed

Faced with repeated obstruction, the NEC majority invoked its right under the union rules (SR 6.6) to call a Special Delegate Conference (SDC). That would enable members to debate relaunching the national campaign and address the vital question of who runs the union. But calling an SDC was blocked!

Branches representing thousands of members have sent motions to the general secretary demanding an SDC. In a move that beggars belief, branch motions have been dismissed as simply 'correspondence', requiring no action. This contempt of Cavanagh and Heathcote for the

union's rules and democracy will not be lost on branches and reps.

The tremendous response by activists to the call for an SDC is a warning to Cavanagh, Heathcote and the union officialdom.

End the paralysis – elect a fighting left majority!

A state of semi-paralysis exists at the top of the union. This is not just an affront to our democratic traditions but directly weakens the ability of the union to face the challenges ahead.

Socialist Party members warned that Starmer's government will not be worker-friendly. Anti-union laws – including 50% turnout thresholds in ballots – will operate long beyond what could be achieved by emergency legislation to abolish them, and reforms will be watered down without the hot breath of the trade unions on the government's neck.

The scrapping of pensioners' winter fuel payments, retention of the two-child benefit cap, rejection of the WASPI women's demands, and public expenditure cuts, all bear out our view.

We must prepare our members for a fight on pay, jobs and conditions. PCS must organise at the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and with other unions for coordinated action across the public sector. If our union puts up a serious fight it can inspire others across the trade union movement. Socialist Party members also want a serious discussion on political strategy – to strengthen our industrial fight with a political voice.

Elect a socialist PCS president to lead a fighting, democratic PCS!

The elections for the president and NEC this spring are the opportunity for members of our union to win the fighting, socialist leadership they deserve. Branch AGMs begin from 16 January and nominations are open till 6 March. Socialist Party and BLN members are discussing with others who also want a fighting union to again put forward a united slate of candidates. Get involved in this campaign and prepare for battle against the coming cuts!

NEW YEAR STRIKES

● NEU sixth forms fight on for funding for pay

NEU members in non-academised sixth form colleges have continued their strike action into the new year, demanding funding from the Labour government for a pay rise.

● NICK CHAFFEY, SOUTHERN AND SOUTH EAST SOCIALIST PARTY, REPORTS:

More strikers were out at Barton Peveril College in Eastleigh, near Southampton, some for the first time as anger grows. Workers reported that losing pay during the previous strike days had forced many to reassess how badly paid they are for the work they do.

An offer of 3.5% backdated to September, then 5% from April, has been rejected. Strikers told us teachers in colleges with funds would get 5.5%. That would leave government funding unresolved and breaks up national pay.

NEU rep Dani said: "It's not the colleges that set pay, it's the Sixth Form Colleges Association. They get funding from the government. They are responsible for settling this dispute."

● NEU EXEC MEMBER SHEILA CAFFEY (PERSONAL CAPACITY) REPORTS:

Teachers at St Brendan's Sixth Form, Bristol, are standing strong to demand fair pay and at least 22 out of 29 support staff NEU members are refusing to cross the picket line. A fantastic show of strength and solidarity!

● KEN MCCALL, NEU SECRETARY (PERSONAL CAPACITY) REPORTS FROM HULL:

NEU members from both sixth form colleges in Hull remain defiant and optimistic despite the continued gaslighting of the sector from the Government. Pickets have been bigger and stronger than ever, attracting great support from other workers, trade unionists and students across the city, including Hull and District Trades Council. The mood remains positive, and some good local media coverage has enthused the workers currently taking action.



NEU strikers in Hull (left), RMT strikers in Wolverhampton (above), Princes Juices strikers in Bradford (right) SOCIALIST PARTY

● RMT members on Avanti strike for fair treatment

Train managers working for Avanti West Coast took strike action over the holiday period due to unfair treatment. They get paid significantly less than senior management for covering the same roles.

● NICK HART, BIRMINGHAM SOCIALIST PARTY, REPORTS:

Striking RMT members in Wolverhampton told us that one of the few Avanti trains to run on New Year's Eve had three members of senior management on it, as opposed to one guard during normal service. Underlining the reason for the strike, each scab manager was being paid £300 – the same amount that guards are demanding for an entire rest-day shift!



● Princes Juices workers stand up to new owners

On a snowy 6 January, workers began a 48-hour strike at five Princes Juices sites across the UK, following strike action in Cardiff in December.

● IAIN DALTON, LEEDS AND WEST YORKSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY, REPORTS

Workers in Bradford braved freezing conditions to take a stand, with a tailback of traffic blocking the road into the factory.

New owners Newpat Food S.p.A are reneging on a pay offer from the previous owners. Instead of 4-7%, workers are now offered 3%, from a company which made £6 million in profit last year. Meanwhile workers' pay has declined: last year, five workers at the Bradford site were on minimum wage, now it's 105!



● Hampshire bus drivers fight for better pay

● DAVID MAPLES, SOUTHERN AND SOUTH EAST SOCIALIST PARTY, SPOKE TO STRIKING BUS DRIVERS AT FAREHAM GARAGE.

Unite members working for First are escalating their strikes. After four very well-supported days around Christmas, they now intend to strike on three successive weekends in January. Drivers have asked for an increase of 77p an hour from their settlement date in August 2024, and reinstatement of terms and conditions sacrificed during Covid.

They have been encouraged by an overwhelming vote to reject management's offer. That there is only a handful of buses running on strike days, despite management bringing in some drivers from other garages, shows the strength of feeling.

Join the fightback

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

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Fighting sexism on campus

ROZA KWIECINSKA
NEWHAM AND EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Universities might champion themselves as places of liberal freedom and advocate for human rights and feminism. But the experience of staff and students is very different. When it comes to providing fair job opportunities for everyone, regardless of gender, and protecting women from sexual assault, universities still fail.

