

REAL JOBS - NOT WORKFARE

- **A day's pay for a day's work – no exceptions**
- **A mass trade union-led campaign to scrap slave labour schemes**

Join the fortnight of action against workfare - protests around the country

Get in touch for details of what's happening near you:

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020 8558 7947



photo Suzanne Beishon

Paul Callanan

Youth Fight for Jobs national organiser

As unemployment rises the vultures are circling. Among the biggest is Tesco. But they met huge opposition when they advertised a full-time, permanent position for which you would receive a meagre dole payment plus expenses – all part of the Con-Dems' slave labour Work Programme.

We've already bailed out the banks to the tune of billions. Now massive corporations are being subsidised by the state to take on unpaid workers. The government gets to pretend to be helping unemployed people 'get experience' and big business gets work done on the mega-cheap.

Everyone's a winner - apart from the people on the schemes, the taxpayers who fund them and the current workforce who fear redundancy. After all, why would multibillion-pound corporations pay for what they can get for free?

For those who are forced into these

placements, the future is a bleak one of working poverty. But a fightback has begun.

There have been protests at Tesco stores up and down the country calling on them to pull out of the scheme. This has already had an effect with Tesco announcing that it will offer paid placements and guaranteed jobs for all those who complete the scheme at its stores.

And others have taken note too. TK Maxx, Waterstones, Matalan and Sainsbury's and others have pulled out of the scheme. This represents a small victory for the unemployed and working class against attempts to drive down our rights and living standards.

We need to carry on campaigning and consign the whole workfare scheme to the dustbin of history.

Tory millionaire ministers attack campaigners against their slave labour schemes as 'job snobs'. But the point is - these are not jobs!

We need to build a movement that links the unemployed, students and trade unions to fight for real jobs.

Continued on page 3

Youth Fight for Jobs calls for:

- Keep up the pressure to force all companies remaining part of the Work Programme to withdraw immediately
- All unemployed people currently on a placement to be taken on with a proper wage
- Scrap the Work Programme entirely
- A minimum wage of £8 an hour, regardless of age
- Mass investment in a programme to create socially useful jobs and real apprenticeships with guaranteed jobs at the end

the Socialist

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“Capitalism fails the poor” agree Oxford University students!

The world famous Oxford Union was the setting for a debate on the proposition: “This House believes that capitalism has failed the poor”.

Peter Taaffe, general secretary of the Socialist Party, spoke for the motion. Alarm bells must be ringing in the circles of the ruling class that, in one of Britain’s most privileged universities, the motion was accepted.

If the Oxford Union has such a negative view of capitalism, then change is truly in the air!

Peter argued that capitalism has not only failed the poor, but also the working class and society as a whole; that this crisis is not episodic, but systemic. Capitalism has failed people internationally and needs to be replaced by a more rational system of democratic socialism.

Amongst the speakers - both for and against - this was a unique position which, surprisingly, was welcomed by sections of the almost 500-strong audience.

For example, there was applause when he supported the Greek workers’ call for the refusal to pay the debt and the nationalisation of the banks.

The other speakers arguing for the motion, Sir Ronald Cohen, by his admission a venture capi-

talist, Michael Brindle QC and student Scott Ralston, all made damning points about various aspects of capitalism’s quite obvious deficiencies. However, they wanted to make capitalism work more humanely.

Opposition speakers

The motion’s opponents crudely justified even the worst aspects of capitalism. John Longworth, director of the British Chamber of Commerce, incredibly suggested that British workers should be happy that the gap between rich and poor in this country was not as great as elsewhere!

He was outdone, however by the musings of Dr Madsen Pirie, whose claim to fame was that it was he who suggested to Margaret Thatcher the introduction of the poll tax.

Peter Taaffe reminded him that we represented the force that buried the poll tax and consequently Thatcher too.

Pirie informed us that capitalism was “beautiful”, that he “loved capitalism” and he went to bed “dreaming about capitalism”!

Andrew Brigden MP revealed the Tory Party’s brutal right-wing face. He denied that there was any real poor in Britain: the high

figures on poverty were just a statistical scam; and family breakdown, failing teachers, and immigration are to blame.

In fact the theme of all the pro-capitalist speakers was that capitalism should be allowed to operate freely without the slightest government or state interference; that capitalism is the only viable system and is still progressive.

No mention of course of the massive state bailout of the banks ie ‘socialism for the rich’. They buttressed their case against democratic socialism with references to Stalinist North Korea!

Peter pointed to mass unemployment and the events in Greece to demonstrate that capitalism was now an ‘absolute fetter’ to the further development of society.

Students reinforced this case in their contributions, with one female student pointing to Marx’s analysis of “surplus value”, which is a product of the labour of the working class from which the capitalists accumulate their profits.

Lord Grantley fittingly summed up for the opposition the real prospects for capitalism with the immortal words: “Let’s pray for a miracle; grab a glass of whisky as the ship goes down!”

image not available

Wales: A tale of two conferences

Dave Reid

There were two Welsh conferences in Cardiff last weekend. On one side of town in Sophia Gardens Labour Party Wales met in a posh conference centre at the cricket ground.

A group of over 30 construction electricians in the Unite trade union, supported by Socialist Party members, lobbied the conference to highlight the attempt of the ‘Big 7’ construction companies to cut wages by 35% (see page 4).

About a mile away in Riverside over 60 Socialist Party members met to discuss the socialist alternative to the cuts that Welsh Labour is, in part, implementing.

At the Labour conference a spark was refused entry when he asked if he could use the toilet, even though his union, Unite, is bankrolling the Labour Party and was paying for the conference!

At the Socialist Party conference one of the Unite sparks, Andrew Wilkes, who has played a leading role in the dispute, thanked Socialist Party members who had supported their protests when he spoke alongside Peter Taaffe, Socialist Party general secretary.

Peter explained the fundamental crisis facing capitalism in Europe, which is the epicentre of a global crisis. In Britain, people face more than a decade of economic decline.

He described the “cold cruelty” of the British ruling class that attempts to place the blame for the crisis on groups like the disabled which has resulted in disabled people being attacked in the street as “scroungers”.

Les Woodward, Remploy GMB national convenor, confirmed this analysis when he explained that a Remploy colleague (who is obviously working) was knocked out of his wheelchair in such an attack.

He thought that far from expecting his grandkids to have a better life than him the prospect is that they will be thrown back to the same standard of living as his grandparents.

A social worker in the Rhondda valley described how colleagues working in the Rhondda Food Bank cannot keep up with the demand for food as people on benefits don’t have enough to eat.

She explained how, like most people, they have modest aspirations... a job, a decent house etc. But “they have as much chance of achieving these as going to the moon” under this system!

This was Socialist Party Wales’s biggest ever conference with delegates and visitors contributing £700 in the fighting fund collection.

The conference was, unfortunately, too short to discuss all the issues affecting the working class and the Socialist Party in Wales. Next year - a two-day conference!

Portsmouth: Anti-cuts activists present an alternative budget

Portsmouth Socialist Party

Austerity is not working! That was the message delivered to Portsmouth city council on Tuesday when 100 anti-cuts activists lobbied the annual budget setting meeting, before presenting a ‘needs budget’ as an alternative to a second wave of cuts.

The lobby was organised by Portsmouth Against Cuts Together (PACT), a community group supported by the city’s trades union council. PACT brings socialists, trade unionists and community campaigners together to oppose all cuts to jobs and public services.

PACT also presented a needs budget in 2011 when the council voted for the first wave of cuts. This year the Lib Dem-run council proposed a further £20 million of austerity with an intention to cut up to

£45 million over three years.

Speaking at the deputation on behalf of PACT, Socialist Party member Ben Norman said: “It is clear austerity is not working. It is a failed strategy, born of a failed ideology, and by continuing with it you are failing your communities.”

Deputations were also made by the Unison union to oppose the planned 250 redundancies of local council workers, and by the Portsmouth Pensioner’s Association who argued that the cuts are having a disproportionate impact on those who most need support.

PACT called on the council to oppose all cuts, to reverse decades of privatisation and to reject the council tax grant from central government which will result in even more cuts in 2013.

As an alternative to austerity PACT called for a budget to meet the needs of the city, not the demands

of central government. This included investment in homes, creating ‘climate’ jobs and reinstating the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA).

Through its ownership of a commercial port the council is asset-rich and has one of the largest reserve funds in the country. PACT called for these funds to be used to delay cuts while the council worked with unions, community groups and neighbouring councils to campaign for extra funding from central government.

As neither Labour nor the Tories, considered the official opposition, proposed an alternative budget it is clear that the unions and community groups are now the real opposition to austerity.

To continue to build this opposition PACT will be hosting it’s AGM on 5 March, 7.30pm and Southsea Community Centre.

TUSC AGAINST CUTS

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition list for the Greater London Assembly elections in May 2012 has been agreed:

● **Alex Gordon**, president of rail union RMT will head the list. ● **Nick Wrack**, TUSC national committee ● **April Ashley**, Unison executive, representing black women members ● **Steve Hedley**, RMT London organiser ● **Ian Leahair**, Fire Brigades Union national committee member ● **Gary McFarlane**, anti-racist activist ● **Martin Powell-Davies**, executive member for Inner London of the teachers union NUT ● **Joe Simpson**, assistant general secretary of the Prison Officers Association ● **Jenny Sutton**, lecturers union UCU ● **Nancy Taaffe**, library worker made redundant, former chair Waltham Forest Unison ● **Jackie Turner**, GP ● **Lee Vernon**, Young Members convenor for London and southeast of the civil service union PCS ● **Lesley Woodburn**, Unite rep on southeast regional TUC LGBTQ committee.

(There is a place reserved for a leading CWU representative). Candidates are in a personal capacity

Scrap workfare, fight for real jobs!

Continued from page 1

The anti-workfare campaign that has sprung up will give confidence to many. We need to press home the advantage, forcing those companies still taking part in the workfare schemes - including Tesco, Asda, McDonalds, Primark and Topshop - to withdraw.

Without these big names, workfare could become unworkable. Though the government won't stop there. We need to keep the pressure on.

Job cuts

Public sector workers are being made redundant in their hundreds of thousands. Local councils are looking for 'volunteers' to run public services such as libraries. The community action programme will see people sent out to do jobs like litter picking or cleaning graffiti off walls. These jobs are supposed to be done by properly trained public sector workers who get a wage, a pension and other workers' rights.

