

# Unilever: the private sector can do it too Striking to defend pensions

**O**n 9 December, workers at FTSE 100 giant, Unilever, took strike action for the first time in their history against attacks on pensions. According to strikers in Leeds, the pension scheme is slightly in deficit, but Unilever could easily use its £6 billion in profits to plug the gap. The strike blows apart the Con-Dem government's lie that cutting public sector pensions will somehow help private sector workers.

James, an Usdaw member, whose wife is a senior teaching assistant and as a Unison member had been on strike on 30 November, said he was set to lose £6,500 off his pension. "I did a rough calculation; I could lose silly amounts over the course of my retirement, £300,000."

In response to the strike, Unilever bosses have spitefully taken away the usual staff Christmas parties, hampers and gifts.

The strikers understood that bosses weren't going to back down after just one day of strike action and were willing to take further action until they won. When Unilever workers do strike again they should coordinate their strike with the public sector to ensure it has the maximum effect, and to build unity between public and private sector workers in defence of pensions and against all the cuts.

Representatives from West Cheshire TUC joined Unite pickets at Unilever's IT facility in Ewloe, North Wales. A picket of around 20 received a good response from passing cars, distributed leaflets explaining their case and made a clear stand in defence of themselves and their fellow workers.

Unilever's Pot Noodle mine came to a grinding halt as the entire shop floor workforce at Unilever's Croespenmaen factory near Crumlin in Gwent walked out on strike.

There was a lot of support for the public sector workers' action last week in defence of their pension schemes and support for the idea



photo Socialist Party Wales

of coordinating their action with public sector workers. If Unilever does not withdraw its attempt to close down the final salary pension scheme then further action is planned for January which could easily be coordinated with a public sector pensions strike.

There were three picket lines at the Unilever plants in Port Sunlight. Port Sunlight was built as a model village by the Lever brothers to house the workers at their soap factory. However the days of the 'liberal patrician' factory owner are long gone.

Discussions on the picket were warm and welcoming and the common struggle for decent pensions in the public and private sector was clearly recognised - a number of workers had visited a local PCS picket on N30. There was a determination not to lose this struggle, and recognition that further action was needed.

There were roughly 40 people

on the picket line at Trafford Park. Sheena Mitchell, senior Unite steward said: "We were promised in 2008 that Unilever would keep our final salary pensions scheme with increased contributions. There is no need to do this. It's just pure corporate greed."

There were 60 or so pickets from Unite and GMB trade unions in Warrington. One of the union stewards spoke to the Socialist: "There's about 250 people at this site, union membership must be about 95%. There are about 2,500 out on strike across the country today."

In Burton-on-Trent Chris Parton, National Union of Teachers rep and Socialist Party member was well received when he visited the picket line and passed on a message of support from National Shop Stewards Network Staffordshire.

**Ian Pattison, Andy Ford, Kenny Cunningham, Steve North, Dave Reid and Andy Bentley**

# No progress at climate conference

**Pete Mason**

When is an agreement not an agreement? When it's an agreement to reach an agreement in the future.

Far from being a "huge step forward" as Energy and Climate Change Secretary Chris Huhne insists, claims of success at the climate conference in Durban, South Africa are fraudulent.

The 194-party conference agreed to start negotiations on a legally binding new accord to replace the 1997 Kyoto protocol (which had no effect on global warming whatsoever), to take effect by 2020.

Canada has just announced it has withdrawn from Kyoto. But Kyoto expires next month anyway - the Canadian government's last-minute rebuff demonstrates that the likelihood of a 2020 binding agreement resulting from the Durban conference is almost non-existent!

The capitalist government representatives gathered in South Africa ultimately protect a failed system which is the cause of - but cannot provide a solution for - global warming.

Durban was nothing but a ferment, while the world's global temperatures are rising faster than ever. 2020 is simply too late, locking the world into a dangerous future.

A promise of tens of billions of



dollars a year for poor countries to fight global warming is worthless, with no means of raising the cash agreed.

Those signing up included China, as required by the United States before it would come to the table. The US government fears competition from China. Witness China's huge scale of production of solar panels, which has accelerated a seven-fold fall in prices since 1985.

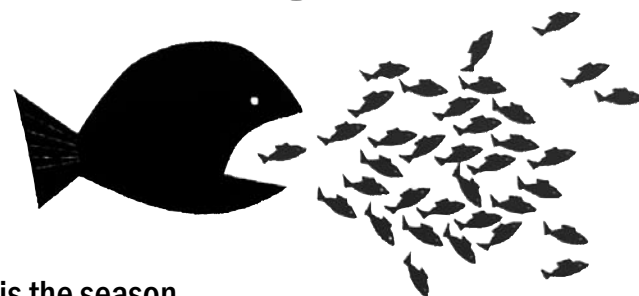
Instead of leading to the worldwide replacement of fossil fuels with cheap solar panels (alongside other renewables) in networks of locally produced electricity, the price collapse has sent US solar panel com-

panies out of business.