On campus, sexism is a problem that takes many forms. From unfair grading of assessments based on gender, to comments about women students' appearance, clothing and makeup. There is no inherent biological advantage for male students, but there is a huge underestimation of women students.

Education has the third-highest gender pay gap out of all the UK sectors, worse than manufacturing, mining and retail. Although women make up around half of university lecturers, they are significantly outnumbered in higher academic positions. Only 24% of professors are women. Even fewer women hold top roles, with just 18% as vice-chancellors or principals.

Women students also experience shockingly high levels of sexual harassment and sexual violence, both on and off the university campus. From 'casual' teasing to online trolling, harassment and physical attacks.

Campus should be a safe space for all students, no matter their gender, sexual orientation or race. It should not only be a place of learning, but also a place of integration, friendships and discovering yourself.

One terrifying statistic is that 97% of young women (18-24) in the UK have been sexually harassed. Many of these incidents happen in education and learning environments. This shows that right now, for many people, university is not that safe a place.

Research by the Young Women's Trust found that young women who endure sexism in the UK are "five

times more likely to suffer from clinical depression" and that "younger women who had experienced sexism were more likely to report greater psychological distress even four years following a sexist experience."

University is a place where students are not only stressed about grades, additional jobs they have to do, finding an apartment, but where women are exposed to sexism, leaving long-lasting impacts, including on mental health.

Universities are not doing enough to tackle sexism and sexual harassment. 72% of students don't know or are unsure about where to report or seek support. When women are brave enough to speak out, many find that it backfires. Women face diminishment or silencing: it is disgraceful that universities in England have used non-disclosure agreements to silence those who have experienced sexual harassment and violence.

Procedures for reporting sexual harassment should be managed by committees led by trade unions and students. This would ensure that the processes are effectively implemented and accessible to those who need them, fostering a zero-tolerance policy for harassment and abuse on campus.

For too long, the universities have overlooked survivors, enabled a 'rape culture', and prioritised profits over the safety of students. There has to be increased funding and support for student services, and a commitment to taking action against violent behaviours.

Seemingly small things like improved lighting around campus and housing at night, and accessible transport links to campus are important too. The safety of women students is priceless and should not be compromised. We need a fully funded, free public transport network, so that people can get home safely. Socialist Students has led campaigns to fight for these measures, such as the campaign to save the Liverpool night bus.

It is mindblowing that students not only have to pay huge sums of money for education, but also are exposed to harassment and sexism. Building a movement for free education is essential - scrapping fees and debt and introducing living student grants. We fight for full government funding to provide a safe and free education for all.

These problems are not new. In 2010, the National Union of Students (NUS) published a report finding: "One in seven respondents had experienced a serious physical or sexual assault during their time as a student, 12% had been stalked while at university or college, and 68% had been a victim of one or more kinds of sexual harassment while they were at university."

97%
of young women aged 18-24 in the UK have been sexually harassed

Following the report, NUS strategy focused on promoting 'zero-tolerance' policies in students union bars. But like the 'Ask for Angela' scheme, unions have been accredited without investing in the training for staff and bouncers, or staffing levels, to make it enforceable.

There has also been a focus on educating students about consent, often working alongside university management.

It is essential to focus on education and training; we must confront prejudices, gender stereotypes, and sexist behaviour whenever we encounter them. Though who delivers it and how is important.

However, education alone has clearly not been enough to solve the problem. One problem is that strategies based on 'raising awareness' can

reduce the issue to just an individual problem or behaviour. Socialist Students understands that individual behaviour is influenced by the broader economic and social system we live in, which is capitalism.

Since capitalism benefits from perpetuating gender inequality, individuals are constantly being bombarded with ideas that reinforce sexism and misogyny. Sexism is a systemic issue, and requires systemic solutions.

Take social media, for example. We live in a world where the impact of social media is massive. Misogynistic messages are targeted at boys and young men. Social media has been monetised to make huge profits for social media companies as well as individual 'influencers'. Individuals like Andrew Tate or Ben Shapiro have made millions from using sexist rhetoric to explain the economic crisis and 'crisis of masculinity'. And they prefer to blame minorities, immigrants and women for the effects of a capitalist world - propping up capitalism through reactionary ideas.

Additionally, access to online pornography has left children and young people, especially young men, with a misguided representation of women, men, and what sexual relationships look like. Porn created under a capitalist system reinforces harmful stereotypes and objectifies women and doesn't show the act of consent, which is crucial in any relationship. As much as 90% of it is violent - normalising sexual violence against women.

Education can cut through these ideas, but it won't stop them being promoted in the first place. The Socialist Party calls for the social media companies to be brought into public ownership to remove the profit incentive behind the spread of misogynistic and divisive ideas, and for them to be run and controlled democratically. For example, by subjecting algorithms to scrutiny by trade unions, young people, educators and others. The same goes for all of the major corporations and businesses that also profit from sexism.

This is why Socialist Students recognises that the fight to end sexism and misogyny is not separate from the fight to bring an end to the capitalist system as a whole and for the socialist transformation of society.



Why I'm coming to Socialist Students conference

'A great opportunity to meet and discuss with fellow young socialists'

HANNAH PONTING
LIVERPOOL SOCIALIST STUDENTS

As Keir Starmer's recent tuition fee hike announcement has so clearly shown, the Labour Party no longer has any interest in helping or investing in young people's futures, making solidarity within Socialist Students important now more than ever.

As the nationwide support for the recent Funding Not Fees campaign has shown, more and more students are becoming interested in socialist ideas.

It was a fantastic experience to discuss ideas with so many likeminded people when I attended my first Socialist event in London in November 2024, and the Socialist Students conference will undoubtedly provide yet another great opportunity to meet and discuss with fellow young socialists.

