



the Socialist

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RESIST CAMERON'S COLD CRUELTY

"The National Shop Stewards Network has forged a close relationship with Remply workers all over the country and we are offering all our resources to Remply workers and their unions to build the necessary campaign to win this battle. The NSSN calls on all its supporters and its affiliated organisations to contact their local Remply factory and offer assistance."

Rob Williams
Chair, National Shop Stewards Network. See page 4.



The slogan 'we are the 99%' has shaken the rich 1% and their representatives in parliament. It has pushed Tory prime minister David Cameron to talk about 'moral', 'caring' and 'popular' capitalism.

However, it is the brutal reality of the cuts – supported by the Tories, Lib Dems and New Labour – that shows how caring these big business mouthpieces really are.

Unemployment is rising. Benefits are being slashed. Among the latest to face the Con-Dems' axe are 1,700 disabled workers in skilled, productive jobs as 36 Remply factories face closure.

Remply's national trade union convenor, Les Woodward, reports.

The announcement of the closure of 36 Remply factories and the privatisation/closure of a further 18 in the near future has left Remply workers bitter and angry.

The consultation process was a sham. A vast swathe of the disability lobby allowed

themselves to be used by the government to add some sort of justification by saying that the Remply model was outdated and disabled people do not want to work in "segregated employment".

With 13 jobs being lost in the public sector to every job 'created' in the private sec-

tor, the stark truth is that most working class people with disabilities would love a chance for employment either in a Remply factory or anywhere else.

And the rather limp promise of full support for Remply workers to find alternative work is an illusion.

There are few if any jobs out there, even less jobs with the same level of understanding, support and quality of terms and conditions that were trade union negotiated in Remply.

This attack on a vulnerable group of workers by a vicious, nasty little government made up of public school toffs who will never know what life is really like in Con-Dem Britain, illustrates the lengths that the ruling class will go to, to prop up their sick, rotten capitalist system.

Remply receives a £111 million subsidy

to employ disabled people - nothing compared to the billions of pounds of public money used to bail out the banks or the £4.5 billion spent annually on the occupation of Afghanistan.

With jobs in jeopardy, benefits being cut, and no possibility of employment, Remply workers have no alternative but to fight hard to protect their jobs and their factories.

Messages of support can be sent via les.woodward@ntlworld.com and 07977 436251.

Meetings to organise support of Remply workers include a London Disabled People Against the Cuts meeting on 20 March and a Swansea trades council meeting on 21 March – see www.socialistparty.org.uk/whatson for more details



the Socialist

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Interview with RMT candidate

Fight the cuts – for a workers' alternative

The London regional organiser for the RMT transport union, Steve Hedley, gave a fraternal address to the Socialist Party's 2012 congress. Steve, who is a Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) list candidate in the 2012 Greater London Assembly elections, spoke to Bob Severn from the Socialist.



Steve Hedley

Why are you standing for TUSC in the London elections?

We need an alternative to the Labour Party because they're not representing working people anymore. They seek funds from the trade union movement, but when the trade union movement has any issues that we want aired, they're not backing us up. Ed Miliband condemned people for going on strike to defend their pensions and that's just not tenable. We need people up there who are going to put our point of view forward.

The Labour Party leaders say that cuts should be made but the Con-Dems are going 'too far and too fast'. They support the public sector pay freeze and wouldn't reverse the cuts made so far. What do you say?

There should be no cuts. Everybody knows now that bankers' bonuses

have increased. They know about the money being held offshore in tax havens. They know about the billions of pounds that are owed in tax loopholes. It's up to the government to get hold of that money, bring it back into the economy to stop it benefitting a few rich individuals and start benefitting the whole of the country.

What's happening in London RMT over workers' pay and conditions for the Olympics?

We're looking at Olympic bonuses for all of our staff. Cleaners have won a 25% Olympic bonus on London Overground. We want a significant bonus for all our staff who are going to be doing extra work and if we don't get it we have to give an industrial response.

There have been reports of further increases in peak time rail fares being planned. Do you see this as the thin end of the wedge of the McNulty report reforms?

It's part of the strategy of the train operating companies to maximise the profits they can squeeze out of people. It's absolutely appalling.

McNulty himself said that it's over four times as expensive to run a privatised railway than a nationalised one. At least £1.2 billion could be saved by renationalisation so renationalisation should be the answer to all these problems. The job cuts are going to endanger the travelling public as well.

Engineering and maintenance is going to be cut. The tracks and the signals are going to be less well maintained. The stations and the ticket offices are going to be destaffed to a large extent so if there's an incident there's going to be less people to deal with it.

We think the union can have common ground with the public in opposing all these cuts.

You're also standing in this year's election for the RMT position of assistant general secretary (AGS). Why should RMT members vote for you?

I've got a record of organising people on the London Underground and the London transport region to get better pay, better conditions and to defend jobs.

I've come up with a credible strat-

egy of opposing the McNulty report. We have to have a coordinated political and industrial strategy. We've got to build links with commuter groups and passenger groups.

But at the end of the day if we're going to stop this thing coming in we've got to have a credible campaign of extended, unified industrial action to make these people withdraw from this terrible report that they're going to try to implement.

Otherwise we're going to end up with exactly what the report wants: De-staffed stations – people who are left there are going to have their wages cut by 30%.

We're here to defend all working people's jobs. We're not going to pay for this crisis of capitalism on the one hand and the crisis that they've created on the railway with privatisation on the other hand. Why should ordinary workers pay for it?

As AGS I would be pushing for full renationalisation. Now is the time to do that. We've got the figures to back us up. We should fight for renationalisation and fight for the rank and file members out there.