The government is using unem-

ployment to undercut the pay, terms and conditions of those in work. The working class is now threatened with a race to the bottom.

With 2.67 million unemployed facing being forced to work for benefits, big business now has no motivation to take on people on real wages and is in fact more likely to lay people off in order to make for the cheaper option.

Workfare could also act as a way of frightening workers out of action to demand decent conditions as they will know that there is a cheap, easy alternative for the bosses in the form of workfare.

Youth Fight for Jobs totally rejects the race to the bottom. We face these attacks on our rights and living standards because we live in a society that is geared to making the maximum profit for a tiny minority of very wealthy people.

In order to achieve a society that can provide a decent job and good living standards for all we need to bring an end to this system. We need a society that provides jobs for the 99%, not just profits for the 1%.



Youth Fight for Jobs joined protesters at Westminster Tesco on Saturday 18 February. They occupied Tesco for an hour until the police threatened to arrest the peaceful protest for aggravated trespass photo Suzanne Beishon

Workfare glossary

Work Programme

Private and voluntary sector providers compete for contracts to place the long-term unemployed in work - the biggest is A4E. Contractors are paid a fee, usually £400, when the job centre refers an unemployed person to them and more money if the person stays in a job for two years. About 20% of unemployed people who have been on the Work Programme for at least six months have been found a job - compared to the target of 40%.

Work Experience

People do up to eight weeks of unpaid labour. They can refuse to take part or pull out during the first seven days, but after that it is compulsory and benefits can be withdrawn for non-participation. 34,200 took part between May and November last year.

Mandatory Work Activity

People are forced to work 30 hours a week doing work "of benefit to the community" or risk losing their JSA. 24,010 took part between May and November last year.

Community Action Programme

Long-term unemployed people are forced to work unpaid under the same conditions for up to six months.

Sector Based Work Academies

Employers are 'urged' to offer work experience placement or guaranteed job interviews. Supposedly to help 50,000 mainly young unemployed people but from January to November 2011 only 3,470 had taken part. This was the scheme which Cait Reilly took part in and is challenging the government in court over - she was never invited to the 'guaranteed' interview.

Main parties have no solution to youth unemployment

Matt Whale

YFJ unemployed organiser and Jarrow marcher

An audience of 200 gathered in Salford recently to discuss and debate the latest unemployment figures on BBC Radio 5 Live. These figures showed that unemployment rose by 50,000 to 2.67 million in the three months to December.

Tory MP Sam Gyimah was asked whether he thinks that a poverty benefit of £67 a week is enough to live on. After stumbling around trying to squirm out of an answer he admitted it wasn't. And both Lib Dem John Leech and Labour's Emma Reynolds admitted they'd struggle on the Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) too.

All the main parties know that JSA isn't enough to live on. When invited to live on JSA for a week in Salford, Sam refused to take up the challenge and, in a typical mainstream politician way, dodged the question and tried to move on.

One member of the audience talked about how, despite post-graduate qualifications and experi-

ence in numerous jobs including teaching, he couldn't find work. He also described a consequence of unemployment when he spoke of a young woman who took her own life after hundreds of rejection letters.

When I got the chance to speak I challenged the Tories to invest in jobs and homes instead of cutting the public sector. Sam responded with the usual 'we've been left this mess by the last government' but when challenged to nationalise the banks and use their profits to invest in public services he had no answer.

No jobs

Sam also had the cheek to claim that there are jobs out there. But a TUC study shows that if you include those wanting full-time work, the unemployment figure is more like six million with at most half a million vacancies. It's not difficult maths - the jobs aren't there!

The 'schemes' the government talked about to get people into work have now been seen for what they are - slave labour of the unemployed. Instead of ministers spouting impressive funding for these



Protesting at Leytonstone Tesco 20 February photo Suzanne Beishon

schemes, Youth Fight for Jobs (YFJ) calls for investment into creating real jobs.

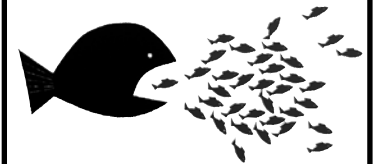
Although the Tories were obviously disgraceful, what really stood out to me was the lack of opposition from the Labour Party. In a traditional Labour stronghold, even the slightest opposition, the slightest lean left, would have received huge support.

But there was nothing - proving once again that the Labour Party has

long lost its links with the working class and doesn't represent the people who fund it through the trade unions.

We need a new mass workers' party with socialist policies that represents workers and the unemployed. The unions should pull funding from the Labour Party and join other leading trade unionists in supporting the Trade Union and Socialist Coalition (see www.tusc.org.uk).

Them...



Very Inappropriate Priorities

14,000 athletes, 7,000 technical officials, more than 20,000 media and eleven million spectators will descend on London this summer for the 2012 Olympics. On the busiest days three million extra journeys will be made across the capital. But don't worry, 'games lanes' are being introduced on 39 miles of road to allow 80,000 accredited members of the 'Olympic family' to by-pass congestion.

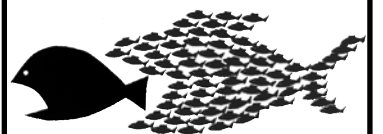
The traffic will cause problems for other vital vehicles too - namely the emergency services. And yet NHS London's request for ambulances to be able to use the lanes has been rejected! Only ambulances with their blue lights on (which can only be used by specially trained staff in certain situations) will be allowed into the VIP lanes. That leaves non-emergency patient transport and vehicles carrying blood and oxygen sitting in hours of traffic queues. Not 'important' enough, obviously.

Rent reduction?

"Rent levels have come down, so we have stopped ripping off the taxpayer." So said David Cameron on 11 January. He was claiming that private landlords were reducing rents in return for local housing allowance (the replacement of housing benefit for private renting) being paid directly to them.

But Inside Housing has now revealed that the prime minister was either mistaken or lying (we know where our bet would go). Only 36 out of 204 local authorities reported any reduction. And in each case, only a handful of landlords were involved. Without an immediate cap on rent and a massive scheme to build and renovate publicly owned housing, the huge subsidy to private landlords will continue.

...& Us



What we heard

I posted a Socialist Party report of the recent strike at Chesterfield Employ in a Remploy Facebook group and got this comment from Colin Cuthbert, shop steward at Remploy Leven:

"From the miners strike to the poll tax to our struggle to keep our factories open, the Socialist Party and before them the Militant Tendency have always been there shoulder to shoulder with the workers. I am not a member of the CWI but I have campaigned with them over the years and have always found them to be the most genuine and committed activists"

Becci Heagney



Join the fightback! Join the Socialists!

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Sparks defeat Balfour Beatty - now for total victory over Besna!

Rob Williams

After an incredible six months of protests, unofficial walkouts and now a threatened strike, Balfour Beatty - one of the 'Dirty 7' building companies - has pulled out of the Besna contract. This would have cut electricians' and other skilled construction workers' wages by up to 35%. It was led by the 'rank and file' committee, many of whom are blacklisted,

This is a major victory for Unite members. It comes on the back of the reinstatement of Paddy Brennan, the suspended convenor in the Swindon Honda plant. Also Unilever and Wincanton have been forced back to the negotiating table after strikes in recent weeks.

It should act as an inspiration to Unite in the public sector and convince the leadership that the union should join in the pensions strike on 28 March, alongside the likes of PCS and NUT. It will be a major boost to the pay talks in the Naeci/Blue Book construction trades.

The campaign by the rank and file workers has acted as a lever on the union and allowed Unite officers to make threats of future action against Balfour, knowing that it would be backed up by the site workers.

The successful legal victory over the second strike ballot was a crucial moment. Blatantly outlawing strikes that have had large majorities in favour - 82% before Christmas and 67% more recently in the case of the Balfour Unite members - can legitimise unofficial action.

In any case, the weekly action of the rank and file made it clear to the employers that the action would continue even if they won in court.

Balfour's retreat is a crucial breakthrough but we can't rest until all the remaining six companies follow suit. Therefore the campaign must continue until a total victory is won. If necessary, strike ballots against them should be launched.

Correctly the union is targeting improving the Joint Industry Board agreement to deal with long-term issues such as the use of employment agencies and blacklisting. We support the involvement of the rank and file committee in any such talks



Sparks lobby Wales Labour conference photo SP Wales

and regular reports back to meetings of construction workers.

This is a fantastic victory after a marathon campaign, headed by rank and file workers. Unite has shown exactly what an industrial union of its size can be - a powerful force that can improve the working lives of workers.

This should be shouted from the rooftops and be the starting point for a mass union organising campaign on the construction sites, involving the new layer of activists that have been the stalwarts of this struggle. The recruiting slogan should be 'Join the union that saves 35% of your wages!'

Support the workers at MMP packaging



On the picket line at MMP photo Harry Smith

Roy Farrar

Workers at the Mayr-Melnhof Packaging (MMP) plant in Bootle, Merseyside occupied their factory from noon on 18 February, following a management lockout after redundancy talks broke down. A number of strikes had already taken place in the previous weeks over the company's unfair redundancy selection procedures and worsened severance terms. MMP is part of a multinational based in Austria which had profits of about £80 million last year.

The Bootle plant is threatened with job losses after the loss of a big contract with Kellogg's.

Unite had already made concessions to save 12 jobs at the plant. Workers pointed out that they have already agreed to expect cuts in pay of between £1,000-£2,000 over the year. But clearly the MMP bosses want more.

MMP management actions have angered the workforce. When the ballot for official action was held, the vote was about 90% in favour!

About 40 workers entered the site at 11.30am on 18 February, telling MMP bosses that nothing would move in or out of the site until em-

ployers met with their Unite union representatives for emergency negotiations. The unofficial action followed official strike action the previous day against 37 redundancies at the firm. Employees went on strike, holding a demonstration on site. MMP bosses responded aggressively, by locking out the workers, the first lockout in the print and packaging industry since 1958, according to Unite.

Their union Unite called for a mass protest for Monday morning, 20 February. Within hours management at MMP agreed to talk with Unite officials and the occupation was suspended.

