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On 28 March:

STRIKE BACK AGAINST THE CON-DEMS



Mass united trade union action can stop cuts

Martin Powell-Davies
National Union of Teachers
executive (personal capacity)

We have the strength to defeat the coalition's multi-billion pound pensions robbery; just look at recent victories achieved with much smaller forces than the alliance of trade unions who are preparing strike action on 28 March.

Trade unionists are among the many people angry at the blatant use of 'workfare' by big business to coerce the jobless into unpaid labour instead of properly paid work and genuine training. Yet the protests over the last few weeks have forced company after company to withdraw, leaving the government scheme in tatters.

Youth Fight for Jobs - which organised the 330 mile Jarrow to London march for jobs last year - is one of the campaign groups

that have helped publicise the issue, organising protest pickets and occupations of those mega-profitable retail giants (see page 5 for more on workfare protests).

Workers' victory

There has also been a significant trade union victory scored by construction workers after six months of protests, unofficial walkouts and a threatened strike. This defeated the attempts by the 'Dirty 7' elec-

trical contractors to impose the Besna contract which would have cut electricians' and other skilled construction workers' wages by up to 35%.

Just think what we can do with a strike on 28 March of trade union members in NUT, UCU, PCS, EIS, SSTA, Nipsa - and more. Even the doctors' organisation - the BMA - is threatening action now!

It's no wonder - the government still wants us to pay more, work longer and get less. If these plans go

through teachers, for example, will be losing a day's pay every single month in extra contributions. And if we back down from action it will give the government confidence to press ahead with all their other attacks too. But with more action we can stop them!

So let's give a loud and confident YES to continuing the campaign and YES to further strike action on 28 March and beyond!



PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD • telephone: 020 8988 8777 • email: info@socialistparty.org.uk

Trade unions must build mass party

In January Labour leader Ed Miliband announced that a Labour government could not guarantee to reverse any cuts and would maintain the public sector pay freeze.

In response, Unite the Union leader Len McCluskey asked: "Where does this leave the half a million people who joined the TUC's march for an alternative last year, and the half of the country at least who are against the cuts? Disenfranchised."

He is right: in the face of these cuts the working class has no mass political voice. But the hope that Len McCluskey expresses that Labour can be transformed into a fighting force, a voice of the working class, is a forlorn one.

The Labour leadership never loses an opportunity to stress that there is no alternative to cuts. For example, Maria Eagle, shadow transport secretary, has announced that Labour would carry out £6 billion in transport cuts.

Even Ken Livingstone, Labour's candidate for mayor, still trying to maintain his position as a radical with a welcome pledge to cut fares and bring back EMA student payments, has come out in support of Miliband's statement on cuts and the pay freeze. Revealingly, while 68% of Londoners support Livingstone's low fares pledge, only 44% believe he will actually carry it out.

Up and down the country Labour councils have forced through cuts budgets, stripping away hundreds of jobs, closing libraries, shutting down young people's, elderly and women's services, and cutting pay.

Clear programme

A serious campaign to reclaim Labour would require the mobilisation of thousands of trade union members, with a clear programme of demands to put on the Labour leadership. These should include, for example, scrapping the anti-trade union laws and restoring the EMA for all students and all the council cuts.

It would require rebuilding the shut-down democratic structures so a leadership on a fighting programme could be elected. But such a campaign is not being conducted.

The Socialist Party believes that the might of the union movement should be mobilised to forge a political voice, not to try to change Labour, but to fight for a new mass party of the working class.

The Socialist Party has, since the start of 2010, worked alongside leading figures in the transport union RMT and others in the formation of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC).

Serious approach

Unfortunately one of the barriers to the development of an alternative, often held up by some defenders of Labour and others, is the 'failed attempts' of the Socialist Labour Party and Socialist Alliance in the 1990s and Respect in the 2000s. The character of each of these organisations and the reasons for their demise vary.

The main point, however, is that they did not develop as mass organisations that were based on serious forces of the working class.

Whenever the possibility of a trade union and socialist challenge is raised in union meetings it is met with enthusiasm – as one teacher said in a recent meeting: "it's about time trade unionists stood in elections".

This is the significance of TUSC's impressive list in London for the Greater London Assembly elections in May 2012. The importance of this list lies in the serious support from the London regions of the RMT and Fire Brigades Union, and also the support within the structures of the POA prison officers' union. This is not an electoral challenge which these union regions are passively supporting – this is their election campaign.

The lead candidate on the list is RMT president Alex Gordon and he and the leading members of other unions – standing at this stage in a personal capacity – such as in the

teachers' union NUT, civil servants' PCS and public sector Unison, themselves represent thousands of people. Hundreds of trade unionists from across several trade unions, including in those affiliated to Labour such as Unison and Unite, have signed the petition supporting a trade union-based anti-cuts electoral challenge.

Opportunity

As the trade union support shows TUSC is not a list of individuals, or simply of left activists, although the Socialist Party has been a key player since TUSC's inception, and the list does include members of both the Socialist Party and the Socialist Workers Party.

The Socialist Party hopes that the TUSC challenge in this election could be a step towards a new mass workers' party. It could increase the pressure on the leadership of the affiliated unions to break the link with Labour. It can also have an effect in non-affiliated unions to encourage them to not only support a political alternative but to stand candidates themselves.

What we hope for is not just a 'left unity project' but something much more significant: the active mobilisation of the organised working class on the political plane. The trade unions are mass organisations, with over 6.5 million members. They have the power to bring society to a standstill. A glimpse of this power was seen in the great events of 2011 – the 26 March TUC demo, the 30 June teachers', lecturers' and civil service strike, and the 30 November public sector strike.

There is a view that the wave of direct action protests currently taking place against workfare, the Occupy movement, and the development of groups such as UK Uncut, all show that there are 'new' methods of campaigning.

Understandably, given the role of some right-wing union leaders in holding back a fight against the cuts in councils, and attempting to call off the pensions battle, there can be a tendency for some to think that such

actions are more effective than mass trade union action.

The Socialist Party supports many of the acts of civil disobedience, or 'direct action'. Bold actions by small groups of people can have a big effect in highlighting issues, garnering widespread support, applying pressure, building confidence. Youth Fight for Jobs has organised brilliant, imaginative anti-workfare protests such as the 'Westfield Workhouse' walkabout.

But it would be wrong to conclude that civil disobedience or 'direct action' is needed instead of mass working class trade union action. Union leaders should not franchise out the fight against the cuts to small groups.

An illustration of the power of workers once organised is the magnificent victory won by electricians, defeating massive construction companies who wanted to inflict a devastating 35% pay cut, through a gritty six-month campaign of weekly protests at construction sites.

The campaign involved the 'direct action' of blocking gates, invading sites and company offices, impromptu demonstrations and occupying roads. These actions pushed the Unite leadership to take the dispute seriously. But it was the serious threat of national strike action that caused first Balfour Beatty and then the rest of the companies, to collapse like a house of cards.

This is the potential role of the working class, organised in trade unions, in fighting the cuts. This power needs a political expression that can give a voice to working class people, articulate a programme that meets their needs, and fight for its implementation.

The TUSC election campaign provides an opportunity to engage a new layer of workers and trade unionists around the country, hopefully inspired by the list in London, either as candidates or as campaigners in the election, as a step down this road.

If you want to stand as a TUSC candidate in local elections in your area this May, check out the TUSC website at <http://www.tusc.org.uk/candidates.php>

Thanks, but no thanks!

Coventry council's Labour leader John Mutton invited Socialist Party councillor Dave Nellist to become the city's deputy Lord Mayor in May, which would normally lead on to the position of Lord Mayor in 2013. In this letter Dave explains why he said: "Thanks but no thanks."

Dear John,

I have taken soundings from a number of local people, and other Socialist Party supporters, and I don't feel, at this time, able to accept.

I appreciate the honour of the ceremonial role and the greater contact over two years, with people young and old, in the city. I would enjoy mayoral visits to everyone from schools to care homes, celebrating with local people. I would take seriously being the voice of sympathy for the city in commiserating with those who have suffered loss.

Some of your colleagues urged me to accept, saying I could bring a radical edge... to the job of Lord Mayor. And I have been tempted.

The first thing I thought I could have done, for example, would have been to invite all those in the queue for food parcels on a Sunday morning by the Swanswell to eat at the expense of the Lord Mayor's hospitality budget that day (and pay for it by cancelling all the normal municipal dinners and attendances at other Lord Mayor's dos across the region).

You see, I think we urgently need to review the council's role and responsibility in the matter of dealing with growing austerity, not leave it to the generosity of individuals or of faith organisations.

But... it's the limitations that worry me, and tip the balance. Since Labour changed Coventry council's constitution ten years ago the Lord Mayor is required, when votes in council meetings are tied, to exercise their casting vote for the majority party (which at the moment would require me to support your programme, and could mean me being obliged to vote for cuts).

The terms of the posts of deputy Lord Mayor and Lord Mayor require political neutrality, and would force me (at the moment the only consistent critic in the chamber against the adoption of the government's austerity plan) to be silent for two years whilst those cuts are inflicted. I could not in all conscience do that.

For that overriding reason I have decided to decline your offer to propose me as deputy Lord Mayor for 2012/13 [...] Once again, thank you for the invitation.

Councillor Dave Nellist

PS. The Coventry Telegraph commented: "It is not the first time Councillor Nellist has chosen principle over personal privilege. As an MP he refused to accept more than the average worker's wage – considerably less than the salary to which he was entitled."

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

Socialism Today

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Rob Williams reports

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Philip Stott assesses the situation



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NHS: Axe Lansley's bill!

Chris Moore
Gloucestershire Socialist Party

A Guardian/ICM poll has shown that most people don't want it. The Royal College of Nursing (RCN), other health colleges, health unions Unison, Unite and GMB, academics and nine out of ten hospital doctors all oppose it. Now the British Medical Association (BMA) has released its strongest criticism yet of the Health and Social Care Bill.