TUSC AGAINST CUTS

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition list for the London Assembly elections:

● **Alex Gordon**, president of rail union RMT ● **Nick Wrack**, TUSC national committee ● **April Ashley**, Unison executive, representing black women members ● **Sian Griffiths**, FBU ● **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 ● **Merlin Reader** postal worker ● **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. Candidates are in a personal capacity

Public rally to launch London TUSC campaign

Wednesday 21 March, 7.15pm
235 Shaftesbury Avenue London WC2H 8EP

Speakers:

Bob Crow, general secretary rail union RMT
Matt Wrack, general secretary Fire Brigades Union
Alex Gordon, president RMT & TUSC candidate
Ian Leahair, firefighters' union FBU national executive & TUSC candidate
April Ashley, Unison national executive & TUSC candidate
Jackie Turner, doctor and health campaigner & TUSC candidate
Chaired by TUSC candidate **Nick Wrack**

Coventry: Fight for a socialist alternative

The Coventry Observer reports that: "Coventry City Council is in line to win an award for the way it has delivered budget cuts.

"The organisation, which has been forced to save millions of pounds in the last two years, is one of three nominated at the Improvement and Efficiency Awards later this month...

"Leader Councillor John Mutton said widespread government cuts meant facing up to difficult challenges in the coming years but added the programme had helped minimise their impact."

All he and the Labour council, elected to defend working class people against the Con-Dems' axe, can do is promise more cuts. He told the Observer: "As cuts bite even further we'll continue to deliver efficiencies in this way as much as we can, although it's clearly getting more challenging every year."

Dave Nellist, Socialist Party councillor has been a lone voice against cuts on Coventry council. He stands

in the tradition of councillors who stand up for those who elected them – such as in Liverpool in the 1980s and Poplar in the 1920s.

See more on Dave and the Socialist Party's record in Coventry:

www.coventrysocialists.co.uk



Dave Nellist



Why I'm standing

"I work in the NHS with vulnerable people with mental health problems. I'm standing for TUSC in the local government elections because none of the major parties are willing to stand up and support public services, which will be incredibly damaging for the people that I work for and I want to give those people a voice."

Lesley Connors, Leeds



Socialism Today



The Socialist Party's magazine
March 2012 issue:

Out now!

● **Striking back in austerity Britain** - Peter Taaffe writes

● **Scotland's referendum on independence** - Philip Stott assesses the situation

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National demo needed to save our NHS

A North London health worker

The coalition government with little opposition from Labour are closer than ever to transferring our National Health Service to the money grabbing private sector who will enrich themselves still further.

At the recent Save Our NHS rally at Westminster Central Hall, health workers listened to a succession of trade union leaders such as Trades Union Congress general secretary Brendan Barber speak about the dangers of the Con-Dems' Health and Social Care Bill. Yet it quickly became clear to the 2,000 people gathered inside and 70,000 watching live on the internet, that no concrete steps for resistance would be put forward.

The mood in the hall became increasingly one of frustration as the speakers' lack of appetite for action became clear.

Several groups of campaigners, nurses and other health staff began chanting 'national demo now' and one group unfurled a banner calling for a general strike to save the NHS. The response of the organisers was to eject most of the dissenters from the meeting!

The most enthusiastic ovation was given to the health campaigner June Hautot, the scourge of Con-Dem health minister Andrew Lansley. Perhaps Barber and Unison leader Dave Prentis should ask June for some campaign advice!

The Labour Party is unwilling to participate in meaningful resistance to even the worst attacks of the Tories. It criticises the 'Tory coalition' from the sidelines while waiting for the next general election.

Meanwhile Labour-led councils claim they have 'no choice' but to implement cuts on behalf of the government, instead of fighting for the needed funding.

Voting in parliament has failed to defeat this bill. It is now time for those who need a publicly owned NHS to take decisive action through their unions and anti-cuts groups.

Opposition

Opposition has instead come from health campaigners and NHS workers. During 2011, these groups were largely met with indifference when trying to enlist the support of the official leaders of the labour movement and struggled to get the attention of the media as to the real meaning of this bill.

If the leaders of the trade union movement lifted their collective little fingers they could have a million people on the streets within weeks to protect the NHS from the profiteering, cuts in services and 'Americanisation' that the Health and So-

Liberals' 'democratic' conference



While the Socialist Party held its national congress in Clacton-on-Sea (see pages 8 and 9) and committed itself to the fight to save the NHS, the Lib Dems had its conference in Gateshead.

The Lib Dems' website claims their conferences are "democracy in action". At this year's conference, party leader and deputy prime minister Nick Clegg claimed he is "as radical as ever".

To prove this, Clegg ignored the party's spring conference's vote to reject the Health and Social Care Bill at the next Lords reading.

And in an attempt to face both ways at once, Clegg claimed 'it's not a Lib Dem bill, but it's now a better bill thanks to our input'.

This 'better bill' would cost £1.7

billion to implement and means that 49% of the NHS could be used for private practice. 80% of the NHS budget would be given to Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG). CCGs are already being set up even before they are written into law with many senior GPs spending up to four days a week on doing so.

CCGs are being 'advised' by huge corporations. So instead of 'handing control over to family doctors' - which is what the Con-Dems claim - it's really handing control over to big business that will 'advise' that more money goes to private health companies.

This would make the NHS into a badge behind which private companies seek huge profits.

cial Care Bill represents.

Such a campaign would also hold some dangers for the Labour Party. Labour's shadow health secretary Andy Burnham was among the TUC rally's speakers.

