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End this 'evil bedroom tax'

Tony Mulhearn, Liverpool Socialist Party

'How can the person responsible for driving through this evil bedroom tax look at himself in the mirror every day?'

This question was asked, not by a campaigning activist, but by the Radio Merseyside presenter of a popular day-time music and chat programme, not noted for its radicalism.

It underlines the growing revulsion with the Con-Dems' attempt to cut housing benefit and force people to move to smaller properties, often outside the social housing sector. The bedroom tax is proving to be the most repellent symbol of this government of millionaire sociopaths*.

Hostility is deep and wide-ranging: at a stall held every Saturday outside Great Homer Street Market in Liverpool, working class people queue up to sign the anti-tax petition; at meetings of the Anti-Bedroom Tax Federation people who have never been involved in any political activity show their willingness to fight.

The fear of people, already struggling to eke out an existence, is palpable as story after story shows how the tax is wrecking lives. But the 'can't pay - will stay' slogan is being taken up across the country, by both those affected and those not directly hit but disgusted by the cold cruelty of the bedroom tax.

Tory hatchet man Iain Duncan Smith, the tax's architect, has tried to blunt the natural sympathy of those not affected by the tax by spewing out the 'scrounger' distortion of claimants receiving excessive benefits. His echoes in the right-wing press never explain that if people want to move to a smaller property in their area, rarely are any available.

At what stage does a distortion become a rank lie? The answer is when it drips from the poisoned tongue of Duncan Smith pontificating from the comfort of his Buckinghamshire estate, worth an estimated £2 million, where he resides in opulent comfort with his millionaire wife Betsy Fremantle, daughter of the Fifth Baron Cottesloe.

But this tax can be defeated by solidarity, based on the traditional slogan of the working class movement: 'a hurt against one is a hurt against all.' Stick together in a mass campaign and this politically corrupt government, mired in sleaze and split from top to bottom can be forced

to retreat.

* Sociopath: Manifesting itself in extreme antisocial attitudes and behaviour; lacking compassion and empathy.

The Socialist Party says:

- No evictions of tenants who fall into rent arrears as a result of austerity cuts. Organise local campaigns to oppose the tax and defend our homes, and link them to existing anti-cuts groups. Build anti-eviction armies in every area to protect people's homes.
 - Stand candidates against councillors who try to evict us. Build a new mass workers' party that draws together workers, young people and activists from workplaces and anti-cuts campaigns, to provide a fighting, political alternative to the pro-cuts parties.
 - Cap rents and build homes. Invest in a major programme of council house building and refurbishment to provide affordable homes for all and decent jobs.
 - End low pay! If workers are paid a genuinely living wage they would not need to claim housing benefit.
 - Boardroom tax not bedroom tax. Make the rich pay for their crisis including nationalisation of the banking system, major corporations and utilities under democratic control with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need.
 - Fight all the cuts. Trade unions must build for a 24-hour general strike as the next major step in the campaign against austerity.
 - For a socialist alternative to cuts and capitalism with a democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people - not the 1%.
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National Shop Stewards Network conference

The 7th annual NSSN conference is open to everyone in the unions and all those fighting these brutal cuts.

29 June 2013 11am - 5pm in the Camden Centre, Judd Street, London WC1H 9JE

"The trade union movement must stand side by side with people affected by the bedroom tax and other benefit cuts. Unite's Community campaign aims to organise students, unemployed and retired people.

"The NSSN supports Unite's calls for the formation of local groups to lobby councils against evictions and the organisation of mass community-led direct action to defend homes and stop the bailiffs."

Nick Parker, PCS DWP rep (personal capacity)

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Anti-bedroom tax federation launched in Merseyside

Andy Ford

Around 40 delegates gathered at the Unite union building in Liverpool on 18 May to set up a federation to coordinate anti-bedroom tax groups across Merseyside.

Delegates were present from the Dingle, Scotland Road, Granby and Canning in Liverpool, and Bootle, Knowsley, Wirral, Kirkby, Wallasey, Warrington and Halton from across Merseyside.

Contradictions

There was much discussion of the conflict of interest that Labour councillors find themselves in by sitting on the boards of housing associations.

On the one hand councillors claim a duty to protect the finances of the housing association, which means using eviction if necessary to enforce rent arrears.

On the other hand their constituents might reasonably expect them to oppose evictions of the people who voted for them.

As was pointed out, the contradiction is only set to intensify with the introduction of Universal Credit in October.

It was reported to the meeting that the giant Riverside housing association, chaired by Labour deputy leader of Liverpool city council, Paul Brant, has already lost over £2 million due to benefit changes.

Another, Symphony, has refused to rule out eviction under the draconian legal provisions of

'Ground 8 for eviction' under which the judge has no discretion to bear in mind hardship or other extenuating circumstances.

Sharing ideas

There was a lot of valuable sharing of information. For instance tenants have to agree to a change in their agreement to encompass Ground 8 - we advised not to agree to this in any circumstances.

One group has a cheap mobile phone which can be rotated between members to share the load of giving advice.

The phone could also be used to send mass texts if evictions are about to occur to mobilise people to block bailiffs.

The Halton group had written an excellent letter addressed to councillors sitting on the boards of housing associations calling on them to pledge no evictions, reclassify properties to avoid the bedroom tax altogether, and commit to not using Ground 8.

Although no vote was taken, there seemed to be broad consensus that the housing associations are the front line as the Labour councils' standard response is that housing is nothing to do with them because all the housing stock has been transferred to the housing associations.

This makes the role of the Labour councillors on the boards one of the crucial pressure points.

A PCS rep spoke to say that those who work in the benefit system are no more in favour of the system than the tenants.

This was supported by someone who knew of housing staff coming home in tears because of the hardship and distress they have to deal with on a daily basis.

There was some debate as to whether to elect a committee and officers, as there is an understandable wariness of formal structures.

But most people agreed on the need for federation officers to carry out decisions and to coordinate the campaign, without dictating to the local groups. A secretary, chair, press officer and treasurer were elected.

It hopefully marks a great beginning for a campaign to stop this hated, unfair and tyrannical tax on the poorest and most vulnerable.

Several of the biggest housing associations in the country have revealed that, as expected by campaigners who know people just can't afford it, many tenants have not been paying the bedroom tax.

For example, the Riverside group in Liverpool said that about half of its tenants who were on full housing benefit aren't covering any of the shortfall at all.

Bedroom tax campaigning in Leytonstone, Birmingham and Newham

Diary of a bedroom tax campaigner

Ian Pattison, Waltham Forest Socialist Party and Waltham Forest Anti-Cuts Union describes a week of campaigning against the bedroom tax.

Monday

We type up all the names of people affected by the bedroom tax who we've met in the last week and their neighbours who are going to stand with them in solidarity, as they say in the Scottish campaign: 'I'll stand with you, if you stand with me'.

Tuesday

Like this time every week, some of us go out on the Avenue Road estate in Leytonstone, Waltham Forest, north east London.

We're taking people directly hit by the hated bedroom tax out canvassing with us for the first time. We sell ten copies of the Socialist in less than an hour.

We're advertising an estate meeting on Saturday. On the way back home we see our posters already plastered in windows.

Wednesday

3,000 people are affected by the bedroom tax in Waltham Forest. Tonight members are on the Wood Street estate in another part of the borough.

People are furious about the bedroom tax, but not just that - cuts, bankers' bonuses,

everything!

Thursday

We're searching Waltham Forest council website, getting legal advice, and talking to other anti-bedroom tax campaigners across London and the country for ideas on how to clog up the system.

Tonight's discussion at Waltham Forest Socialist Party branch is about the bedroom tax. One member sets out our strategy to beat it, another explains a socialist plan to solve the housing crisis.

Friday

We go leafleting on the Avenue again. We sell another three copies of the Socialist, with a big front and centre pages on the bedroom tax - even though we're not knocking doors, we're only sticking leaflets through letter boxes! We meet another two people hit by the benefit cuts who tell us they will come on Saturday.

I go to visit one woman who has been to every meeting (but isn't directly affected). She's bought the Socialist paper twice, she's angry about everything the Tories are doing, so this time I ask her to join the Socialist Party.

She's going to think about it and we'll discuss again. On my way back, I meet a bedroom tax victim who's seen our placards before, him and his daughter take model letters to challenge the council's decision, and our latest poster.

Saturday

We hold our first Socialist Party stall in the Thatched House area (where the Avenue Road estate is).

People are surprised (but very pleased) to see us. We only get two bad responses. One woman is living in overcrowded accommodation, and hopes to benefit from emptied properties.

Once we explain the Socialist Party's demand for a massive house-building programme, she's soon won over, signs our petition, and buys a copy of the Socialist! The other heckler is a Tory councillor - they must be lost.

Ten new people come to our estate meeting, all angry, all women, but not all directly affected. Model letters to ask the council to 'look again', a form to record what bedroom tax they

haven't paid, an explanation of how to apply for the Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP), and plenty of leaflets and posters are distributed.

Everyone agrees to support each other against evictions and stand a Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidate in the 2014 elections.

Birmingham: punishing the poor for being poor

About 30 anti-bedroom tax protesters lobbied the advice surgery of Birmingham council Labour leader Sir Albert Bore, held in the splendour of Birmingham Council House where over £100 million of cuts were agreed this year.