I hope it will be part of developing my skills and knowledge, to better understand and be able to communicate Marxist and socialist ideas. Needless to say, I'm very much looking forward to attending the conference and having the opportunity to hear some brilliant speakers talk on a range of important topics. Hope to see many of you there!

SOCIALIST STUDENTS CONFERENCE 2025
FIGHT FEES
END GAZA SLAUGHTER
BUILD THE SOCIALIST OPPOSITION TO LABOUR
A day of discussion on how students and young people get organised against Labour and the capitalist system it defends

SATURDAY 8TH FEBRUARY, 10AM
HIGHFIELDS CENTRE, LEICESTER, LE2 ODS
(15-minute walk from Leicester Railway Station)

'Not just a chance to talk, an opportunity to take action'

LUKA KEATES
SHEFFIELD SOCIALIST STUDENTS

I'm attending the Socialist Students conference to immerse myself in a dynamic environment of like-minded individuals, all driven by the shared pursuit of a fairer society. It will be an opportunity to connect with students from across the country, each bringing their own experiences and perspectives to the table.

Engaging in the discussions will allow me to refine my own views, challenge my assumptions, and

broaden my understanding of the issues that matter most. The power of collective action and solidarity is at the core of socialism, and the conference will be preparing for the fightback against the Labour government's attacks.

By learning from seasoned activists and fellow students, I'm eager to get new insights into the ways we can collectively push for systemic change. This isn't just about intellectual debate - it's about real-world solutions, practical strategies, and building a movement capable of achieving tangible progress.

The Socialist Students conference isn't just a chance to talk; it's an opportunity to take action. By participating, I'm investing in my education and preparing to become part of a larger force for social justice.

Join the student fightback: join...
socialist students
● Visit socialiststudents.org.uk/join
● or call **020 8988 8761**
● or text your name and school, college or uni to **07749 379 010**

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 £15-an-hour minimum wage for all, without exemptions. For the minimum wage to automatically increase linked to average earnings or inflation, whichever is higher.
 - Share out the work. A maximum 32-hour working week with no loss of pay or worsening of conditions. The right to flexible working, under the control of workers not employers. An end to insecure working, for the right to full-time work for all who want it; ban zero-hour contracts.
 - All workers to have trade union rates of pay, employment protection, and sickness, parental and holiday rights from day one of employment. End bosses using bogus 'self-employment' as a means to avoid giving workers rights.
 - No to austerity through inflation. For all wage rates to be automatically increased at least in line with price rises.
 - Open the books of all companies cutting jobs or claiming they can't afford to pay a real living wage. State subsidies, where genuinely needed, for socially-useful small businesses.
- WORKERS' RIGHTS**
- For trade unions independent of the capitalist state, with members having democratic control over their own policies, constitutions and democratic procedures. For all trade union officials to be regularly elected, subject to recall by their members and paid a worker's wage.
 - Reduce the state retirement and pension age to 55. For decent living pensions.
 - Replace universal credit and the punitive benefit system with living benefits for all who need them.
- PUBLIC SERVICES**
- A massive expansion of public services including the NHS and council services. Reverse all the cuts, kick out the privateers. Bring private social care and childcare facilities into public ownership under democratic control, in order to provide free, high-quality services for all who need them. Expand services for all women suffering violence.
 - For local councillors who are committed to opposing austerity and all cuts to local services, jobs, pay and conditions.
 - For a socialist NHS to provide for

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

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

- fighting, socialist political alternative to the pro-big business parties.
- SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM**
- No to imperialist wars and occupations!
 - Take the wealth off the super-rich!
- For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and the banking system that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working-class control and management. Compensation to be paid
- 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
- only on the basis of proven need, not to the fat cats.
- A democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, and in a way that safeguards the environment.
 - No to the EU bosses' club. Organise a campaign with European socialists and workers' organisations to use the talks on post-Brexit relations to tear up the EU pro-capitalist rules. For a real collaboration of the peoples of Europe on a socialist basis as a step towards a socialist world.
- Do you agree? Join the fightback! JOIN THE SOCIALISTS**
- Visit socialistparty.org.uk/join
 - or call **020 8988 8777**
 - or text your name and postcode to **07761 818 206** to find out more today!



Striking Birmingham bin workers won't let Labour make them pay for a crisis they didn't cause

BIRMINGHAM SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS

Unite members working as bin loaders and drivers for Birmingham City Council took their first of twelve days strike action on Monday 6 January. This was provoked by the council's attempts to remove the safety critical Grade 3 role from bin crews.

The workers affected stand to lose £8,000 a year as a result of the downgrading. It will also make the bin collections less safe and reliable for staff and the public.

Despite the blizzard conditions, morale on the three picket lines was high, with workers saying: "If it takes days, weeks or months, we'll do what it takes to beat the council!"

These attacks on bin workers aren't happening in isolation. Youth services, libraries and day centres are already in the process of being closed, and the council is set to

£8,000

workers affected stand to lose every year

announce a further £195 million cuts next month.

The justification for this is the council declaring 'bankruptcy' in September 2023, allegedly due to equal pay claims by workers in women-dominated roles. But a settlement to pay these workers what they're rightly owed was agreed on the eve of the bin strike - and it's rumoured to come in at a fraction of the original £750 million cost!

It has also come out that for six years the council was overpaying contributions to the West Midlands Pension Fund, totalling £500 million. This didn't get paid to retired council workers - it just sat there helping make wealthy shareholders and speculators richer! This money should be demanded back to be spent on the services our city needs.

Bin workers and other frontline council staff didn't cause the financial crisis, but are being made to pay for it. Not just by a Labour council, but now also by a Labour government stood behind them.

One thing many of the bin workers agreed on was that at the next council election in 2026, there can be no support from Unite for the Labour candidates responsible for these attacks.