Yet several former Labour health secretaries are now sitting on the boards of large private health and health insurance multinationals.

No wonder - the 1997-2010 Labour governments introduced 'reforms', ie cuts and privatisation, in the NHS including the outsourcing of non-medical services and Private Finance Initiative deals. No group understands the conversion to free market economics by the Labour Party better than health workers!

But as recent remarks by Unite leader Len McCluskey and disquiet within the GMB union demonstrate - a quarter of conference motions question the union's links to the La-

bour Party - the labour movement and the Labour Party are not one and the same.

While the Labour Party continues to act as a brake on our movement its influence is under challenge. Unite, Unison and the GMB should stop funding the Labour Party and instead stand and support anti-cuts candidates.

Our task is to increase the pressure within trade unions for mass action to repeal the bill, prepare the ground in local areas for dogged and determined resistance to service closures and link trade unions to campaign groups.

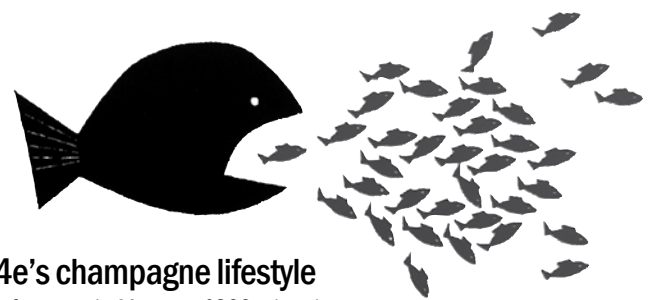
We must also discuss and develop approaches to the question of occupations and other bold action where hospital closures are being threatened. To misquote Elvis we need 'a little more conversation and a lot more action'!

The Socialist Party demands:

- No to cuts. For a publicly funded service, free at the point of use, to provide for everyone's health needs
- End big business profiteering from the NHS! Scrap the costly Private Finance Initiative (PFI) schemes. No to private polyclinics and GP consortiums. Axe the bill
- End 'payment by results'. Take all health services and buildings back from big business and place them under public ownership. Publicly fund and integrate them with the rest of the NHS
- Nationalise the pharmaceutical and medical supply industries and private health providers, with compensation only on the basis of proven need. Bring them under

- working class control and management
- Abolish Foundation Trusts. For democratic control of local health services by elected health workers and community representatives as well as elected representatives from local and national government
- End NHS job losses and low pay
- For a massive trade union-led struggle to defend the NHS
- For a new mass workers' party to fight for the NHS and against cuts and privatisation. For socialist policies and a planned economy to end poverty, bad housing, unemployment, pollution and inequality - the biggest killers and causes of ill-health

Them...



A4e's champagne lifestyle

Conferences in Monaco, £200-a-head nights out, £800 meals - that's the lifestyle afforded by top executives at disgraced workfare company A4e. Former managers have come forward to reveal the 'champagne culture' in light of the resignation of former chair, Emma Harrison, a fraud investigation and several arrests. On one occasion in April 2011 Harrison travelled to New York on a trip that cost the company £20,000. This included her and her husband flying business class. Don't worry though, there were some limits to the spending - Harrison's personal assistant was made to fly economy.

come the East Village consisting of 2,818 homes. Great, you might think. But in Newham, where the majority of the games will take place, the council looks set to receive only 348 homes. And Barking and Dagenham, Hackney, Havering, Redbridge, Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest will only receive 107 between them!

1,226!

That's how many billionaires there are in the world - more than ever before. Collectively they are worth \$4.6 trillion. Apparently the gap between these

Energy Diddlers' Fine

EDF Energy has been forced to repay £4.5 million for misleading customers. 70,000 vulnerable households will receive about £50 each from the company. It's always nice to see Us get something from Them for a change. But we can't help but feel they've been let off the hook just a little - despite the money being reported by some as a 'fine', actually the company is only being fined £1! The rest is compensation to people they've ripped off. Funny how the courts didn't offer giving the stuff back as an optional punishment instead of jail time for people who stole bottles of water and the like during the riots last year.

\$4.6tn

Combined wealth of world's billionaires

1,226 is narrowing. But that's certainly not the case between them and the rest of us - from 2010 to 2011 there was a 49% increase in the annual pay of company directors in the UK.

Turning back the clock

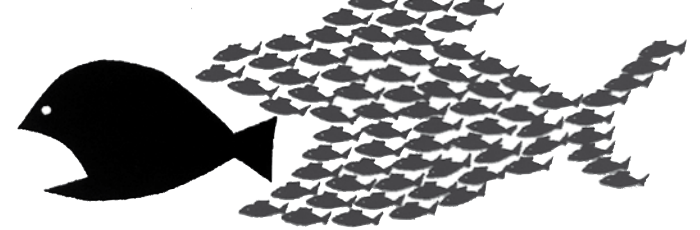
The Economist's 'What year is it in economic terms' shows how far world economies have been thrown back by the crisis:

Olympic let down

Since the successful London 2012 bid in 2005, the east London boroughs have been promised that the Olympics will bring jobs, homes and investment to some of the most deprived areas in the country. Well, with a few months to go, we're still waiting. Once the games are over the Olympic Village will be-



...& Us



What we heard!

An elderly man in a smart suit approached us during a Socialist Party campaign stall in Cheltenham: "What a state we're in: unemployment, economic crisis. It's dire. So depressing. I'm thinking of self-immolation."

Cries of "no!" from the concerned campaigners. "I thought I'd write to Cameron to suggest the entire cabinet does it."