Bore would only let two people in at a time, then it was reduced to one person at a time. Eventually the protesters were told that the police would be called if they didn't stop 'obstructing the entrance'.

According to one of the protesters who managed to see Bore, he emphatically stated that Birmingham council will evict people who fall into arrears because of the bedroom tax.

The council here is being harder than some non-Labour councils. Councillors appear to be going out of their way to punish the poor for being poor.

It is vital that there is a strong showing of anti-cuts candidates at next year's local elections.

Clive Walder, Birmingham Socialist Party

Newham: bedroom tax will add to homelessness crisis

Ben Robinson, East London Socialist Party

It is estimated that Newham, east London, is the borough with the worst homelessness crisis in the country, spending £185.2 million on temporary accommodation since 2009.

However, with the introduction of the bedroom tax affecting an estimated 3,000 homes in one of the poorest boroughs in the country, this looks set to increase.

Newham Council is dominated by the Labour Party, but despite their formal opposition to the

bedroom tax, it appears they are chomping at the bit to deepen the effects of this attack.

A recent council event to 'advise' those affected by the bedroom tax only advised people to apply to downsize or get more work.

This is despite the fact that among the people Newham Socialist Party met were families who had been waiting to move for eight years, and now, because of council inaction were faced with an extra charge they could not afford.

Not content with this, Newham council is also organising spot checks of social housing to check how many bedrooms people have, according to residents we met out campaigning. Pursuing this brutal charge shows the real anti-worker character of the Labour Party.

For more info on the local campaign see nobedroomtaxinnewham.wordpress.com

The chief executive of New Charter Housing Trust Group, the housing association which manages housing stock in one of the areas where Universal Credit is being trialled, has expressed concern over the effect of welfare reform on levels of debt for tenants.

The total amount of debt people have when they are referred to New Charter's advice service has increased by 19% in a year.

There has been a 338% increase in applications for discretionary housing payments since the bedroom tax was introduced.

Glasgow demo against the bedroom tax

Called by the All Scottish Anti-Bedroom Tax Federation

Saturday 1 June, Assemble 12pm, George Square

YouTube tip: search for "Coventry Against The Bedroom Tax - Bekir's Story"

Editorial of the Socialist

Tories in turmoil over Europe

The Tories are thrashing around in ever-deeper water on the issue of Europe. Over half of Tory backbenchers voted against the Queen's speech - their own government's legislative agenda because it didn't announce a referendum on membership of the European Union (EU).

David Cameron was reduced to backing a private member's bill legislating for a 2017 referendum, which won't legislate at all, because the Tories don't have a majority to pass it.

The issue of Europe is also widening the chasm between the Tories and Lib Dems - who were blamed for the absence of referendum legislation - although Lib Dem leader Nick Clegg has tried to mitigate this by saying that a referendum is inevitable at some stage.

The Lib Dems are languishing in single-figure poll percentages and the Tories are in turmoil, immersed in bitter, acrimonious division, currently over gay marriage as well as Europe. Many Tories dismiss their leader as weak and incompetent.

Former Tory chancellor Nigel Lawson delivered Cameron a blow earlier this month by arguing that Britain should quit the EU.

Present cabinet ministers Michael Gove and Philip Hammond have also pinned their colours to the exit mast, saying that if there was a vote today they would opt to leave the EU.

Weighing in against them came another former Tory chancellor, Geoffrey Howe, in last Sunday's Observer mocking Cameron for his twists and turns - Cameron is under sustained attack from both sides of the debate.

Howe berated the Tory leadership for "in effect running scared of its own backbenchers, let alone Ukip, having allowed deep anti-Europeanism to infect the very soul of the party".

He fears that if the Conservative Party loses the next general election it "will move to a position of simply opposing Britain's continued membership" of the EU.

Richard Branson and 18 other corporate chiefs joined in to push the case for staying in the EU, "the world's largest trade bloc", in a letter published by the Independent.

As the EU is basically a bosses' club that enshrines big business interests and neoliberalism in its treaties, much of British big business views it as beneficial and they fear British capitalism

losing trade, power and influence in the event of an exit.

Eurosceptics

On the other hand, braying Tory eurosceptics and Ukip members demand withdrawal, but no more in the interests of working class people than those who lead the call to stay in.

They want to escape from EU decisions - loss of 'sovereignty' for the British ruling class - also from closer EU integration, and in vain from contagion from the eurozone crisis.

Any talk of being outside of anti-working class EU regulation on budget cuts and privatisation is largely a smokescreen, because they support cuts and privatisation in Britain.

For socialists, the bosses' EU must be firmly opposed, because the crumbs it allows in workers' rights are far outweighed by its fundamental character of existing in the interests of the capitalist classes.

It was conceived as a project to overcome the limits of developing the productive forces within the borders of Europe's nation states and to aid Europe's competition with other capitalist powers and blocs.

But it is unable to remove the antagonisms between the ruling classes and all the barriers between the states.

Only an alliance of democratic socialist states - a socialist confederation - will be able to develop the productive forces onto a significantly higher level and use the wealth generated in the interests of the majority in society.

RMT general secretary Bob Crow was right to boldly say in a RMT press release (13.5.13) that his union "will not sit back and allow this debate to be dominated by Ukip and the right wing of the Tory Party...

"RMT will continue to set out the left-wing pro-worker case for British withdrawal from the EU that puts jobs, standards of living, democracy and public services centre stage."

In a comment piece on the Guardian website a few days later (17.5.13) he graphically described the plight of many of Europe's workers: "In the countries hit hardest by the 'troika' of banks and bureaucrats, youth unemployment tops 60% and the millions of personal tragedies of lost homes, jobs, pensions and services are testament to the sick joke of 'social Europe'."

Socialists and trade unionists need to emphatically oppose the capitalist EU while recognising that whether in or out of it, we have to build a mighty movement of opposition to the government's cuts.

Attacks

Politicians leading the main UK political parties are not innocent prisoners of EU-imposed or suggested austerity measures, they all generally support such attacks whether Britain is part of the EU or not.

This includes the Labour Party leaders who intend to continue inflicting cuts and privatisation if they win the next general election.

This makes preparation for a determined electoral challenge by the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) - in which the RMT plays a key role - extremely important for the next local and parliamentary elections, also for the European elections on 22 May 2014.

TUSC can play a crucial role in opposing the bosses' EU while countering the anti-EU nationalism of the right and far right, putting forward instead the need for solidarity and coordinated struggle of workers and the unemployed across Europe.

In addition, building support for candidates who stand as part of TUSC will help to lay the ground for the creation of a new mass workers' party, urgently needed to arm workers with a political weapon against austerity and for a socialist alternative.

Big business tax avoidance scandal

Make the corporate fat cats pay!

Ken Douglas

We've been robbed! Every day big corporations are stealing millions from us; millions that could be used to employ doctors and nurses, to build desperately needed houses and to reverse the massive cuts being made by this Con-Dem coalition.

But hang on, it's okay. "It's called capitalism. We are proudly capitalistic. I'm not confused about this," said Google chairman Eric Schmidt in defence of his company paying only £6 million in corporation tax while earning a staggering £2.7 billion from sales in Britain.

That amounts to a rate of 3.2% - a miniscule amount compared, for instance, to UK basic taxpayers who have to pay a rate of 20%.

Schmidt himself has done very well out of capitalism - he's number 45 in the Forbes 400 richest individuals in America and is 'worth' \$8.2 billion, no wonder he's not confused!

Google's corporate motto urges: "Don't be evil". Presumably that exhortation is directed at anyone except the people who run the company itself.

Fellow evil-doers Amazon managed to top even this. They actually got more in government grants than they paid in tax; grants of £2.5 million covered its corporate tax bill of just £2.4 million, while the company had sales in Britain of £4.2 billion.

Where will these companies' ill-gotten profits go? They'll add to the over £850 billion of corporate profits already in the bank vaults in Europe or go to shareholders to be stashed in tax-havens for the super-rich, bulging with up to £20 trillion world-wide.

Eric Schmidt will be able to trade in his \$72 million yacht and his \$42 million jet for even swankier models.

Meanwhile, ordinary people are being driven into depression and suicide as they seek to cut their already meagre budgets in order to pay the bedroom tax, or a fuel bill higher than it needs to be because of the price-fixing of the energy companies.

Dave Cameron, known for his fearless pursuit of comedian Jimmy Carr over his tax avoidance, met Eric Schmidt this week and you would expect that the subject of Google's tax-dodging would've come up.

But no, apparently the issue of tax 'transparency' was only raised in a general fashion in preparation for the G8 group of countries meeting in Fermanagh, Northern Ireland.

Cameron is forced to make a speech from time to time about corporate tax avoidance, so that the Con-Dem government can appear even-handed as they inflict savage cuts and wage freezes on the working class.

But their real attitude is summed up by Tory London Mayor Boris Johnson after Cameron had criticised Starbucks for not paying any tax in Britain: "We should stop bashing wealth creation - such talk is absolute nonsense."

The Con-Dems won't control these huge companies - they are parties of big business. "It's called capitalism" - a system of production for profit and the capitalists will take as much as

they can get away with.

We demand that these companies and the super-rich who own and run them should pay their tax and more - they could pay off the deficit tomorrow.

But only by nationalising these companies under democratic workers' control and management will we be able to harness their wealth-producing power to meet peoples' needs and end this economic madness where our jobs, education and futures have to be sacrificed to line the pockets of the super-rich.