Birmingham bin workers on the picket line. NICK HART



The Tyne bridge. TAGISHSIMON/CC

Tyne and Wear road closure exposes Labour and Tory decay

SAM MORDEN SOUTH TYNE AND WEAR SOCIALIST PARTY

The main route between Gateshead and Newcastle has been closed for a month. Inspections of a flyover on the A167, that leads to the iconic Tyne Bridge, raised "serious concerns about structural integrity". It is now propped up by large metal structures.

This 1960s piece of infrastructure has been in disrepair for at least a decade, with a plan first raised in 2008 to demolish it! This leaves the only routes between Gateshead and Newcastle either the A1, which goes around both or the A189, which is difficult to access because of nonsensical one-way systems, implemented without any democratic oversight or consultation worth the name.

Gateshead Council, run continuously by Labour since its creation

in 1974, has implemented austerity with apparent glee, only months ago targeting the stadium and the football club that plays there. There is growing anger directed at the council. The latest flyover issue is a neat illustration of the past couple of decades of decay, disrepair, and cuts.

Martin Gannon, as leader of the council, has time and time again made cuts and outsourced local services. Unbelievably, he describes himself as a "socialist". He has suggested that people ought to work from home. The vast majority are simply not able to do so.

Public transport has been affected, with buses diverted, isolating a section of the town from an already patchy and unreliable network. Tyne-Wear metro operator Nexus initially only slowed down trains passing beneath the flyover, before

having to suspend all services across the River Tyne. Services have now restarted, because of the propped up flyover. Without knowing the danger, people were still using the flyover on the week of the inspections.

With the raising of the bus fare cap, and potentially its eventual scrapping, and routes and fares across the whole public transport network being decided by private companies or bureaucrats, the need for a democratically planned, fully funded public transport system, run by workers and local communities, is as important as ever.

The capitalist class in Britain is less and less capable of meeting the most basic of maintenance and welfare needs of the population. Only through a fight to end austerity and bring about a socialist future, can we have the decent-quality, safe, and healthy communities we deserve.

People in Carlisle flock to socialist NHS campaigners

BRENT KENNEDY CARLISLE SOCIALIST PARTY

Carlisle Socialist Party recently held a very successful protest stall to defend the NHS, with people flocking to sign our petition, and well reported in the local media.

Labour had announced a new target for 92% of routine NHS appointments and operations to be completed within 18 weeks by March 2029 - over four years away.

But the Society for Acute Medicine, which represents hospital doctors, warned that without more resources

and staff to drastically improve devastated NHS urgent and emergency care services, the plan is "doomed." They also fear that concentrating on a target for just one part of the health system will mean cuts in other parts, such as A&E, community care, and mental health.

We responded by upping our campaign for the 130,000 staff vacancies in the NHS to be filled, with more training places for doctors and nurses, and scrapping student fees. We also highlighted the dire state of the social care system, and the cynical neglect of its workers.

It will be impossible to solve the ongoing problems of an underfunded NHS without employing 165,000 more, better-paid, and better-trained social care staff in publicly owned care homes and services.

Our petition therefore also supports a substantial pay rise for all health and care workers to make up the standard of living they have seen eroded in recent years, a precondition for much-needed recruitment and retention.

Another demand opposes further undermining of our universal health system by creeping privatisation, instead calling for renationalisation, under the democratic control of health workers and patients, of all

privatised or outsourced services.

Already private profiteering health companies carry out up to 20% of operations on NHS patients in some parts of the country. Labour health secretary Wes Streeting wants a two-tier system, which only benefits a wealthy minority.

All our demands were explained in the local paper, also the online version, getting our socialist message across to thousands of Cumbrians.

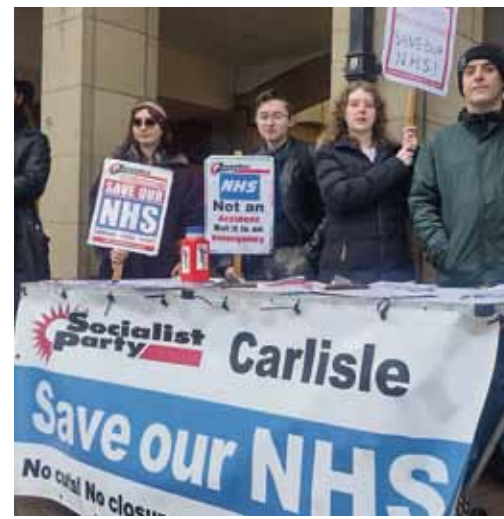


PHOTO: JASPER CHARLIN

I joined the Socialist Party to create a world for us all

JO FREDERICKS KENT AND EAST SUSSEX SOCIALIST PARTY

An area like Medway is predominantly poverty stricken, as we had the Tories running us into the ground for years. They spend other people's money on themselves, or to hurt someone, but they'll never spend it to help.

Since Labour took over Medway last year nothing much has changed. When those that want to change things try to contact a local Labour MP, they will ignore you, as the Tories did.

We have abandoned buildings that could be used for shelters. But all too often, they are turned into unaffordable flats for the privileged and the entitled, whilst there are homeless people's tents surrounding this "nice area".

What is the point in creating flats that no one can afford? Instead, we could be building social housing.

The Gala bingo building in Chatham has been standing alone and unwanted for some time. It could be a shelter, instead it has people living in its lobby, just to keep out of the cold.

Joining the Socialist Party, I can help get these points across, and help those without a voice.

Too many people suffer at the

hands of a corrupt capitalist system, that was only ever created for the rich. It's about time they were accountable for the carnage, massacres, and misery they have been responsible for.