A woman in Gloucester asked Socialist Party members if we knew that the House of Commons was sinking into the Thames mud and that Big Ben was leaning more and more to the right. "Really?" Scornfully: "Well it won't be to the left. Personally I think most people are like me and hope it will sink with all of them in it!"

From @davenellist this week

A Labour council! A Labour council!! gives 'freedom of city' to Michael Heseltine #labour'snotlabouranymore

Just off to Cardinal Wiseman school for second 6th form debate this week after #stringervoice on Tuesday @coventrycc

@bbcthisweek on International Women's Day let's have Peter Stringfellow! On tax and economic policy. Who's idea was that?



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Socialist Party Congress report

Preparing for the struggles ahead

At the Socialist Party's national congress on 10-12 March, the discussion on developments in the trade unions was introduced by Rob Williams. He proposed, and it was unanimously agreed, to send messages of support to the Remploy workers facing a battle to keep their factories open and to the MMP packaging workers in Bootle who are also fighting redundancies foisted on them by a vicious employer.

The conference erupted in cheers as delegates agreed to send congratulations to the construction workers who have defeated the big construction companies' attempts to slash their wages and working conditions.

Rob graphically set out what workers are facing in the age of austerity. In the public sector, especially in local government, the Con-Dems have been able to push through cuts, a pay freeze, redundancies and privatisation - impossible without the collusion of Labour councillors and often a defeatist role played by trade union bureaucrats.

But the anger and frustration about all these attacks has been concentrated on the pensions dispute. That battle, and the willingness to fight of public sector workers, has had an affect on the private sector by legitimising struggle again. There has been a rash of disputes, notably those reported on in the Socialist, such as Unilever, Wincanton and the Stagecoach bus drivers.

The correct tactics and strategy



Unilever workers on the picket line photo the Socialist

being adopted by the leadership of the civil service union PCS, which includes Socialist Party members, has been important. The Left Unity conference on 7 January played a vital role in keeping united national action on the agenda.

The pensions struggle is continuing, with the planned strike on 28 March - and it could reignite. But whatever happens it has helped to reinvigorate the fighting spirit within the trade unions and it has paved the way for the battles to come, including over the NHS.

The construction workers' battle showed the complexities within the trade union movement - the need to go through the official union bod-

ies as well as organising rank and file action. The trade union officials involved were largely weighed down by past setbacks and the bold and imaginative methods used by the rank and file were essential in igniting and spreading the dispute. But the employers only backed down after there was an official strike ballot.

Through all of these disputes the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) has played an increasingly important role and the conference on 9 June should further develop its significance as a fighting organisation for active trade unionists.

The discussion ranged across many unions and workplaces, delegates explaining how future battles

will emerge. In education for example, school teachers are taking action against privatisation and cuts, as well as pensions, the action taken by the NUT having an influence on the other teaching unions.

Affiliation to the Labour Party was another theme, with a member of Unison pointing out how the confidence in Labour has been severely dented after all the cuts being implemented by Labour councils. Only one third of Unison members were paying into the affiliated political fund anyway.

The long-running witch-hunt against Socialist Party members in Unison is an indication of the fear the union leadership has of the arguments for a fighting democratic union. And the repeated failure of the witch-hunters to win the arguments at employment tribunals is an indication of their political weakness.

Several delegates mentioned the importance of selling the Socialist in workplaces. Many workers will take out subscriptions to the paper, especially if the content is used to develop workplace discussion groups and some will be convinced to join the Socialist Party by what they read.

The lively and interesting discussion and the summing up by Jane James, from the executive committee, really underlined the important positions many Socialist Party members have in the trade unions and the necessity of continuing the preparation for the forthcoming battles.

In brief

Teachers' strike suspended

After a successful strike in London on 23 February, NUT members in sixth form colleges outside London were due to take a half-day's strike action on 15 March. The employers have resorted to trying to drag the union through the courts, so the strike is suspended for the time being.

Nigel Fox, Secretary of Hampshire NUT, explains why the action was planned: "The purpose of the strike is to draw attention to the 20% funding cut colleges are experiencing between 2011-16. It is of the same magnitude as the cuts being faced by the police service, where some forces are looking at privatising large swathes of their service in response.

"We are particularly concerned by the effect on staff workloads - which are increasing by 20% - and the consequences for 16-19 educational provision. One particular strand of funding hit by the cuts is the so-called 'entitlement' element. This is used to fund things like tutorial support, careers advice and the non-examined curriculum. Funding for providing this is being cut by 75%."

Killed at work

Part of the government's crusade against 'red tape' is to reclassify dock work as 'low risk'. But Hazards magazine has recently revealed what a lie this is. Since the end of October 2011, five workers have been killed working in docks at Tilbury, Sunderland, Ipswich and Immingham. Also, on 31 January this year, Health and Safety Executive inspectors issued an immediate stop work notice at part of the Humber International Terminal, effectively bringing all activity at the dock to a halt. This can only be issued where there is "risk of serious personal injury." The Con-Dems are happy to play to the gallery with glib gestures about eliminating 'red tape', while workers' lives are put at risk. A number of protests and events are being organised across the country on Workers' Memorial Day on 28 April.

Fighting the rail cuts

Transport union RMT is organising a budget day of action on 21 March, against the many attacks on the rail industry. The McNulty rail review allows train operating companies to ramp up fares while cutting the service to the public, including closing ticket offices and removing staff from stations. The protests will specifically target South West Trains, where a private takeover of the infrastructure begins on 1 April. The RMT is calling for transport to be run as a public service in public ownership.