- Over 100 of Britain's richest people are hiding billions of pounds in offshore tax havens
 - 98 of the top 100 companies on the FTSE stock exchange are using tax havens, with firms such as Tesco and Barclays each owning hundreds of offshore subsidiaries
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Another blow for workfare

The government's hated workfare schemes suffered another setback recently when a judge ruled that the names of those taking part must be made public.

More than a year earlier, a Freedom of Information request had been made to find out which companies and charities are involved in having unemployed people work for them without pay, only receiving their usual unemployment benefit.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) had claimed that participating organisations would be seriously financially damaged by the information being made public because of the unpopularity of the schemes. Too right when they're making a profit from the work of unemployed people without paying a penny!

This legal victory against the government follows another earlier in the year which ruled that the DWP had not provided adequate information to those taking part in the schemes. The Con-Dems (facilitated by a pathetic abstention from Labour) quickly avoided paying compensation by changing the law!

The latest figures also show that while big business makes a killing, workfare fails utterly to succeed in its stated aim - getting the unemployed into work.

In Hull North, where there are about 55 jobseekers chasing every job, government figures from November show that only 0.7% of the people referred to the Work Programme found jobs that lasted six months.

Campaign

This ruling is an opportunity to step up the campaign against workfare. Youth Fight for Jobs was at the forefront of the protests against businesses taking part last year which forced a partial victory on one of the schemes and led to several companies pulling out.

Millions of people are wasting their skills and interests in unemployment. We've been told we're in a 'jobs recovery' but the latest figures show that was short-lived and unemployment is already on the way back up.

Millions are 'underemployed' - working for the minimum wage, on zero-hour contracts for bullying bosses.

And then to top it all off, the government and the bosses want to force the unemployed to work as the underemployed - but for no money! We demand major investment in a programme of socially useful, paid jobs, with decent conditions and trade union rights for all.

Join Youth Fight for Jobs' Sick Of Your Boss week of action starting 8 July.

See www.youthfightforjobs.com

NHS staff under the cuts cosh

An NHS worker and Unite rep

The NHS is under the cosh, having been instructed by the government to make savings of £20 billion. This has driven a relentless assault upon the terms and conditions of thousands of employees.

Staff have been subjected to years of pay freezes, pay caps and draconian pension reforms. However, the public sector austerity programme has been surpassed in the NHS by an abhorrent national agreement, regrettably supported by trade unions such as Unison and the RCN.

This agreement allows the withdrawal of key terms and conditions of employment and the introduction of, among other things, performance -related pay.

These outrageous changes are opposed by Unite and some smaller unions. Unite believes this

will be the thin end of the wedge, that this agreement will open the door to further erosions of national terms and conditions, in turn signalling a green light for Trusts to go it alone, negotiating terms, conditions and salaries at a local level.

This strategy will inevitably lead to further cuts, making services more attractive to 'Any Qualified Providers', thereby resulting in the privatisation of key public services.

The NHS increasingly relies upon the goodwill of many thousands of hardworking, dedicated, caring professionals.

Many routinely work through their break periods and often beyond the end of their shift.

This work, often unpaid, is undertaken through necessity and is often accompanied by a degree of emotional blackmail from highly stressed managers and doctors.

Having described the situation in the NHS, I pose the question, do desk bound executives really believe that cutting staffing costs to the bone will achieve anything other than causing further damage to staff morale which in turn will result in a deterioration of care and outcomes?

Southern Health workers fight back

Support and care workers employed by the Southern Health Trust are fighting to defend their terms and conditions.

The Trust, which supplies care and support services across southern England, has decided to cut pay by 15% and reduce holidays by eight days.

This is a breakaway from the Agenda for Change national agreement and it affects about 800 workers.

A Southern Health worker told the Socialist: "We don't accept any move away from Agenda for Change. We must make a stand now.

"We're being told we have to sign the new contracts otherwise we'll lose our rights anyway.

"Health bosses must be shown that we will fight to defend our terms and conditions. If we don't then any Tom, Dick or Harry can come along and attack our terms and conditions and maybe put us on the minimum wage.

"We've already had members ringing up, crying on the phone, saying: 'that's my house gone'.

"A consultative survey by Unison has shown 90% of members in favour of industrial action and about 86% in favour of strike action.

"We've had a big public campaign to get people to send protest postcards to the chair of the board. 8,000 have been given out and thousands have been returned. Also we're contacting local politicians to put pressure on them.

"We have the backing of Oxfordshire trades council and we were on the front of the May Day march in Oxford this year.

"We have the backing of many different union branches across the country including lots of Unison branches.

"We've built the union in Southern Health and we have a good stewards network. We now have to make sure that Unison start the strike ballot as soon as possible. We'll be lobbying the trust board on 29 May.

"We always put our service users first and by doing this we are putting them first. We don't want a demoralised workforce - that would be bad for the service users and the staff."

Lobby of the Trust board: Wednesday 29 May, 9am. Main Hall, Lyndhurst Community Centre, Lyndhurst SO43 7NY

Them & Us

MPs' pay rise

£65,738 a year basic salary just isn't enough for our MPs. Not to mention their infamous expenses. The body that decides these things thinks they've been working so hard that they should receive a pay rise of anywhere up to £20,000 a year.

That's despite the fact that the average wage for the rest of us is £26,500 and the public sector is still in the middle of a pay freeze, with an offer of a 1% increase after that.

If all politicians followed the example of past Socialist Party MPs and councillors who have only

taken the average wage of the people they represent, they'd no doubt think twice about such a measly pay offer for public service workers.

More of the same

When looking for a new health advisor, you might think the prime minister would look for an experienced doctor or nurse who understands the important role of the NHS in looking after the nation's health and wellbeing. You'd be wrong. The latest appointee at Downing Street is Nick Seddon.

Seddon has previously worked for think tank Reform (with corporate donors including drugs giant GlaxoSmithKline) and for private healthcare company Circle.

In 2010 he said that while health should be mainly funded by government it should be "organised outside of government, by insurance companies and other organisations."

No prizes for guessing if he'll be a voice of opposition to Cameron's deadly plans for the NHS.

Unhappy workers

Workers in Britain are feeling under more pressure at work than at any other time over the past 20 years, the Skills and Employment Survey has found.

And for the first time, public sector workers are under more stress than those in the private sector.

It's no wonder job related stress is on the rise and job satisfaction is going the opposite way, given the threat of unemployment, job cuts meaning an increase in workload, and the pressure to meet targets and deadlines.

The American Dream

Many of the cuts being made and measures introduced by the Con-Dems are widely recognised to be taking us further down the 'American road' - private companies in the health service and no nationally agreed standards in public services for example.

And the consequences are replicating the situation across the pond as well, with the rise of food banks providing emergency food for the poorest.

In the US one in seven live in poverty, 47 million are reliant on food stamps and six million use

food banks.

Class cleansing

The insanity of the government's lack of action to tackle the housing crisis just keeps becoming clearer. £2 billion has been spent over four years providing emergency accommodation for homeless families, many who have been priced out by sky-high private rents.

And the cost isn't just financial. Families and communities are being destroyed. The Bureau of Investigative Journalism has revealed that councils have moved nearly 11,000 families to different areas in the last financial year alone, and the rate is continuing to rise.

Most of these have been moved further out of London, some out of the capital altogether. This class cleansing has to stop.

Fighting cuts in wales

Within the general crisis of British capitalism there is the special crisis of the Welsh economy. Founded in the 19th century on mining and heavy industry and sustained in the late 20th century by manufacturing, the modern Welsh economy has staggered on since the 1980s based on foreign inward investment in industry and public spending.

Now these two sectors are receding and Wales faces a bleak future on the basis of capitalism unless the working class can defend public services and the welfare state.

This special feature on Wales looks at where the cuts are hitting hard and puts forward a strategy to stop them, based on mass struggle and the socialist and revolutionary traditions of the Welsh working class.

Is Plaid Cymru a real alternative for working class people?

Ross Saunders

Communities in Wales are only gradually realising the bedroom tax's full effects as arrears mount up and tenants slide closer to eviction.

There is misery all over Britain but it is particularly acute in Wales, which has an unemployment rate of 10%, above the UK average.

Long-term unemployment lingers as a result of the smashing of the mining and manufacturing industries which used to dominate the economy.

The Tories began those attacks, but Labour governments failed to halt the decline: in Wales 171 factories closed between 1998 and 2008, with job losses of 31,000 in manufacturing.

Unemployment benefits as a proportion of average income fell substantially in the same period. Cuts such as the bedroom tax hit Wales while it is already down.

The Welsh working class desperately needs an organisation to organise its defence. Some look to the Welsh Nationalist Party, Plaid Cymru.

Plaid MP Jonathan Edwards has called on councils and Housing Associations to reclassify properties as having fewer bedrooms to escape the bedroom tax.

Plaid councillor Neil McEvoy proposed a motion calling on Cardiff council to pledge not to evict anyone who falls into arrears as a result of the bedroom tax.

Compared to Labour (who amended Plaid's motion, deleting the pledge not to evict), Plaid will appear radical, at least in opposition. But would Plaid in power do any differently? The evidence says "No".

Until 2012, Cardiff was run by a Plaid-Liberal coalition, which carried out brutal cuts to services amounting to millions of pounds, including services for benefit claimants and the most vulnerable.

