Socialist Party 2011 Congress A party growing in strength

HE 2011 Socialist Party national congress took place on 26-28 February in the quiet calm of Clacton-on-Sea amid the tumultuous changes taking place in Britain and across the world.

Sarah Sachs-Eldridge

The three-day congress was interrupted to hear the magnificent news of the election of two Socialist Party TDs (MPs), as part of the five-strong United Left Alliance's gains in the Irish republic. It is unlikely that any previous performance at the theatre where the congress met was as well received as the Skype link-up with newly elected Joe Higgins.

News of the resignation of the prime minister in Tunisia's interim government, Mohamed Ghannouchi, a crony of Ben Ali, was also met with cheers.

This 300-strong meeting heard from very new delegates and those with decades of party membership. The response to the fighting fund appeal, introduced by national committee member Alec Thraves, reflected the enthusiasm for building the Socialist Party. Over £11,500 was raised!

Middle East

PETER TAAFFE, Socialist Party general secretary, introduced the first session, on the revolutionary movements in the Middle East. Peter helped all members present to grasp the importance of a Marxist understanding of the processes taking place, particularly the 'theory of permanent revolution,' developed by Leon Trotsky, a leader of the 1917

Russian revolution.

Clare Doyle, from the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), the world socialist organisation to which the Socialist Party is affiliated, also spoke. She explained why socialists have to put forward a programme for the struggles, to "make conscious the unconscious" aspirations of the working class and youth.

Britain

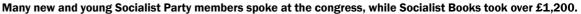
THE NEXT session focussed on Britain; the future of the weak Con-Dem coalition, the growth in the confidence of the working class to struggle, the role of Labour and Ed 'the ineffectual' Miliband and the trade union leaders, as well as other aspects.

In her introduction Hannah Sell, deputy general secretary, set out a strategy for victory against the cuts in jobs and services. Sharp changes in the pace of struggle, particularly following the huge 26 March TUC demo, are possible. We must also prepare for the Con-Dems to manoeuvre in their implementation of the cuts, as they face growing opposition from trade unions, communities and among young people.

In reply to the excellent discussion, Socialist Party executive committee member Judy Beishon said that the fight against the Con-Dems' enormous attacks would have to surpass the anti-poll tax movement, the miners' strike and much more.

Marxism provides a guide to fighting to change the conditions in which we live but an organisation to carry through the tasks is required. Paula Mitchell, London secretary, introduced the discussion on build-





ing the Socialist Party.

She outlined the achievements the party has made since the last congress which include reaching 2,000 members, launching new branches and expanding the party's staff. The increased pace of the struggle requires a division of emphasis so, while everyone is responsible for increasing the party's membership, publication sales and finances, some will do this through their public roles and some through taking responsibility for the detail of the tasks.

New members

THE DISCUSSION demonstrated the party's growing strengths and myriad talents of its members. The first speaker, Nick from Leeds, was not a member at the time of the last congress and his Hyde Park and Headingley branch did not exist then. The Yorkshire membership has grown by almost 60% over the last two years! The final speaker was Tony Mulhearn, a leader of the mass struggle in Liverpool which won major concessions from Thatcher in the 1980s (see page 11).

Speakers described how the Socialist Party's strategy for fighting the cuts is increasingly gaining an ear among trade unionists.

Clive Heemskerk from the executive committee introduced a discussion on the council and Welsh Assembly elections this May. He argued that the vastly altered situation, particularly after 26 March, requires a stepping-up of the socialst and anti-cuts electoral challenge. encouraging as many candidates as possible. There was also some interesting debate on the Alternative Vote (AV) referendum, and a vote in favour of opposing the change (see Socialism Today issue 145, February 2011 for an article on AV, and future issues of the Socialist).

The end of 2010 saw an explosion of student protests. Socialist Party student organiser Claire Laker-Mansfield explained when introducing the youth and student discussion that this had transformed the outlook of young people.

Youth Fight for Jobs

THE CONFIDENCE of those who spoke in this excellent discussion was the living proof of this. Congress heard from young members of the Socialist Party from all over England and Wales who have thrown themselves into building the youth movement.

National youth organiser Ben Robinson replied to the discussion. He emphasised the role for all members in supporting the Youth Fight for Jobs march for jobs on the 75th anniversary of the famous unemployed workers' march from Jarrow to London. Members of all ages pledged to help out, including marching!

Ken Douglas and Jane James from the executive committee introduced and replied to the session on finance. Congress heard of members' dedication and determination to ensure the party has the necessary 'lubricant' to fund the production of leaflets, placards and the full-time staff and headquarters.

A national committee was elected to lead the party's work until the next congress.

Members were saddened and inspired by the eulogies given to two giants of the Socialist Party and the labour movement who had died since the last congress, Peter Hadden, a leader of the CWI in Northern Ireland, and John Macreadie, who played a major role in the civil servants' PCS union one of the most effective trade unions (and formerly in the CPSA).
 Socialist Books took over £1,200.

Socialist Books took over £1,200. photos Senan and S. Beishon

president, was a guest speaker at the congress. In his interesting speech, Alex said that the RMT looks forward to working with the Socialist Party as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition.

Socialists are internationalists and it was fitting to end the congress with a report from Tony Saunois of the CWI. Everyone drew confidence from reports of how the ideas and methods of the CWI are gaining in influence and support. With members in over 45 countries, our international is growing in membership too.

No attendee at the Socialist Party's 2011 congress was left in any doubt – the party is preparing for battle. We have the 'axe wielders' in our sights, but not only them. The capitalist system, which puts billionaires' profits before the needs of the millions, must be replaced with democratic socialism.

Socialist Party LGBT group national meeting

Saturday 12 - Sunday 13 March, London. Starting 1pm Saturday, finishing 4pm Sunday

From fighting the cuts to fighting for socialism
How will the cuts affect lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities and how do we fight back?
Building the Socialist Party's LGBT work





Over £11,500 was raised in the congress fighting fund appeal. The Socialist Party, which has no big business backers, relies on funding from its members and supporters. You can still help build the socialist alternative to cuts and bankers' bailouts by donating to the 2011 Congress appeal – use the slip below, call 020 8988 8777 or go to www.socialistparty.org. uk/donate photo S. Beishon

Alex Gordon, the RMT union's

arrange accommodation, email socialistpartylgbtgroup@gmail. com or phone 020 8988 8777.

Find out about Socialist Party and anti-cuts events at www. socialistparty.org.uk/whatson

Get involved I'd like	to join the Socialist F	Party 🛛 I'd like mor	e information about the	Socialist Party						
Donate I'd like to donate £	to the Se	ocialist Party pleas	e make cheques payab	le to Socialist Party						
Subscribe 12 issues £9 E Western Europe: 12 issues £16, half yea Return slip or pay at www.socialistpart	ar £32, year £50 Re :									
Name Address and postcode										
tel/email										
Return to: Socialist Party, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD or phone 020 8988 8777 to pay by card, to arrange a direct debit, or to join.										
Credit card No:										
Name:	Start Date:	Expiry Date:	Security Code:	Issue No:						

SOCIALIST PARTY FIGHTING FUND

£ target £ received			January-March 2011				deadline: 8 April			
Southern	1,200	1,776								
West Midlands	2,100	1,779								
East Midlands	1,550	1,284								
Wales	2,300	1,717								
Northern	600	367								
Yorkshire	2,900	1,703								
London	6,100	3,398								
North West	1,200	652								
Eastern	1,200	463								
South West	1,400	527								
South East	1,000	373								
England & Wales	3,450	106								
TOTAL	25,000	14,151								