Tube strike ballot

The RMT has announced the timetable for the strike ballot of its members employed by Tubelines on London Underground. The dispute is over the demand for equal pension and travel pass rights with other staff on the tube. Tubelines workers perform tasks across the tube network and maintenance and upgrade work on the Jubilee, Northern and Piccadilly lines. The ballot, for strike action and action short of a strike, will begin on 20 March and run until 16 April.

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

DEFEND JOBS & PENSIONS, STOP CUTS
ALL STRIKE TOGETHER!

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 54498, London, E10 9DE

May Day greetings

Celebrate International Workers' Day by supporting the paper that fights all cuts with a May Day greeting in the Socialist.

The Socialist appeals for greetings from trade union branches, workplace and community groups, anti-cuts campaigns, Youth Fight for Jobs groups and student societies.

Can you get a greeting agreed at your next trade union, society or campaign meeting? Or can you use the May Day appeal sheet to collect pledges from fellow workers, students, or campaigners?

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
 - £15 for up to 30 words
 - £1 per word
- 25% discount by paying before Thursday 19 April. To order May Day appeal sheets and to give your greeting contact bobsevern@socialistparty.org.uk or 020 8988 8781.

Send your greeting by Thursday 19 April to make sure it is displayed on 1 May.

Construction workers fight on

Rob Williams

Over 40 construction workers protested on 14 March outside the Shard site at London Bridge. These workers were fresh from the victory over the 'Dirty Seven' construction companies who had tried to impose the Besna contract, which would have deskilled the industry and cut wages by 35%. They were now taking on the construction bosses over their use of agency working in the construction industry.

The Shard site is run by Mace who, like all the other employers, use agencies to allow them to pay lower wages than the national agreement, JIB. They use this strategy to attack the terms and conditions which have been agreed with the unions.

Loads of Shard workers took leaflets onto the site. They explained that Mace is a profitable multi-

national company but is forcing the workers to take pay rates significantly lower than the national agreement. Workers are working overtime without overtime payment and are being denied other nationally agreed payments.

It's clear that, after their marathon six-month campaign to defeat the Besna, the confidence of construction workers has been raised. They now want to take on the other burning issues in the industry like agency working and blacklisting.

These protests will continue and they will act as a check on their union Unite and the officials when they enter into the negotiations with the construction companies. The companies want to force concessions out of the union to worsen the JIB but these electricians, pipefitters and plumbers are determined not to offer any concessions and to improve the JIB.



One of the many lively London protests photo Chris Newby

Fighting Con-Dem attacks on education

Socialist Students get a response



Across Britain, thousands of students took part in the 14 March protest called, but not built for, by the National Union of Students against £9,000 tuition fees, the ending of Education Maintenance Allowance student payments, privatisation and cuts. Many of the more successful local protests were organised by Socialist Students members. In Sheffield 60 students joined protests at both Sheffield University and Hallam University, 50 were on protests in York and 40 in Brighton.

Chaz Lockett from Sheffield University Socialist Students told the Socialist: "It was a really fantastic demo which was bright and noisy. We got lots of support from members of the public and many people joined in with the demonstration. "The next step is building the momentum from today for 28 March, when public sector workers are planning a strike over pensions. We want to give them as much support as possible, as to beat the cuts we need to link the struggles of students and workers."

Southampton's Tory hypocrite brought to book

Josh Asker
Southampton University Socialist Students

Education activists in Southampton confronted universities minister David Willetts on Friday 9 March over his plans to privatise education and the introduction of £9,000 fees.

After an event to publicise his book - *The Pinch: How the Baby-Boomers Stole Their Children's Future* - the Tory Havant MP was met by 60 activists.

Members of Southampton Students for Education were joined by Socialist Students, Youth Fight for Jobs and UCU union members to highlight the hypocrisy of his book and the full extent of his govern-

ment's cuts. UCU representative and university professor Catherine Pope decried cuts of over 400 staff at the university last year and 100% removal of public funding to Arts and Humanity departments.

As frustrations grew over the ministers' refusal to answer questions or justify his policies, the MP for Havant was ushered away to the cries of "No ifs, not buts, no education cuts!"

Meanwhile protesters were left wondering who he will try to blame next. It was made clear by socialists at the event that we don't blame 'baby-boomers' for the economic crisis but the banks and big business who continue to rake in record profits while making young and working class people pay.

Royal excuses from De Montfort student 'leader'

Lucy Stokes
Leicester

I had sent an email to De Montfort University (DMU) student union president Liam Davis regarding the NUS walkout.

His response said he had concerns that a second round of missed lectures wouldn't gain wider student

support as lessons were already cancelled for the royal visit at DMU!

This shows how spineless he and the student union leaders are.

We need a fighting student union that takes action against fees and cuts, for a living grant for all, decent, affordable housing and decent jobs with decent pay guaranteed when students graduate from university.

Housing crisis in London Forced out - fighting back

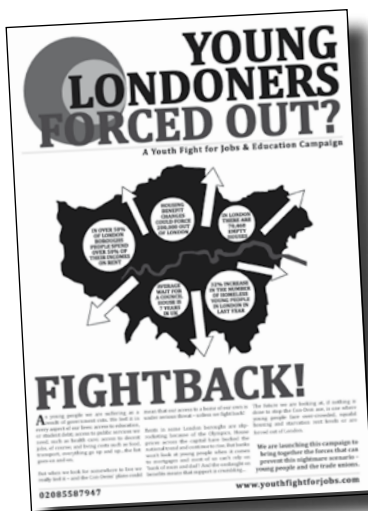
Suzanne Beishon
London Youth Fight for Jobs

It has been revealed that the number of people sleeping rough in England has grown by more than a fifth in the past year.