At a gate meeting, nearly 100 workers heard stewards announce that the MMP workers in Deeside have agreed to ballot for industrial action and join with their Bootle brothers and sisters. Messages of support had come from MMP New Zealand, as well as from the European plants in Austria and Germany.

The next scheduled action is planned for Wednesday 22 February, which is to be a two-hour strike around noon.

• Please send messages of support to Unite FOC Phil Potter p-potter1@sky.com

National Shop Stewards Network
6th annual conference:
Saturday 9 June 11am - 4pm
 Friends Meeting House,
 Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ

Speakers include:

- RMT general secretary, Bob Crow,
- PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka
- a leading Rank and File campaigner in the construction workers' campaign
- Kevin Courtney, NUT deputy general secretary

For more information see: www.shopstewards.net
 Contact the NSSN at: info@shopstewards.net
 or PO Box 54498, London, E10 9DE

Tyne and Wear Metro cleaners No choice but more action

Transport union RMT member Richie Veitch recently wrote a letter to his local paper about the cleaners on the Tyne and Wear Metro, whose pay and conditions have been severely undermined since the Metro was privatised. This is an extract from his letter.

The way the Tyne and Wear Metro cleaners are being treated by the company is nothing short of outrageous. In the latest attempt at undermining the trade union movement, the management sees fit to dismiss one of their employees without hearing his case in the way agreed between the company and recognised trade union - of course one suspects that this tactic was deployed by the company to avoid having to go to (yet another) employment tribunal as they already have over 25 waiting to be heard.

In another dramatic episode of mismanagement, the company this

week told all of its employees that they had lost their tax codes! Now it is left to the employees, who are paid the national minimum wage and suffer from the most draconian terms and conditions I have ever known, to chase up the tax office in their own time.

I strongly suspect that the latest attack on the workforce maybe the straw that breaks the camel's back. They have no choice other than to respond industrially and show this shambolic, greedy, privateer that they will no longer accept being treated like slaves in a Victorian workhouse. I wouldn't blame them if they did.

In brief

Cleaners strike

"£8.30 - London Living Wage!" was the chant of the Initial cleaners taking strike action on 16 February outside St Pancras station in London.

The cleaners, living in one of the most expensive cities in the world and working on Eurostar, domestic trains and station areas are paid as little as £6.50 an hour, well below the figure for the 'London living wage'.

Every worker on the picket line enthusiastically signed up to support the electoral challenge of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), pleased to see their union, the RMT, linking with other trade unionists to stand up and put an alternative to the pro-cuts politicians that encourage companies like Initial to suck profits out of working class people.

Suzanne Beishon

DVLA



Outside Chester DVLA

PCS workers at the DVLA office in Chester staged a lunchtime protest on 14 February as part of their campaign to oppose the closure of all 39 local DVLA centres with 1,200 job losses. Protests were held outside DVLA offices across the UK.

The workers were supported by Cheshire West Against The Cuts and other trade unions as leaflets were given out explaining the situation and services users signed a petition opposing the closure. Any savings made from closing the centres will be wiped out if Vehicle Excise Duty evasion rises by a mere 0.5% - which is likely, if the service is allowed to deteriorate due to the government plans for these office closures.

Alec Price

Heathrow Express

Drivers on the Heathrow Express will be on strike on 26 February and 11 March in support of sacked driver Zahid Majid and RMT branch secretary Liaqat Ali. This is following a massive "yes" vote for action by the RMT members.

They will also be taking action short of a strike by not doing additional hours on the weekend of 3-5 March.

A separate industrial action ballot was 85% in favour of action to support the Heathrow Express branch secretary Liaqat Ali over his suspension from duty on spurious allegations about his trade union activities.

Management has now returned Liaqat from suspension, and all allegations have been found to be completely unfounded and potentially malicious. But now the company have provocatively started pursuing possible disciplinary charges against Liaqat.

Fighting to defend the NHS

Save Charing Cross hospital!

Sullivan Roberts

It's clear that plans are now well advanced which will savagely cut hospital provision in an area of eight local authorities in North West London.

At the end of January, NHS North West London published a paper: "Shaping a Healthier Future - Case for Change". This is part of a softening-up exercise before cuts are announced in June.

The paper tries to provide a rationale for fewer hospital beds and hospital sites. For instance, they say that: "...at the end of people's lives, more want to die at home rather than in hospital, and the NHS needs to do more to enable this." Certainly, by removing beds and closing hospitals they will make this happen, whether patients like it or not!

Under the guise of meeting the changing health needs of the population, hospitals are being earmarked for closure, with no guarantees that there will be any increased funding for alternative provision in the community.

The overall aim seems to be to reduce by 20% to 30% the numbers being admitted to hospitals in

North West London. This is planned against the background of a 9% fall in hospital beds in NW London over the past five years.

The paper also says: "Patient experience is generally poor across NW London hospitals." This may be true, but the answer is not to shut down the hospitals, but to improve them, to raise staff morale and to invest the £150 million they admit is needed.

It is clear that this is not under consideration and as a result are identifying hospitals for closure - almost certainly Charing Cross, and quite possibly Ealing and others too.

Rich and poor

The rich and privileged of this part of London are immune to these cuts through their access to expensive private healthcare. But ordinary working people risk the decimation of their services.

Already huge discrepancies exist in life expectancy in the area. Queen's Gate in Kensington and Chelsea has the highest male life expectancy (88.3 years). But a short trip down the Harrow Road is Harlesden in Brent, where it is 71.5 years - a difference of 17 years!

In Westminster, the average life ex-

pectancy for women is 90.3 years in exclusive Knightsbridge and Belgravia compared to only 76.6 years in the working class ward of Church Street.

This is not the first time that hospitals in the area have faced the threat of closure. In particular, with the 1992 Tomlinson report, and then again in 2005, when Charing Cross was in line to lose its A&E department, it was only through a massive campaign of resistance, involving both staff unions and the wider community, that these threats were lifted.

Socialist Party members, and its predecessor, Militant Labour, played a pivotal role in these campaigns.

Prior to the launch of the so-called public consultation exercise in June, it is vital that a campaign rooted in the local community is in place.

The Socialist Party in West London is already out on the streets of Hammersmith and Fulham opposing any proposals to get rid of A&E at Charing Cross as a prelude to closing the hospital.

We are meeting an overwhelmingly favourable response. We will also be raising the issue of opposition to health and hospital cuts as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition challenge in the London assembly elections.

Gateshead: Children's healthcare under threat

Elaine Brunskill

In Gateshead the Primary Care Trust (PCT) is threatening to end all children's in-patient services within the borough in cases where over 23 hours of care is needed. Around 40 people attended the PCT's public consultation meeting on 16 February.

Not one person from the floor, which included parents, grandparents and hospital workers, spoke out in favour of the PCT's proposals.

In the PCT's glossy brochure they highlight that 'at times' fewer than 50% of beds in the children's unit are occupied. However, staff from the QE hospital reported to the meeting that: "tonight all 16 beds on the unit are full".

Unpopular ideas

One parent asked the PCT what volume of negative responses would it take for them to reconsider their plans. The response was that even two million wouldn't guarantee anything, though admitting they have in the past shelved unpopular ideas.

Of the two proposals the only difference was whether the short-stay assessment units would be open 14 or 24 hours a day.

However, both the options would end in-patient care of over 23 hours in Gateshead or South Tyneside hospitals.

None of the public at the meeting had heard about it via the PCT. Disgracefully, this included the mother of a severely disabled child who has spent over 23 hours in Gateshead's children's unit 30 times.

It had been left to trade unionists, socialists and others to raise the is-



The NHS is under attack in every area photo Paul Mattsson

sue and effectively advertise it.

Concerns were raised about the maternity ward, where already ante-natal classes have been stopped. Pregnant women have reportedly been advised to look on the internet for information!

The response of the PCT that maternity services "will not change, but what happens in the future I do not know" was not reassuring.

The PCT estimates that no more than four children would be affected each day. But this means almost 1,500 families a year.

Those attending the meeting have huge concerns about this attack on Gateshead's children's unit, and did

not believe the PCT who said this was not a cost-cutting exercise.

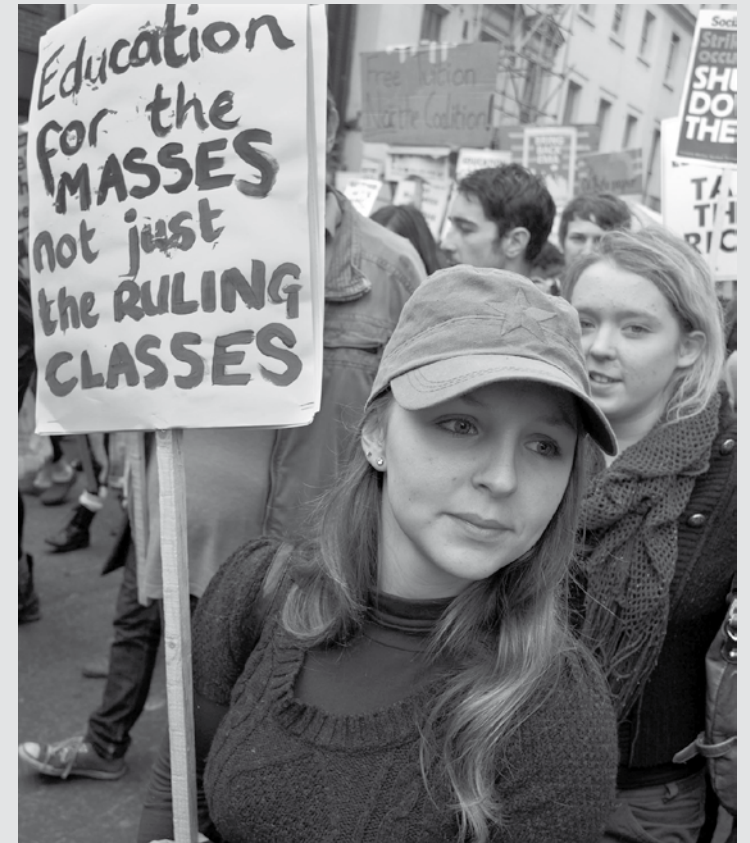
As one person commented: "If it's not a cost-cutting exercise, it's clearly just incompetence".

