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# Labour - condemned for condemning strike

**T**he Labour Party died on Thursday." This was how one letter to the Guardian on 1 July, the day after the biggest strike action in decades, summed up the feelings of millions about Labour leader Ed Miliband's condemnation of the strikes.

To add insult to injury Miliband, having condemned the strike, was then photographed in parliament laughing over a cup of tea with Cameron and Clegg, while the pickets stood outside.

In reality, the Labour Party, as a vehicle for the interests of the working class, died long ago. Under Blair the party was transformed from a capitalist workers' party - with a capitalist leadership but a working class base that could influence the party via its democratic structures - into a capitalist party.

However, Miliband's statement has brought the pro-capitalist reality of New Labour home to millions. Another letter to the Guardian on 1 July drew the conclusion that many others will also be pondering: "Surely it is time for a new party to represent workers and hold true to the values many of us thought Labour was supposed to represent."

The death of political parties is being widely predicted by capitalist commentators. The real reason for their shrinking membership, however, was mentioned as an aside by Anthony King in the Financial Times (2 July): "differences among the main parties have narrowed, sometimes to vanishing point. Few socialist parties exist any longer, and only the tiniest fringe parties talk the language of political struggle."

King went on to say that the continued decline of party memberships is inevitable. In the past, he states, politics was a matter of "warfare... between classes, nations, races and religious denominations" but in Europe today, he says, this is no longer true.

## Class war

It is true that the differences between the establishment political parties has narrowed to vanishing point, but the gap between them and the views of the majority of the population has never been wider.

If King was to ask any public sector worker in Britain, or benefit claimant, or library user, or student if political "warfare" was a thing of the past they would be able to tell him about the vicious class war being conducted by this government against them.



King concludes: "Who in 2011 would dream of christening... a party 'the Labour Party'? The very idea is anachronistic". Given the recent history of the Labour Party in cutting and privatising services and opposing strikes it is very unlikely anyone would give a new workers' party that name, but a mass party that stood for the majority - for the working class, the poor, the young - would, far from being "anachronistic", be enormously popular.

The Socialist Party participates in the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC www.tusc.org.uk) an electoral alliance involving leading militant trade unionists from the RMT, PCS and NUT.

TUSC plays an important role, enabling trade unionists, community campaigners and socialists to stand candidates against the pro-austerity consensus of the capitalist parties.

For the Socialist Party TUSC is also part of a campaign, which we have waged for well over a decade, for the trade unions to stop funding Labour and to begin to build a new party that stands in the interests of working class people. Both the objective need and potential for such a party has never been greater than it is today.

At the 30 June London strike rally Mary Boustead, the general secretary of the ATL, the most 'moderate' union to take part in the strike, attacked the Labour leadership which is "laughingly called an opposition". She called on trade unionists to 'do it for themselves' (see

pages 8 and 9), receiving the biggest cheer of the whole rally.

If any platform speaker had argued for trade unionists to do it for themselves - by striking but also by standing in elections on a clear anti-cuts programme, it would have had a huge response.

## Break the Link

None of the unions that went on strike on 30 June are affiliated to the Labour Party. This year's PCS conference agreed that, within the next twelve months, a full membership ballot would be held "to decide whether the union could stand or support candidates in national elections".

If that ballot is passed it will be a major step forward for the trade union movement and would open the possibility of a trade union based electoral alternative on a wider scale.

It is true that the leaders of some of the Labour-affiliated trade unions, particularly Len McCluskey, general secretary of Unite, have argued for a major campaign to reclaim the Labour Party, rather than founding a new party.

Mistakenly there were hopes that Ed Miliband's leadership would represent a step in this direction. On the contrary, as we warned, Miliband's leadership is a continuation of New Labour.

For the trade unions to reclaim Labour

would require a mass influx of trade unionists into the party. We don't think that this can be achieved: the main response of trade unionists to Miliband's condemnation of the strike is not to join the Labour Party to change it but to turn away from the Labour Party in disgust. We argue for Unite to stop funding New Labour and to begin to build a new party.

## Serious campaign

Nonetheless, a serious campaign to reclaim New Labour by affiliated trade unions would be a huge step forward on the current policy of the majority of the union leaders of clinging to the coat-tails of the Labour leadership.

Such a campaign would have to demand that Labour adopts a socialist programme. Key demands would include the repeal of all the anti-trade union laws and opposition to all cuts in public services, not just in words but in action.