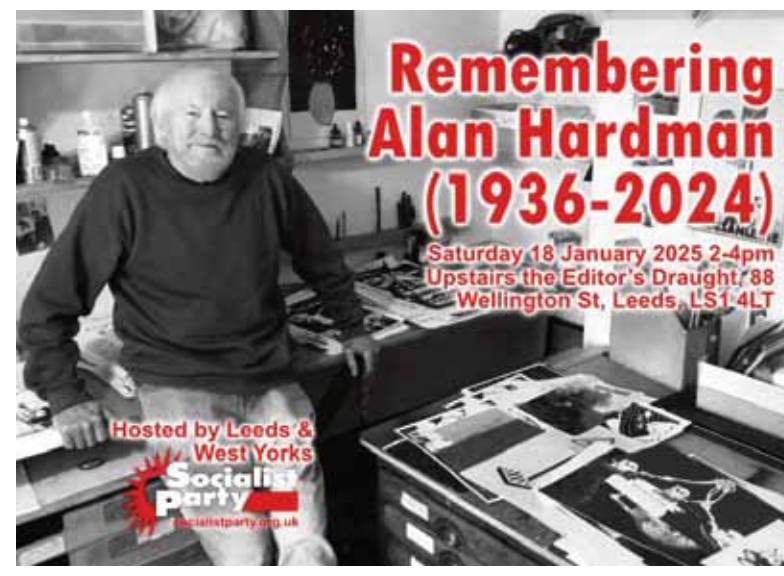
I have spoken to many people, to get them to see that it's not refugees, the LGBTQ+ community, disabled and old people that are your problem. Through the Socialist Party, we can get the message out that it's the super-rich capitalist bosses that are the problem.

Today, the people of Palestine are suffering. For our government to be on the side of the Israeli state terror, is not surprising.

It's about time we had a new system. We will no longer see our friends fooled by bigots in the media and the right-wing politicians, because there would just be people helping people all around the world, as it should be.

To me, socialism is essentially helping all those that need it. Socialists are the ones to bring the world forward.

Through socialism everyone can thrive, have equal rights, and a world that works for all.



Special needs education – kick out profit, fight for the funding we need!

JOHN WILLIAMS CARDIFF CENTRAL SOCIALIST PARTY

In the past decade in England, the number of school children entitled to Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) support has nearly doubled. This is mostly due to improved understanding about and tolerance of neurodiversity and mental health, there has been an increase of diagnoses of autism, attention-deficit disorders, and mental health disorders.

What we need is funding to match, so people can have the best help and support possible. Unfortunately, this hasn't been the case for the past 14 years and that trend is continuing under Starmer's Labour too. Councils have lost 26% of their spending power since 2010, mainly due to local authorities refusing to fight austerity coming from the Westminster government.

The recent Labour Budget, which in reality was a continuation of austerity repackaged, did offer an additional £740 million for SEND provision in mainstream schools. But that's peanuts if you take into account what councils have lost - over all councils in England alone still face a total shortfall of nearly £5 billion by 2026.

Private profiteers

It's a broken system. The public spending watchdog warns special needs education is "financially unsustainable for councils". But profits are booming for private providers, revenues for the three largest private providers have doubled since 2019.

Councils have increasingly turned to private providers, including large ones owned by private equity firms concerned with one thing - profit.

And big business has been lobbying the government over plans to cut costs as it would affect their lucrative money making. In its most



Protest against SEN cuts in Leicester. LEICESTER SP

recent accounts, Horizon Care and Education Group, which runs SEND schools and residential care homes, listed "changes in government purchasing policy away from the independent sector" and "local authorities' control of spending" among the principal risks to the business. That just shows where their priorities are!

What's clear is when whenever there's a funding crisis from central government, big business will try to step into the equation, but they only care about what money they can

make in the short term. And councillors who are supposed to fight for us, don't fight the cuts and the austerity agenda from Westminster.

We need socialist councillors prepared to fight and to tell the truth - that there is enough money in society to meet everyone's needs. Even just the councils with elections this May, a minority, together have over £7.5 billion in reserves. That money could be used to fund the services we need, while buying time to build a mass campaign to force Keir Starmer's Labour government to pay up.

Kent socialists will fight council cuts

NINA BROWN KENT AND EAST SUSSEX SOCIALIST PARTY

The Socialist Party met in Ashford to campaign on the housing crisis, and for reinstating winter fuel payments. We're a spread out Socialist Party branch, and with poor public transport links in the area, it's the first time that we have done a stall in Ashford.

It was really positive, with lots of good conversations with people who had direct experience of these issues, and other council cuts. We met three new people interested in the Socialist Party.

We then had a public meeting discussing the council cuts, and how to fight them. We also discussed the need for an anti-cuts option at the ballot box, and further building the Kent and East Sussex Socialist Party branch.

Join us on Thursday 13 February, 8:30am, in Maidstone, to lobby the Tory county council in Kent to fight against the cuts.



Memoir review JD Vance's 'Hillbilly Elegy'

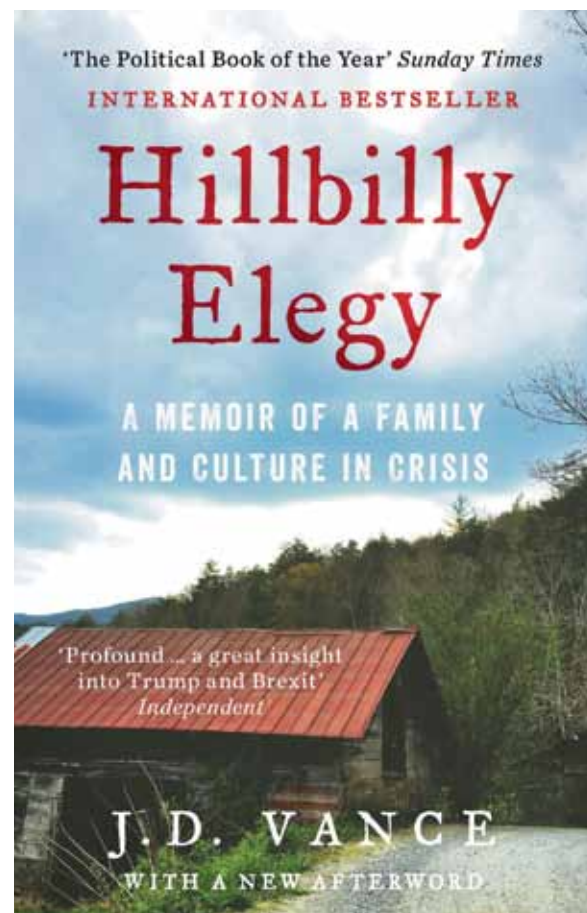
MATT DOBSON

SOCIALIST PARTY SCOTLAND (CWI SCOTLAND)