In a letter to 22,000 family doctors, the BMA urged them to take an "active stand" against the "ruinous" reform that "will be irreversibly damaging to the NHS as a public service, converting it into a competitive marketplace... this will lead to the privatisation of commissioning and is likely to exacerbate health inequalities".

And the president of the Medical Practitioners Union, Dr Ron Singer, chased Andrew Lansley through the Royal Free Hospital in Hampstead, London, after the health minister refused to speak to protesters.

The Tories claim that handing 80% of the health budget over to GPs is about extending local control. But a leaked NHS report last year explained that private companies will direct the commissioning. The bill is about removing all barriers to privatisation.

Most hospitals will move to Foundation Trust status, increasing the scramble for resources between hospitals and allowing up to 49% private patients. If local health trusts can't afford to provide healthcare, patients either have to go private or go without.

Chilvers McCrea stopped providing GP services in Southend because they were not making enough money. Care UK and Assura have the largest number of contracts to run sizable health centres. But in 2010 Assura sold off its medical



Carlisle Socialist Party and anti-cuts campaigners protested outside the office of the local Tory MP, John Stevenson, to hand in a petition signed by over 500 people against the Health and Social Care Bill

services business to Virgin after it failed to make a big enough profit.

A report in 2011 by auditor KPMG predicted many growth opportunities in the UK health sector. KPMG has links to British billionaire private healthcare boss Mike Parsons who secretly met David Cameron for a second time just before his election as prime minister.

Parsons, whose nursing home empire is likely to expand if Tory health plans go through, has said: "all the reforms and changes with the NHS are making it easier to recruit nurses from the NHS now." He's a committed supporter of Cameron's Big Society, praising the US system where levels of volunteering are five or six times the British level. But he's no fan of health and safety restrictions and says "our community has been let down by the statutory sector".

Yet a Castlebeck (where Parsons is on the board) home near Bristol for vulnerable people with autism and Asperger's Syndrome had a culture of routine abuse and humiliation by

poorly trained and badly paid staff.

The Southern Cross Care Homes 2011 financial crash left 31,000 elderly residents potentially homeless. Cameron said alternative accommodation would be found, including with companies like Barchester Healthcare, owned by Parsons. A case of out of the frying pan and into the fire. Transferring the NHS into the hands of private profit hungry companies is creating a nightmare scenario.

Opposition to the Health and Social Care Bill is huge, but it must not be left in the hands of MPs, Lords and professional bodies.

Labour opposes the bill but in government opened the NHS to further privatisation; introducing foundation hospitals, Private Finance Initiatives and private Independent Treatment Centres.

The unions must organise decisive mass action to defend the NHS, including balloting for industrial action and organising and building for a national Saturday demonstration.

Cops and big business robbers

Derek McMillan

The writer Neville Shute advised a young American from the southern states that the safest place to evade racial attack and abuse in England was a police station. This was never a very convincing assertion but with the G4S 'security' company becoming the first firm to run a police station it may become even less so.

G4S has controversially been given a £200 million deal to build and run a police station in Lincolnshire. But what are its credentials for this contract?

Jimmy Mubenga was "restrained" by G4S officers while being deported in

2010 and died as a result. Gareth Myett, a 15 year old, died in G4S custody in 2004.

Even the Home Office seems to have noticed a problem here and reportedly "warned" G4S about their dangerous methods of restraint. However the warning must have fallen on deaf ears because it came in 2006, between the two deaths.

Campaigners in Australia believe G4S should stand trial for murder over the death of an aboriginal elder, Mr Ward. Instead the G4S employee responsible was merely fined. Mr Ward died while being transported in a stifling prison van at a temperature of 55 degrees. You can see how

G4S puts health and safety at the top of their agenda!

Privatisation of policing is even opposed by the Police Federation who have not previously been in the forefront of campaigns against deaths in custody. They can see that a privatised police service "may not have the same level of public duty and dedication as current police force staff".

Privatised police stations, schools and hospitals. The pattern is clear enough. Unfortunately the coalition points to the Labour

Party as the originators of their most odious policies. A party of the working class would oppose this.

See more about G4S on page 8

Police bounty

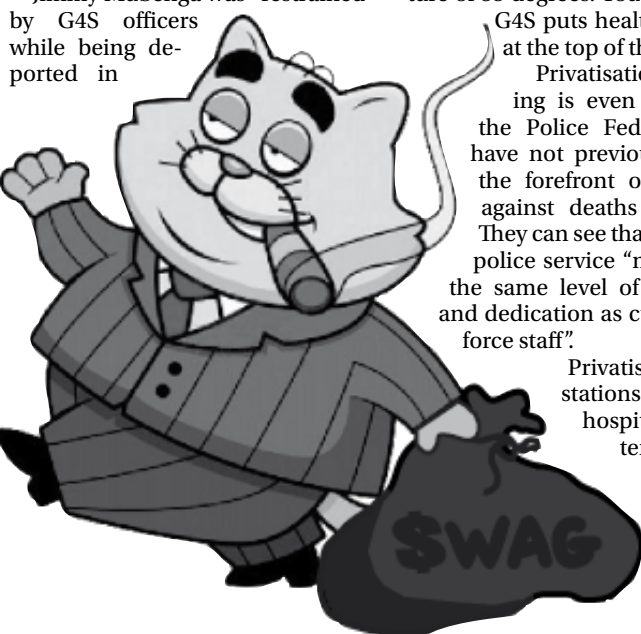
The £200 million contract G4S has for a Lincolnshire police station now looks like just small change compared to the police bounty now on offer to big business.

As reported in the Guardian, the Con-Dems are looking to outsource all parts of the police that "can be legally delegated to the private sector". Almost everything but the power to arrest could be privatised.

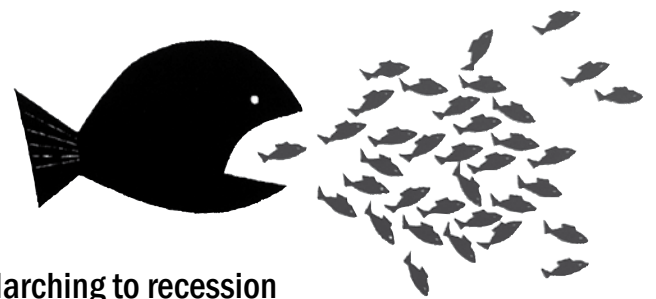
West Midlands and Surrey police have already invited firms, including G4S, to bid for a contract worth £1.5 billion, which could rise to £4.5 billion if other police forces join in.

Parts of some police forces - 'backroom' and 'front desk' services - have already been outsourced. Avon and Somerset police's contract with IBM was such a disaster parts of it were taken back in house.

The Home Office has defied the Freedom of Information Act by refusing to publish the 'business case' for police privatisation.



Them...



Marching to recession

Remember chancellor George Osborne's prediction of a "march of the makers" where manufacturing would bring growth back to Britain's economy?

Well a GMB study has shown an average of 3,400 manufacturing jobs are being lost every week.

But this is not due to a lack of cash - big business is sitting on £130 billion as it sees no 'worthwhile' opportunities to make big enough profits. Job-shedding companies should be taken out of the hands of the fat cats and nationalised to be put under democratic control to allow job creation to build socially useful products.

es at Britain's biggest home lender Halifax happy? Of course not!

Halifax has increased its mortgage interest rates, costing 850,000 customers an average of £16 a month. Other lenders are likely to follow. Maybe the increase is to help pay the new boss of Halifax's parent company, Lloyds Banking Group. George Culmer has been rewarded £1.9 million in shares as a 'golden hello' although he doesn't have to start work for two months.

Money for nothing?

Meanwhile, Barclays chief John Varley has been given a 'golden goodbye' of £4 million.

However, a study by Paterson Associates has shown that chief executive pay has little relation to performance, with Barclays being a prime example. For every £1 paid to Varley from 2006

Road to recovery?

Think that spending cuts and public sector job losses are strangling the chance of any recovery?

The Institute of Directors doesn't think so. Not content with a 48% increase in FTSE 100 directors' income, it has called on the government to make deeper cuts while reducing taxes on rich individuals and companies combined with reforms (ie attacks) on workers' rights.

Surely that has nothing to do with the Institute of Directors representing, er, rich individuals and companies?

48%
increase in FTSE
100 directors' pay

to 2010, shares declined £10,787. The Financial Times has pointed out that "corporate spinners" would say that share prices were beyond control of executives during the financial crisis: "Which is an unintentionally hilarious stance. Either these people are brilliant folk worth many millions of pounds, or they are just guys at the mercy of the markets, same as anyone." Quite.

Rough sleepers increase...

The number of rough sleepers in Britain has increased by 23% in one year. A study by Homeless Link has shown

23%
increase in rough
sleepers

that 75 homelessness projects closed in the last year while 2,206 accommodation spaces were cut in the last two years. 55% of homelessness projects said they have been told by councils to expect further cuts.

Lords 'celebrate' IWD

For International Women's Day Tory baroness Verma has put a motion to Lords stating: "...in the last year alone, there were over one million female victims of domestic abuse in England and Wales... International Women's Day remains an extremely important date."

So what has her government done? The head of Refuge has said the domestic violence charity could close this summer due to 50% funding cuts.

Annual funding from councils to organisations working with victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse fell from £7.8 million in 2010-11 to £5.4 million for 2011-12.

In 2011 an average of 230 women were turned away by Women's Aid each day due to lack of refuge space.

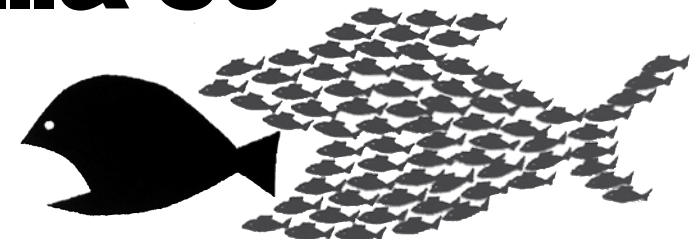
See more on pages 6 and 7

...as home prices rise

Average house prices in London have hit an all time high of £381,305, while London rent prices have gone up another 0.8% in one month alone.