The Disability Welfare Advice Service was scrapped making it harder for disabled people to find out what benefits they're entitled to.

Today, Plaid is the controlling force on Gwynedd council, North Wales, but there are no reports of pledges to protect people from bedroom tax evictions or reclassify properties there.

Empty words, not backed by action, will not defend our living standards: we need a political party that will do everything possible to fight the Lib-Con Coalition when it tries to make us pay for the bankers' mess.

Plan C?

Plaid Cymru cannot adopt the bold solutions required to solve the problems of Wales and the UK because it is held back by a conservative wing based on private business interests in Wales.

The recently-released "Plan C", rightly calls for a break with the monopoly of the finance sector, but on the crucial question of what would replace its dominant influence, Plaid calls for "maximising the potential of the cooperative and social enterprise sectors to develop business and entrepreneurial skills in our communities."

What Wales needs is socialism - democratic working class ownership and control of the economy by the working class - is the only way to end long-term unemployment and economic stagnation.

The launch of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition Wales steering committee, including leading figures in combative unions like the RMT and the PCS, is an important step towards that solution and the development of an independent mass party for the working class in Wales.

Teachers' message: stay firm against performance-related pay

NUT Cymru members spoke to Dave Reid

Over 500 Welsh teachers poured into a recent Cardiff rally organised by NUT and NASUWT unions against government attacks on teachers' pay and conditions.

Anger at education secretary Michael Gove's attacks on pay and pensions and at Welsh Labour education minister Leighton Andrews' policies, created a growing demand for action.

There was an enthusiastic response to the idea of joint industrial action by NUT and NASUWT, beginning with a one-day strike in north-west England on 27 June.

NUT deputy general secretary Kevin Courtney and NASUWT general secretary Chris Keates were applauded for criticising government policies on schools and mentions of action.

Unfortunately, the anger and enthusiasm was only partially reflected by the union leaders.

Teachers from both unions were concerned that Chris Keates implied that the one-day national rolling action might be called off in Wales if Leighton Andrews made concessions to the unions on observations.

She said Andrews has been asked to adopt the joint union performance management policy, changing the way teacher observations are carried out and to publicly ask Gove to scrap plans to end the national pay structure. He ticked one box by writing to Gove, but not the second box - yet.

Defend pay

Andrews merely wrote to Gove saying the Con-Dem government should retain a national pay structure for teachers in Wales and England.

He has not conceded on observations but, if he made some concessions, the NASUWT leaders say they would be prepared to call off the one day action, even though Gove would impose performance-related pay on Welsh teachers.

Verbal opposition by Andrews would be enough for union leaders in Wales to call off the action. One Welsh NASUWT leader told the press: "If resolution is reached with the Welsh government, the rolling programme would roll past" even though Welsh teachers would be hit by pay cuts as much as teachers in England.

NUT activists said after the rally that if NASUWT leaders called off this autumn's one-day regional action the NUT should go ahead regardless as NASUWT members would support them. NUT Cymru leaders must remain firm.

Save the NHS - unions must lead the way

As the Wales TUC annual conference was meeting on 22 May, the Labour Welsh Government was poised to publish its 'South Wales Plan' for 'reorganising' accident, emergency and other health services. Communities hold their breath - will their hospital be one of the lucky five that retains full accident and emergency services?

North Wales health campaigners are mounting a legal challenge to plans to move intensive neonatal care to the Wirral.

Protests at cuts and campaigns to save local services are springing up from Llandudno to Llanelli.

The Wales TUC Conference should have been a 'council of war' preparing a fight to defend our NHS. But these cuts are carried out by a Welsh Labour Government.

That makes all the difference to the leaders of the big, Labour-affiliated unions dominating Wales TUC.

The only agenda resolution on the NHS, from Swansea Trades Council, called for the Wales TUC to head a campaign to defend all NHS services in Wales.

The General Council opposed this resolution. It still denies that the Welsh Labour Government is making deep cuts of around £200 million in the last year, 3.3% of total Health Board budgets.

Labour's refusal to defend the NHS in Wales risks fragmenting the fight into cross-party campaigns to save local services, while accepting cuts elsewhere. Llanelli's Labour MP calls for politics to be kept out of the campaign to defend A&E services at Prince Phillip Hospital; while Pembrokeshire's Tories have been out petitioning to save local NHS services!

The General Council opposed Swansea Trades Council's call for a fighting lead, saying that any cuts are the fault of the Con-Dem coalition in Westminster.

In areas like health, where the Welsh Government has fully devolved powers, it describes cuts as 'modernisation'.

Instead of the demonstration called for in the resolution, the General Council's idea of action is a bus tour of Wales giving out leaflets and inviting local politicians to condemn the Con-Dem government, even as they 'reluctantly' make their cuts.

There will be a fight to save NHS services in Wales: communities won't stand by and see services destroyed.

It will be more difficult if the General Council blocks the Wales TUC from leading that fight but we call for rank and file trade unionists to build links with local campaigns to oppose all cuts and fight for an NHS true to its founding principles - free and accessible to all.

On 8 June the Welsh Shop Stewards Network (WSSN) meets in Cardiff; trade unionists there would hope to be building for a WTUC NHS demo but the WSSN should consider calling one.

Ronnie Job

Stop the fire cuts!

The BBC, acting as a megaphone for government cuts propaganda, describes the Knight Review of fire and rescue services as bringing about 'efficiencies'.

However, what it will bring about if its recommendations are accepted, is an increase in needless deaths and injuries.

Speaking at Swansea Trades Council's May Day rally, Chair of FBU Cymru, Cerith Griffiths, highlighted local cuts already taking place, including replacing fire engines with vans and halving shift numbers in Llanelli.

Trade unionists should get behind FBU resistance to these cuts. The Knight Review and cuts to fire and rescue services is one more attack on essential public services to add to coastguard closures, the destruction of NHS services, rail and mail privatisation etc.

Together they are an irrefutable case for a 24-hour general strike to halt cuts and privatisation.

South African economy: Mass sacking threat demands mass action

Democratic Socialist Movement (CWI, South Africa) reporters

The Workers and Socialist Party (WASP) has denounced Amplats' (Anglo American - the world's largest platinum producer) cold-blooded plans to slash 6,000 jobs.

WASP stands in solidarity with the Amplats workers who are threatening strike action in protest.

With every worker supporting between six and ten dependants and each mining job estimated to generate another 26 jobs in the wider economy, these job losses spell disaster for mineworkers, their families and working class communities.

If the Amplats retrenchment plan succeeds, mass retrenchments are likely to follow across the economy.

WASP therefore calls on all Amplats workers, the National Workers Committee and the unions in the mining industry to mobilise for united, well-organised and effective resistance.

In particular, all the federations of labour, should organise a 24-hour general strike as the

starting point for a campaign of rolling mass action to unite the entire working class to defeat the retrenchments at Amplats and elsewhere.

Timing

Amplats has been condemned by other capitalists for allegedly capitulating under the pressure of the unions and the government in limiting the job cuts to 6,000 from the original 14,000.

Investors have been determined to claw back the concessions they were forced to make after the strike wave that swept across the mining industry in the latter half of 2012.

In fact, Amplats has not reneged on its investor-dictated mandate to cut production and retrench 14,000 workers.

It has simply changed the timing. The 6,000 retrenchments are merely the first instalment.

As part of the restructuring of the entire industry the mining bosses are contemplating up to 200,000 job cuts over the next five years.

Hence, Anglo Gold Ashanti has announced mechanisation of production and Sibanye Gold has announced that 5,000 workers in its Gauteng mines are "in surplus", while 3,000 will be fired as the Beatrix West mine is shut down.

With the sharpest fall in the gold price since 1983, the Chinese economy slowing markedly and continued recession in the USA, Europe and Japan, more mining companies are likely to follow suit.

This is in a situation where South Africa's real unemployment rate is 38% (as opposed to the official rate at 25.2%).

Despite the fact that these fabulously wealthy mining companies have been hugely profitable for decades, and are easily able to pay the justified wage demands of the workers, a media storm of vicious anti-working class propaganda has accompanied the jobs threats, which deliberately omits or distorts the facts about the profitability of the mines.

With no end in sight for the global economic crisis, the bosses fear that demand will decline. They are thus putting measures in place now to protect their profits against short, medium and long-term decline.

The real agenda of the Amplats bosses, the Chamber of Mines and the entire capitalist elite is to break the back of workers' unity and resistance and to restore the pre-Marikana (where 34

striking miners were gunned down by police, last August) balance of forces.

Workers have correctly concluded that the recent killing of miners, starting with the assassination of AMCU (independent union) workers' leader Mawethu Steven, is no coincidence.

The same modus operandi is at work now as last year: sinister killings, which never really ceased, by unknown forces that the police have yet to identify and arrest, to create an atmosphere of terror, and division among workers.

With the workers divided, the bosses hope to push through their cuts on jobs and production, and to comfortably sit out the strikes they expect as wage negotiations now begin.

The only alternative for the workers is to unite and fight back if the capitalists are not going to walk over the broken bones of their workforce on the way to the recovery of their system.

More cuts

With South Africa's economy in crisis, we can predict that the government - rather than taxing lavish company profits to increase its income - will try to cut public spending.

This means wage freezes and probable retrenchments in the public sector and certainly no further expansion of the social welfare net.