It would be necessary to demand that Labour councils stop wielding the axe and instead 'take the Liverpool road', that is to follow the example of Liverpool City Council in the 1980s; refusing to implement cuts and mobilising the workforce and population in a mass campaign in their support.

It would also be necessary to demand that the pro-capitalist leaders be expelled from the party. Linked to this would be the rebuilding of democracy within the Labour Party, which is currently non-existent at national level.

The trade unions, the main funders of New Labour, no longer even have the right to move motions at the toothless annual conference. Yet Miliband is threatening to get rid of even the few tiny remnants of workers' democracy that still exist, including the election of the shadow cabinet.

We do not think that a campaign to reclaim New Labour could succeed. However, we are not inflexible; were it to be effective we would turn towards such a development.

Equally, if we are proved correct, the affiliated trade unions would need to draw the conclusion that New Labour could not be reclaimed and join with those workers who are fighting for the formation of a new party.

Such a party, in contrast to the shrinking membership of all the capitalist parties, would grow rapidly.

**Conference of TUSC candidates and campaign organisers, Saturday 16 July, 11am-4pm, ULU, Malet Street, WC1E 7HY, Registration fee £5 waged/£3 unwaged.**

## Durham Miners' Gala: Miliband pulls out

Elaine Brunskill

Ed Miliband has come under fire for pulling out of speaking at the Durham Miners' Gala. In a cowardly retreat it became clear he did not want to share the stage with Bob Crow, the militant leader of the RMT transport union. Seemingly the Durham leadership of the National Union of Miners (NUM) was asked by New Labour's apparatchiks if Bob could be 'uninvited'.

Initially, when Miliband had pledged to speak at the Durham Miners' 'Big Meeting', it was hailed as evidence of Miliband's determination to rebuild links with Labour's traditional working class supporters. However, Miliband's haughty indifference for workers has been further highlighted by his message to unions to call off the 30 June public sector strike.

At a local UCU pre-strike rally

Kevin McHugh, national executive member of the PCS civil service union, derided Miliband for pulling out of the Gala. Members of the UCU lecturers' union are also unhappy about Miliband's attack on their strike action. This led to local Labour MPs, Ian Mearns and Dave Anderson, trying to distance themselves from their own national leadership.

This year's Durham Miners' Gala comes at a time when there is desperate need for a strong workers' party to lead the attack against this rotten Con-Dem government. According to the Financial Times (FT) the north-east is "the English region most vulnerable to cuts in public sector jobs and spending".

The Con-Dem government are spinning the yarn that the private sector will take up the slack of public sector job losses.

However, the FT report goes on to say that the region's private sector will also be badly hit. Research indi-

cates that an estimated 30,000 public sector job losses in the north-east will trigger the loss of a further 20,000 private sector jobs.

We are already seeing workers' lives in the private sector being turned upside down as they are thrown into unemployment. In Birtley 126 workers, almost two fifths of the workforce, have been 'shafted' by AEI Cables. The company entered a Company Voluntary Arrangement, which has left the sacked workers with no redundancy payments.

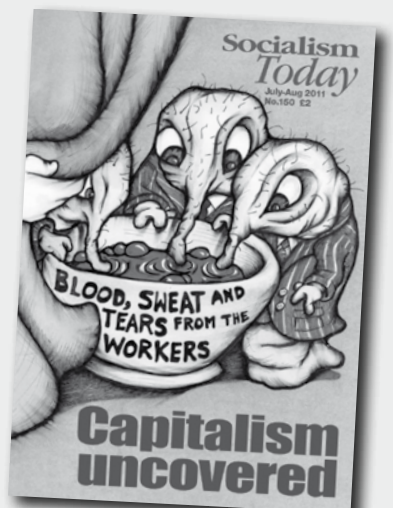
As the sustained attack on both public and private sector workers heats up an increasing number of workers are looking for an alternative.

At this year's Durham Miners' Gala, alongside listening to the brass bands, and participating in the carnival atmosphere of the event, tens of thousands will also come to hear Bob Crow putting forward a fighting alternative to this rotten government's austerity programme.

## Socialism Today

The Socialist Party's magazine July-August 2011 issue includes:

- **Capitalism uncovered**  
Lynn Walsh discovers 23 Things They Don't Tell You About Capitalism
- **Greek crisis**  
The 'enraged' and the workers' movement
- **China's halfway house**  
Continuing Socialism Today's China debate series, Peter Taaffe analyses 'Red Capitalism'



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