Think that's enough to keep the boss-

...& Us



What we heard

At a Coventry Socialist Party stall, a worker from the city's Hillfields area said he was going to join the party and donated £10, inspired by former Socialist Party councillor Rob Windsor, who died in January. See www.socialistparty.org.uk and www.coventrysocialist.org.uk for tributes to Rob.

The blacklisting battle continues

Hugh Caffrey
Manchester Socialist Party

Swingeing 35% pay cuts were beaten by construction electricians' mass protest and industrial action, but the threat of blacklisting remains.

Defending trade union activists against victimisation is part and parcel of the fight for direct employment. The construction bosses must be made to actually implement the Joint Industry Board agreement which says labour should usually be directly employed.

Manchester electricians are continuing their weekly Wednesday protests at the central library site. This is in protest at the council's inaction when known blacklisters

including NG Baileys are receiving millions of pounds in public money to refurbish the library.

They have distributed an open letter to councillors, demanding the council acts immediately. Steve Acheson, rank and file national committee and Unite branch secretary, told me: "Now the Besna is over, we are doing as we promised to the Labour council at their last full meeting - that we would highlight Baileys' involvement in this human rights abuse, the employers' illegal conspiracy of blacklisting.

"What was noticeable throughout this campaign against Besna has been that our best activists are exiled from the sites. Our union needs to show the same commitment over blacklisting that it showed over Besna."



Outside Manchester central library photo Hugh Caffrey

London election candidate named in employers' blacklist

Responding to reports in The Observer on 4 March that security services "gave data to a clandestine organisation funded by major names in building industry" and compiled a secret 'blacklist' file on Professor Charles Woolfson who researched health and safety on oil rigs, the Trades Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) has called for firms that used information to blacklist trade unionists and academics, to be banned from public sector contracts.

Steve Hedley, a TUSC candidate

in the GLA election, who was one of those named in the Consulting Association's files and suffered four years without permanent employment, said: "Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition candidates standing in the GLA elections pledge that if we are elected in May we will oppose public contracts being signed with blacklisters by the London Mayor or any of his officials...."

"It smacks of a sort of police state, almost with the police colluding with the employers to blacklist the

trade unionists. Some of the people on that blacklist are just ordinary health and safety reps. You just wonder how far this goes."

RMT President, Alex Gordon who is TUSC lead candidate in the GLA elections, said: "Trade unionists have known for decades, that shadowy organisations with links to police and security services colluded with bosses of some of Britain's biggest companies to deprive workers of a livelihood, by operating illegal blacklists. It now emerges that the practice also spread

to blacklisting professors carrying out research into the worst industrial disaster in the history of the UK oil and gas industry.

"Blacklisting trade unionists is the new McCarthyism. TUSC candidates will fight to expose it, end it and win justice for those who have been its victims. There must be a full public enquiry into the activities of the Consulting Association and Britain's rotten corporate culture of blacklisting as a matter of public interest."

Unison: Delegates gagged

A conference delegate

The Unison Higher Education sectional conference took place in Brighton on 2 March. Given that the government has launched a major attack on our pension schemes and following the massive strike on 30 November last year, you'd have thought that defending pensions would have been the key debate of the day.

Instead, the Service Group Executive (SGE) announced that the emergency motions on pensions were ruled out because they included the term "heads of agreement" which they claimed did not exist and "therefore could not be acted on!"

When the spokesperson for the standing orders committee was challenged to explain the reason in more detail, he was lost for words and said "he'd forgotten his notes".

The delegates voted virtually unanimously that they wanted the pension resolutions included. In response the chairperson suspended the conference, declaring that it would resume when delegates would vote "the right way".

After one and a half hours the conference resumed with the SGE

sticking to their guns, even though the term "heads of agreement" has been used consistently within the union in the last months, including by Dave Prentis himself in his union diary in the February 2012 edition of the union newsletter In Focus.

This is clearly a spurious excuse and a slap in the face to union democracy. In reality the leaders of Unison have accepted the premise that we must pay more, work longer and get less when we retire, and are preparing to present a shoddy sell-out as some kind of achievement.

The delegates did not take this lying down, with a number of further attempts to get pensions discussed. In the end the standing orders committee allowed a half hour debate on pensions, but refused to allow a democratic vote on the motions.

Delegates then voted unanimously for a living wage campaign and a pay claim equal to inflation plus compensation for previous cuts.

This blatant attempt to gag the rank and file will not succeed, as anger builds up over this and three years of pay cuts. The left is standing candidates for the SGE to challenge the current mis-leaders and will continue to campaign for a fighting democratic union.

MMP workers step up action

Harry Smith

Locked out Mayr-Melnhof Packaging (MMP) workers in Merseyside have voted decisively for continued action in their dispute. 139 papers were issued in a secret ballot, following a meeting of the workforce in a nearby hotel, and 138 voted in favour of rejecting the management offer.

An agreement had been reached only weeks ago between Unite and MMP bosses to reduce the number of redundancies the firm had at first wanted - from 49 [out of a total of 149 workers] down to 37. To save the 12 jobs workers had made concessions - losing pay over the next year to the tune of between £1,000 to possibly £2,000.

The MMP 'offer' was a reversion, to not only their original demand for 49 jobs to go, but now, more to go "voluntarily" on top of those.

Ding dong the BIPP is dead!

A Manchester health worker

Manchester health workers are celebrating a significant victory after management's policy of withholding some pay over spurious sickness grounds was found unlawful at a Tribunal. Hundreds of staff at Central Manchester Foundation Trust (CMFT) are now owed money by management.

The "Behavioural Incremental Pay Progression" (BIPP) policy was introduced in November 2010 in order to "safeguard employment" - if you believe CMFT bosses! This was all about saving money and management admitted as much at the Tribunal.

The BIPP was applied retrospectively, and said that if you had four instances of sickness or 18 days sick in the previous rolling 12 months, then you would lose your increment. Increments are annual increases in salary within overall pay bands, received provided a worker's

On the picket line workers pointed out that the loss of such numbers put a question mark over the overall viability of the plant to operate.

MMP insisted that it would not meet the previously agreed redundancy terms. This and the redundancy selection process started the dispute on 10 February. To add further insult to injury MMP managers now claim that they want to discipline up to 15 workers whom managers claim undertook 'provocative' actions around the early part of the dispute.

In anticipation of a hardening of the dispute the stewards have drawn up rotas for a 24-hour picket of the factory.

Please send donations to the hardship fund made payable to 'Sogat Progress Fund' to: Phil Morgan, Unite the Union, 2 Chantry Court, Forge Street, Crewe, Cheshire CW1 2DL tel: 01270 500 240

performance is "satisfactory" according to the Agenda for Change national agreement.

The Tribunal's findings are essentially that local NHS employers cannot re-interpret parts of the national agreement covering sickness and pay progression as they see fit. This will have effects in the NHS far beyond Manchester.

Trust bosses want to make huge cuts to wages, get rid of jobs and prepare for full privatisation. This is fuelled by the £20 billion national funding cut which New Labour imposed in 2010, and which the Con-Dems maintained, together with huge PFI debts owed to the private-sector.

Beating the BIPP has strengthened the unions' position and workers' confidence in the unions. Management is bound to return with further attacks, through sickness and disciplinary policies, appraisals, or go directly for job losses. However, beating the BIPP shows that when the unions act together then they can defeat the bosses.

In brief

Stagecoach bus drivers win victory

Stagecoach South Yorkshire bus drivers in Barnsley and Rotherham have won a significant victory in their fight for higher pay. After a bitter four month dispute, in which over 300 drivers, members of Unite, took 12 days of strike action, Stagecoach were forced to accede to most of their demands. By 251 votes to 35, drivers voted to accept an increase in their hourly rate to £9.05 an hour, with no strings attached and a lump-sum payment in lieu of back-pay from the annual settlement date of April.

Drivers were on £8.57 an hour and had a 2% rise imposed in November, taking them to £8.74. In effect, they have won a 5.6 % pay rise.

This is a victory against a company who brought in managers from around the country to run a strike-breaking operation on every strike day. While this meant that up to 80% of services ran, it was at considerable expense as not only wages but bonuses and hotel accommodation were paid to the scabs, and fares were slashed to £1 to try to keep passengers. Because of the determination of the drivers (there were only a handful of local drivers who scabbed and it's reported that even some of them joined the last days of strike action) and the solidarity from other bus workers and trade unionists, Stagecoach could not afford to keep the strike-breaking operation up. So the bosses were forced to drop the strings and offer a lump sum in back-pay.

Alistair Tice

UCU Wales Congress

The Welsh section of the University and College Union, UCU Cymru, held its annual congress in Cardiff on 3 March. Delegates were eager to fight, not just on pensions, but on a wide range of other issues. The elections for Wales officers returned an increased number of left activists including one Socialist Party member to Wales Council. Delegates then passed unanimously a call to build the fightback on pensions.

Members also rallied around a socialist-led move to halt a Labour-backed attempt to water down UCU Cymru's strong position on young workers. UCU is affiliated to Youth Fight for Jobs and demands job creation and a minimum wage of £8/hour.

During the congress the re-election of Sally Hunt as union general secretary was announced. Hunt has promised to slash the UCU national executive by half and circumvent it through more online, one-way "consultations", so the fight is on to defend union democracy.

Edmund Schluessel

Olympics

Transport union RMT is to ballot for industrial action on Transport for London over a ban on staff leave for the duration of the Olympics and has also declared a formal dispute with London Underground (LU) over a failure to reach an agreement on Olympics recognition and reward payments for all LU staff.

For more on these and other workplace reports see www.socialistparty.org.uk

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

Speakers include:

- Bob Crow, transport union RMT general secretary
- Mark Serwotka, PCS general secretary
- A leading Rank and File member of 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 54493, London, E10 0DE

Workfare

“Give us jobs NOT slave labour”



The McDonald's protest in Leeds photo Iain Dalton

Paul Callanan
National Organiser YFJ

On 3 March, Youth Fight for Jobs (YFJ) organised and took part in anti-workfare demos up and down the country. We named and shamed those high street brands that are using the unem-

ployed as modern-day slaves.