*I've been sellin' my soul, workin' all day
Overtime hours for bullshit pay
So I can sit out here and waste my life away
Drag back home and drown my troubles away
It's a damn shame what the world's gotten to
For people like me and people like you...
Livin' in the new world
With an old soul
These rich men north of Richmond
Lord knows they all just wanna have total control
Wanna know what you think, wanna know what you do
And they don't think you know, but I know that you do
'Cause your dollar ain't shit and it's taxed to no end
'Cause of rich men north of Richmond
I wish politicians would look out for miners
And not just minors on an island somewhere
Lord, we got folks in the street, ain't got nothin' to eat
And the obese milkin' welfare
God, if you're 5 foot 3 and you're 300 pounds
Taxes ought not to pay for your bags of fudge rounds
Young men are puttin' themselves six feet in the ground
'Cause all this damn country does is keep on kickin' them down*

Some lyrics from ex-addict factory worker and Piedmont country singer Oliver Anthony's viral 2023 hit 'Rich Men North of Richmond'. Rightful class rage at the political elites, with Capitol Hill in Washington DC being "north of Richmond", Virginia. A righteous howl at economic super-exploitation and the misery of the American cost-of-living inflation-fuelled nightmare of the Biden years. Also, at 'culture war' and identity politics perceived attacks on freedom of speech. But with a reactionary element, kicking sideways, no doubt at Anthony's neighbours, "milkin' welfare". Is it any wonder this was played at the post-Trump victory parties? Where not just Reform UK's Nigel Farage and Tesla tycoon Elon Musk have danced, but also the youngest vice president-elect in history, author of the memoir Hillbilly Elegy, JD Vance.

Taking advantage of Anthony's lyrics, which obviously reflect the confusion of layers of the US working class, Vance and the 'Magas' have lost no opportunity in promoting 'Rich Men North of Richmond' as the "new generation's protest song". Anthony's other songs such as Doggonit where he lacerates the whole political establishment - "Republicans and Democrats, I swear they're all just full of crap / I've never seen a good city slicking, bureaucrat" - are ignored.



Anthony, to his credit, then defended "the poor" and the welfare system against the pro-Trump right-wing religious fundamentalist commentator and podcaster Matt Walsh.

Although it was published in 2016, back when JD Vance raised concerns about "Trump being America's Hitler" in a private social media chat, Hillbilly Elegy is worth reading. As is the Netflix dramatisation worth watching, not just to trace the evolution and zig-zags of Vance's populist politics and opportunist ideas, but to get a sense of the social conditions and crisis in US society that have led to Trumpism, itself a distorted expression of colossal social, economic and class polarisation.

Vance, through the saga of his chaotic working-class family, gained attention and ultimately political

power and high office by expressing what many commentators refer to as the 'loss of the American dream'.

Vance grew up in Middletown, Ohio, but his 'Hillbilly' Scotch-Irish roots are in eastern Kentucky, in the Appalachian Mountains, a huge area bordering the 'rust belt', running from Georgia in the South right up to New York state. His grandparents, like a whole generation of others, were economic migrants to Ohio. His grandfather worked in steel plant Armcoc. Such was the extent of post-war internal migration, Middletown was called 'Middletucky'. Hillbilly Elegy switches between steel producing Middletown and Kentucky coal country. An interesting early mention is made of his grandfather being active in the steel plant's labour union. However, this part of the story is

never further developed.

In fact, labour unions are conspicuous by their absence in Elegy, despite Vance's family saga taking place during their decline from a high point in the 1950s to their nadir period in the 1990s. Vance has nothing much at all to say about this - in contrast to his useful descriptions of many other social changes. This is not an accident, given the wrong political conclusions he draws from his and his family's experiences. Vance either does not see, or deliberately distorts, the potential in working-class collective struggle and the diametrically opposed class interests between 'Hillbillies' and the elites he later wines and dines with on his law course at Ivy League Yale University. Rather, he promotes hard work on an individual basis and the strong work ethic instilled in him by his grandmother - i.e. a "positive culture" - as the way to realise the 'American dream'. Vance contrasts this with another 'culture' he identifies in Elegy as "too many young men immune to hard work". He claims this 'culture' has interacted with "wider social decay" to create the suffering in the US's white working-class communities.

'Workshy culture'

Vance overplays this 'workshy culture' in one particularly reactionary passage in which he and his grandmother vent about "those on welfare" who can buy more with food stamps at the supermarket he works at than those struggling in full-time work. His grandmother, in many ways a very admirable character, is full of contradictions. She is an ardent supporter of the poor in many other ways and her hatred of the elites comes out when Vance joins the marines and serves in Iraq. She and her husband mostly vote Democrat until the 1980s when they are attracted to Republican President Reagan on 'cultural issues'. The irony of course is that his administration accelerates much of the social unwinding of the 'American dream' around them.

