

What we thought about Socialism 2011

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Just got home after the best weekend for a hell of a long time aka Socialism 2011. What a fantastic thing to be a socialist, fighting the greed and corruption in the crappy world we live in, so we ALL live as dignified fulfilled human beings, free from the panic and stress and threat of homelessness, worrying if we can afford food, etc.

What a brilliant weekend among comrades fighting the fight, from working class heroes from Kazakhstan, and trade unionists Vik Chechi and Dave Nellist. Les the Remploy convener, the list goes on...

Sunara, Coventry

I've just got back from Socialism 2011. My first time but hopefully not my last! I learned so much from the workshops and hearing what others had to say.

The whole weekend, from supporting the Jarrow March on its final leg, to the inspiring and excellent rallies, has filled me with a stronger sense of solidarity. There were some funny parts, like when I was asked to hand out recruitment cards before a rally and happened to ask someone if he wanted to join... then he looked up and I saw it was the general secretary of the Socialist Party! Well, I am a new member!

Being with so many people singing from the same hymn sheet has definitely given me more confidence in what I see as the only alternative - the socialist alternative.

James Bibey, Reading and Bracknell Socialist Party

Tweet:

At socialism atm and it's going really well! Jackie Grunsell was brilliant on the NHS as was Peter Taaffe on outlining what a socialist democracy would look like.

Alec Price

I've been every year for the last five years and can't imagine not being here every November, you learn so much. Rallies outstanding, especially Clare Daly TD, an inspiring workers' MP on a workers' wage from across the water. Getting a few like her in Britain, like we used to have in the 1980s, can't come soon enough. All in all the shot in the arm we all need before N30.

Paul Gerrard, Salford Socialist Party

An inspiring event bringing together the different layers of the working class - youth, students and trade unionists. It was an honour to speak from the platform. Here's to another 12 months of struggle and Socialism 2012.

Vik Chechi

I have had a fantastic weekend at Socialism 2011. The workshops I attended, such as the 'Hardest Hit', were really interesting, hearing the contributions made from people whether it was about ideas and/or experiences. The rally was really inspiring, listening to speakers such as Clare Daly and Vik Chechi, I'll definitely be going to next year's event.

Lucy Stokes, Leeds

Socialism 2011 has inspired me to go out and fight even harder to rid us of the Tory-led government and to build a socialist alternative.

Tom Maestri, Dorset Socialist Party

Again a magnificent weekend which contained the main elements needed for developing the fight against the

Con-Dems and explaining the socialist alternative.

Clarity of ideas, visionary strategy, combined with an astute tactical appreciation of the critical need to raise the mass consciousness of the working class.

The presence of the Jarrow marches was an inspiration to everybody. All of this was made possible by the prodigious organisational effort which went into making the weekend a success.

Tony Mulhearn, Liverpool Socialist Party

Amazing weekend. Such a relief to be among people who talk sense. And the rally on Saturday was spine tinglingly inspirational.

Marjorie, Ireland

It was my first Socialism, and what a weekend it was! Everything I experienced, from the march we joined, to the rallies and the debates, were such an inspiration.

It brought a lump to my throat and a tear to my eye when we welcomed back the Jarrow marchers, what a fabulous group of young people they are and that they are involved in doing something they wholeheartedly believe in, I was completely awestruck.

I give thanks for everybody who is involved in the logistics of Socialism and look forward to being there again in 2012.

Dawn Wheelhouse, Huddersfield Socialist Party

It was great to find my views very much in line with what the Socialist Party is saying.

I do think we stand at the gateway of a great opportunity to begin having a mainstream debate about whether free-market capitalism is the only way to run the planet - a debate that the Socialist Party can and will lead on, I'm sure.

I believe that, since the Berlin Wall fell, the Labour Party gave up any opposition to the idea of free-market capitalism. I believe it was misguided. I believe the process has now come full circle.

Without pressure from the grass roots, the political establishment will not change though. So I was very inspired to be able to attend Socialism 2011 and to feel renewed confidence in our struggle.

Labour Party member, Exeter

Tweet:

Brilliant weekend of political discussion & debate at Socialism! Jarrow March rally excellent too. Blimey I'm tired!!

Fran Heathcote

This was my first experience at Socialism. I found it to be an engaging, productive and very friendly atmosphere with several excellent discussions.

I'm sure that in the current climate many people are looking for an alternative to capitalism. At Socialism 2011 what really stood out were the number of honest and caring working people, having the courage to try and make a meaningful difference to their situation.

Michael Gilbert, Tower Hamlets Socialist Party

Socialism 2011 was a huge success. Following the inspiring Trafalgar Square welcome to the Jarrow marchers, the discussions and debates that followed were the icing on the cake.