WASP believes the crisis in the mining industry is a mirror of the crisis in the capitalist economy as a whole.

The only way not just to save but to create jobs is for the mining industry along with the commanding heights of the economy to be nationalised under the democratic control and management of the working class.

It would then be possible to plan the economy to meet the needs of the overwhelming majority.

WASP

The Workers and Socialist Party (WASP) was launched on Sharpeville Day (21 March) to a packed hall of over 500 Pretoria municipality workers; mineworkers' delegates from a dozen mines in gold, platinum, coal and iron ore; and executive members of the 20,000-strong revolutionary transport union Natawu. The launch received extensive coverage in the South African media.

The initiative to launch WASP was born directly out of the experiences of the mineworkers in the course of their 2012 strike action.

The brutal repression and collusion of the state, the mine bosses and the corrupt union leaders, culminating in the Marikana massacre, crystalized one clear sentiment in the minds of millions: 'the ANC government does not care about us and we need our own political alternative'.

At a meeting at the end of last year, six of the rank and file strike committees that sprang up during the strikes, along with the Democratic Socialist Movement, agreed to take the step of launching WASP.

The mineworkers' national strike committee voted unanimously to back WASP at its meeting on 9 March.

WASP aims to unite the struggles of workers, communities and young people under one umbrella. WASP stands for the nationalisation of the mines and other sectors of the economy under democratic workers' control and management and intends to contest the 2014 general election.

- To help support WASP and the work of the mineworkers' national strike committee please send donations to: South Africa Miners' Solidarity PO Box 66682, London E11 9ER, Cheques payable to "South African Miners Fund"
- Or bank transfers to South African Miners Fund, Lloyds TSB Bank plc, Sort code: 77-13-15, Account no: 62969960, Reference: your surname or trade union branch.

And please email a notification of payment to sasolidarity@gmail.com

Sri Lanka: Isolate the murderous Rajapaksa regime

Manny Thain

Prime Minister David Cameron's decision to lead Britain's delegation to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting is a kick in the teeth to all Tamil-speaking people.

The meeting, to be held in November in Sri Lanka, gives a seal of approval to President

Mahinda Rajapaksa's murderous regime that was responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands of civilians in the closing months of the war against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Since the war ended in May 2009, Rajapaksa has tightened his grip on power. The 18th constitutional amendment (September 2010) placed key government institutions directly under his control, and the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act is used to clamp down on any dissent.

Trade union and left-wing activists, journalists and human rights campaigners are routinely targeted, ie arrested and detained, tortured and disappeared.

Tens of thousands of Tamils remain unaccounted for, many languishing in secret detention centres. The predominantly Tamil north and east of Sri Lanka has been turned into a militarised zone.

The regime is establishing permanent settlements of soldiers and their families in the area, and moving people from the majority Sinhala population to take over land seized from the Tamils.

Rajapaksa has embarked on a divisive, violent campaign, whipping up Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinism to try to divide and rule.

Meanwhile, his regime pursues aggressive neoliberal economic policies, driving up prices of essential goods and cutting public services.

International big business is welcomed into free-trade zones based on the super-exploitation of labour.

This is devastating working class and poor people's living standards throughout the island, regardless of their ethnic/religious background.

The regime is courting investment from China, which is developing a huge deep-sea port in Rajapaksa's power base.

Strategically placed along one of the world's busiest sea lanes, Sri Lanka is also considered to be of vital importance to other regional and global powers, such as India, the US and Britain.

So it is of no surprise that the hypocritical British government - which has continually granted arms licences and other services to the Sri Lankan army - is keen to wheel and deal with Rajapaksa and his cronies.

The Tamil Solidarity campaign is stepping up its activities to stop this meeting going ahead. On Saturday 8 June we are co-hosting with the British Tamils Forum an event bringing together Tamil community activists with trade unionists and others to launch this initiative.

We have fought long and hard for a truly independent investigation into all allegations of war crimes - from both the Sri Lankan armed forces and the LTTE.

Alongside other campaigning groups and agencies which have also highlighted the situation, Tamil Solidarity is helping to link the fight of Tamil-speaking people with the might of the trade union and workers' movement, the natural ally of workers and oppressed internationally.

- After the 2012 Unison conference voted to support Tamil Solidarity (TS), the union's NEC policy sub-committee has finally agreed to back it. The International Students Campaign of the National Union of Students (UK) has also agreed to back TS.

Solidarity Day: Saturday 8 June, 4pm to 8pm.

School of Oriental and African Studies, Vernon Square Campus, Vernon Square, Penton Rise, London, WC1X 9EW

Contact: info@tamilsolidarity.org, Keerthikam@tamilsolidarity.org or 07778327044 www.tamilsolidarity.org

Committee for a Workers' International (CWI)

The Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) is the socialist international organisation to which the Socialist Party is affiliated.

The CWI is organised in 45 countries and works to unite the working class and oppressed peoples against global capitalism and to fight for a socialist world.

For more details including CWI publications write to: CWI, PO Box 3688, London E11 1YE.

email cwi@worldsoc.co.uk

The CWI website contains news, reports and analysis from around the world. www.cwi.org

Southampton TUSC rally

Labour non-answers show why real anti-cuts councillors are needed

Nick Chaffey, Southern region Socialist Party secretary

"Can you guarantee that this time next year, Sure Start, libraries and Woolston youth centre will still be open?" Twice, Woolston Labour councillor, Carol Cunio, was challenged by Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidate Sue Atkins.

Chairing the TUSC Woolston byelection campaign launch meeting, anti-cuts councillor Keith Morrell invited the Labour councillor to answer. The meeting was met with silence. It revealed to everyone at the meeting why electing a third anti-cuts councillor in Southampton is an urgent task for those fighting to protect jobs and services from Con-Dem cuts.

The byelection, being held due to the Labour council leader's resignation, is on 13 June. The Labour leaflet says the party is: "On your side in tough times." But over 500 jobs have gone at the council since Labour took power last May, with further cuts of £40 million to come over the next two years.

"If we don't take a stand, what will be left? That's why I pledge if elected I will stand with Keith Morrell and Don Thomas and refuse to implement cuts. Councillors have a choice: I won't vote for cuts." This was the clear case put by Sue.

Josh Asker, from the Save Southampton City Youth Services campaign, spoke about the threat to the local youth centre, which the campaign has helped to win a one-year reprieve for. "It shows campaigning can have an effect, but if things are going to change we need councillors who are prepared to challenge the Con-Dem cuts."

Hannah Sell from the Socialist Party gave the support of the TUSC national steering committee to Sue, Keith and Don. In her contribution, Hannah outlined how the money was there to provide jobs and public services. But, in the pockets of the rich 1% and big business, it was lying idle, uninvested.

"We would implement a levy on the £850 billion sitting in the bank vaults of big business and

invest in building affordable housing to end the housing crisis and create jobs."

The discussion covered a variety of issues including the challenge for trade unionists to build fighting unions that can defeat the austerity agenda.

Over 30 attended the meeting; trade unionists, anti-cuts activists and new faces from the local community. £120 was donated to the campaign appeal, a very positive reflection of the mood at the meeting.

TUSC is also contesting a 6 June byelection for the Walkergate ward of Newcastle city council, whose Labour majority passed a £100 million three-year cuts programme back in March. TUSC candidate Bobbie Cranny was one of the participants in the 2011 Youth Fight For Jobs Jarrow March, backed by six national trade unions. Bobbie completed the whole route from the north east to London.

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is an electoral alliance that stands candidates against all cuts and privatisation. It involves the RMT transport workers' union, leading members of other trade unions including the PCS, NUT and POA, and socialists including the Socialist Party.

www.tusc.org.uk

Don't Vote for Cuts- Councillors have a choice

How Southampton fought back against Con-Dem cuts and built support for a socialist alternative to austerity; Just £2 including p&p; Available from Socialist Books; PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD; Ring 020 8988 8789 to pay by card

www.socialistbooks.org.uk Please make cheques payable to Socialist Books

Anti-blacklisting campaigner run over

Paul Gerrard, TUSC election agent, Salford Ordsall

Retired construction worker George Tapp, who has stood as a Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidate in council elections in Salford, has been hospitalised after being

deliberately knocked down by a car while taking part in a protest against blacklisting on 15 May.

The 64 year old sustained two broken legs and a fractured knee cap, and is now recovering in Manchester Royal Infirmary.

George is a respected labour movement figure in Salford who was a Labour councillor for the city's Ordsall ward from 1987 to 1995.

He has since twice fought the ward for TUSC, polling 381 votes (16%) in 2011 and 18.7% in 2012, on both occasions among the best results for TUSC nationally.

He is an active fighter against blacklisting, against council cuts and the bedroom tax. Only three weeks ago he called a 60-strong meeting in Ordsall to organise against the tax.

Witnesses say the car drove deliberately and at speed into a crowd of protesters who were leafleting at the BAM construction site.

BAM are known blacklisters and paid £38,371 to the notorious Consulting Agency between 1996 and 2009.

As part of the BFK consortium they were also responsible for the sacking of Frank Morris from the London Crossrail site after he had raised health and safety issues on the Olympics job, hence the protest in Manchester.

The police response to this incident has been appalling. Their press statement runs: "while we respect the democratic right of anyone holding a peaceful protest, if we believe individuals have behaved in an unlawful manner, we will take action."