In the same period homelessness has jumped 14% nationally and in London that figure is even higher at 36%. In fact in seven London boroughs homelessness has doubled in a year!

Hidden away in the report of those figures, was the fact that as a result of job losses there has been a 44% increase in households who are homeless after repossession.

While wages have stagnated or been cut and jobs have been slashed, rents have risen 8% since 2009 reach-



200,000 people could be forced out of the capital. In London Youth Fight for Jobs, linking up with trade unions, has launched Forced Out - Fight Back to campaign against these issues.

The campaign has already been debating with Grant Shapps, the Tory housing minister, on Twitter (follow @LDNForcedOutYFJ).

The campaign is also active at universities around London. Many students have horror stories about housing - one young woman told us that she was paying £300 a week for a room in a shared house!

Youth Fight for Jobs campaigns for:

- All housing and housing benefit cuts to be reversed
- Rent to be capped at a genuinely affordable level
- After the Olympics, the infrastructure should be used to benefit the low-paid and young
- A mass house-building programme and renovation scheme should be used to create jobs and apprenticeships on trade union pay rates
- Banks and building giants should be forced to provide cheap, no or low interest mortgages. If they refuse we demand they should be fully nationalised and run to meet social need

London housing campaign launch meeting
Tuesday 17 April, 7pm
ULU, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HY
Supported by Unite 1111 housing workers' branch
Contact youthfightforjobs@gmail.com for leaflets and to get involved

One survey showed that 30% of Londoners say they expect to be driven out of the capital by the high cost of housing and more than one million people in London were relying on credit and payday loans to help pay their rent or mortgage in the last 12 months.

David Cameron has stated that lower housing benefit limits are forcing landlords to reduce rental levels. Using freedom of information requests of every English council an Inside Housing survey found his claim does not stack up.

Of 204 authorities to respond, just 36 reported any rent reductions in return for direct payment of local housing allowance (LHA).

In reality, many landlords in the London boroughs where renting is cheaper actually see an opportunity to push rents up as people flood into those areas after being priced out of others.

One survey showed that 30% of Londoners say they expect to be driven out of the capital by the high cost of housing... 200,000 people could be forced out of the capital

ing a record high at the end of 2011, meaning a bigger and bigger proportion of what we earn is spent on rent and other housing costs.

Library cash goes to supermarket bosses

Gloucestershire Socialist Party

Following an extensive campaign and judicial review that was unfavourable to them, Gloucestershire county council (GCC) has been forced to redress its cuts programme through public consultations.

Campaigners have now discovered that the "library workshops" being run as part of the public consultation will each receive £40 in shopping vouchers to be spent at Tesco and Sainsbury's.

Only one campaign member was invited (obviously by mistake) to the workshop, despite the fact that the GCC's Big Society agenda promised that local groups could take over public facilities.

The invite that went out states that the library review is happening due to "limited resources" but this did not deter the GCC from putting taxpayers' money into the pockets of retail giants Tesco and Sainsbury's.

'Monumental mess'

Joanna Bo Anderson, a tireless leading figure in the countywide campaign, said: "It is particularly galling as this consultation is only happening because Gloucestershire County

Council made such a monumental mess of the libraries review the first time around. Such a mess that the High Court ruled them to be guilty of 'bad government' and a 'fundamental breach of the law'.

"Despite plenty of warnings GCC insisted on leading the taxpayers of Gloucestershire into the costly court case. They are now paying a research company £60,000 of our money to do a new consultation... and now they are giving our money to big business."

The council and the research company Vector refuse to answer questions about who will be invited to the workshops. Vector argues that library campaigners are not their client - yet it is the taxpayer who will pay the bill! It subsequently emerged that the consultation seems to be targeting nursery school parents for whom transport is laid on.

Library users are not being targeted - this is a bit like repeating a survey until you get the desired response.

The last consultation was a sham - held in selected shopping centres during working hours; apparently this one has been designed to prove libraries are not wanted, despite the fact that the number of people using libraries in the county has gone up.

May Day detainees' case

The European Court of Human Rights is releasing its judgement on the May Day Detainee case on 15 March.

Socialist Party member Lois Austin has been fighting a legal battle for justice since 2001 when she and

3,000 other protesters were 'kettled' by the police for seven hours on a May Day anti-globalisation protest. Fuller report in the next issue of the Socialist.

See www.socialistparty.org.uk for updates

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the Socialist

SUPPORTING YOUTH FIGHT FOR JOBS
FIGHTING WORKFARE -
'WE WANT JOBS NOT SLAVE LABOUR!'
www.youthfightforjobs.com



Unemployment



● 2.67m unemployed (highest since 1995) but the TUC says it would be 6.3m if you include those who can't find full-time work



● Joblessness among 16 to 24-year-olds is at 1.04m, a rate of 22.2%, more than one in five



● 56% of young black men are unemployed

Workfare



● Mandatory Work Activity = up to 30 hours a week, 4 weeks. Dole money = £67.50/30 = max of £2.25 an hour, no contracts...

● The government intends 250,000 workfare placements on the Work Experience scheme alone. If each placement is 8 weeks of 30 hours work, this is 60 million hours of unpaid work.