The standard of debate and the enthusiasm of the participants represents a massive step forward for the Socialist Party. For old and new comrades alike the solidarity at Socialism was inspiring and will give us all confidence to go forward to the 30 November action with confidence in the ideas of socialism.

Val and Terry Pearce, Reading and Bracknell Socialist Party

Closing rally Getting ready for 30 November strikes



Both rallies were jammed with both those new to socialist ideas and those who have campaigned for decades
photo Senan

Michael Wrack
Hackney Socialist Party

The closing rally of an excellent Socialism 2011 weekend, chaired by executive committee member Judy Beishon, was superb preparation for 30 November. This should see three million public sector workers strike together against the government's pension reform and follows the strike of 750,000 in June.

One of the trade unions that took part in the action in June, and will be striking again this time, is the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union. PCS assistant general secretary Chris Baugh (personal capacity) opened the rally by explaining how capitalist commentators have been responding to the new period of class struggle.

Understanding the threat to their system, many are desperate for that system to appear to be a "fairer capitalism". As Chris explained, the alternative to capitalist crisis cannot be provided from within the existing system, but will come from the working class fighting in solidarity to create a new society based on our own interests, the ideas of socialism.

It is at times like this when the conflict of class interests at the heart of capitalism becomes most obvious, and working people will increasingly look to organisations that will represent them. Following the 30 June strikes, the PCS recruited 8,000 new members in two months and the other unions can expect similar growth if they offer a fighting lead.

Alex Gordon, president of the Rail, Maritime, and Transport (RMT) union, spoke next. The majority of RMT members are not covered by the public sector pension scheme, but those who are (including workers at the royal fleet, the Orkney ferries, and Tyneside metro) will all be balloting for strike action. Alex agreed with other speakers that, whatever happens on 30 November must only be the start, and further coordinated national action will be necessary to

defeat this government.

Assistant general secretary of the POA prison officers' union, Joe Simpson told the rally how, when he was younger, his father told him he must join the Labour Party as it was the only political party that represents working class people. Unfortunately Labour has long since moved away from doing that, as was shown by Miliband's condemnation of workers involved in the June strikes. Nonetheless looking for a party that fights in the interests of the working class, Joe said that he had decided to join the Socialist Party.

As the class struggle intensifies:
"Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
But to be young was very heaven!"

Joe called on all trade union members at the rally to campaign for disaffiliation from the Labour Party. He also called on the trade union movement to make 30 November a success by organising demonstration and rallies which everyone who wanted to support the strikes could attend.

As well as using their industrial strength through the trade unions, working people also need a political voice. Socialist Party councillor Dave Nellist gave memories of his time serving as a Labour MP, when there were active socialists, and others willing to stand up for the working class, working inside that party.

As an example Dave recalled a time during the miners' strike when 28 Labour MPs invaded the pit at the commons to stop a Tory motion cutting benefits for the strikers' families. A graphic comparison with now, where all three capitalist parties are in agreement on the pension attacks and council cuts.

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) stood its biggest

slate of anti-cuts candidates yet at the last elections, and the electoral challenge to the tri-partisan neo-liberal agreement will be even bigger next time, including probably in the Greater London Assembly elections.

The effect a fighting leadership can have on union members was shown by Vik Chechi, Unison branch secretary at Queen Mary's University. Vik was elected into his position six months ago, prior to which the branch had not had a single meeting in five years.

Since then the branch has been rejuvenated into one with an active membership, and a good anti-cuts campaign on campus. Management's response to this has been to attack Vik, placing him on immediate suspension, with dismissal threatened even before any investigation had taken place. The branch is determined to fight this attack (see page 4 for more).

Rob Williams, chair of the National Shop Stewards Network, gave a barnstorming speech setting out the tasks and inspiring the audience with confidence (see page one).

Closing the rally, Socialist Party deputy general secretary Hannah Sell spoke of how internationally we have moved into a period of mass struggle, and as the rally showed, there is an increasing potential for the ideas of socialism to be raised as the alternative that is needed.

With the ideas of socialism we can take the opportunities of this period to bring about real change, from a system for the millionaires to one for the millions. Hannah concluded by explaining that it has not always been easy to be a socialist - when the promises of capitalism seemed possible. But for millions today it is becoming more and more clear that 'capitalism is crisis'.

While all working class people suffer as a result of the cuts, Hannah quoted from William Wordsworth, writing at the time of the French Revolution, to describe being a socialist in this period, as the class struggle intensifies: "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, But to be young was very heaven!"