A pensioner is run over, sustaining concussion and two broken legs, and instead of hunting down the driver they are considering prosecuting the pickets!

Dave Smith, Secretary of the Blacklist Support Group, called George: "A blacklist hero. He recently led a delegation of blacklisted workers who encouraged the Mayor of Salford to ban blacklisting firms from publicly funded contracts. We wish him a speedy recovery."

Rank and file activists have promised a major protest soon in response to this further attack on trade unionism.

Messages of support should be sent to George via 07949 335390

Liberty backs blacklist investigation

The AGM of Liberty, the campaigning organisation to defend human rights, endorsed a motion from the Communication Workers Union on 18 May in opposition to the blacklist in the construction industry.

The motion called for further investigation of the companies involved, and notification to workers on the list of that fact.

The motion was supported from the floor by Socialist Party member Roger Bannister, attending as delegate from Knowsley Unison.

Birmingham university backs down: students and workers win!

Edmund Schluessel, NUS NEC-elect and UCU member

Maintenance and support staff at University of Birmingham are celebrating near-total victory as university management has abandoned restructuring plans. 361 Hospitalist and Accomodation Services (HAS) staff faced compulsory redundancy, pay cuts and being forced to work anti-social hours under plans announced in March; the £407,000-a-year pay packet of the vice-chancellor would have been unaffected.

The university also planned to force staff to work at weekends and bank holidays for no extra pay. These plans have all been dropped and staff have won extra flexibility in setting their own schedules.

Birmingham University Unison worked closely in partnership with the students' union, Birmingham Guild of Students, to fight back against the cuts and job losses.

Staff and students demonstrated together against university management on May Day, and in a major show of solidarity, the students' union put out a call for a national student mobilisation in support of the Birmingham HAS staff.

Determined response

In a statement, student campaigning group Birmingham Defend Education said:

"This outcome demonstrates that protest and direct action work.

"Unions were negotiating on these issues behind the scenes for two months, whilst the university kept announcing further attacks.

"As soon as they started to sign up large numbers of new members and talk about strike action, and we sent our statement to David Eastwood, the university abandoned the majority of their attacks within two weeks.

"This also illustrates the power of students and staff when working together. We should remember that staff and students, not management, are what make the university work.

"If we recognise this, and the power that we have when we stop doing what we're told, we can claim the conditions of work and study that we want to see."

Low pay

The problem of low pay remains unresolved. Many maintenance staff at Birmingham and dozens of other universities are paid only the national minimum wage, while the university makes annual profits of nearly £30 million.

Lecturers and other university staff on the national pay spine have received real-terms pay cuts every year since 2009.

The five-way consortium of university trade unions, consisting of UCU, Unison, Unite, GMB and EIS, are meeting with employers on 21 May to discuss the latest 0.8% pay offer.

The five unions should unanimously reject the offer and prepare for national coordinated action to stop the pay cuts and job losses, and push the TUC to name the day for a 24-hour general strike against all the cuts.

As an incoming Socialist Students member of the National Union of Students' executive I will push for NUS to learn from the Birmingham students' example and to give the fullest possible support to any action in defence of education and against the cuts.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 16 May 2013 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Support for Mid Yorkshire Health struggle in the Mirror

On 17 May, the Daily Mirror carried an excellent column by Paul Routledge about the important struggle taking place in Mid Yorkshire Health Trust.

The Socialist has been the only national paper consistently covering the dispute so far but we welcome this article in the Mirror.

Paul explains the important battle being waged in defence of trade union rights and the role being played by Socialist Party member and Unison branch secretary Adrian O'Malley as well as his Unite counterpart, Maria Thompson. Here are some sections of the Mirror's article.

"This new package of measures would effectively scupper the ability of Unison members, numbering more than 3,000, to choose full-time union reps on the NHS payroll.

The cost to the health service of this long-standing arrangement is probably less than £50,000 a year. It is money well spent on good industrial relations, easing life at work in the cash-strapped NHS.

It certainly pales into insignificance alongside the millions of pounds spent by Mid Yorks Trust bosses on outside consultants - £986,292 to Ernst & Young in April alone - to tell them how to do their job.

It beggars belief that the NHS should be allowed to waste enormous sums of taxpayers' money on advising managers how to manage, while devoting thousands of man hours to stuffing the unions and employees who belong to it.

But that's what life is like in your modernised, top-down, reformed, commercialised health service. It is a captive of the business mentality [...]

Behind the human resources psychobabble is a clear intention to stuff the union.

Less time for anyone to represent the members, and only then with the permission of the bosses [...]

Why is all this happening? Well, the Mid Yorks NHS Trust racked up millions of pounds in losses because managers went through it faster than Norman Wisdom in a revolving door, and

a new management team decided that the workers should pay the price of earlier mismanagement.

The workers wouldn't have it. They balloted, as the law requires, and some of them went on strike, though for only six days. So they, and their union, must be punished.

I have nothing but the most thoroughgoing contempt for the Graham Briggses [director of human resources] of this world - overpaid, over-mighty and over-sure of themselves, buttressed in power and authority by the Tory NHS "reforms".

Mr O'Malley and Ms Thompson are the real champions of our NHS, not the bosses who pretend to run it."

Hear, hear!

The Socialist Party calls on the trade unions to take the lead on a national campaign to defend our NHS, including building for a national demo to focus the defence of the health service and a 24-hour general strike to stop the government's destructive agenda.

Strike against legal aid cuts

Paul Heron, Haldane Society of Socialist Lawyers executive committee

As the Socialist goes to press, a demonstration outside parliament is being held on 22 May against the Con-Dems' proposals to further cut legal aid.

This protest will be followed by an indoor rally to discuss a strategy to defeat the latest proposals.

The Con-Dems, through their Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act (Laspo), have already slashed legal aid since last month.

This includes cuts to:

- Private family law, such as divorce and custody battles
- Personal injury and some clinical negligence cases
- Some employment and education law

- Immigration where the person is not detained
- Some debt, and housing issues, with welfare benefit issues being taken out completely

Truck justice

The government's latest proposals are a further ideological attack on what they perceive as popular targets - prisoners and migrants.

Proposals will mean private competitive tendering of criminal legal aid - with Eddie Stobart and Tesco in line to bid.

The Tories also want to limit judicial reviews - legal challenges against government - clearly aimed at avoiding the 'embarrassment' of finding their austerity laws challenged in the courts.

The Haldane Society of Socialist Lawyers will argue at the 22 May rally that opposition to these proposals cannot be successful just by lobbying, seeking support from the press, or putting written papers into the consultation process.

We call for united industrial action. An initial 24-hour strike - to shut down the courts and other legal aid related services - would send a clear message to the government, as the start of a programme of strike action.

The strength of feeling has never been more militant - already in the North West of England lawyers have effectively held a one-day strike.

Many fear for their jobs, and fear for the people who are represented in the courts and for the demise of justice that this 'transformation' will bring.

United action needed

The Haldane Society of Socialist Lawyers calls for:

- The setting up of a united organisation which brings together all groups and individuals opposed to the legal aid cuts.
- A 24-hour strike followed by a stepped programme of increasingly intense strike action
- The Bar Council and Law Society to recognise the concern of their members and support such action
- Collaboration with Napo, Unite the Union, the PCS, and others working in the justice system
- The place of legal aid in the welfare state to be recognised and defended along with other public services

- A campaign which is not simply defensive, but which fights to undo previous cuts

A future issue of the Socialist will look at the government's latest proposals in more detail www.haldane.org

March against the G8

This year's G8 summit will be held in Fermanagh, Northern Ireland (NI) on 17-18 June. The heads of government of eight of the world's largest capitalist economies will discuss how they can further the interests of those they represent - the super-rich, big business and the bankers.

The G8 leaders are determined to make workers, young people and the middle class pay for a crisis which we did not create, in order to fund the bailout of the bankers and speculators.

The G8's austerity agenda created mass unemployment across the globe, especially among young people. And billions of people on our planet subsist on less than \$2 a day.

Collectively, the G8 governments are responsible for inaction on climate change which threatens our environment and humanity's future.

For them, the profits of the energy corporations come first. In 2001, the G8 issued a communique promoting hydraulic fracturing or 'fracking', a dangerous method of extracting gas which can contaminate water supplies.

Multinationals and many local politicians are salivating at the thought of bringing this process to Fermanagh, against the wishes of local communities.

The G8 - and the capitalist system it represents - is intimately bound up with war and the suffering it brings to people across the globe.

Member governments have directly engaged in imperialist campaigns in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, and Mali, to name but a few.

Some back the Israeli state's oppression of the Palestinian people. Meanwhile, they fund and arm dictatorial regimes around the world.

'Benefits' of the G8?

There has been a concerted propaganda campaign in the media to convince us that the G8 visit is a good thing; it will boost the NI economy, attract inward investment and tourism and put NI on the 'world stage'. How many times have we heard the same hot air before? Working class communities are still waiting for the 'peace dividend' promised 15 years ago!

The reality is that the austerity agenda the G8 represents is gutting the economy, locally and globally.

The NI Assembly Executive is taking £4.3 billion out of our economy in cuts. Investment has collapsed because companies aren't convinced they can make large enough profits. Tourism suffers because people simply have less money to spend.

The Lough Erne resort, where the summit will be held, illustrates this. It went into administration and was closed down.