We have been winning victories. Already the government is claiming that those who drop out of the Work Experience scheme won't face a threat to their benefits. And a number of big companies have also dropped out of the scheme.

But we must continue to fight.

The threat to benefits still exists in most of the schemes. That's why we are inviting the trade unions, eight of whom back YFJ, and organisations like Right to Work and Boycott Workfare to join us in organising a national demonstration. YFJ is considering June as a possible time for this.

Naming and shaming the profiteers

London

Workfare minister Iain Duncan Smith got a rough ride from Youth Fight for Jobs on 2 March, both inside and outside Tottenham Town Hall.

IDS refused to respond to Ian Pattison, YFJ organiser's points about workfare, instead pushing him out of the way and loudly stating "the work experience programme is brilliant!"

IDS blamed young people in Tottenham for believing they shouldn't have to travel to find work. YFJ explained that there are 25 people looking for every available job in Tottenham, but the situation is similar everywhere. The fact is there aren't enough jobs. YFJ challenged Duncan Smith and the Tories' cuts agenda and the effects it's having in exacerbating unemployment but all IDS could reply was "well I disagree with you".

South and West

Youth Fight for Jobs activists, Socialist Students and Socialist Party members from across Hampshire converged on Southampton High Street. Young people took turns on the megaphone, explaining the injustice of the scheme, and gathering a crowd of supporters. The demo was covered by the Solent University student newspaper and many young people signed up to show their support for the campaign, with others pledging to support Trade Union and Socialist Coalition candidates in the upcoming local elections.

In Bristol the 60-strong protest started outside BHS in the city centre - a location agreed before BHS pulled out of the Work Experience schemes - and proceeded around the city's main retail area. We handed letters to the staff in all the shops we went to making it clear that we were not demonstrating against them and calling for them to join in the struggle for decent jobs and decent conditions for all.

In Brighton YFJ marched to McDonald's, which the police then shut down! Jack

Poole of Brighton Socialist Students, who is standing for president of the student union, made a speech describing the attacks facing young people and students today.

Glenn Kelly, Socialist Party, described the movement in 1985 that met Thatcher's attempts to conscript young people into the Youth Training Scheme. A quarter of a million students went on strike in 1985 and the government backed down!

Throughout the day our main demand was for real job creation. The private sector is clearly not up to the task, so we call for proper investment into public works to provide socially useful jobs for the more than 2.5 million unemployed. For example, YFJ calls for a mass house-building and renovation programme as one example of socially useful public works that could create jobs. We call for an £8 an hour minimum wage, reverse all education cuts including the axing of EMA, for workers to join their trade unions and build fighting and democratic trade unions.

Ian Harris, Michael Wright and Jon Redford

Midlands

Birmingham has one of the highest levels of unemployment nationally at 11%. Our protest toured Poundland, Greggs and McDonald's - currently estimated to be making £800 million in profit every month - as we explained to shoppers the need to fight for real jobs.

In Mansfield we got a great reception leafletting and petitioning outside McDonald's, British Home Stores and Dorothy Perkins.

When two police constables approached us and asked if we had permission to use the megaphone, we explained what we were doing. We also said we opposed privatisation in Lincolnshire police and other forces, and had visited the picket line during last year's strike against cuts and redundancies by Nottinghamshire Police Union members. They wished us good luck and left it

at that.

In Nottingham the protest received brilliant news coverage and a good turnout. People were desperate for leaflets and to join in the chanting outside Wilkinson's, Greggs, McDonald's and Primark. Many also came to tell personal stories of their experiences of being forced to work for free through the scheme. They highlighted their continued unemployment as proof that the placements did nothing but help big businesses keep their profits by forcing people to work for free.

In Lincoln, days before the protest we were receiving calls from the head office of HMV to assure us that they had pulled out of the scheme and begged us not to protest there! On the morning of the demonstration we'd heard that Primark were so concerned about the effects of the coming protest that they had a full staff meeting in the morning and were planning to take legal action against us if we entered their store.

This gives a glimpse of the effect that workers and young people can have when they organise and protest.

Nick Hart, Jon Dale, Helen Pattison and Alex Moore

Yorkshire

Devonshire Green in Sheffield was the start of a protest tour of multinationals benefiting from the government's workfare schemes.

Judging by the number of companies who have already withdrawn from the workfare schemes, the protests are having a serious impact.

In Hull on 5 March young people and trade unionists protested outside McDonald's. We received overwhelming support from the public as they took our leaflets.

Workers from a multi-national coffee shop came over and offered us free coffee samples and took leaflets, being in complete agreement with our campaign.

Chaz Lockett and Matt Whale

Summit for nothing

Iain Dalton
Leeds

After a summit of panicked business leaders worried about becoming the next focus for protest over their participation in workfare schemes, the government announced it had dropped threats to stop benefits if people pulled out part way through their 'work experience'.

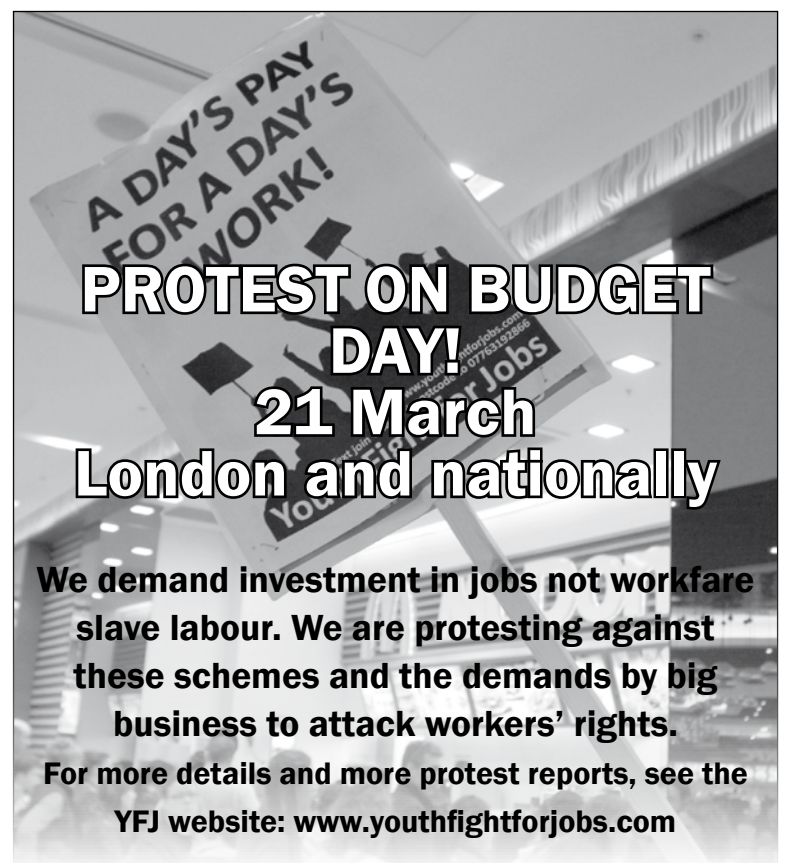
The past few weeks have seen a number of companies pull out of or suspend/review their involvement, as the protests organised by YFJ and others have panicked them.

HMV and Burger King have announced they are dropping out, with Boots joining them even after

the government made its announcement. This shows these schemes up for the shambles they really are.

In YFJ we support the retail workers' union Usdaw's call for the removal of any compulsion from the schemes and for participants to be given the same terms, pay and conditions as existing staff. We would add that there should be guaranteed jobs at the end for those on the placements and they should be able to join the appropriate union.

With the trade union movement we need to build an active campaign of supporting protests outside stores, aiming to build a mass campaign to end workfare and fight for decent, well-paid, permanent jobs for all.



The inside story

A former worker for a workfare provider

The welfare state is now a lucrative business - Emma Harrison's contract as A4e chief was worth around £200 million. According to the Department for Work and Pensions, under the new scheme a company such as A4e will receive £600 for each claimant who starts on their programme.

If that person was previously receiving a sickness benefit and moves into work the private provider will receive an additional £3,500 - on top of that they are given a further £9,600 if the claimant is in employment at the end of the 104-week period.

No wonder businesses without any prior interest or experience, such as G4S security, were clamouring for contracts during the bidding phase.

There are two or three Work Programme providers in most urban areas. By 2015 the best performing businesses in each locality will receive an additional £1,000 for each job outcome. Market forces and incentives now overrule any attempt

to see claimants as individuals; we are not told where these jobs were going to come from and how targets will be met in areas of mass unemployment.

Jobcentre staff have the power to order claimants aged 18 or over to undertake four weeks, for 30 hours a week, of 'work related activity' for up to six months.

Failure to attend Work Programmes and placements, or refusal to carry out instructions while on the scheme will result in JSA being stopped for up to 13 weeks. The inevitable detrimental effect this has on established housing benefit claims makes this punishment even harsher.

But there seems to be no requirement for businesses to provide evidence that there is a real possibility of a job. Travel, clothing and child care issues are also not addressed.

This government has created a culture of blame and shame. They are forcing unemployed people into jobs that don't even exist and paying private companies bonuses for achieving what should be a right, not a privilege - a paid job and a living wage.

International Women's Day 2012



socialist books

New pamphlet!



Alicia Blackett

International Women's Day 2012 falls against the backdrop of ever more cuts being imposed by the coalition. Last year saw a major wave of government attacks on jobs, benefits and services realised, with working class women disproportionately affected in all of these areas.

In particular, the brutal cull in public sector jobs combined with pay freezes and pay caps will have a devastating effect on women, who continue to make up two-thirds of the public sector workforce. Thousands of teachers, nurses and social workers will face the brunt of the Con-Dem assault on the public sector.

Vicious cuts

There have also been recent government announcements of up to £18 billion of cuts to social security and welfare. Access to domestic and sexual violence services will be increasingly limited as 31% of funding for these vital services has been slashed.

Cuts to working tax credits and child tax credits will hit women particularly hard, just as the closure of care services and day care centres will mean that more women are expected to 'pick up the slack' and take over care responsibilities from these important services.