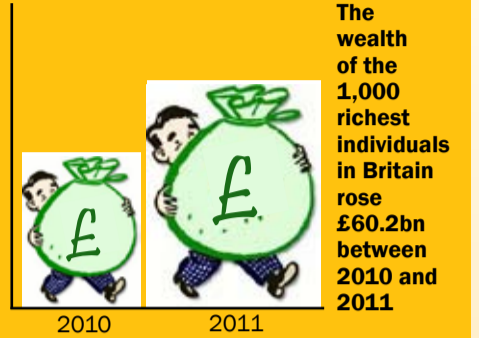
● 200 people have already had their benefits docked for non-compliance

● 1,000s of terminally ill people have received letters demanding they seek jobs

£8.6m

Disgraced former boss of A4e workfare company, Emma Harrison paid herself £8.6m in 2011

Rich get richer



● There are 1,226 billionaires in 2012, an all-time high. The group's combined net worth is \$4.6 trillion, up 2%. The average worth of a billionaire is \$3.7bn.

● The wealth of 1,000 richest individuals in Britain have a combined worth of £395.8bn

29

There are 29 UK billionaires

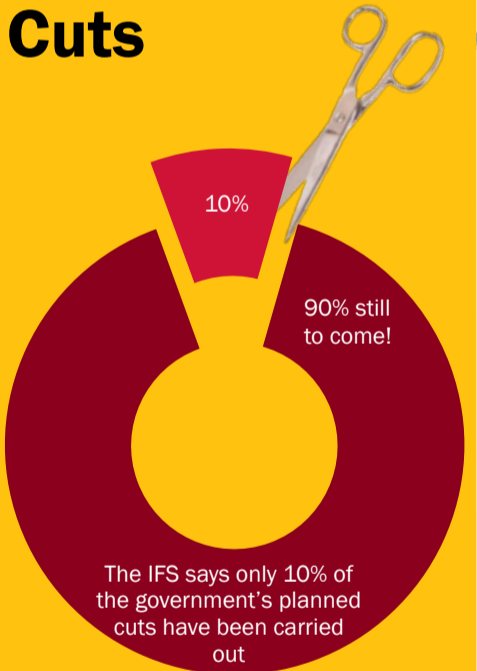
● FTSE 350 bosses have seen their bonuses go up by 187% since 2002!

● Cash piles: big business in the UK sits on £130bn

● Privatisation:
 Welfare: £5bn over seven years;
 Schools: £7.2bn;
 Health: £24.2bn;
 Prisons: £4bn; Higher education: £33m
 This is how much each of these vital public services is estimated to be worth to the private sector now - the figure could get much higher... unless we stop them!



Cuts



● Budget deficit of £110bn for 2010/2011, while unpaid tax was £120bn

● Some of the cuts: School meals, -55.1% to £6m, Rail; -41% to £2.98bn; Children & families, -31% to £2bn; Further Education, -16% to £4.7bn

● 450,000 disabled people will see their incomes cut under one of the changes planned to housing benefit

● NHS cuts: before Lansley's Bill government is making £20bn in cuts, about a fifth of health spending (initiated by Labour)

...but we're fighting back!



Workfare protests 21 March

BUILD A MASS MOVEMENT TO KICK OUT THIS GOVERNMENT OF THE RICH FOR THE RICH

Socialist Party national congress 2012

In Clacton-on-Sea from 10 to 12 March, 295 delegates and visitors took part in a very successful Socialist Party annual congress. New members at their first ever party congress and more experienced members alike went back to their home areas inspired by the discussions and determined to push on with developing the party's work.

In keeping with the democratic tradition of the party, delegates elected by members in branches throughout England and Wales discussed and voted on resolutions covering the main political issues faced in Britain today, and the work of the party in participating in events and building our membership. Resolutions and amendments had

been submitted by the party's national committee and by many of the branches. The resolutions agreed will serve as guidelines for the party's work in the coming year.

As usual, a national committee was elected to lead the work of the party in between this congress and the next.

Indicating great enthusiasm for building the party, over £9,000 was raised for the party's fighting fund in a congress appeal, and over £800 a month of increased monthly donations (party members' subs) were pledged.

Welcomed to the congress were a number of visitors from sister sections of the Committee

for a Workers' International (CWI), from France, Scotland, northern and southern Ireland as well as some of the leaders and staff of the CWI itself.

Also very welcome were visits to give fraternal addresses (in a personal capacity) by president of the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) workers' union Alex Gordon, assistant general secretary of the Prison Officers Association Joe Simpson, assistant general secretary of the Public and Commercial Services union Chris Baugh, and London regional organiser of the RMT Steve Hedley.

The congress included a moving memorial tribute to former Coventry Socialist Party councillor Rob Windsor, who died on 14 January.

World developments show - capitalism is crisis

Sarah Sachs-Eldridge

“When the present devastating world crisis of capitalism broke, the Socialist Party and the CWI drew bold far-reaching conclusions: that this time there would be no quick or easy way out for capitalism and that arising from this we would see a period of revolution and counter-revolution”. With these words Peter Taaffe, Socialist Party general secretary, opened the first session of the Socialist Party 2012 national congress.

This sums up the backdrop of world events - from the struggles taking place against Con-Dem cuts in Britain; to the more than 15 general strikes in Greece; to the revolutionary movements in the Middle East and North Africa, which face reaction but are far from over; to the unravelling of the eurozone and more.

Increasing numbers of people recognise capitalism as a system in crisis. Even China, that has been the powerhouse of the world economy, is seeing its growth drop off. This could have enormous implications for the development of mass struggle by the Chinese working class.

Peter highlighted developments in the Middle East and the US, where, despite mass unemployment, Obama could win the presidential election given the state of the Republican candidates. A second Obama term could provide the working class and youth with confidence to start to build their own party.

But Europe is still at the epicentre of the crisis - and Greece is in the 'eye of the storm'. The Greek economy has suffered a slump with a 17% drop in GDP in the last five years. No Greek



Peter Taaffe

could have believed what would come to pass had it been suggested five years ago - school students are too underfed to do sports and wages have been slashed by 40% on average.