It's being temporarily re-opened with staff re-employed on lower wages! Any money the G8 summit brings in will be outweighed by the massive security bill.

Fermanagh will be turned into a militarised zone in the run up to the G8 summit, causing huge disruption to the lives of ordinary people.

Thousands of police officers are being brought in, as well as the army. Water cannon will be on stand-by and the Policing Board has authorised the purchase of drone spy-planes.

While the politicians are closing schools and slashing the health service, no expense is being spared to protect the likes of Cameron and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

There has been a conscious attempt by the police, politicians and the media to smear those who oppose the G8 as violent thugs and to connect us to dissident republicans.

This is an inaccurate character assassination. We are seeking to peacefully protest. Those involved in violence will be inside the G8 summit!

Join the socialist opposition!

We stand for a socialist world, where the massive wealth which exists would be taken into public ownership and used democratically to provide a decent life for all.

We are seeking to build a political force which unites workers and young people from across the sectarian divide to fight for our common interests.

See socialistpartyni.net for more information

March against the G8

- Belfast: 15 June, Assemble 12pm at Custom House Square
- Enniskillen: 17 June, Assemble 6.30pm at Enniskillen Library

@:•g8notwelcome@gmail.com

London Socialist Party regional conference

Fighting for the 99% in the city with most millionaires

Michael Wrack, Tower Hamlets Socialist Party

Seventy Socialist Party members attended the London regional conference on 19 May.

The conference opened with an international flavour with a report from South Africa. The Committee for a Workers' International's recent work in South Africa has resulted in a huge growth, both in numbers and influence, of the Democratic Socialist Movement (DSM, CWI South Africa) and in the recently successful launch of Workers and Socialist Party (WASP), which DSM comrades are playing a key role in building (see page 9).

The next session, "London: political developments and tasks", was introduced by London Socialist Party regional secretary Paula Mitchell. Paula spoke of the huge inequality in London, where there are more millionaires than in any other city in the world, yet unemployment (and youth unemployment) is at a higher rate than the UK average.

The session heard from Socialist Party members playing a leading role regionally and nationally in the RMT, NUT, Unison, and Unite unions; from young people involved in the Sick Of Your Boss campaign; and in-depth contributions about local government cuts, attacks on benefits, and developments in the economy.

There was agreement on the potential for campaigns opposing the bedroom tax. This session was followed by a fighting fund appeal that raised £1,025.

The session on building the Socialist Party was introduced by Chris Newby, including promoting socialist ideas in the trade unions and campaigning among different communities in

London. The discussion also went into detail on attracting new members to the party and the role they can play in building a socialist alternative.

The conference then split into three commissions on the Socialist newspaper, party finance, and being a branch secretary. Conference reconvened to unanimously agree the conference document, with amendments on NUT work and election campaigning, and elect a new regional committee.

The conference was not all serious work though - to end the day we enjoyed some political stand-up comedy from 'Anti-Duhring Battalion'.

Fighting back pays off: Thera East Midlands forced to make concessions

After very successful strike action, support workers employed by Thera East Midlands have won some important concessions.

The Socialist spoke to Unison members: "This concession follows a 24-hour strike that started on 18 April and a lively protest outside the Grantham head office of Thera Trust.

"Some employees have received letters extending discretionary pay protection by another six months. They have also been told that Thera East Midlands (TEM) will remain in the NHS pension scheme for the foreseeable future.

"This is possibly due to the employers initially not understanding the consequences of withdrawing!

"These concessions do not end the struggle for the scrapping of the draconian conditions in the Thera contract and the campaign for a wage increase from £7.59 an hour to £8 an hour for Thera contracted employees.

"On 14 May, Unison reps and regional officials from Derbyshire, Mansfield, Northamptonshire and Nottingham met to discuss the campaign to defend terms and conditions. The union has agreed to call a two-day strike which will be on 29 and 30 May.

"This was greeted positively at the TEM members' meeting in South Derbyshire Healthcare branch on 14 May.

"Workers felt that the action has forced the pay concession but the proposed contract has to be scrapped.

"The meeting was rightly determined not to allow the employer to try to divide members who are on TUPE terms from those on Thera contracts.

"During the strike, members from the different branches will meet to discuss the dispute and strengthen our resolve.

"TEM refuses to recognise Unison but there is also a mood among members to win recognition."

POA conference - Prisons should not be run for profit

Ian Pattison

In May the prison officers' union POA met for their national conference in Southport. POA is increasingly at the centre of the battle against austerity and a leading trade union in the fight against the cuts. Tens of thousands of POA members have lost their jobs under Tory, New Labour, and Con-Dem governments. The number of prison officers has gone down, at the same time as the prison population has been increasing.

POA trade union facility time is under constant attack.

POA are challenging prison privatisation. Reactionary Tories are foaming at the mouth to condemn the entire public sector and welfare state whenever there is a scandal in an NHS hospital, usually resulting from under-funding and PFI privatisation. But they remain silent on scandals in privatised prisons. POA made it clear they will fight prisons being run for profit. It's bad for prison officers and prisoners.

Rob Williams, national chair of the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) addressed the conference.

The NSSN's demand for a 24-hour general strike to stop austerity has been buoyed by the POA motion on a general strike passed at September 2012's TUC conference.

Although most trade union leaders are twiddling their thumbs over whether to call a general

strike, the TUC general council has been forced to discuss it and the POA's motion has helped to promote the idea.

The Socialist Party, the only left group present, got a fantastic response at the conference. 43 delegates bought copies of the Socialist. Socialist Party and POA national executive member John Hancock addressed an anti-racist fringe meeting, linking austerity measures and the rise of the far right, and what the Socialist Party and NSSN have done to combat that.

The POA's left leadership has done a considerable amount to combat divisive racist ideas, even inside POA. Unlike some trade unions, racist BNP members are barred from POA membership.

Support Carling brewery workers at Burton-on-Trent

Brewery workers in Burton-on-Trent are balloting for strike action as workers face a vicious assault from their employers Molson Coors.

Workers are facing £8,000-£9,000 a year pay cuts, cuts in working conditions and a threat to sack everybody if they don't agree to the proposals by 14 June.

Phil Salt, Unite branch secretary explained: "These attacks have cast a shadow across the town, as other workers and employers watch carefully how this will end. Our branch believes that employers throughout the Midlands and the food, drink and tobacco sector nationally will also be monitoring this dispute closely.

"We are a well-organised site with over 90% membership. We believe that if we allow this to happen, employers will believe they can do anything, anywhere.

"These proposals will depress the local economy. We are told we are paid 'upper tier' pay rates. Bring those rates down, and the averages come down for everybody else. Our members face losing their homes. That's how extreme these proposals are.

"A ballot for strike action is underway, and we expect a resounding YES vote. The ballot closes on 28 May."

- Messages of support may be sent to Burton.Brewery@unitetheunion.org or via #burtonbrewery on Twitter.
- A fighting fund has been established. Cheques should be made payable to 'Unite' with

'Burton Brewery' written on the back and sent to Unite the Union, Finance Department, Transport House, 9-17 Victoria Street, West Bromwich, West Midlands, B70 8HX

Sacked Tesco drivers on the march again

Around 100 of the Tesco drivers sacked earlier this year and their families marched through Doncaster on Saturday with their red Unite flags waving.

They handed out leaflets, asking shoppers to boycott the store and demanding that Tesco gives them their jobs back.

They then handed out their "Every Sacking Helps..." leaflets at the doors and car park entrances of the Tesco store in Doncaster.

Senior steward Trev Cheetham said: "Tesco management betrayed the loyal workforce, some with 20 years loyal service, by throwing them to Eddie Stobarts".

This meant the drivers lost their pension scheme and other benefits and after one month at Stobarts they were told that they were to be replaced by other drivers on less pay and worse conditions.

All this while Tesco made £3.8 billion in profit and paid their highest paid director over £1.6 million.

Trev added: "Many have still not found new jobs after being thrown on the dole and are now living on £70 a week ... We will continue the protests!"

Steve Scholey, a driver and shop steward with 12 years' service commented: "Tesco said one of the reasons they had carried out this action was because they were worried about CO2 emissions, but workers were being bussed in from other depots and supplied by agencies to meet the workload, so it was really about getting cheap labour".

John Gill, Doncaster Socialist Party

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 20 May 2013 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

PCS members fight Land Registry privatisation

It was reported in the Socialist on 1 May that the Land Registry, the government body that maintains a register of freehold and leasehold land across England and Wales, was considering new private sector business models.

Management have now announced to staff that they have recommended to the minister for Land Registry (Michael Fallon MP) that Land Registry should move from its current public sector trading fund status to 'GovCo' status.

In effect this would be a private company either wholly or partly owned by government. Fallon supports this move.

PCS Land Registry group vice-president and Socialist Party member Dave Lunn spoke to us in a personal capacity and said: "Although the news was not unexpected, it has left our members extremely worried about their futures.

"At this stage it is unclear exactly what such a move would mean for our members' jobs, their workplaces or terms and conditions, but what is clear is that a move towards the private sector can only be a bad thing.

"We are also concerned that this will mean that the Land Registry will move away from its public service ethos and become merely a facilitator for the market and big business.

"PCS representatives will be meeting in Brighton this week to discuss this issue, what it could mean for members and perhaps most importantly how we fight it. We will need to develop a broad campaign that fights this attack on all fronts, but it is clear to me that central to any campaign must be the threat and delivery of industrial action".