The Con-Dems' cuts package will hit working class women the hardest, not because it is a conscious policy choice because Tories hate women - although some of them do - but because women are already disadvantaged in society to begin with.

Despite advances in the economic and social position, women in Britain continue to be paid an average of 15.5% less than men, even after 40 years of the Equal Pay Act. Young women will therefore be affected by the rise in tuition fees and the scrapping of education maintenance allowance (EMA), as a whole generation of young people are priced out of higher education. And women are still expected to be the main providers of care within the family.

The oppression of women is rooted in class society, and came about through the development of the

patriarchal family as an economic and social unit.

When ordinary people talk about 'family' they mean real individuals - parents, children, partners. But for the ruling class, the institution of the family plays a vital role in reinforcing their own ideals and values throughout society, as well as being a means to pass on wealth and private property.

Welfare state

Furthermore, big business shareholders and their representatives in government want to maximise profits by keeping their costs to a minimum. This applies not only to actual wages but also to what is known as the 'social wage' - the tax cost of health, housing and education for a new generation of workers. They do this by off loading these costs as much as possible onto individual families, and women particularly.

The family also serves to reinforce hierarchy widely in society, and is presented as a reflection of the 'natural order' of things. But the patriarchal family as we know it has only existed for around 10,000 years. Before this, for the majority of human history, nomadic hunter-gatherer societies, based on shared resources and shared responsibility for the upbringing of children, were the predominant form of organisation. Although a division of labour based on sex existed, women's work was valued equally by the group.

It was the development of private ownership and concentration of wealth by an elite, as well as the concept of inheritance and the oppression of women's sexuality, that led to a loss of status and freedom for women.

Fightback

Nevertheless, women, especially working class women, in Britain have fought hard for advances in their position in society, and have won many rights and freedoms that they were previously denied.

The overwhelming majority of people would now accept that men and women should be equal and support the many rights that have been won over the years such as domestic violence and marital rape being recognised as crimes. There is a general view that women should have some fertility rights. The Socialist Party fights for all women to have the right to decide

when and whether to have children.

The struggles of women have made clear that any attacks on these hard-fought for rights will be fiercely resisted. The most successful movements for women's rights in the past have taken place at times of increased struggle of the working class in general.

We have already begun to see resistance to the Con-Dems' savage austerity package in both the magnificent 30 June and 30 November public sector strikes, where a majority of strikers were women. Also the fantastic student protests in 2010 involved many young women from university and college campuses.

This struggle against the cuts is encouraging women to campaign on other issues too. The successful 'slutwalk' marches held around the country helped expose myths about rape and questioned why sexism and discrimination exist in society.

Attacks on women's rights more generally have been seen, through plans to erode abortion and fertility rights, as well as Nadine Dorries' 'Abstinence for Girls' bill, that aimed to promote the teaching of abstinence to female students in sex education lessons. Protests were organised around these proposals, leading directly to the defeat of both and victory for women across the country. It can certainly be said that faced with these attacks women are fighting back.

The Socialist Party has been involved with all of these campaigns, and fights to link the struggles of women to the struggle against capitalism more widely.

We have already seen how the government has attempted to divide workers - young and old, unemployed and working, private and public sector. There is no question they are also prepared to use sexism to divide the movement against austerity. It is clear that any successful movement must be united and involve both men and women.

A united working class struggle against austerity and the rotten capitalist system must take place. Only with the construction of a socialist society - one which has freed the family from its role as a social and economic institution and where economic resources are owned and controlled collectively through a democratically planned economy - will the true emancipation of women be fully realised.

- A living minimum wage for all. Close the pay gap
- Axe the Health and Social Care Bill! No cuts to sexual health or maternity services
- Protect and improve abortion services
- No to all cuts! Support the public sector pensions struggle
- No cuts to services for rape survivors or victims of domestic violence. An end to victim blaming
- A new mass workers' party to provide an alternative to the big business politicians
- A socialist world free from sexism and inequality



London Slutwalk photo Sarah Wrack

Housing cuts hit women hard

Helen Pattison

Changes to housing benefits, and funding cuts to services women rely on to escape problems such as domestic violence, will result in more women being forced to live in dangerous conditions.

The government has increased from 25 to 35 the age at which people can claim enough housing benefit to live on their own, meaning single claimants up to 35 can only afford a room in a shared house.

Renting in this way can be dangerous for women who are vulnerable to being attacked by other people sharing the accommodation - 70% of sexual attacks on women are by people they know. 17% of rape within the home is perpetrated by landlords.

The only way to achieve safe housing for all women is through affordable publicly owned housing. Housing associations are not the answer. They are run like businesses and often by organisations with separate agendas than providing housing for those in need.

It is legal for housing associations to ask for 'proof' that women have been suffering domestic violence before giving them priority status. One association has been down-grading the applications of women suffering from non-physical forms of abuse.

All this comes at a time when emergency shelters for women trying to escape violence are being closed because of cuts, resulting in many having no alternative but to remain in abusive situations.

Women are more likely to be in receipt

of housing benefit, because of the wage gap that still persists despite equal pay legislation, so will be hit hardest by any changes made.

Women are also more likely to have dependents (children or other relatives they care for) so will be hit by the stricter rules being imposed on how many bedrooms a family can claim housing benefit for.

Coupled with other cuts to services women rely on to be able to work and the benefits cap the government is attempting to impose, more women and families will be left in overcrowded and possibly dangerous homes. The housing market is out of control with private rents sky rocketing.

High quality affordable housing should be available to all, giving women the chance to live in safety and the ability to leave violent relationships and keep their families safe.

- Reverse all housing and housing benefit cuts
- Reintroduce private sector secure tenancies and rent controls
- For massive investment in building and renovating truly affordable, good quality council housing
- For a huge programme of construction job creation with trade union rates of pay
- Councils should use their planning powers to stop housing associations issuing short-term tenancies. If the associations refuse, take them in-house!

Stop benefit cuts!

Eleanor Donne

David Cameron claimed in 2010 that he would make his government the most 'family friendly' ever. Not surprisingly, in a recent survey of new mothers, only 6% believed this statement. The Con-Dems have cut, in a most 'unfriendly' way, the very benefits which were there to provide help for pregnant women and new mothers.

Threatened!
 CUT £190 Health in pregnancy grant
 CUT £500 Sure Start maternity grant limited to one child
 REDUCED Childcare help
 CUT Child benefit from 2013 if you earn around £35,000 a year
 CUT £545 Working Tax Credit baby element

The government has frozen child benefit and intends to means test it from 2013, so that households with a higher rate tax payer (earning around £35,000 or more) will not get it. However, for many women, no matter what their partner earns, child benefit is the only guaranteed income they have. This independent income, although small, can be vital if they are in an abusive relationship.

Maximum help with childcare costs, via Working Tax Credits, has been reduced from 80% to 70%, leaving many families on low incomes with an extra £546 a year added to their childcare bill.

Given the rising costs and reduction in help available, it's not surprising

that, in one recent Mumsnet survey, 16% of women with families had been forced to quit work because they didn't make enough money to cover childcare costs.

Some nurseries are exploiting the shortage and increasing their fees. The Day Care Trust estimates that in the south of England those with two children are likely to be paying a similar amount or more than their mortgage in nursery fees.

Government cuts have made it harder for women, especially lone parents, to work. Yet they are continuing down New Labour's path, forcing lone parents off Income Support when their youngest child is five. With close to three million already unemployed (over one million of them women), how exactly are they to find work?

The Con-Dems aim to cut at least £18 billion off their social security and welfare budget. The Fawcett Society estimates that lone mothers can expect to lose the equivalent of one month's income every year by 2015.

- Scrap the benefit cap - for a decent living income for all
- Defend and extend pregnancy and maternity benefits
- Restore Income Support to lone parents
- Defend housing benefit - restrict rent levels not benefits
- Flexible, affordable childcare for all that want it



Stop Dorries protest photo Suzanne Beishon



26 March 2011 TUC demo photo Paul Mattsson

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Kirklees marches to save child centres

Mike Forster

Around 100 angry parents and their children demonstrated through the streets of Huddersfield on Saturday 3 March against Kirklees council's proposals to mothball half of the 32 children's centres.

Intense negotiations have been taking place between the council leader, Mehboob Khan, and campaign leaders about the final proposals. Initially the parents were asked to call off the demo, but when they refused, the leaders of the three main parties actually turned up on the protest!

The campaign is clearly paying off. Councillors are becoming very nervous in the run-up to the local elections. Final proposals will soon be known. Parents are planning to respond in detail and to lobby the cabinet meeting on 13 March which will ratify any recommendations.

If the campaign's action committee is not happy with the council's position, then six councillors are standing by to 'call in' the decision,



photo Huddersfield Socialist Party

which will mean it will be referred to the council's scrutiny committee for further consideration.

None of the council's recommen-

dations can be implemented until the scrutiny committee has finished its work.

The action committee is deter-

mined that its work will continue until all of the centres are saved and parents are given a direct say in how services will be run in the future.

Sheffield: Stop G4S taking over asylum seeker housing

Alistair Tice
Yorkshire Socialist Party

Around 70 asylum seekers and their supporters, organised by South Yorkshire Migration and Asylum Action Group (SYMAAG) rallied in Sheffield against G4S taking over asylum seeker housing.

Demonstrators protested outside

the town hall and then marched down to the UK Borders Agency HQ.

G4S is the world's largest private security army with contracts worth £600 million for security, managing detention centres, prisons and 675 court and police station cells. Now G4S hopes to get another £135 million as the housing of people seeking asylum is privatised.

G4S lost a previous contract for 'escorting' deported asylum seekers as a result of 773 complaints of abuse and the death of an asylum seeker.

From 1 March asylum seekers in Yorkshire and Humberside are being expected to face them and their sub-contractors as their landlord.

Over 500 asylum seekers and families could be dispersed to pri-

vate landlords or hostels, often miles away from children's friends, schools and family doctors.