By the end of the meeting those on the top table all looked dejected. Even the consultant paediatrician, who spoke on the platform on behalf of the PCT conceded "I would passionately like to keep the service in Gateshead".

Children in Gateshead need a sick children's unit in the borough. Staff from the hospital, parents, grandparents and others from Gateshead are preparing to fight to retain this service.

Defend education

Join the student walkout



The working class must not be priced out of education photo Paul Mattsson

A Sheffield student

The National Union of Students (NUS) has called on students to walk out of lectures on 14 March as part of a national week of action.

Socialist Students is campaigning for good turnouts at both Sheffield Hallam and the University of Sheffield, with a march to the city centre. We are also trying to involve local colleges in the rally. Students are being hit by the Con-Dems' fee trebling and the abolition of the EMA student payments.

Sky high fees

The walkout has been officially organised in opposition to the privatisation of higher education and hidden course fees which represent a brutal attack on students. But Sheffield Socialist Students believes that this must be linked to defending students from sky-high tuition fees and the mass-sacrificing of teaching budgets.

Neither the NUS nor our student union (SU) have advertised details about the walkout. We have lobbied our SU to publicise and coordinate action - but Socialist Students will provide a lead if our SU refuses to do so.

Our campaign will be launched at a meeting on 22 February, at which the SU education officer has agreed to speak.

We hope the rumour that the SU council intends to vote against a proposal for demonstrations on campus and a boycott of lectures is false.

We intend to work with other left-wing groups and societies on campus, drawing in as many students as possible, to hold a protest march against the dismemberment of our education. Given the anger that exists and the mood for action there is potential for many more to join Socialist Student societies.

The lecturers' union UCU in Sheffield have given us their full support. However the university authorities have not yet commented on whether students will be penalised for boycotting or walking out from compulsory seminars - we must oppose any victimisation of protesters.

Mass student support for the walkout will provide a strong message to the weak coalition government: we will not let our education system return to 19th century nepotism, while universities and colleges fall further into the hands of private investors. We will not allow the working class to be priced out of education.

Socialism Today



The Socialist Party's magazine February 2012 issue includes:

- Dithering in Durban
- Pensions fight continues
- 'The year of all risks'

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WHAT'S WRONG WITH CAPITALISM?

Capitalism in Britain

Between 1978 and 2000 the share of net income going to the richest 1% increased from 4.2% to 10%



Between 1977 and 2008 the share of net income going to the poorest 60% decreased from 40% to 33%.



Between 1988 and 2002 the 1%'s share of 'marketable wealth' increased from 17% to 23%.



Meanwhile the bottom 50% saw its share drop from 10% to 6% between the mid 1980s and 2002.



In the 1880s bank assets were the equivalent of 5% of GDP



In 2006 at the height of the banking bubble bank assets were equal to 500% of GDP



Rewriting the rules for setting up small companies will not change anything. We need a root and branch reorganisation of society



The 99% and the 1% have become watchwords as the fightback against austerity grows. They encapsulate the unequal and exploitative nature of capitalism. In response to the growing opposition to this profit-hungry system many of its proponents have attempted to argue that not

all capitalism is bad. Here Lynn Walsh, editor of *Socialism Today*, the Socialist Party's monthly magazine, exposes the myths proposed by Tory prime minister David Cameron as he tries to sell us the idea of 'popular' capitalism. www.socialismtoday.org

David Cameron, like other capitalist leaders, has been deeply shaken by the tumultuous events of the last year. Revolutions in North Africa and the Middle East, general strikes throughout Europe. Riots in Britain, massive public sector strikes. The eurozone debt crisis. Stagnation of British capitalism, deepened by the Con-Dems' austerity measures. Despite their smiling faces, Cameron, Clegg and the others fear social upheaval and revolution. They also fear an electoral backlash against them from their traditional middle class supporters. Cameron has to admit that there is a "crisis of capitalism" and that capitalism is "unpopular". So he is attempting to stitch together some political camouflage under the heading of "popular capitalism".

Ownership society?

In a recent speech (19 January) Cameron promised new legislation, which he claimed would make it easier for people to set up cooperatives and small businesses. This is part of his scheme to get "more people engaged in a genuinely popular capitalism". He wants an "ownership society". He wants a nation of shareholders, savers, and homeowners - as well as new entrepreneurs - who will enjoy the "success of capitalism".

"Fairness" is the slogan of the day. How credible is this coming from a cabinet of Con-Dem ministers who are together worth £60 million? Most of them, including Liberal Democrats, come from wealthy, privileged families. Twenty-three of 29 ministers have assets and investments estimated to be worth more than £1 million. Cameron, who wants 'fairness', has personal wealth of £4 million. George Osborne, the austerity chancellor, is worth £4.6 million.

These changes reflect both the trends in capitalism (de-industrialisation, casualisation of the workforce, etc) and the policies of successive governments (a financial free-for-all through deregulation, huge tax cuts for big business and the wealthy, an assault on trade union rights, etc).

The rest (the unpaid labour of workers, or surplus value) the capitalists take for themselves in the form of profit. This is how the capitalists accumulate capital. At the heart of the market is an unequal exchange between workers and capitalists. This is why capitalism can never be 'fair'.

The unequal exchange between workers and bosses at the heart of the capitalist production process ultimately underlies the polarisation of income and wealth in society.

Spiraling exploitation

One indication of the increased exploitation of workers is the sharp fall in wages as a share of GDP. In 1978, total wages in Britain represented 58% of GDP. By 2011 this had dropped to 53.8%. This meant that workers were taking home £60 billion less in 2011 than they would have if the wage share had remained at 1978 levels. This amounted to a cumulative loss of approximately £1.3 trillion. (Stewart Lansley, *All In This Together?* TUC, 27 January 2012) Will Cameron, in the name of a 'fair market' be attempting to reverse this anti-working class trend? Will he restore trade union rights, enabling workers to defend their wages and conditions? Will he raise the minimum wage to a level that guarantees a living wage?

Their personal wealth reflects the huge inequalities of income and wealth in British society. The share of net (after-tax) income received by the top 1% of taxpayers rose from around 4% in 1978 to 10% by 2000. In stark contrast, the share of national income of the bottom three-fifths of the population fell from 40% to 33% between 1977 and 2008. (Stewart Lansley, *The Cost of Inequality*)

Wealth (in the form of property, financial assets, etc) is even more unequally distributed. In 1988 the top 1% owned 17% of 'marketable wealth'. By 2002 the top 1% owned 23%. Meanwhile, the share of the bottom 50% shrank from 10% in the mid-1980s to 6% in 2002.

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Chanting the 'free-and-fair' mantra will not reverse these deep-rooted trends. Cameron scores a point when he comments that "the last [New Labour] government made something of a Faustian pact with the City... It seemed frightened of challenging vested interests, believing... that the interests of big business were always one and the same as those with the economy as a whole."

But what will the Con-Dem government actually do to change this? Tighter regulation, promised by Cameron, may impose some temporary restrictions on the banks and finance houses. But, as in the past, they will very quickly find ways round any new legislation.

Cameron attacks the "bonus culture" and the "excesses" of the City. But what will the Con-Dems do about it? A number of top bankers and chief executives have, under the pressure of intense public hostility, given up their bonuses for last year. Yet hundreds of bankers will still be collecting phenomenal bonuses in addition to their inflated salaries.

For instance, 24,000 employees of Barclays investment bank will still be getting bonuses averaging £64,000. The head of Barclays Capital, Bob Diamond, got a bonus of £6.5 million for 2010 on top of his salary of £1.35 million. This year, he will be offered a bonus for 2011 of 'only' £2 million.

The excesses of the banks, being bailed out at our expense, will not be curbed by sermons or even legislation. Capitalism, in reality, has become more and more dominated by parasitic financial capital.

For instance, in the 1890s, total British bank assets were equal to 5% of gross domestic product. At the peak of the bubble in 2006 they had risen to a staggering 500%. Their debt was 30 times their assets. The return on their shares - the profits made by shareholders - reached 30%.

Cameron promises that he will make sure that "the market is fair as well as free". But this is impossible. Capitalism is based on exploitation.

New wealth (in the form of goods or services which are sold on the market for money) is created by the application of workers' labour power to materials and production equipment (built up through capital investment). But what the capitalists pay workers in wages is only part of the value of the labour power expended in production.

The unpaid labour of workers, or surplus value) the capitalists take for themselves in the form of profit. This is how the capitalists accumulate capital. At the heart of the market is an unequal exchange between workers and capitalists. This is why capitalism can never be 'fair'.

The unequal exchange between workers and bosses at the heart of the capitalist production process ultimately underlies the polarisation of income and wealth in society.

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'Fair capitalism' - a fairy tale

Cameron proclaims his "ambition of building a nation of shareholders, of savers, of homeowners... Margaret Thatcher did the same with privatisation [of utilities], with share ownership, with the right to buy your council house."

But figures from the Office of National Statistics show that Thatcher's attempt to spread share ownership has been a total failure. In 1963, individuals in Britain owned 54% of UK shares traded on the London Stock Exchange (LSE). This fell to 13% in 2006 at the peak of the boom. Under the impact of the crisis after 2007, they fell further to only 10%. Overseas investors now own 42% of LSE shares.

Even the pro-Tory Daily Telegraph comments: "The data highlights how the Thatcher revolution in private share own-

99 Just five firms dominate 99% of the sugar market

ership failed to create a lasting impression on the stock market..." (27 January 2010) Cameron will be no more successful than Thatcher in promoting so-called popular capitalism.

One of the main aims of Cameron's cooperatives bill is to promote the development of small businesses. Small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs), however, are being ruthlessly squeezed at the present time. Those that supply goods and services to bigger companies in the manufacturing sector are being hit by the stagnation of manufacturing.

Most small businesses, however, are in the service sector, and are being hammered by the decline in consumer spending, as a result of squeezed incomes and unemployment. SMEs are also being crushed by the credit squeeze imposed by the big banks (despite the ultra-cheap credit provided to them by the Bank of England).

It is absurd to think that small businesses can flourish while the economy is at best stagnating, or on the verge of another serious downturn.