PCS has shown that it is one of the most campaigning unions around and it is clear that a massive member-led campaign will be needed if they are to defeat what is seen by many as the first step towards the full privatisation of a vital public service.

Firefighters prepare for pensions battle

Claire Laker-Mansfield

The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) met on 15-17 May in the teeth of enormous attacks on firefighters and on the life-saving service they provide. From threats of station closures to the 1,200 jobs that were cut in the last year, it's clear that the Con-Dems would rather see working class people killed in the ravages of fire than ask those responsible for the economic crisis to foot the bill.

It's therefore unsurprising that a mood of defiance prevailed among the conference delegates. A determination to resist was evident in almost every conversation and there was a clear thirst for ideas and a strategy for defeating this vicious government.

Copies of the Socialist sold well and the new pamphlet 'Don't vote for cuts', drawing lessons from Southampton's struggle against cuts, was a real success. The demand for a 24-hour general strike also gained a big echo when discussed.

Perhaps the central discussion was on the question of a strategy to defend pensions in the service. The proposed attacks include further increases in the employee contributions to the scheme and, outrageously, an increase in the age of retirement from 55 to 60. A ridiculous proposal when you consider the physical demands of the job.

The conference unanimously passed a 'seven point plan' of demands that the union would make of the government, passed on the understanding that if the government fail to negotiate in good faith this would be followed with a ballot for crucial industrial action.

In an act of apparent provocation, the conference ended on the day another raft of attacks were announced - veiled in the language of reform - with the publication of the Knight Review. Nothing could emphasise better the need for a fightback to save our fire service and, by extension, the lives of countless ordinary people.

Workplace news in brief

NUT vice president election

Socialist Party member Martin Powell-Davies is to stand for election as national vice-president of the teachers' union NUT.

Martin is secretary of Lewisham NUT and has been a member of the NUT's national executive for three years.

He has always argued that the response to the government's attacks on teachers' pay, pensions, working conditions and education in general should be well-organised national strike action.

As a practising science teacher, Martin understands the pressures that teachers face but he is convinced that teachers will respond positively to a clear lead and call for action.

Martin has also been backed by the Local Associations National Action Campaign - at a meeting attended by delegates from 26 NUT associations (branches).

Veolia

Refuse workers in the London boroughs of Croydon and Bromley are to ballot for strike action over pay.

The Unite members will start voting on 31 May after Veolia offered a 2% pay rise in Bromley and 1.75% in Croydon.

Veolia is a highly profitable company which effectively wants to see its workforce take a pay cut. Talks are also starting with Veolia in Camden and Unite has said if a fair offer is not made then those workers will be recommended to ballot for action too.

British Library

PCS members at the British Library went on strike on 16-17 May. The strikes were the start of a wave of action across the culture and heritage sector.

This is part of the PCS national campaign against government imposed cuts to pay, pensions, jobs and working conditions.

Up to 300 workers at the British Library's main site in St Pancras, central London, went on strike on 16 May.

Two-thirds of the library's reading rooms were closed and strikers led a protest outside the press launch of the library's new exhibition "Propaganda: Power and persuasion".

On 17 May there was a strike at the British Library in Boston Spa, West Yorkshire. Almost 200 workers supported the strike which caused significant disruption.

Michael Docherty, British Library PCS, personal capacity

Cuts kill: Con-Dem benefit 'reforms', mental health and suicide

Sue Powell and Sharan Hendry, Gloucestershire Socialist Party

Steven Bottrill, whose disabled mum Stephanie killed herself because of the bedroom tax, said: "Hopefully now someone will listen. Someone will realise what has gone on and change things."

Studies by charities, as well as the NHS and the DWP, have shown that suicides and suicidal thoughts have increased among disabled people due to benefit cuts and the Atos Work Capability Assessment. Yet when we visited Eton-educated local Tory MP Richard Graham, he dismissed this problem. Sharan, desperately worried about Atos, benefits and bedroom tax, sought answers, even some reassurance.

Graham began a little speech: "the problem is that for far too long, too many people in this country had expected something for nothing... the government is helping people get off benefits". This former merchant banker not only arrived 20 minutes late but was totally unprepared and incapable of answering a single question. Great work ethic!

Enthusiastically proclaiming "work can be fun", he extolled the virtues of "helping people like Mary... she's 80% blind but we have some marvellous people here who found her work in a supermarket".

According to charities for the blind, not a single blind or visually-impaired person has found sustained employment through the Work Programme. Sharan asked if Mary had done unpaid work experience? That must have been "fun". Hadn't Graham heard that the government's cuts were driving disabled people to suicide? His scathing response: "I'm not prepared to discuss generalisations."

Sharan had wanted concrete advice and answers; she got none. Graham gave a lesson in class politics instead. Previously "not political", she's since joined the union Unite Community and the Socialist Party.

Scroungers?

Capitalism always blames its victims. Now, more than ever, claiming benefits is portrayed as scrounging rather than being a right. This adds psychological despair to the harsh reality of

scraping by on a pittance. Threatened and attempted suicides, as well as actual deaths, have doubled among 24-35 year old men in the UK since 2008.

Last year there were deaths among sick and disabled people who had been subjected to the profit-driven bullying of Atos.

Our MP was not alone in cynically using the 2012 Paralympics to back the Con-Dems' case. If only someone had told Helen and Mark Mullins how to capitalise on the sporting achievement of their daily 12-mile trek to a Coventry soup kitchen.

Helen had mental health issues, Mark was her carer. They had all their financial assistance cut. Mark explained in a TV interview: "They have no problems suspending benefits. They just put a tick in a box and alter your life." Weeks later - December 2011 - their lives ended in a suicide pact, but it was the cuts that killed them.

Figures published in the Lancet showed UK suicides jumping 8% in the immediate aftermath of the financial crisis. Suicide rates have risen nearly everywhere except Sweden and Finland. In Algeria, Portugal, Greece, Tunisia and Italy suicide is a growing problem, with deaths three times higher among men than women.

Few of these deaths make headline news but the government has the evidence. Richard Colwill, from mental health charity Sane, said: "No one should be surprised that factors such as unemployment and job insecurity can push people who may be already vulnerable to take their own lives. Life events like redundancy, bankruptcy and the relationship breakdowns that often follow can cause bouts of mental illness."

Newsworthy

Claimants slashing their wrists in jobcentres or setting themselves on fire is not deemed as newsworthy by the right-wing media as sensational headlines about benefits fraud. But government figures state only 0.5% of Disability Living Allowance claims are fraudulent.

Before the crisis, Greece had the lowest suicide rate in Europe: 2.8 per 100,000 inhabitants. Suicides have since doubled and attempted suicides have also increased. Debts, joblessness, job insecurity are the key reasons given, but it is also the sense that the future holds nothing better.

In the US, suicide rates rose dramatically in high unemployment areas. Macomb County, Michigan, with 13.7% unemployment, reported almost 40% more suicides compared to before the recession. Researchers at University of Chicago found that mass layoffs in America caused an immediate rise in suicides, followed by a bigger spike six months later when unemployment insurance ran out.

In Ireland, suicide rates increased by 25%, while in Japan, a 2008 study found one in five members of the population admitted contemplating suicide as the recession began to bite.

Many people are finding themselves in a place where nothing seems certain anymore, as if the world around them has gone mad. Economic crisis is turning into a mental health crisis. The absence of a generalised struggle is a contributing factor that reinforces the idea that 'there is no alternative'.

This despair is a product of capitalism - a system that is sick and rotten to the core. It must be replaced, by socialism, through mass struggle, to give people a purpose and sense of worth that this society cannot.

The number of US deaths from suicide surpassed the number of deaths from car crashes in 2009

Over five million Americans lost access to health care due to losing their jobs in the recession. 750,000 have turned to binge drinking, while the number of anti-depressant prescriptions have soared

Suicides and bad health have increased far more in countries that have slashed health and welfare budgets

A University of Cambridge study found that for every 1% increase in unemployment, there is a 0.8% increase in suicides by under-65s

Why I joined the socialists

Decent jobs not slave wages

We hear all the time about the numbers of jobs created in the private sector under the Con-Dem government. But I wonder how many of these are similar to or identical to the job my step-daughter managed to get last year with one of our largest high street clothing retailers.

At 17 years old, she was given a starting salary of minimum pay at £3.91 an hour. She had to attend two training course days at the store for eight hours each day without pay. She had been given a 20-hour contract. This was luckier than eight other people starting the same day, who were given eight-hour contracts.

The shifts change week to week. She is told her week's shift the Friday before. This ensures she cannot seek more hours with another employer as she never knows when she will be available to work.

This company does not supply a uniform, but demand employees buy their clothes to wear while working in the store. Giving them a 50% discount on those clothes is supposed to make this okay! A regular change in design 'seasons' means staff having to keep buying clothes.

To gain employment in any form, people everywhere feel they have to accept pay and conditions like these. People in work live in poverty, while the capitalists running the show gain greater and greater wealth.

For this reason, and many more, I have joined the Socialist Party and encourage others to do the same. We must fight for a socialist Britain that will act as beacon to the world and attract others to the cause of work for all with a living wage and equal rights. As a part of this we must fight all cuts and the evil bedroom tax!

Declan Clune, Hampshire

<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/16714>