G4S chief executive Nick Buckles gets an annual salary and shares worth £2.4 million with a £7 million pension pot. Former Labour home secretary John Reid, now a lord, is a G4S director, put on the payroll at £50,000 in 2008.

See www.symaag.org.uk for more

Leeds Tenants Federation opposes Welfare Reform Bill

Iain Dalton
Hyde Park and Headingley Socialist Party

Almost 100 people attended a conference called by Leeds Tenants Federation to discuss the government's Welfare Reform Bill and its impact on tenants in Leeds.

Linda McNeill, the federation's

chair, introduced the meeting. 1.7 million families are on council house waiting lists with 2.6 million trapped in overcrowded housing. Rather than the government's attacks on tenants being any sort of solution, the Federation calls for a cap on rents in the private sector, secure tenancies for private tenants and a building programme of social housing.

Steve Carey, Leeds council's of-

ficer for revenue and benefits, explained how the government's reforms impact upon Leeds.

The government has already reduced caps in housing benefits. Large families now cannot claim for more than the rate for a four bedroom property. But caps are unlikely to make private landlords drop rents.

Changes in the socially rented

sector, from April 2013, around 'under-occupancy' mean children would be expected to share rooms up to the age of ten if they are of different sexes and up to the age of 16 if they are the same sex.

The Federation is also campaigning over the 6.8% social rent increase in the Labour council's budget and the 6,000-7,000 empty private properties in the council area.

In brief

Save Heatherwood

Over 40 activists from Bracknell, Reading, Ascot and Windsor attended a Bracknell public meeting on 29 February organised by Defend Our Community Services to save Heatherwood Hospital from closure.

Already our local birthing centre was closed in spite of its popularity with local mothers. Carol Brooker from the Health Advisory Group called for a concerted campaign to get the birthing centre reopened. Our campaign has so far attracted nearly 20,000 petition signatures and we are forcing the health authorities to reconsider their proposals.

We have organised rallies, public meetings, leafleting, petitioning and lobbying and we plan a week of action in April.

Terry Pearce
Chair, Defend Our Community Services (personal capacity)

Torquay NHS campaign

The first ever Socialist Party stall in Torquay took place on 3 March, part of developing a branch in South Devon. The stall against NHS cuts sold 16 copies of the Socialist, raised £12 fighting fund and got a fantastic response. A meeting in Torquay will take place on 8 March.

Socialist Party congress

The Socialist Party's 2012 congress will be taking place on 10-12 March. See the Socialist issue 709 (printed a day late so the paper's editors can take part) and www.socialistparty.org.uk for reports. The congress includes a finance appeal to help fund the party's work. The party has no wealthy backers and relies on the backing of its members and supporters. The finance appeal will help produce posters, leaflets, pamphlets and other campaigning material for fighting the government's and councils' 'austerity' cuts.

To support the appeal, go to www.socialistparty.org.uk/donate (label your donation 'congress appeal'), phone 020 8988 8777 or use the form below.

May Day greetings

Support the Socialist with a May Day greeting this year. Greetings celebrate International Workers' Day while helping to raise essential money for the paper that fights all cuts.

Greeting rates include: £500 for a whole page; £300 for a half-page; £170 quarter-page; £90 one-eighth; £50 one-sixteenth; £30 1/32; £20 small box and £15 for up to 30 words

The deadline for May Day messages is 19 April. Pay by this date to get a 25% discount on your greeting price.

Contact bobsevern@socialistparty.org.uk or 020 8988 8781 for leaflets, more information and to give your greeting.

Socialist Party International Women's Day schools

Hampshire

Socialist Students national organiser Claire Laker-Mansfield explained the origins of women's oppression and then examined how women are being disproportionately affected by the cuts today.

Job losses and attacks on pensions in the public sector affect women more as they constitute two-thirds of that workforce. The cuts in benefits and services also hit women hardest. Women use more state services than men and benefits make up twice as much of women's income than men's.

The public sector strikes of June and November 2011 saw many women take action, a lot for the first time. There is a growing sense among women that there is an alternative, the cuts are not necessary and we should be fighting for a fairer society.

We agreed to hold meetings on a quarterly basis in different parts of Hampshire.

Jane Ward, Hampshire Socialist Women

Yorkshire

The Socialist's youth news editor Sarah Wrack outlined the Con-Dem government's ideological attacks on women's rights and how the cuts will disproportionately affect women. But Sarah also pointed to the revival of feminist movements and the huge numbers of women taking part in the pension strikes as evidence that these attacks will face a fightback.

Hyde Park and Headingley Socialist Party member Alicia Blackett spoke on women and the family, tracing the development of the family as an economic

and social institution and how the oppression of women is rooted in class society.

A Leeds Socialist Women activist

East Midlands

Alicia Blackett started the day school by speaking on 'Women and the Family'. Capitalism exploits the labour of women as mothers, carers and workers. After lunch, Helen Pattison began a debate about the "sexploitation" of women's bodies in the media and the beauty industry.

Finally, Jean Thorpe raised the need to build the Socialist Party among women. We agreed we must continue to ensure meetings are female friendly, safe, and supportive.

Kerry Feetham, Leicester Socialist Party

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SOCIALIST PARTY FIGHTING FUND

	£ target	£ received	January-March 2012	Deadline 30 March
North West	1,200	1,018	██████████	██████████
South West	1,400	1,088	██████████	██████████
Northern	600	460	██████████	██████████
Yorkshire	2,900	2,132	██████████	██████████
Wales	2,300	1,557	██████████	██████████
East Midlands	1,550	895	██████████	██████████
Eastern	1,200	649	██████████	██████████
Southern	1,200	527	██████████	██████████
West Midlands	2,100	908	██████████	██████████
London	6,100	2,637	██████████	██████████
South East	1,000	88	██████████	██████████
England & Wales	3,450	197	██████████	██████████
TOTAL	25,000	12,163	██████████	██████████

Quebec: Students engage in 'indefinite' general strike action

Tens of thousands in battle against massive rise in tuition fees

Cedric Gerome, CWI

A powerful students' struggle is sweeping over Quebec, the French speaking province of Canada. Over 65,000 university and high school students are currently engaged in an indefinite general strike all over the province.

At the core of the dispute is the biggest neoliberal attack on education since 1990, with a dramatic increase in university student fees of \$1,625, (a rise of around 75%) over the next five years.

Currently, 65% of students in Quebec finish their studies with an average debt of \$14,000. The new measures, if passed, will hit young people from working class and middle class families even harder.

The right-wing provincial government of Jean Charest says that even after the increases, Quebec university students will still be paying less than the Canadian average for a higher education. This is a cynical attempt at 'divide-and-rule' policies aimed at pitching Canadians against the struggle of Quebec students.

What the establishment politicians do not explain by using this comparison, is the fast-developing social segregation taking place in the Canadian education system. According to official figures, the number of Canadian students contracting a debt of up to \$50,000 has risen by an incredible 1,475% in the last four years!

CBCNews, reported: "Thirty years ago, tuition fees accounted for less than a seventh of university operating revenue. Now, it's more than a third, as governments increasingly download the cost to the students and their parents". This is the 'model' they want to import into Quebec.

Furthermore, comparatively low tuition fees in Quebec are a direct result of important student strikes (in 1996 and 2005) that partially succeeded in cutting across the attempts of successive governments to roll back the idea of accessible education for all.

To justify the increase in tuition fees, the government of Jean Charest and its supporters keep repeating that there is not enough money to finance education. Yet the same government says nothing about university rectors earning wages

above \$300,000 a year, does nothing about the \$2.5 billion annually lost in tax evasion by the rich and big corporations, gives record amounts of public subsidies to 'vulture' private companies making enormous profits and sells off, at a discount, Quebec's mineral resources.

Escalating movement

Two weeks after the start of the 'hostilities', following a call by the 'Coalition large de l'association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante' (Classe - an umbrella organisation involving several student associations) the strike continues to spread, involving mass street protests, sit-ins, occupations and pickets.

After a first wave of students voted for the strike in mid-February, more have joined in. Several other student associations and unions are about to vote in favour of taking strike action in the coming days and weeks, meaning that tens of thousands more could add to, even double, the ranks of strikers in the near future.

This is already one of the biggest students' strikes in Quebec's recent history. A victorious outcome to such a movement would not fail to leave a profound mark, not only on every student who participates in the movement, but on the Quebec working population, which suffers cuts and a bosses' offensive on wages, jobs and conditions.

Indeed, the students are not the only ones affected by the neoliberal policies of the Charest government. In addition to the rising tuition costs, the introduction of a health-care tax, the increases of electricity rates and other measures are part of this spending cuts and tax increase programme.

Students are not the only ones fighting back. Important industrial battles have taken place in recent months, such as at the Rio Tinto Alcan aluminium factory and the ArcelorMittal metal plant near Montreal. For the student movement to be successful, the struggle needs to be spread, especially to the organised working class.

In the context of the austerity policies being carried out, the students' movement forcing the government to retreat could serve as a spark for broader layers to move into action, not only in Quebec but across Canada.

no image available

Some initiatives have been undertaken to link up the student strike with other community and working class campaigns. This is among the proposals that Alternative Socialiste, the CWI section in Quebec, is advocating in the students' movement.

Alternative Socialiste calls for the students' struggle to appeal for active support beyond the students, to build a united mass movement against the rise of tuition fees and all cuts, and in opposition to the unpopular reforms of the Charest and Harper federal government.

Union leaders

However, at this stage, these sorts of initiatives are not advocated by the leaders of the trade union bureaucracies whose support for the student movement has remained at the level of pure rhetoric.

The Fédération provinciale du travail du Québec, the biggest union federation in the province, which organises over 600,000 workers and 44% of the unionised workforce in Quebec, expressed its solidarity with the students but, at the same time, its leaders argue for a rapid way out of the disputes. The union leaders have refused, so far, to engage in anything concrete to help build overwhelming support for the students' struggle.

When it comes to the main student union leaders, they fall short of

providing a programme of action for victory. In part, this is because they fear losing control over their own membership.