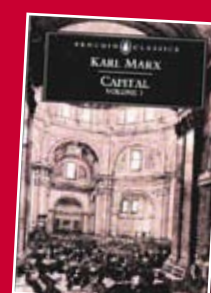
Cameron's 'fair and free' camouflage is a tatty, see-through effort to cover up the pathological symptoms of capitalist crisis. It will prove to be futile. A cauldron of discontent and anger is boiling up within society. It will not be cooled by fairy tales of a 'fair', 'responsible' capitalism.

Read on!



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photos Paul Mattsson

David Cameron wants to "get more people engaged in genuine popular capitalism". He wants to see "more entrepreneurs": "I admire, more than anything, the bravery of those who turn their back on the security of a regular wage to follow their dreams and start a company."

This (leaving aside the insult to the unemployed) panders to the idea that anyone, if only they are entrepreneurial enough, can become a successful capitalist. Maybe a tiny handful, perhaps, on the basis of outstanding technological innovation and with sufficient financial backing from a sponsor, can become successful (often taken over by a big company at a later stage).

The reality of present-day capitalism, however, as Cameron well knows, is that it is dominated by giant companies and big banks. It is an absurd fantasy to believe that just anyone can start a successful business and grow big.

At the end of the post-war upswing in the 1970s, the top 100 companies controlled around 70% of the assets of all manufacturing and non-financial services. The concentration is undoubtedly greater now, although up-to-date information is strangely lacking.

However, analysis of companies listed on the UK stock exchange shows the degree of concentration. In 1998 the top 100 companies accounted for 68.4% of the market capitalisation of all companies. By 2008 the share of the top 100 had risen to 87.77%.

In Britain there is an incredibly high level of monopoly in a whole range of industries. For instance, in the following sectors, the five biggest firms dominate the market: sugar 99%, tobacco products 99%, gas distribution 82%, oils and fats 88%, confectionery 81%, manmade fibres 79%, coal extraction 79%, soft drinks and mineral water 75%, pesticides 75%. Detergents are dominated by Unilever and Procter & Gamble. This is clearly monopolistic capitalism, not popular capitalism.

Five big banks dominate the UK banking sector. Four giant companies (Tesco, Sainsbury's, Asda and Morrison's) between them control 74.4% of the grocery market. They have wiped out thousands of small shops.

Despite the claim of the Thatcher government to be opening up the power companies to competition through privatisation, six big companies now control the retail electricity market: EDF Energy, Centrica, RWE npower, E.ON, Scottish Power, and Scottish and Southern Energy.

What these facts show is that capitalism is becoming less and less popular.

Only 10% of company shares traded on the London Stock Exchange are held by individuals (and most of those are held by wealthy people).

Marx was right

These facts confirm the continuation of deep-rooted tendencies within capitalism analysed by Karl Marx 150 years ago. He showed that competition between capitalists produced two interrelated trends. One is the increasing centralisation of capital, as the biggest companies strive to take over a bigger share of production and markets in seeking to maximise their profits. This accounts for the huge waves of 'mergers and acquisitions' - takeovers - during recent financial bubbles.

At the same time, there is a steady concentration of ownership, as control of the big companies is concentrated into fewer and fewer hands (mostly through finan-

5 Five big banks dominate the banking sector

cial investment vehicles such as hedge funds, mutual funds, and investment companies, which are investment clubs for the super-rich).

These trends, moreover, operate on an international basis, as globalisation and the deregulation of markets (ultra-free market policies) have unleashed global competition between the big corporations and banks.

Concentration

A recent study of 43,000 transnational corporations (TNCs) revealed the tightly knit interconnections between the top global corporations. (Vitali and others, *The Network of Global Corporate Control*, www.arxiv.org)

The study shows that "nearly 40% of the control of the economic value of TNCs in the world is held, via a complicated web of ownership relations, by a group of 147 TNCs in the core, which has almost full control over itself".

88 100 companies dominate 88% the market, 2008

Many of the companies within the core are interconnected through mutual shareholdings and can be thought of as "an economic 'super-entity' in the global network of corporations". It hardly comes as a surprise to learn that three-quarters of the core companies are banks or financial institutions!

Within Britain and across the globe these big banks and corporations wield enormous power. They dictate to governments. Through financial markets,

CAPITALISM IS CRISIS

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which deploy the wealth of big business and the super-rich, they determine the anti-working class policies of governments: social spending cuts, mass unemployment, squeezed wages, and the erosion of rights. There is nothing 'fair' or 'popular' about their activities.

That is why capitalism, as even Cameron is forced to admit, is very "unpopular". A few speeches about Britain's alleged "insurgent economy" (where?) and a country "fizzing with business potential" (?) will not change the reality.

Cameron claims he is seeking "a new model" of capitalism. But what we need is a new model of society, a socialist reorganisation. "Improving human wealth and happiness," - Cameron's professed aim - depends on taking over the giant banks and companies that dominate the economy.

They need to be run democratically, on the basis of a plan, to meet the interests of the great majority of society, not the wealthy few who currently control them. Democratic workers' management and control would ensure that the economy was run efficiently (avoiding the bureaucratic problems that arose under Stalinism in the Soviet Union).

Cameron's promise of a "more socially responsible and genuinely popular capitalism" is a cruel deception. Capitalism offers only a bleak future of economic stagnation and social crisis. This will be aggravated by the Con-Dem government's anti-working class austerity measures. Rewriting the rules for setting up small companies will not change anything. We need a root and branch reorganisation of society.

800 celebrate life of Rob Windsor

A socialist champion of Coventry's people

Coventry Socialist Party

"It was an inspiring event," said Kath O'Donnell about the funeral for her anti-poll tax colleague, Rob Windsor, at Coventry Cathedral.

A socialist councillor in St Michael's ward, he was described as "passionate, driven, eloquent and uncompromising... but a humble man".

Around 800 people – a huge turnout of work colleagues, council workers, Socialist Party (SP) comrades and hundreds of people from St Michael's and across the city – joined Rob's family to celebrate his life, a testimony to the man and the socialist and Marxist ideas he promoted.

Speakers paid tribute to the 'force of nature' that was Rob. Workmate Mike Fowler described Rob as "about as good as it gets".

Another workmate, Alan Thomas, said Rob was selfless and had an amazing record of helping peo-

ple, fuelled by his compassion and Marxism.

"If we're made of dust, what dust he was," said Coventry SP member Dave Griffiths who described Rob's eventful life and dedication to fighting injustice, inequality and oppression.

Rob's greatest pride was the anti-poll tax struggle. And rightly. He firmly fought for a campaign of mass non payment which was to cement his relationship with the Socialist Party.

Warmth and compassion

A message from Scottish socialist Tommy Sheridan said: "There are some people you meet in life who have inner warmth and compassion that oozes from them... Rob Windsor was one of those people."

"Rob was a champion in the titanic battle against the poll tax. His understanding of the law made him a priceless member of the anti-poll tax team.

"He showed no fear in confronting the powerful on behalf of the powerless. His courage was awe inspiring."

SP general secretary Peter Taaffe praised Rob's role not only as a campaigner in Coventry but as a national leader in the Socialist Party.

Another leading SP member, Hannah Sell, explained how young he was to be an anti-poll tax leader. She added: "His socialism stemmed from his solidarity with anyone suffering poverty and injustice."

Because no individual councillor could stop all that, Rob "was determined to fight for a better society. It's a tragedy that we've lost him when the need for a society that acts for the 99% rather than the 1% has never been clearer. He would want socialists here to re-dedicate ourselves to the cause we shared with him."

Fighting back

SP councillor Dave Nellist said Rob was a politician not because he wanted to be one, but to fight back for working people. Our job, if we admire his work, is to find the next generation who'll do as Rob did, and fight to spread the ideas of socialism and the need to change the world.

The Bishop of Wolverhampton, Clive Gregory, said Rob was not a religious person but could be described as spiritual. "His spirituality was... a belief in the potential of every person and the collective potential of humanity".

Clive knew Rob's work well as he had been a Coventry vicar at St Peter's church in Hillfields. He said the cathedral was the only place large enough to hold Rob's funeral and that the cathedral's community should be proud to welcome such a man. Clive called for a permanent memorial to Rob.

Expelled from the Labour Party as



Rob and Isla celebrate an election victory

it embraced the market, he was not deterred by a time of political retreat by the left during the 1990s. He continued the fight for socialism and led dozens of campaigns.

But whether on the council or leading campaigns, Rob hardly ever missed a meeting of his local SP branch, always looking to build support for our party.

Inspired

Recently he had the pleasure of hearing even Margaret Thatcher's biographer, Charles Moore, say how the 'leftist' argument now looked more credible and would gain new force. How Rob would have loved to be part of that. Luckily, he inspired so many and we are confident others will pick up the baton of struggle.

After the cathedral, family and close friends went to Canley cre-

matorium to be greeted by 'Always look on the bright side of life.' The traditional workers' song The Internationale was sung at the end.

Hundreds who could not fit into the Canley chapel were hosted by Coventry Socialist Party at the SQ club where speakers young and old remembered and saluted Rob's contribution to the Socialist Party and the working class.

Peter Taaffe urged everyone to re-commit themselves to the struggle for socialist change and to join the SP if they weren't already a member in order to carry on the struggle that Rob fought so hard for.

Everyone there felt taller for knowing and campaigning with Rob and he would have been proud of the tribute his fellows paid him.

Read the obituary for Rob at: www.coventrysocialists.co.uk



Rob campaigning against New Labour's introduction of tuition fees

Support the 2012 Congress appeal

Ken Douglas

Socialist Party national treasurer

With just two weeks to go to 2012 Socialist Party congress, can you donate to our finance appeal?

Your support is essential to enable us to produce the posters, leaflets, pamphlets and other up-to-date campaigning materials, vital for fighting the Tory/Lib Dem coalition's continued savage attacks on the public sector.

Coming up soon are the next public sector strikes against the coalition attacks on pensions. We will also be fighting the next round of council cuts and standing candidates in the local elections and the

London Assembly elections.

We urgently need to replace vital print shop equipment, which will cost around £12,000 – making this fighting fund appeal even more important.

You can help. Make a donation today, hold a fund-raiser in your area, start a loose change jar – every penny, every pound counts. Please pay your donation in today via our website, telephone 020 8988 8777 or use the form below.

Win the Ken Loach at the BBC DVD box set (RRP £51.05), reviewed in the Socialist issue 699, by entering the Socialist Party raffle - £1 a ticket. Phone 020 8988 8771. The draw will take place on 10 March.

