



Peter Taaffe's speech gripped the audience.



At one of the many lively discussions.



The bookshop sold over £2,000-worth of books.



RMT president Alex Gordon.

# Socialism 2010

## An inspirational weekend

"I left Socialism 2010 even more convinced that not only is a socialist world possible, it is imperative to defend ordinary people from the attacks which the capitalists worldwide are unleashing on us." **Glen, a postal worker**

**S**Ocialism 2010 was a superb event. Crammed into the weekend of 6 and 7 November were discussions, debates, rallies and a social. But a clear red thread tied the entire event together - the need to build a mass working class movement against all cuts and to fight for a socialist alternative to the "rotten stinking corpse of capitalism".

**Sarah Sachs-Eldridge**

Over 900 trade unionists, campaigners, students and young people attended throughout the weekend. One of those young people, Sam from Huddersfield, described it as: "inspiring and useful. I feel better equipped to put socialist ideas into action in my area."

For many the highlight of the weekend was the Rally for Socialism on the Saturday evening. First up to speak were the trade union leaders. Matt Wrack, general secretary of the firefighters' FBU union, described some of the outrageous tactics used by the employer in the London firefighters' dispute. These include training up a scab workforce, a "throwback to Victorian times", harassment of FBU members' families and the threat of mass dismissals.

He explained that bringing in companies like AssetCo, "run by spivs and gangsters", during the strike was preparation for privatisation of the service. To fight the cuts agenda and the austerity package, Matt pledged the FBU's commitment to organising with other trade unions.

### Socialist alternative

ALEX GORDON, president of the transport workers' union RMT, developed Matt's closing call - the need for a socialist alternative. In the face of huge cuts "the only sane response is to build houses and create jobs". He called for international solidarity to fight the Con-Dem-type governments in every country. He exposed the opportunism of New Labour in opposition, posing as an alternative but arguing that 'some cuts are necessary'.

Alex also explained that the RMT's current dispute over 2,000 job cuts on London Underground centres on the question of who runs the service - workers and the unions in the interest of the safety of the service or Tory mayor Boris Johnson. Hugo Pierre insisted that his union, Unison, is, at rank and file level, a fighting union. But, in explaining the witch-hunt of Socialist Party members of the union over false allegations of racism, he gave a glimpse of some of the obstacles facing campaigners in Unison.

Claire Laker-Mansfield, Socialist Students national organiser, described how students at every level are expected to "pay more and more and get less and less". But she left no doubt that Socialist Students and Youth Fight for Jobs will be fighting to make sure that young people today "will not be a lost generation". London Socialist Party secretary Paula Mitchell introduced anti-war activist Cindy Sheehan as someone who "became a political campaigner in the belly of the beast". Cindy's humour went down a storm - but so did her political message that in the US there are two parties for the rich and none for the "working and look-



At the packed Rally for Socialism.

photos Paul Mattsson

ing-for-working class". She described her political journey from blaming George Bush, "a boil on the ass of humanity" to blaming what she calls the "system". Cindy Sheehan is certainly very funny - but she is also clearly very courageous. She describes her rise to worldwide popularity as being down to George Bush's increasing unpopularity. But when she stood against the Democrats in California her adoring media wouldn't touch her. It was a stressful experience but she came second with 50,000 votes. She is now considering standing for president on a left-wing, socialist programme to provide working class people with a voice to speak out against the onslaught.

The large and enthusiastic audience listened intently to the clear programme for struggle set out by Socialist Party general secretary Peter Taaffe. "A channel separates Britain from France", where millions have recently participated in eight separate days of general strikes and demonstrations, but Peter described how "socially and politically France is coming here". He quoted comedian Paul O'Grady to describe the current coalition government - 'the kind of people who would cheer when Bambi's mother gets killed'. But, Peter explained, "anger and class bitterness will not be enough. We need a clear strategy - we need a party of the working class here, in the US and internationally."

This government is intending to out-Thatcher Thatcher but the trade union leaders have failed to lead the necessary

battle. An urgent national demo would build the confidence of workers to fight and to organise as a prelude to the necessary call for a 24-hour public sector general strike in Britain against all cuts.

Socialist Party website editor and executive committee member Judy Beishon made an appeal for finance. Her appeal for money for materials to help build the struggle was met with an enormous show of generosity, over £30,000 was raised.

Yessenbek from Kazakhstan described the way the ruling elite has gorged itself on the resources and wealth of the country, while the working and poor masses are plunged into greater poverty, misery and insecurity.