Clearly, this self-destructive free-market madness must be ended and replaced by democratic planning of a publicly owned energy industry worldwide. This would allow the rapid transformation of the planet impossible under capitalism.

Action is urgent. The powerful workers' struggle against the neoliberal governments which are implementing savage austerity measures around the world is a struggle against the very same governments which failed once again to protect the planet. Such struggles show the only way forward.

# Them...



## 'Tis the season

Everyone's struggling to keep the show on the road this Christmas, aren't they? Well children of the 1% don't have to worry at all about what Father Christmas is bringing. Parents who frequent Selfridges are apparently busy picking up £550 cashmere Dior baby grows and £209 Ralph Lauren polar bear jumpers. And Harrods' Toy Kingdom seems unaffected by Austerity Britain as mums and dads scramble for toy cars costing nearly £10,000 and dolls houses at £899.

Meanwhile a recent report by charity Family Action showed that families on a low income are doing their best to spend under £200 on Christmas this year with most saying that they will buy their children essential clothes that they're short on as presents. And one third of families expect to run up debt over the Christmas period. But we're all in this together don't forget.

## Money down the drain

Do you remember when we had to bail out the banks because of how important they are for the economy? And how we can't ask too many questions about bankers' bonuses because we have to attract the best people to the job? Well the New Economic Foundation think tank has found that for every £1 produced by bankers, they cost us £8.40. In fact the average banker destroys £42 million a year! Sounds like we might be better off without them after all.

Hospital cleaners, on the other hand, save the economy £10 for every £1 they cost by preventing the spread of infectious diseases. And yet 50,000 NHS jobs are at risk because of cuts which we supposedly have to make because of the debt the government got us into by bailing out the banks in the first place! We know who we'd rather give a bonus to this Christmas.

## X(ploitation) Factor

The X Factor finished on 11 December with the final viewed by more than 15 million fans. During the final show runner up Marcus Collins thanked the behind-the-scenes team for helping to make the show a success. But it seems not everyone working on the show has been receiving the 'thanks' they should. The X Factor is under in-

vestigation by HM Revenue and Customs for using unpaid interns. At the same time Syco Entertainment, the company co-owned by Simon Cowell and Sony which makes the X Factor, is making huge profits - Cowell is estimated to make £128,000 every day! No doubt the X Factor's young fans, many struggling to find decent work themselves, are hoping Simon remembers those doing the hard graft.

## Paying for your money

Barclays bank customers on low incomes will face a whopping increase in bank charges from March as the rules on their Cash Card account are changed. These accounts are used by about one million of Barclay's poorest customers and have no overdraft facilities.

The charge for direct debits taking the accounts into an unplanned overdraft will go up by 200% from £8 a day to £24 a day. So going overdrawn by £2 a week before payday could cost you £170! Don't worry though, Barclays are at the same time ending a £2 charge for sending customers text messages when funds are low. Thanks Barclays - not charging us for receiving a text message! Back to cash in the sock drawer then.

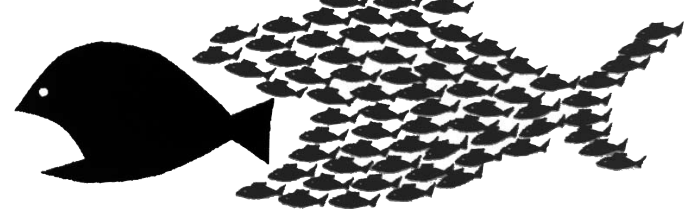
## Kick out Tory scum!

If we weren't disheartened enough by Tory MP Aidan Burley being filmed on a friend's Nazi-themed stag night, it seems his attitude to the trade unions reflects the same ideas! Burley and his cronies are under investigation in France for the incident where they rampaged around a ski resort chanting things like "Mein Fuhrer! Mein Fuhrer! Mein Fuhrer!" with some dressed in replica SS uniforms.

Burley heads up the Trade Union Reform Campaign which calls for attacking workers' democratic rights by escalating the anti-trade union laws. We're uncomfortably reminded of the thousands of trade unionists imprisoned in concentration camps during the holocaust.

NB: It has emerged that the EDL, far from being the grass-roots organisation it claims, has been funded by millionaire Ann Marchini and former investment fund director Alan Ayling.

# ...& Us



## 'What we heard'

Selling the Socialist at Blackfriars at about 7am while supporting the striking electricians a guy stopped on his push bike and started ranting at me, saying things like: "You public sector workers should go back to work... Don't you realise we have a trillion pounds of debt in this country?" I asked him if he thought school dinner ladies were responsible for the £1 trillion debt, or any low-paid public sector worker for that matter. I then asked where he worked. Morgan Stanley Cooper. I asked how much he earned. £1.2 million last year was the reply...

**Martin Reynolds**