Vance writes movingly about the violence his family experienced and their struggles around poverty, drug addiction and a lack of universal healthcare. Outrageously, he is forced as a young worker and serving marine to subsidise his grandmother's healthcare bills, which the private healthcare vultures viciously chase towards the end of her life. His mother, heartbreakingly, showcases the addiction crisis in America, moving from alcohol to heroin while struggling to work as a nurse. Addiction-fuelled crime tears apart both his childhood communities in Appalachia and Ohio. He describes young Appalachian children's agonising dental problems due to drinking sugary soft drinks - a phenomenon called "Mountain Dew mouth." There are some expressions of anger at big business, but these are often equalised with appeals to his community to change their individual and cultural ways. For all his eloquence, interestingly, Vance does not have much to say about some events in his childhood home. In the mid-2000s, when large parts of Hillbilly Elegy take place, there were labour disputes in the steel industry, including two lockouts by Armcoc bosses, and the use of scab labour in Middletown and across Ohio. While Vance powerfully laments the decline of the industry and the town, this is not mentioned.

Part of his conclusions in Hillbilly

Elegy are that investment from the private sector, including those 'made good' like himself, can make a difference in working-class areas. He suggests the education system better prepares students for the class-based elitism of the Ivy League.

Elected politician

After Hillbilly Elegy was published, Vance was elected as a Republican into Congress. In 2010 his online blog called for a reduction in federal funding for social security, but this was softened in the book. Now he and Trump say they are committed to fully funding it. They are wary about a backlash from the working class. Will the 'Hillbillies' they court with Vance turn into bitter class enemies? Despite what Vance implies, the right to social security was not a result of a 'workshy culture' but hard won through battles fought by workers and the labour unions, including the mass strike and unionisation movement under President Roosevelt in the 1930s. Recently, Vance has moved closer to the far-right Project 2025. He has expanded his calls for cultural shifts around abortion and promotion of the family to appeal to the Christian right. He concedes that the US ruling class "made mistakes" with their policies of deindustrialisation and neoliberalism, causing wealth inequality from the 1970s onwards, but is not able to see that his own family's chaos arose out of the social conditions that resulted.

JD Vance represents a shift in the Republican Party, calling for an abandonment of laissez-faire economics and says a "new American dream" must be built on good jobs which will require state intervention. Of course this is tied up with reactionary social ideas. Trump and especially Vance will come under huge pressure from the coming class conflicts. What will they say about the many industrial battles ahead, including the announcement of the biggest Amazon strike in history by the Teamsters? Vance's demagogic calls to replace all politically hostile government workers will also meet resistance.

Ultimately, while reflecting the rage in US society, Vance has no real solutions. That would mean taking on the capitalist interests whose world he now inhabits. Only taking the vast wealth, resources and potential of the US economy under democratic working-class control - of those who suffer with "bullshit pay" - can offer a better world for the working class in the US. A mass workers' party, based on the organising potential of the labour unions, undermining the corporate two-party system, will be a key weapon in this fight.

• The book was published by Harper Collins and is available to buy now, and the film can be seen on Netflix

WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?

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Memoir review Finding the Mother Tree

HEATHER RAWLING

'Finding the Mother Tree' reveals a fascinating world of complex and changing inter-relationships between trees and other living things (even salmon!) including the transfer of energy and chemicals.

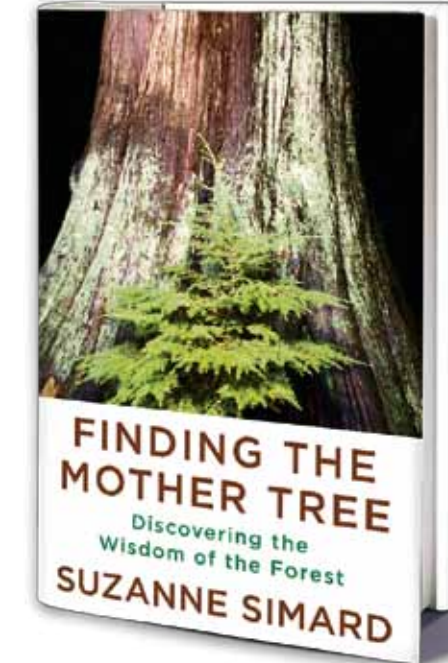
A fascinating book. A combination of science, adventure and biography. And the book unconsciously confirms the Dialectics of Nature developed by Marx and Engels: "That in nature, amid the welter of innumerable changes, the same dialectical laws of motion force their way through as those which in history govern the apparent fortuitousness of events" [Engels preface to second edition of Anti-Dühring].

Author Professor Suzanne Simard is the daughter of loggers. Living in the rich forests of British Columbia, Canada, she grew up with an intimate knowledge of the landscape and its occupants. She absorbed into her being the trees, plants, fungi, animals and bugs.

As a child, she became fascinated as much by what lies beneath as what lies above the forest floor.

Her interest grew into a passion as she witnessed the demise of trees grown in monoculture in the hungry pursuit of profits. Her observations led her to scientific experiments that overturned conventional methods of forestry based on the philosophy of competition. A capitalist philosophy based on the idea that if you eradicate all competition, the winner takes all. So trees not required for harvesting must be eradicated.

But Suzanne's experiments showed that different species of trees do better when planted alongside each other. They share carbon, water and other nutrients in a complex



system below ground involving a variety of fungi. Her findings were peer reviewed and published in Nature, the scientific journal. But when she presented her paper to people in the forestry industry, mostly men, she was laughed at and ridiculed. Her polite nickname was Miss Birch. In private, apparently, they changed one of the letters. Eventually her determination to uncover the secrets of the forest to save it from destruction cost her job with the Canadian Forestry Service.

Undaunted, she found other work at the University of British Columbia. A lifetime of research, asking more questions, has revealed the interdependency of species, communication networks between trees using the pathways of fungi, changing and adapting to the environment. She

develops a growing appreciation of the wisdom of the indigenous nations of Canada, who learnt over thousands of years to take only what was needed from nature and give back in some other way what was taken, staying in harmony with the environment.