Kazakhstan 2012, which involves CWI members, grew out of campaigns to defend people's homes against repossession and to build independent trade unions. Now its programme aims to "change the country in the interests of the vast majority of people".

### Workers' control

IT STANDS for the "renationalisation of everything that was privatised, under workers' control", explaining that they demand "workers' control and management of the whole of society, with people elected throughout, including at the very top". 2012 is the date of the next presidential elections when they hope to replace the current repressive regime.

One of Kazakhstan 2012's main aims is the founding of an all-Kazakhstan trade union organisation with a conference to do so on 20 November. Yessenbek invited

trade unionists from Britain to attend.

Andros Payiatisos, from Xekinima, the Socialist Party's sister section in Greece was the final speaker. He welcomed us "on the road to Greece", the road to eight general strikes and a mass movement against cuts. From May to July there was not a single day in Athens when there were no demonstrations and strikes.

But he also described the Greek government's horrendous assault on the working class and youth of Greece. Unemployment of 20% and 65% of pensioners live on less than €600 (£500) a month.

Meanwhile Andros explained that €78 billion has been poured into the banks. No wonder 91% of Greeks say they are angry. No wonder they say no party can provide a solution. No wonder 80% expect a social explosion.

Andros told of how, in a country that boasts large left parties, none calls for the nationalisation of the banks and big business. Xekinima has often been a lone voice in putting forward a clear programme of struggle against these cuts.

He also explained that the Greek experience has shown that it is not enough to call 24-hour general strikes - there must be a plan to develop the struggle.

With such clear ideas on strategy, on programme, with a democratic and open approach and with the inspiration of the spirit of struggle and internationalism shown throughout the weekend, it is not surprising that 30 people agreed to join the Socialist Party over the weekend, with many more likely to do so over the next days and weeks.

## Workers united

**T**HE CLOSING rally of Socialism 2010 was an inspiring account of workers' struggles in a number of European countries, in response to capitalist governments' austerity programmes.

**Dave Carr**

Victorino Roux of the CWI's new section in Spain said that workers and young people there are facing the biggest attacks on living standards for a generation. With four million unemployed, (some 20% of the workforce including around 40% of young people) the country is on the edge of a social crisis and a social revolution.

The workers have organised a general strike movement. But in addition to intensifying trade union struggles, workers and young people have to organise a political fightback against the capitalist parties.

Alex Lecoq of Gauche Revolutionnaire (CWI France) explained that in France, the working class is refusing to pay for the capitalist crisis. "Yesterday [Saturday 6 November] was the eighth day of protest against the Sarkozy government, with one and a half million people taking to the streets." All sections of the working class are involved in the strikes and protest movements.

Opinion polls show that 71% of the population want the strike movement to continue and 55% say that they want to see a 1968 type of general strike [when the working class challenged the power of the ruling class].

In the current class struggle more people are becoming receptive to socialist ideas, reflected in a growth of Gauche Revolutionnaire.

### Inspiring

"THE STRUGGLES in France and Spain are extremely inspiring to trade unionists in Britain," said PCS president and Socialist Party Scotland member Janice Godrich.

Janice condemned the savage Con-Dem cuts made by millionaire cabinet MPs on low-paid PCS members. And, referring to the government's claim that the cuts affect all social classes in Britain, Janice replied that we're not 'all in this together', instead this is an ideologically driven assault on the working class.

The PCS union is campaigning for a workers' alternative to the cuts and is encouraging trade unionists to support the PCS's demand for a national trade union demo against the cuts before Christmas. In addition, Janice called for nationally coordinated industrial action to halt the cuts.

Continuing the theme of capitalist crisis and workers' struggles, Hannah Sell, deputy general secretary of the Socialist Party in England and Wales, explained that the role of the Socialist Party is to arm the workers' movement with a strategy and programme of demands to develop these struggles. Such a programme has to draw the

widest possible section of the working class to the anti-cuts banner.

Hannah challenged those on the left who want to involve Labour Party and Green Party councillors who talk about fighting government cuts but then vote through cuts packages in local councils. But if these councillors are prepared to vote against cuts and 'take the Liverpool road' [of Militant-led councillors in Liverpool who fought the Tory government in the 1980s] then the Socialist Party will support them. If not then we will encourage trade unionists to stand their own candidates against them in next May's local government elections.

Hannah finished by saying that not only does the Socialist Party campaign against cuts but it also fights for a democratic socialist planned society which would ensure the necessary resources to provide a better life for all.