Their aim is to keep the strike within 'safe channels', limiting it to a single issue. This is only laying the basis for a poor negotiated deal with the government which is what happened in 2005, the last generalised student movement in Quebec.

The education minister has made clear that he is determined, at all costs, to pass the measure and states it is part of the budget decision that cannot be modified. A similar determination to win should be the general stance on the students' side.

Polls already indicate that the support and sympathy for the student strike is mounting. This is despite the propaganda of the mass media, the attempts at criminalising the movement, and the police repression against students.

These polls indicate the potential for a broader movement in opposition to fees and cuts, which needs to be urgently built.

For example, a call should be made by student unions and workers' unions alike, as well as by all community campaigns, to join the students in their national demonstration on 22 March, in Montreal, and to take strike action on the same day, to build a united show of strength against the austerity policies of the government.

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:

no image available

Russia: Widespread fraud alleged as Putin wins presidential election

Communist Party and neoliberal opposition fail to win mass appeal.

Rob Jones, CWI, Moscow

no image available

Egypt: Union leader jailed for "insulting" government minister

Protest against new attack on workers' rights.

David Johnson, Socialist Party (CWI, England and Wales)

no image available

Hungary: Towards bankruptcy and dictatorship?

Economic crisis has combined with a reactionary government.

Tilman M. Ruster, SLP (CWI, Austria)

Spain: Thousands in student protests against education cuts

no image available

Hundreds of thousands of students took to the streets of Spanish cities on 29 February to protest against the right-wing Popular Party government's swingeing austerity cuts in education. A reported 70,000 students marched in Barcelona and 60,000 in Valencia. The peaceful demonstrations were, however, subject to police violence.

The cuts come at time when unemployment in Spain has reached 23% of the working population - the highest in Europe. For young people the situation is particularly acute, with over 50% of 16-24 year olds jobless.

A student leader remarked: "They are making cuts in public education, they are giving us no option to work, and on top of this when we protest democratically they beat us with complete impunity."

The student protests form part of the wider anti-austerity protests associated with the M15 movement - so called after thousands of people occupied city centres starting on 15 May 2011

emulating the huge social protests in Tunisia and Egypt last year. Mass trade union demos also took place in the days preceding the students' action.

Clearly the students, M15 community protests and the trade union movement should link up their struggles into a common campaign to defeat the government's capitalist austerity measures and to demand that IU (United Left) links up with others to fight for an alternative government of the left.

CWI in Spain demands:

- Stop police repression against the youth
- Immediate freedom for students unfairly arrested
- No to cuts
- Defend public education
- A general strike of students throughout Spain
- Unity of workers and students
- Stop the sacking of teachers
- Public resources for public education, now

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.

Working unpaid

Through the workfare scheme, older people who are sent on the Work Programme are required to do mandatory work related activities. Recently I was told I was being placed at Poundland for four weeks. I am fighting this. Minister for employment Grayling's statement said that: "the only compulsory scheme they operated was a short-term scheme, 'mandatory work activity', used when Jobcentre Plus advisers felt someone's job search has 'gone off the rails' [and] was work carried out on 'community-benefiting projects'". But the fact is that under the Work Programme prospectus the providers have to send the clients to a work placement for four weeks.

The plight of older unemployed people should be highlighted as well as the 16 to 24 year olds. I am 53 and find it insulting to be forced to work unpaid under the guise of training.

Alex Corner

Opportunity knocks?

Fib-Dem deputy prime minister Nick Clegg told the BBC that workfare protesters had a "mixed up sense of priorities, that want to prevent young people taking up opportunities..." Perhaps Clegg thinks he's offering some glorious opportunities for young people.

no image available

Opportunities to work for around £1.67 an hour, hoping to be among the 300 out of 1,400 that have been taken on by Tesco to a permanent (but not necessarily full time) post.

Most people we've met campaigning against the schemes Clegg is championing agree with our arguments. We say these companies make hundreds of millions and some even billions in profit each year. So they can afford to take people on for the rate for the job in permanent full-time positions. If not, then the capitalist bosses have clearly failed in their mission to develop society and we should take these industries out of their control and organise them democratically for the benefit of all.

Iain Dalton, Leeds

Whose law?

On Salford Town Hall steps recently, lobbying Labour councillors to vote against cuts, they told us: "I didn't come into the council to decimate services which is sometimes what we've had to do..." - Had to, councillor, had to? One said: "I'm a socialist (!) and it sticks in my throat..." - Steady on, councillor, keep your voice down, the group leader might hear you!

But inside the chamber councillors voted through £26 million of cuts, which will cost 360 jobs. Not a Labour hand raised in opposition or even abstention. The biggest fuss was over prayers. The chaplain's seat was empty. The Tories howled ... surely Mr Pickles had sorted the nasty atheists out and prayers were back on the agenda? No, said the Labour leader, no communication had been received and until it was, 'we obey the decisions of the high court, we al-

ways obey the law'. Yes, councillor, that's the trouble.

Over the mayor's head Salford's coat of arms says, in Latin, 'the welfare of the people is the highest law'. We know which law Labour obeys and it isn't the people's welfare.

Paul Gerrard

Cuts hit disabled

On a Socialist Party stall in Northampton, one woman said she was her severely disabled husband's carer and that the council had charged them over £5,000 for a walk-in bath. This was an essential item as her husband, due to brain damage, is so afraid of water that he cannot have a shower. She is also forced to rent a stair lift from a charity despite being entitled to one.

Her husband was also physically attacked for being disabled. To try to stop this happening again the police installed three cameras. However, these were no use as the lights on their street were turned off by the council. The lights were only turned back on after months of refusal when the police told them to do so.

We also talked about the carers support workers losing their jobs; this already meagre service is being cut down to its bare bones.

Nick Doyle

Horsefeathers

David Cameron admits that he'd ridden the horse, Raisa, that the Met police lent to ex-News of the World editor Rebekah Brooks. The PM rode it with Brooks' husband - a fellow old Etonian and part of the millionaire Chipping Norton set. Readers may have linked this story with Murdochgate. Didn't this show that Britain's wealthy and the government were mixed up in this scandal of capitalist news management and bribery of officials in the state, police, prisons, military and health service?

Oh no, say Cameron's spin doctors. It wasn't as bad as Gordon Brown's partner Sarah who threw a Downing Street pyjama party for Brooks - "the prime minister does not wear pyjamas on the back of a horse." It was all just a harmless Old Etonian Friends Reunited gig! The press call this story Horsegate. A century ago Americans would have called it horsefeathers, a euphemism for horse****!

Sam Rivers

Olympic strike

The leader of my union, Len McCluskey got wide media coverage recently. Unlike Len, most of my workmates see Miliband and Labour as just another bunch of self-serving politicians. But on many issues, I find it refreshing to see Unite's leader speaking up for members against attacks by the bosses and the government.

Unite is currently demanding a £500 bonus for the extra pressured London bus workers will endure during the Olympics. This looks likely to result in a ballot for industrial action if - as seems likely - the bosses fail to cough up. Naturally, we support any action members decide to go for. Although I feel Len could fall into a trap by especially inviting strike action during the Olympics themselves. Of course they will be a carnival of money-making for businesses. But millions - especially young people - are looking forward to this once-in-a-lifetime event. Why let the media turn it into a union-bashing carnival too?

A London bus driver

Film review

Revolution through Arab eyes - the factory

David Johnson reviews a new documentary showing the history of struggle in the Middle East's largest factory.

“**R**evolutions don't come out of the blue,” says the commentator, as scenes of Egypt's 2011 revolution open this history of the Mahalla Spinning and Weaving Company and the struggles of its 27,000 workers. Interviews with past and present activists show the background to those inspiring events.

Workers speak with pride about their workplace, with its ten cotton mills, power station and 300,000 machines, making five million items of clothing a year. The film shows a side of Egyptian women largely ignored by the media.

Workers interviewed are confident activists, who describe their work and the solidarity coming from it. “We spend eight hours every day together. It's more than we spend at home. We are all together - Christians and Muslim. At work we are like a family.”

Within a decade of Mahalla opening, the first strike took place in 1938. Workers won a change of shift pattern. In 1947 a strike demanded the reinstatement of victimised workers. Tanks entered the factory and three were killed.

When the Free Officers, with Colonel Nasser at their head, seized power in 1952, we see scenes of huge enthusiastic crowds. Workers had been inspired by Nasser's speeches, but a month later they went on strike and were brutally suppressed. Later, concessions were made and the film shows how Nasser combined reforms with repression.

Many workers in the 1950s and 1960s believed they were living under a socialist regime. Mahalla was (and still is) a state-owned company. “Nasser followed socialism,” says one retired worker. “I was a socialist member of the union. We loved him for his bravery and for freeing us from the monarchy.”

The film does not challenge this description of Nasser's regime, although socialism cannot exist without real democratic control by workers at every level of society.

After Nasser's death, Sadat changed the regime's direction and started favouring the private sector. When soldiers returned to their Mahalla jobs after the 1973 war, dissatisfaction grew. A strike broke out in 1975 which one leader describes as “poor workers against capitalism.”

Hosni Mubarak succeeded Sadat in 1981, accelerating privatisation. Interviewees remember the Mahalla strikes of 1986 and 1988. In the first, management caved in and conceded the workers' demands of paid weekends.

no image available

During the second, 20,000 demonstrated, chanting “Down with Mubarak” - the first time this was heard on the streets. They were protesting at the cancellation of an education allowance. The leaders were given long prison sentences and then sent to distant parts of Egypt after their release.

Following that defeat, no strike took place until 2006. Then, after a two-month pay bonus had not been paid, women workers walked out. “Where are the men? The women are here!” they chanted as they marched round the massive site, the men joining in.

After a three-day strike, management promised the bonus would be paid. But when that promise too was broken, another six-day strike and factory occupation won a massive victory. Many other workers were inspired to follow Mahalla's example.

Mubarak's fall

The film mentions that the official union leaders were impeached, but it does not adequately expose their role as an arm of management in trying to defeat the strikes. But it describes the vital later step towards setting up an independent trade union, with elected leaders instead of appointed ones.