Capitalism disposes of the weak and dying trees. But Professor Simard's work shows that dying trees bequeath their energy and food to help the trees around them survive, even sending warning signals of disease. As she faces her own mortality, she argues that: "Some death of trees (is inevitable) but too much upsets the balance and can cause a cascade of changes rippling through the landscape."

Chopping down and killing trees with chemicals depletes the natural resources in an ecosystem and newly planted saplings struggle to get enough water and nutrients to survive.

Trees even recognise their own kin giving them preferential treatment in the sharing of earth's resources.

Professor Simard is a hands-on scientist working in the field. Hard, arduous and dangerous work at times including brushes with grizzly bears and accidental radiation leaks. Her life story is fascinating too. This is also an adventure book with vivid and beautiful descriptions of the forests of British Columbia.

A very readable science book that attests to the power of nature to recover from the ravages of capitalism, even if that means evolving and adapting. But taken too far, the forests will not recover, and their vital role in storing carbon will be lost.

There is no real solution put forward in this book on how to stop the plundering of our forests. It doesn't attempt to. That is our job as socialists to fight on an international and global level to overthrow capitalism and usher in socialism. A socialist world could democratically plan how best to use and conserve the bounty of nature for future generations.

• Finding the Mother Tree by Suzanne Simard is available to buy at suzannesimard.com/finding-the-mother-tree-book

Non-fiction review You Have Not Yet Been Defeated

PETE MCNALLY

In her foreword to this book, published in 2021, Naomi Klein described it as a living history and its author, Alaa Abd El-Fattah, as an intellectual, writer, technologist and Egyptian revolutionary.

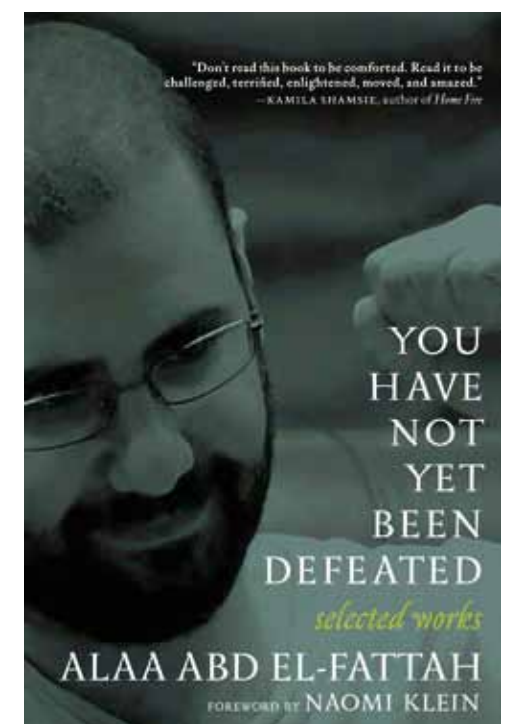
The author has been prosecuted or arrested by every Egyptian regime to rule in his lifetime. It becomes clear that the life of the author is entwined both with Egypt and the wider world of struggle and oppression. The editors in the introduction point out that Alaa has spent seven of the eight years since the country's counter-revolution in prison. General Abdel Fattah El-Sisi came to power in 2013. Alaa is far from being a Marxist, although Lenin is quoted on page 379: "We are building the new order out of the bricks the old order has left us". Clearly the old order has to be brought down first.

There are many chapters in this book reflecting the upsurge of events

and the setbacks, the last chapter being 'Palestine on my mind'. At first, Alaa is the only person in his prison who has access to news through a weekly visit. This news is passed from cell to cell by shouting. Alaa writes that "my generation was raised on scenes from the second intifada and launched itself onto the scene with student demonstrations in support of Palestine. One movement followed another until this generation led a revolution. Yes, the routes of the demonstration lie in the solidarity demonstrations with the second intifada, for we are Arabs and Palestine is always on our minds."

What has stayed with me from this collection is an appreciation of the resilience of the participants in the struggle for a better world. They will find that what is needed is a party based on the working class.

• You Have Not Yet Been Defeated by Alaa Abd El-Fattah is available at fitzcarraldoeitions.com



£1 / £2 solidarity price

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the Socialist

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FUNDING NOT FEES

USRA ABDIRAHMAN

WALTHAM FOREST SOCIALIST PARTY

As a sixth-form student about to face the crushing reality of university costs, I am absolutely furious about the state of tuition fees. £9,250 a year for a degree? It's outrageous and the Labour government is trying to increase them! The education system leaves working-class students like me buried in debt before we even start our careers. This isn't about getting a better future anymore - it's about surviving a system that is set up to keep the rich at the top and the rest of us struggling to get by.

And let's not even get started on colleges. We're expected to perform well in exams, yet the resources and support we need to actually succeed are being slashed year after year. Teachers are underpaid, classrooms are overcrowded, and the government just doesn't care. It's clear that the people in charge have abandoned us, leaving colleges underfunded and students to pick up the pieces. How are we supposed to prepare for university when we're not even given the chance to excel at the basic level?

The Labour government says its reforms will fix a broken system - that's all well and good, but can we trust them? How many times have we heard empty promises like this before? Talk is cheap, and I'm fed up with politicians who make nice speeches but fail to deliver when it counts. We need more than just words; we need real change. We need free, accessible education from top to bottom, and we need proper funding for colleges that are being left to rot.

Education should be a right, not a privilege for the wealthy. The wealth is there - in the pockets of the super-rich. It's time we stand up and demand that the government invests in our future.

Socialist Students conference 2025

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WHAT WE STAND FOR: THE SOCIALIST PARTY'S MAIN DEMANDS >>> see column on p6-7