North West aggregate meetings

Merseyside

The Socialist Party in Merseyside has seen many new members join our ranks and new branches set up across the area over the last few years.

Recently it was decided to start regular aggregate (joint combined branch) meetings for Merseyside and the first was held on 15 February in Liverpool with members from Wirral, Cheshire West and Merseyside taking part.

The first discussion was around the British Perspectives document for the party's 2012 national congress.

The discussion elaborated on a number of points in the document, including the Labour Party's insistence on attacking public sector workers. This is not just through condemning strike action but also agreeing to keep the Con-Dem coa-

lition's cuts and supporting wage freezes if they won the next general election.

It was noted that there was particular scope to develop the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition in the upcoming May elections. TUSC candidates will be standing in Liverpool and Birkenhead.

A finance appeal raised around £200. The aggregate meetings will continue on a quarterly basis.

Alec Price
Cheshire West Socialist Party

Greater Manchester

On 20 February Socialist Party activists from branches across Greater Manchester attended an aggregate meeting.

Those present heard Alec Price introduce a discussion on the Brit-

ish Perspectives 2012 congress document.

The discussion looked at the development of workers' struggle over the last year. This included key vic-

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Party meetings at

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tories against council cuts locally in which Socialist Party members played a key role.

All present stated that although the situation for the working class in Britain looked severe, socialist ideas would receive an increasingly favourable hearing in the period ahead.

Alex Davidson
Manchester Central Socialist Party

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SOCIALIST PARTY FIGHTING FUND

	£ target	£ received	January-March 2012				Deadline 30 March
South West	1,400	869	■	■	■	■	■
North West	1,200	603	■	■	■	■	■
East Midlands	1,550	758	■	■	■	■	■
Northern	600	282	■	■	■	■	■
Yorkshire	2,900	1,248	■	■	■	■	■
London	6,100	2,169	■	■	■	■	■
Eastern	1,200	396	■	■	■	■	■
Southern	1,200	394	■	■	■	■	■
Wales	2,300	691	■	■	■	■	■
West Midlands	2,100	546	■	■	■	■	■
South East	1,000	30	■	■	■	■	■
England & Wales	3,450	186	■	■	■	■	■
TOTAL	25,000	8,177	■	■	■	■	■

Romania: Protest movement topples the government

Victor Cosmin
Romania

In the middle of January, several countrywide protests stopped Romanian president Basescu's draconian healthcare 'reform' from being enacted.

After 28 days of protests, in temperatures of -20°C, the Romanian working class and youth stopped the inhuman healthcare reform of the ruling party (PDL) and brought down the government of prime minister Emil Boc and his ministers. Now it's time to go on to remove the president, and the rotten system he represents!

Privatisation

Up to a month ago, none of the members of the Romanian political elite would have predicted the social anger which their healthcare reform was about to unleash.

President Basescu was confident of success, having introduced privatisation programmes in all sectors of the Romanian economy, like his predecessors since the restoration of capitalism.

He decided to take a further "step forward" and follow suit in education and healthcare. Unfortunately for him, this time, events took a different path.

Neither last year's labour 'reforms', that created worse working conditions for people, nor the austerity measures that forced many working class people into dire poverty, triggered an explosion of nationwide protests. It was a single, albeit brutal and provocative reform, in healthcare. How can this be explained?

The Romanian working class had already been disgusted by the political circus of the last 20 years, when parties with so-called 'opposing ideologies' allied with each other only to obtain power, in a sea of corruption. Complemented by the impact of the austerity measures of 2011 and the new draconian laws of 2012, the anger finally exploded in the recent movement.

On 10 January 2012, the state sub-secretary of the healthcare ministry, Dr Raed Arafat, resigned from office because he was against the privatisation reform in the emergency healthcare system.

Specifically, the reform aimed 'only' to allow for private emergency systems to compete with the state-financed one. However, in Romania there is already a shortage of medical personnel, especially field doctors, who require years of training.

If the private sector entered emergency services, it could only have employed doctors from the state

sector, and step by step, the whole emergency system would be privatised. Workers and the poor of the country would have been left to die unless they could afford to pay for a trip in a private ambulance!

Since he was elected in 2004, the "Balkan Berlusconi", as Basescu was called a few times by the western media, has cut the wages of working people, established anti-worker labour laws, called the working people "lazy" and even "idiots" or "worms"!

Protests escalate

The protests continued, relatively peacefully, as thousands filled squares, even in smaller towns and provinces. As the 'opposition' Social Liberal Union (USL), a coalition of the Social Democratic Party (PSD) and National Liberal Party (PNL) tried to claim the protests for themselves, the people went even further, to criticise the whole political establishment, and in some cases, even demand 'a government of the people, by the people and for the people.'

Even the opposition was scared of the Romanian workers and youth now, and backed down from supporting the protests, as people began to turn their anger against them too.

In a country which had never known serious movements since the great miners' strike of 1999, the protests shook the thrones of the

whole political elite. The people in the squares realised that their enemy is not just the PDL and Basescu, but also the rest of the political elite, who sold our economy for personal profit since the 1990s.

At one stage, the USL even organised its own protests composed of party members, in order to divert the workers from the genuine struggle. The opposition parties infiltrated the protests with their youth wings, attempting to change the slogans of the movement and repeatedly stated on the TV that they would support the protests, as long as the people would stop demanding early elections and the resigning of president Basescu!

Countrywide the major slogans on protests were anti-PDL and anti-USL, along with banners expressing solidarity with workers in Greece or the 'Indignados' in Spain.

Boc resigns

The continuing protests led the prime minister to resign on 6 February. This is the clearest example yet in Europe of a protest movement bringing down a ruling government. This struggle shows that Romania is ready to enter the international struggle against austerity, the capitalist machine and the dictatorship of finance capital.

Protests have even grown in intensity, however, since the news has arrived that the new prime minister is Razvan Ungureanu, who worked as a secret service spy. Appointing such a man might be considered a move reminiscent of a military dictatorship, and could even further inflame the protest movement, especially after the cold season. The prime minister is gone, but the political apparatus is the same.

Real change

This is why the CWI proposes a real revolutionary direction which would benefit the Romanian people. The capitalists have three big parties in this country. The people need an alternative of their own!

The protests stopped a repressive capitalist law and have overthrown a government, but it is not enough! The protests must go on and be further organised around working

class demands including general strike action. This requires democratic, fighting trade unions to be built, and the current leaders, who were dragged late into only partial support for the movement, removed

The continuing protests led the prime minister to resign on 6 February. This is the clearest example yet in Europe of a protest movement bringing down a ruling government

and replaced with leaders accountable to the workers, on an average industrial wage.

The movement must continue to be directed against the entire political establishment. A mass working people's party, democratically controlled by a mass membership, could play a crucial role in providing the struggle with a viable alternative programme.

This government must be replaced with a genuine workers' government, which would, in the genuine traditions of democratic socialism and Marxism, immediately nationalise the banks under democratic control, kick out the IMF, invest in job creation, increase wages, and put all the big business and state enterprises under the control of working people through democratic committees and assemblies of workers and youth.

The real enemy is not just Basescu, and not even just the political elite, but also the capitalist economic system itself, which drives the whole world into a deep recession and then attempts to get the working class to pay for it. All workers must unite in worldwide solidarity to crush their common enemy.

A longer version of this article written by a school student participant in the movement can be read on socialistworld.net

The Committee for a Workers' International

The Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) is the socialist international organisation to which the Socialist Party is affiliated.

The CWI is organised in 45 countries and works to unite the working class and oppressed peoples against global capitalism and to fight for a socialist world.

For more details including CWI publications write to: CWI, PO Box 3688, London E11 1YE. email cwi@worldsoc.co.uk

www.socialistworld.net

The CWI website contains news, reports and analysis from around the world. Recent articles include:

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Kazakhstan: Defend workers' leaders Stop the repression

Manitain the protests

The trade union movement internationally has condemned threats to leading activists from the independent Kazakhstan trade union Zhanartu.

Bob Crow, RMT general secretary, wrote: "Events on 16 December 2011 in the city of Zhanaozen, when striking oil workers were massacred, shocked the trade union movement worldwide. In the wake of the strike, [Esenbek] Ukteshbayev and [Ainur] Kurmanov, have been on a prolonged tour of Russia. They believe that attempts are afoot to either arrest or abduct them and forcibly remove them to the territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan where inevitable arrest and imprisonment await them."

Danish trade union activist and reporter Agneta Persson said: "Any attempt to abduct Esenbek and Ainur, or arrest them – either on the territory of the Russian Federation or in Kazakhstan – will be condemned worldwide. If anything happens to these two workers' leaders, the Nazarbayev and Putin regimes will be held fully responsible."

In a joint statement, Irish Socialist Party TDs (MPs) Clare Daly and Joe Higgins, said: "We seek an assurance that Mr Ukteshbayev and Mr Kurmanov will not be subjected to harassment or to the continual threat of abduction or arrest."

An amendment, moved by Irish Socialist Party MEP Paul Murphy, in the European Parliament, condemning the repression in Kazakhstan and demanding the release of political prisoners was agreed..

Ben Robinson

● www.campaignkazakhstan.org to participate in the email campaign

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the Socialist postbag

Do you have something to say?

Send your news, views and criticism in not more than 150 words to Socialist Postbag, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD, or phone 020 8988 8771, email: editors@socialistparty.org.uk. We reserve the right to shorten letters. Don't forget to give your name, address and phone number. Confidentiality will be respected if requested.

Building a real....

While spending time recently in hospital, I heard the despair of those serving at the front line. Despair when colleagues are let go with little chance of replacement or of trying to do the best job possible with few resources. The bankers got bailouts over six times the NHS's yearly budget, keeping bosses in bonuses and salaries we can only dream of. Meanwhile we're told we're 'lucky' to be in work and must pay by accepting worse terms and conditions. Over a million young people under 25 are already out of work - we are already paying the price. The Labour Party merely says: "We would do the same if we were in power". Trade union leaders must be on drugs if they think Labour's going to start speaking for working class people. Labour was built by the trade unions - it's now time to drop Labour and build a new mass democratic workers' party to represent us.