The Mubarak regime's fall was heralded by the events of 6 April 2008. The film says the Mahalla workers called for a general strike, but in fact the strike never got fully off the ground inside the factory due to a massive security forces clamp-down.

But outside in the city, workers' families poured onto the streets and fought pitched battles with police, who used tear gas, rubber bullets and live ammunition, killing three. Egypt's prime minister came to the factory days later to personally

promise the workers a month's pay as bonus. But this was too little, too late to save the regime when the uprising broke out in January 2011.

The film's disappointing conclusion shows revolutionary activist Hossam El-Hamalawy, saying: “Even if workers are not raising political slogans now, let them win and help them win those economic struggles. They will get the confidence to raise political slogans the following days.”

Of course socialists should give every support to help win strikes and occupations, but we should also show the links between these actions and the fight for democratic rights.

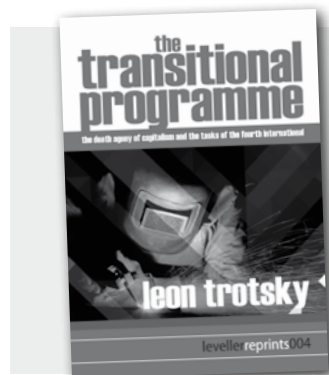
El-Hamalawy continues: “The labour movement is the only solution to put a silver bullet in the body of the regime. These uprisings and strikes will continue until we get a cabinet and a new regime that can solve Egypt's structural problems, but as long as the army generals are still ruling this country no political process is going to deliver us the demands that we have put forward in Tahrir and other squares.”

But do the Revolutionary Socialists, of which El-Hamalawy is a prominent member, really believe that ending the generals' rule will allow a political process to deliver all workers' demands?

While capitalism continues, its government representatives may change but bosses will go on squeezing as much labour from workers for as little pay as possible.

The struggle to kick the generals out must continue, but no illusions should be created that a capitalist civilian government will meet all workers' aspirations. A government of workers and the poor is needed.

This film is a good introduction for further discussion. See it on YouTube www.youtube.com/watch?v=uo1Fytmjlmw

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Peter Taaffe, Socialist Party general secretary

What can students do to defend education?

Ian Pattison
Socialist Students

Students arriving at university in September will be the first to pay the new £9,000 tuition fees and by that time, EMA student payments could be a thing of the past. Can students do anything to change things?

On Wednesday 14 March, students will walk out as part of the National Union of Students (NUS) national student walkout. NUS has called the walkout over privatisation. But students aren't just walking out to stop the selling off and profiteering of our education by big business.

Quite rightly, students are angry over a whole host of issues - the crippling rise in tuition fees to £9,000, the scrapping of EMA, cuts. Students are also being denied access to healthy food or liveable accommodation on many university campuses. That is why Socialist Students has been campaigning to make sure the demands of the walkout reflect the broad range of issues that students are angry about.

2010 student movement

On 10 November 2010, 52,000 students marched through the streets of London in defence of our education on the NUS-organised demonstration. This gave confidence to students that they weren't alone in fighting back.

Socialist Students gave out 10,000

leaflets on the day calling for mass student walkouts to defend education. Two weeks later, 120,000 school, college, and university students responded to the call. This was despite the fact the right-wing NUS leadership refused to support the walkout.

It was school and college students who organised some of the most successful walkouts in 2010. But these students haven't been included in this year's walkout by the NUS leadership, even though they have as much, if not more, to lose from the attacks on our education.

Schools and colleges

School and college students need to get organised. Activists should look to set up school and college student unions and fight for NUS affiliation. Where this isn't possible, Youth Fight for Education groups could play a similar role of democratically organising the fightback against cuts and to bring back EMA.

When the date of the walkout was announced a month ago NUS president, Liam Burns, said "let's clear out the lecture theatres, the seminar rooms, the ITC suites and the libraries and demonstrate clearly that without students, universities are just empty buildings. Let's work hard together to show that students care and make the national walkout count."

Liam Burns talked 'left' when he stood for election and used anti-fees rhetoric, but has since betrayed all of his campaign promises. The



Students protest during 2010 movement against the fee increase photo Senan

problem with the NUS leadership is that they are tied to New Labour, and are more concerned with pursuing their own careers than properly representing students.

The NUS leadership has not built for the walkout effectively and the numbers who take part on the day are likely to reflect this. But this is not the last chance.

National demonstration

We need a national demonstration in the autumn term with coaches booked from every university in the country. This demonstration should demand free education, the reinstatement of EMA, no cuts and no

privatisation. It should be used as a launch pad for a mass movement demanding the right to a decent education.

Mass movements of students and workers can force this millionaire government into retreat. On 28 March, just a fortnight after the walkout, teachers, lecturers, and civil servants are planning to strike together in defence of pensions. Ideally, these two events should have been on the same day.

The pensions sell-out by some of the right-wing trade union leaders means that fewer people will take strike action on 28 March than on 30 November 2011. Regrettably, some striking public sector workers will

see this as a step back for their campaign. However, if tens of thousands of students join striking workers' demonstrations, it will give confidence to public sector trade unionists that their fight is not over.

We have to coordinate our action in the future. This will broaden out the student walkout and the public sector strikes to be not just about education and pensions but all cuts. We're already forcing the government and big business back on workfare.

A determined and sustained struggle of students, workers, and the unemployed can stop the attacks on our education, rights and services dead in their tracks.

NUS elections Vote Socialist Students for a fighting student leadership

Claire Laker-Mansfield
Socialist Students national organiser

It's election time for Britain's student unions and once again thousands will be asked to vote 'Joe Bama for president (yes we can!)' or 'Ben Johnson for education - BJ for satisfaction'. But amidst all the ridiculous sloganeering and silly outfits a serious battle is taking place. It's a battle over what student unions are really about.

Are they to be serious, fighting bodies, with students in control, campaigning to defend education and young people generally? Or are they to be stagnant pools of careerism engaged only in passively accepting, or worse, actively furthering, the aims of vice-chancellors, external trustees and pro-big business capitalist parties?

Socialist Students says we need to take back our student unions. We need them to be fighting bodies run from the bottom up with genuinely democratic structures. The National Union of Students (NUS) and local student unions should be at the fore of leading the fight against fees, cuts and privatisation.

This means they need to have principled policies, arguing for education that is universally free, fully funded and publicly owned at all levels. But simply having these policies isn't enough. The old adage is

correct: actions speak louder than words!

In the past, students have been let down by their 'official' leadership. In 2010 NUS failed to organise or even support the mass protests which took place against the tripling of fees and scrapping of EMA following the initial NUS-backed demo on 10 November.

More recently, they have taken the welcome step of organising a student walkout for 14 March. But so far they haven't done what's necessary to build for there to be mass participation in this action.

Record of fighting

Socialist Students is fielding several candidates in this year's student union elections. All of them are standing on the basis of a record of playing a leading role in the fight against cuts and fees in their area. All are standing with the programme of Socialist Students behind them.

We fight against cuts, fees and privatisation and call for the immediate reinstatement of EMA, expanding it to be available to all college and sixth form students.

We campaign for NUS to call and build for mass action including walkouts, demonstrations and occupations against the government's attacks.

Locally, student unions should be campaigning for university management not to implement cuts and



Lizzy Grey on the Jarrow March

fee rises on behalf of the Con-Dem government. Local unions should revive union general meetings and student assemblies to give ordinary students the opportunity to have a real say in how their union is run.

Socialist Students is standing Jack Poole in Brighton University for student union president. For national positions on the National Executive Council we are standing Edmund Schluessel, of Cardiff University, and Lizzy Grey, from Newcastle College. Liat Norris from Staffordshire University is also running for a full-time officer position. Vote Socialist Students for democratic, fighting unions.

Building for the walkout at Leicester

Rebecca Christiansen
Leicester Socialist Students

The student union executives at both the University of Leicester and De Montfort University (DMU) are refusing to support the NUS-called walkout. DMU has gladly said that all lectures are off when the Queen visits on 8 March but the student union is afraid that students "will miss too many lectures if they walk out on 14 March."

At Leicester, we issued an emergency proposal to the student union parliament calling for them to support the NUS campaign and build for it on campus. We asked the student union to use its authority to make sure that the students walking out are not penalised and to organise pickets outside academic buildings. However, the steering committee denied this emergency proposal and made it into a white paper which is due to be processed on Tuesday 13 March - the day before the walkout!

Students at both University of Leicester and DMU have been seriously let down by our student unions, so we have to do the work ourselves. We will leaflet for the walkout and try to connect it to the Youth Fight for Jobs and Education campaign to bring back EMA so that college and university students will walk out together. On 14 March we will arrange a demo either on campus or in the city centre.

We held a meeting titled "a socialist alternative to cuts, fees, job losses and workfare". The response was good and the questions asked showed that people have started to be critical towards capitalism and look for a socialist alternative.

What we do after 14 March is equally important. We need to continue with the meetings on cuts to education and the socialist alternative. We are also looking forward to next term's freshers fairs where there will be potential for Socialist Students to get many more members as next year's freshers will be the ones paying £9,000 fees.



Socialist Students activists are leafletting and talking to students around the country to make the walkout as successful as possible

NO CUTS NO FEES BRING BACK EMA

• Walkout 14 March

The Con-Dems' cuts represent a potential death blow to the idea of education as a right for all. This includes the axing of EMA student payments for college students, the tripling of university fees, vicious cuts and privatisation programmes across all aspects of education, including the free school and academy scam.

But students are fighting back. Now Socialist Students is building for the biggest possible action on the NUS-called walkout on 14 March. Where the NUS has not put its full weight into campaigning for this, it is unlikely to reflect the scale of students' anger. This must be just the start!

• Strike 28 March

Unions representing hundreds of thousands of workers, including lecturers, are planning to strike to defend their pensions on 28 March. Students should join the picket lines at their colleges and universities and refuse to go to classes if they take place. Mass action by trade unions has the power to stop the government's attacks. Workers and students, unite and fight!

See page 11 for more.



photo Senan

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.
- 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!