The final contribution was a rousing contribution from Irish Socialist Party MEP Joe Higgins. Joe remarked that in the Irish Republic the economic situation "is not simply a crisis but one of an absolute disaster".

The Irish government's 7 December budget will be savage in the intensity of its cuts in workers' living standards. Next year the government is proposing to cut spending and increase taxes on the population to the tune of €60 billion. The health service will be decimated, tuition fees will rocket, and there will be deeper cutbacks in public sector workers' living standards.

Meanwhile the massive bailout of banks and financial speculators continues. "We will not pay this bill. The Irish working class didn't create this crisis, we won't pay a cent to the dictatorship of finance capital," said Joe.

This economic crisis is giving rise to a new political crisis. The governing coalition of Fianna Fail and the Greens will be annihilated at the next general election.

However, the Labour Party also accepts the dictates of capitalism. We need a workers' alternative, said Joe. The Socialist Party will contest a number of seats in the next election as part of a wider united left alliance.

Joe condemned the utter capitulation of the trade union leaders to the government's austerity programme. Public sector workers have taken strike action but have been sold out by the trade union leaders hence a degree of acquiescence at the current time.

But this mood will change because the working class face even more cutbacks. Recently, tens of thousands of students demonstrated against rising tuition fees.

This current crisis of working class leadership is a Europe-wide phenomenon, explained Joe. It means that the Socialist Party and the Committee for a Workers' International increasingly needs to bring leadership to the working class movement.

"Capitalism is broken", Joe declared, and the battle for a socialist alternative has begun.

## What we thought of Socialism 2010



My first time at Socialism was fantastic. It was very inspiring to be immersed in an environment of intelligent socialist thought and debate. Will certainly come again next year!

**Mike Naylor, Huddersfield**

I found the debate to be most informative, the speakers exhilarating and the younger members' involvement an inspiration. Knowing the fight will continue with them gives me great hope for the future struggles in which we must all unite. Fight on comrades and I would be proud to be counted as being in your membership!

**Andy Molloy, hospital porter, north east London**

This is the first time I've been to something like this, as I've only joined [the party] recently. I thought it was really good and the social was great as well. It's been really exciting - the reason why I joined is because the Socialist Party isn't just talking about stuff and waving signs around, they're actually doing a lot of really good work.

It's good to hear from people from other countries like Greece, because there's so many things that I didn't know were going on in Greece. They tell you in the media that [the workers are] ungrateful, but I didn't actually know how bad [the attacks on workers and public services] were.

**Rachael Horwitz, Oxford Socialist Party**

Socialism's been really good because of the multiculturalism. People are very open to all the ideas put forward and you meet so many different people from different places.

**Saad, Sheffield Socialist Students**

I've had a good time - I've never been here before, good speakers, like Joe Higgins, like Peter Taaffe. I met a lot of people and had a good night out. The 'can we have socialism' session was good as I learned a lot.

**Jon Campbell, college student, Salford**

It was inspirational to hear reports from around the country from socialists involved in anti-cuts campaigning and fighting to defend public sector jobs... I was especially impressed by the reports of young comrades, many of whom are new to politics. They are playing a vital role in building opposition to the Con-Dem attacks on the welfare state.

**Terry Pearce, Bracknell Unite, personal capacity**

Terrifying, inspiring but mainly exciting to see people from so many different countries really beginning to work together, sharing their ideas and experiences in the face of the common enemy - rampant capitalism.

**Marjorie Sachs, Ireland**

Socialism was awesome. My session on LGBT issues was great, very informative and the rally was inspiring. Great to see so much money was raised as well, shows the will to fight back! Forward to socialism!

**Dan, FE student and fast food worker, Coventry West**

Socialism was more than inspirational. Trade union leaders who refuse to fight the cuts had better watch out. The message from Socialism was: stand up, or stand aside. Those so-called leaders will be swept away in the tsunami of protest and struggle.

**Kaz**

I was inspired by all the speakers, but as a woman, I was particularly inspired by the women at Socialism, especially Hannah Sell's speech at the rally. As a student, Socialism has prepared me for the fight ahead to defend education.

**Mary Hackwood, south London**

An excellent and expanding event. In his speech Peter Taaffe summed up the challenges with precision and a renewed passion that inspired the rally.

**Jim, NAO activist, Coventry West**

This was my first Socialism weekend. I felt more and more as I listened: if we come together and make plans to fight as one, we can really make a difference. Do not underestimate the power of the people. Together we can change the world.

**Chloë De Vos, Antwerp**