Joe Young

...mass workers' party

"Voters will never forgive, or forget, the party that ruins our NHS," says Unison union general secretary Dave Prentis (Unison e-focus magazine). True, but that applies to Labour as well, Dave! Particularly when a Labour-run Welsh government is passing on Tory cuts, the highest cuts per head in the NHS in the UK.

Unison should stop forgiving Labour for this and its many other betrayals and instead back trade unionist and socialist candidates who will oppose all cuts in the NHS and all other public services.

Ronnie Job, Unison steward
(personal capacity)

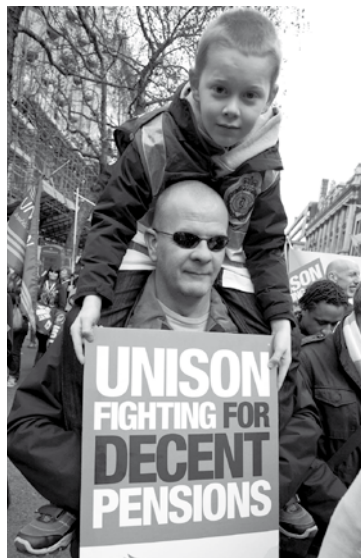
Life summary

Many years before his peerage, former Labour leader Neil Kinnock lived opposite my grandparents in Blackwood, South Wales. Once while chatting, my grandfather asked Kinnock if he was going to the upcoming Wales v South Africa rugby match in Cardiff. "Well", said Kinnock, "I'm going down, but not to the game, I'm joining an anti-apartheid demonstration outside." The next time they met, my grandfather asked him how the demo went. Kinnock replied that no one turned up so he threw his placard in the bin and went into the match!

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In my opinion this story sums up his entire political career better than anything else I've ever read or heard.

Scott Jones, Llanelli

**Uni insults workers**

Nottingham University has let the departments where staff took strike action on 30 November use the money not spent to create a 'hardship' fund for students. Emails were sent to students and staff (many of whom took strike action) saying that the 'money that was saved' on wages that day was available to students.

I think this is an attempt to discredit the action and insults staff. The University ordinarily takes no notice of its poorer students' 'hardship'. The food on site is run by an expensive private company and all halls on campus are all-catered, starting at nearly £4,000 for a shared room!

Nottingham University needs to do a lot more than start a 'hardship' fund consisting of one day's pay from staff.

Helen Pattison

Failing 'experiment'

There has been a lot of discussion about Tory plans to make schools become academies with all the lack of democratic control, domination by big business sponsors and curriculum set by the religious right that goes with it. Toby Young, an advocate of academies who is setting one up in London, described them recently as an "experiment".

If I remember rightly, the thing about experiments is that sometimes they work and sometimes they don't. Should risks like this be taken with education of children?

Pete, Worcester

Privatised fines

Local authorities are now resorting to desperate measures to raise money courtesy of the "Community Safety Accreditation Scheme". Under this scheme councils and even private security companies can use authorised personnel to impose fines with a demand for immediate payment on unsuspecting citizens. Offences can include disorder, dog fouling, and littering. Even private vehicles can be stopped. Rank and file police officers have expressed concern as it is now seen as a third tier of policing, or more cynically "policing on the cheap".

Naturally private security companies now see this as a legal means to earn easy money.

Lin Black, Swansea

Fans not financiers should run football

Dave Maples

Professional football in Britain is stumbling from one crisis to another. After repeatedly failing to deal with racism, attention returns to financial malpractice. In one week, two of Britain's most famous clubs, Portsmouth and Glasgow Rangers have gone into administration.

In both cases short-term club owners have taken a cavalier attitude to their responsibilities to run the clubs in a financially prudent manner, neglecting to make adequate provision to pay tax and other liabilities. The victims, again, are the communities the clubs are based in, the supporters, charities such as St John's Ambulance and small businesses.

In the premier league era, attention has focussed on some players' inflated wages. The real story however has been off the pitch.

Clubs in Britain have been attractive for speculators and their retinue of agents, accountants, solicitors and other advisers, looking for windfall profits if they can get them into a higher league or European competition. And speculators find that the Football League welcomes them with open arms.

As the Football League explained: "At all times following its takeover of Portsmouth, Convers Sports Initiatives (CSI, the owners), complied with the requirements of the owners' and directors' test as set out

in the regulations of the Football League".

The League failed to mention that its 'test' is largely self-certification and the absence of any fraud convictions. They don't say that the majority shareholder of CSI was prevented by the Financial Services Authority from gaining a UK banking licence. If speculators' plans don't work out, taxpayers and the local community pick up the losses.

Many people have an obsessive interest in football. With the increasing harshness of everyday life for workers and young people, this is no surprise. Football should provide some light relief.

Portsmouth and Rangers fans should demand genuine open inquiries into financial mismanagement. These inquiries should primarily involve supporters, non-playing staff, players' representatives and elected local authorities. They need to expose how the clubs have been run.

The football leagues should also be exposed as a cabal of owners rather than organisations with football's wider interests at heart.

Football should be controlled by the fans. This will require building on the achievements of fans-owned clubs such as AFC Wimbledon and FC United of Manchester.

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Should socialists support the proposed HS2 rail link?

The debate on the HS2 high speed rail in the Socialist 703 continues with arguments for and against the scheme.

For

I believe we should gear transport policies towards public and not private transport. We are not in an either/or situation on investment. The government should draw up a 'needs budget' for public transport investment which would cater for high speed as well as conventional rail.

Of course if the big civil engineering contractors and their profit-seeking suppliers were nationalised the cost would diminish. An integrated socialist transport network would integrate high speed rail into the rest of the network; there is no need to treat it as a separate company or to ring-fence its accounts.

We need to answer genuine concerns, but we should welcome HS2 as a major project that can deliver environmental benefits and create jobs. We should campaign for the whole industry to be nationalised under workers' control and management to ensure that fares, including those on HS2, are affordable and that those living near the line aren't blighted by noise.

Clive Walder

Against

In the debate we all agreed on the need for an efficient nationalised transport system to benefit working people and that, in the abstract, we support high speed rail systems. I argued we should oppose proposals to spend £32 billion to build HS2.

This scheme is supported by the same multinational train operations and building firms that try to drive down their workforce's wages and conditions. The service is designed for business travellers. Ticket prices will be very high and only people in London or Birmingham will be able to use it. HS2 will do nothing to reduce the overcrowding experienced by most people and won't reduce ticket prices.

The £32 billion will create jobs. But wouldn't this be better spent on keeping existing jobs that rail companies want to cut, and to develop and create jobs by developing the existing infrastructure and increasing its capacity?

The Stop HS2 Campaign will develop political alternatives - they say they won't vote for parties that support the scheme. Socialists should oppose HS2 otherwise right-wing groupings will be able to take advantage of the hostility and leave working people with no alternative.

Steve Bell

Radio Review - My generation

BBC Radio 4 airs a 45-minute play every weekday, giving a first break to many newer writers. My Generation, centred around one family over four decades of the protest movement, is a recent example of excellent radio drama.

Writer Alice Nutter, once part of the band Chumbawumba, uses her own experiences to bring to life four periods or events in our rich heritage of protest.

Starting in Leeds with the 1970s feminist movement against the backdrop of the Yorkshire Ripper

prowling the streets, progressing through the 1980s miners' strike, the rave culture of the early part of the 1990s and finishing with the Occupy movement, My Generation provokes memories, both good and bad.

What sets it apart from many commentators' views of the past decades is that it doesn't conclude that protest is just a folly of youth or pointless. As you'd expect from Alice Nutter's own life, the politics are more anarchist than Marxist and the lifestyles of communes and 'direct action' are removed from the

experiences of most readers of the Socialist. But this doesn't detract from a good story well told.

Indeed, some of the arguments against such stunts as firebombing a sex shop feature as strongly as those in favour. The scenes at Orgreave during the miners' strike highlight powerfully the brutal police assault on pickets and supporters.

With an excellent musical score and strong performances, My Generation is well worth a listen if you can catch it on BBC iPlayer.

Dave Gorton

Fight homophobic Tory attacks

The Con-Dems' all-out assault on public services hits everyone - but some groups in society suffer disproportionately. Lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) people are often hit badly by cuts in public services and are more likely to end up homeless.

Bullying and physical attacks on LGBT people are rising. Homophobic rhetoric from Tories, at the moment focussed on the issue of marriage, is a contributing factor. Here two Socialist Party members look at the issue.



The fight for LGBT liberation is the fight for socialism photo Paul Mattsson

Peter Bloom

According to a report in the Independent (17 January 2012) over 100 Conservative backbenchers threaten to vote against the coalition's plans to introduce same-sex marriage. Success for this revolt would be a victory for the forces of prejudice and a threat to our right to live as we choose.

Is David Cameron's apparent reversal of his homophobic stances when in opposition a positive sign? Then he voted against the repeal of "Section 28" which banned the alleged "promotion of homosexuality" by local councils. He also opposed lesbians and gay men being allowed to adopt children and wanted to prevent lesbians from receiving in vitro fertilisation treatment.

Now, Cameron aims to modernise marriage for traditionalist reasons. "I support gay marriage because I am a Conservative", he declares. He is also trying to "modernise" the Tories and ditch their image as the nasty party.

Because Labour MPs will support same-sex marriage it is unlikely that

the Tory rebels would win a vote in parliament, but by promoting homophobia they will encourage the blaming of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and trans (LGBT) people for society's problems.

The Thatcher government introduced section 28 in the 1980s to divert attention from cuts. Capitalist politicians use prejudice and scapegoat minorities to divide workers among themselves, aiming to cut across any fightback against their attacks.

Tory right wing

Many Tory right-wingers oppose the coalition deal with the Lib Dems, who support same-sex marriage. They see Cameron as betraying the Thatcherite heritage, including Section 28, and will use homophobia to drive a wedge through the coalition and, they hope, isolate the Tory modernisers around Cameron from the party base.

All varieties of Tory - also Labour and the Lib Dems - agree on promoting their version of "family values" as cover for attacks. They think that family members should take over all caring roles, without pay or

benefits, as cuts and privatisation eat away at provision for the old, sick and disabled. Cameron's desire to modernise marriage is in part intended to co-opt LGBT people into this way of thinking.

Socialists support marriage equality. Same-sex couples should be able to get married and couples of different sexes should have access to civil partnerships. We should be able to live as we choose, free from economic pressures and social prejudices. Cameron does not share this vision.

Most people, LGBT or not, must fight simply to survive in this time of austerity. Cameron promotes 'equality' while simultaneously championing cuts that widen the gap between rich and poor.

Genuine equality can only come with the democratic, socialist transformation of society. Only in a classless society, where individuals are free from economic fears, can true individuality flourish.

Socialists work for real 'modernisation' and not capitalist 'modernisation'. The fight for LGBT liberation is the struggle for the socialist transformation of our society.

Protesting against Sentamu

Ben Mayor

On 19 February the 'Coalition for Marriage' was launched, with the aim of attacking same-sex marriage. But they face growing opposition.

Up to 150 people, including Socialist Party members, gathered on 31 January outside York cathedral, carrying banners proclaiming "Equal Marriage for All."

We were protesting at outrageous remarks by John Sentamu, Archbishop of York, who said marriage

should be between men and women and that "the government should not overturn centuries of tradition by legalising gay marriage".

Some see Sentamu as 'progressive' because he talks about social deprivation and human trafficking, but he is part of a wealthy institution, the Church of England, which is entrenched within the capitalist political and economic system. Sentamu gives voice to reactionary ideas that will be used against LGBT people leading to a rise in prejudice and homophobic and transphobic

hate crimes.

Whether individuals believe in the institution of marriage or not, socialists support the democratic right to choose to marry regardless of gender and sexual orientation.

This is part of the overall struggle of workers, including working class LGBT people, organising to fight discrimination in workplaces and communities.

The fight for LGBT rights is part of the fight against the cuts and a system that dehumanises people in a race to the bottom in wages and living standards.

Organising against the cuts

The Greenwich Unite 2050 branch, which represents many workers in south east London, has grown recently - not just in numbers of new recruits, but also qualitatively. Socialist Party members have been in the leadership of the branch since April 2011 and a number of important concessions have already been won.

Increased pay has been won for low-paid library and call centre workers by organising those workers to stand together and take action collectively.

Attempts to drastically cut the pay and conditions of cleaners, catering workers and drivers in passenger services have been forced back. Negotiations are taking place which may even mean a pay increase for some in this group.

When a small group of workers were handed compulsory redundancy notices, the branch campaigned against these. As a result, the amount of redundancy pay offered was doubled.

After a long battle with the council, on 16 February the branch held its first meeting on council premises with time off agreed for members to attend. The council had originally withdrawn this authorisation when the new branch leadership was elected. The 160 chairs that were set out were not enough. Many had to stand in the council's largest hall.

previously led the Unison branch made the difficult and painful decision to begin organising in Unite, while continuing to support Unison activists fighting to transform their union into an active campaigning body.

Had the move not been made, pay claims would not have been won, pay and conditions would not have been protected and workers facing disciplinary proceedings would have been sacked.

Unison's regional full-time officials now occupy the Greenwich Unison branch which is still in 'administration'. Over 1,000 members have left and neither branch meetings nor elections take place.

These unelected officials failed to prevent the privatisation of the council adventure and play service. They did not campaign, just writing a puny letter to councillors. When the unelected branch secretary and a regional Unison employee turned up to a council meeting to hand the letters to councillors, they missed the councillors and leafleted the Unite members instead!

There are major battles ahead in Greenwich. The council, encouraged by the witch-hunt in Unison, has taken an anti-union stance. Socialist Party member Onay Kasab has been elected as branch secretary of Unite. But, following his refusal to accept an offer of £32,000 to leave, the council has now decided to privatise the service where he works.

Not content with acting as austerity administrators for this viciously anti-working class Con-Dem government, Labour councillors will also viciously attack the trade unions, including privatising whole services and inflicting a collective punishment on other workers.

Unite members need to campaign against all cuts and to defend their fighting branch leadership. It is no accident that as well as attacking Onay's position, the council are targeting libraries. The parks department could be next - both departments are led by fighting socialists.

The fight put up by the library workers to defend pay, conditions and the service gives employers the best answer - we will organise and we will fight!

Libraries campaign

The meeting heard about the magnificent libraries campaign. Over 1,300 members of the public have signed the Unite survey cards opposing the transfer. Nearly 500 have signed petitions. Now, following a council decision to press ahead with the transfer despite the huge opposition, Unite members in libraries are preparing for strike action and a real victory is possible.

Many of the workers who are now activists in the Unite branch were previously members of Unison. However, the actions of the right-wing, witch-hunting leadership of Unison made it impossible for Greenwich Unison to defend its members effectively.

Socialist Party members who



Marching through Greenwich against the cuts photo the Socialist

Pensions strike 28 March



Tell the government... “NO DEAL!”

Martin Powell-Davies

NUT national executive committee (personal capacity)

The Con-Dems' shabby deal on public sector pensions is little different to what was on offer on 30 November, when two million workers took strike action.

The government still expects workers to pay more, work longer and get less. This is why civil servants in the PCS, teachers in the NUT and lecturers in the UCU unions are being consulted on plans for further strike action, starting with another national strike on 28 March.

There is no reason for workers to pay in more and then get less in return. For example, the NUT calculates that £46 billion more has been paid into the teachers' pension

scheme than has been paid out.

This 'deal' is an unfair tax on workers to pay for the government's bank bailouts while £120 billion of tax continues to go unpaid by the very rich.

If the Con-Dems are successful with this attack on pensions, it will be followed by further attacks on pay, pensions and working conditions.

Young workers have got the most to lose. They face a lifetime of high contributions but then won't be able to claim the full pension that they have paid so much for until they are at least 68.

Some young workers will just drop out of the schemes altogether, guaranteeing poverty in old age. That's a threat to everyone. If too many stop paying in, the pension schemes would really be in trouble. Then they'll demand even higher contributions!

The government's attacks don't just affect public sector workers. They have acted as a signal to big business to make further attacks on private sector pensions.

Unilever, where workers have already started a programme of strike action, Shell and Ford have all ended their final salary pension schemes despite all increasing their profits. There is, therefore, the potential for public and private sector unions to coordinate action over pensions.

Support further action

The threat of action last November forced some minor concessions out of this government. With continued action, public sector workers can win further gains. This is why PCS, NUT and UCU members should vote yes in the consultation to continue campaigning to save

pensions and yes to further strike action, starting with 28 March.

They could be joined by the Northern Ireland Public Sector Alliance (Nipsa), Scottish teaching unions EIS and SSTA, the Fire Brigades Union and sections of Unite, who have also rejected the

pensions offer.

The government intends to start increasing pension contributions from April, but the changes don't come fully into effect until 2015. Public and private sector workers' action can still force the government into retreat.

Pensions minister says: 'Take a break'

Lib Dem pensions minister Steve Webb wants companies to offer 'defined ambition' pensions.

Instead of being regulated like final salary schemes, bosses could offer 'reassurance' to workers over pensions, but have 'flexibility' for stock market fluctuations or if workers live too long!

Many employers went on

'pensions holidays' during the booms of the 1990s, to boost their profits. The 2001 stock market crash then left many pension funds in deficit.

Shell, which recently ended its final salary pension scheme, took a 'contributions break' as late as October 2007.

It seems the minister's real reassurance is for big businesses that cut workers' pensions.

What we stand for

The Socialist Party fights for socialism – a democratic society run for the needs of all and not the profits of a few. We also oppose every cut, fighting in our day-to-day campaigning for every possible improvement for working class people. The organised working class has the potential power to stop the cuts and transform society.

As capitalism dominates the globe, the struggle for genuine socialism must be international. The Socialist Party is part of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), a socialist international that organises in over 40 countries.

Our demands include:

PUBLIC SERVICES

- No to ALL cuts in jobs, public services and benefits. Defend our pensions.
- No to privatisation and the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). Renationalise all privatised utilities and services, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need.
- Fully fund all services and run them under accountable, democratic committees that include representatives of service workers and users.
- Free, publicly run, good quality education,

available to all at any age. Abolish university tuition fees now and introduce a living grant. No to academies and 'Free schools'!

- A socialist NHS to provide for everyone's health needs – free at the point of use and under democratic control. Kick out private contractors!
- Keep council housing publicly owned. For a massive building programme of publicly owned housing, on an environmentally sustainable basis, to provide good quality homes with low rents.

WORK AND INCOME

- Trade union struggle to increase the minimum wage to £8 an hour without exemptions as an immediate step towards £10 an hour. For an annual increase in the minimum wage linked to average earnings.
- All workers, including part-timers, temps, casual and migrant workers to have trade union rates of pay, employment protection, and sickness and holiday rights from day one of employment.
- An immediate 50% increase in the state retirement pension, as a step towards a living pension. Reinstating the link with inflation now.
- Reject 'Workfare'. For the right to decent benefits, education, training, or a job, without compulsion.
- Scrap the anti-trade union laws! For fighting

trade unions, democratically controlled by their members. Full-time union officials to be regularly elected and receive no more than a worker's wage. Support the National Shop Stewards Network.

- A maximum 35-hour week with no loss of pay.

ENVIRONMENT

- Major research and investment into replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy and into ending the problems of early obsolescence and unrecycled waste.
- Public ownership of the energy generating industries. No to nuclear power. No to Trident.
- A democratically planned, low fare, publicly-owned transport system, as part of an overall plan against environmental pollution.

RIGHTS

- Oppose discrimination on the grounds of race, sex, disability, sexuality, age, and all other forms of prejudice.
- Repeal all laws that trample over civil liberties. For the right to protest! End police harassment.
- Defend abortion rights. For a woman's right to choose when and whether to have children.
- For the right to asylum. No to racist immigration laws.

NEW WORKERS' PARTY

- For a new mass workers' party drawing together workers, young people and activists from workplace, community, environmental and anti-war campaigns, to provide a fighting, political alternative to the pro-big business parties.
- Trade unions to disaffiliate from the Labour Party now and aid the building of a new workers' party! Support the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition as an important step towards this.

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

- No to imperialist wars and occupations. Withdraw the troops immediately from Afghanistan!
- Tax the super-rich! For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and the banking system that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working class control and management. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need.
- A democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, and in a way that safeguards the environment.
- No to the bosses' neoliberal European Union! For a socialist Europe and a socialist world!