Workers have fought austerity and the Papademos bankers' government (installed by the Troika of the EU, ECB and IMF) through general strike action, occupations and demonstrations. Peter described the situation as a "war without guns".

Workers' organisations

He explained that the central task in Greece and internationally is the building of new mass organisations of the working class. The capitalists have proven that in their hands the future is unbearable. Workers are drawing conclusions from this reflected in electoral support for the large left parties of over 30%.

The Socialist Party's sister organisation in the CWI, Xekinima, calls for the formation of a workers' government. Unfortunately the big left parties themselves fail to make this call and have not given a lead on the programme necessary to defeat austerity. Xekinima calls for non-payment of the debt, nationalisation of the banks, breaking with the euro on a working class basis of international solidarity



photo Senan

with all workers in Europe struggling against austerity and democratic socialist planning.

The situation in Spain, with more than half of young people out of work, is desperate. Even Mariano Rajoy, the new prime minister, says that the rapid cuts demanded by the EU are not possible - warning they would provoke a general strike. This too points to the inevitability of the break-up of the eurozone in some way.

Far-right threat

In pre-election France Nicolas Sarkozy is attempting to steal the racist ideas of the far-right candidate Marine Le Pen to challenge the ex-social democratic Socialist Party. Le Pen's support among blue-collar workers, in the absence of a mass party of socialism and struggle, should be a warning to the labour movement internationally. In Greece too the far right has shown its ugly face - and in other countries.

The recent left political formation

in France, the NPA, has failed to develop and, with populist measures such as taxing the rich, the Socialist Party candidate François Hollande could win the presidential election.

In Ireland the merging of two potentially genuinely mass campaigns could lead to significant steps being taken with regard to working class organisation. The campaign of non-payment of the punitive household tax and the left 'No' campaign in the referendum on EU fiscal control are led by the Socialist Party in Ireland which has two TDs (MPs) and a Member of the European Parliament.

The international speakers developed some of these points but so too did members from England and Wales who follow these crucial events. Socialists are internationalists and now more than ever understanding of world events is vital preparation for the further development of struggle in Britain. The Socialist Party also takes very seriously the necessity of international solidarity action in

defence of socialists and workers in struggle across the world who face vicious regimes - such as in Kazakhstan (see page 11) and elsewhere.

Among the very good contributions were Alec Thraves from Wales on both the possibilities and limitations of new workers' political formations; Robin Clapp on the character of the crisis and Iain Dalton, among other issues, on perspectives for China.

Lynn Walsh, editor of *Socialism Today*, replied to the discussion. He decisively answered those economic commentators who compare Greece to the Argentinian crisis of 2001-2, saying it 'recovered'.

Today the Greek tragedy is set against a backdrop of systemic capitalist crisis, but as in Argentina it will be the working class and middle class who are expected to pay the price.

Lynn explained how all the fundamental contradictions of capitalism are coming to bear in this crisis, showing the absolute necessity to fight for socialist change.

Building the Socialist Party: 'year of the branch'

As the three main parties were savagely attacking our jobs and services in 2011, support for the ideas and campaigns of the Socialist Party grew. Judy Beishon, member of the executive committee, introduced the session on building the party at the congress.

Judy highlighted the spectacular events that had defined the last year: the TUC demonstration on 26 March and the public sector strikes on J30 and N30.

At each of these, the Socialist Party in-

tervened with hundreds of thousands of leaflets and sold thousands of copies of the Socialist paper, which put forward our demands of escalating action until we win.

We supported the National Shop Stewards Network conference and lobby of the TUC that called for the coordinated strike action that then took place on N30. Youth Fight for Jobs, launched by young members of the Socialist Party, led the 330-mile Jarrow March against youth unemployment.

They were welcomed in London by a large demonstration and the inspirational *Socialism 2011* event. We have also been involved in the Occupy movement, countless other strikes and protests, as well as local anti-cuts groups.

The congress provided an important opportunity to reflect on the suc-

cesses of the Socialist Party over the past year and to discuss our work for the year ahead. Our local branches have increased in number, size and influence so that we are now active in cities and smaller towns up and down the country.

Organised and determined

Many members gave examples of how sometimes even small groups of activists, organised and determined, have been able to have a big impact. The branch provides members with the support and ideas, through discussion of topical political and historical events, to go out and campaign in workplaces, colleges, universities and communities.

The meetings we hold and the reports that members send in to the

Socialist can provide an important antidote to the barrage of lies and attacks from Parliament and the right-wing media.

This is more important than ever. The attacks on ordinary people have just begun and already 2012 is proving to be a year of struggle. We will be taking part in all aspects of the fightback.

All sections of the working class are suffering as a result of the cuts but women, disabled people and members of the LGBT community, some of the most vulnerable people in society, are being the hardest hit and we support their protests and defend their jobs, services and benefits.

We are standing in the local elections and the Greater London Assembly as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, putting for-

ward fighting anti-cuts candidates. Our young members will continue to fight unemployment and cuts to education, building our campaigns in schools, colleges and universities and in the communities. We will continue to support the action taken by the trade unions and campaign for fighting, democratic unions.

In her reply Paula Mitchell, London secretary, explained that the Socialist Party is growing and every member can play a role in helping us build the party further as we step up our campaigning work over the next year.

We have the strategy for fighting all the cuts and defending rights. But we can also provide arguments for an alternative - for a democratic, socialist society. Now is the time to join our party and build this fightback!

Becci Heagney

Socialist Party national congress 2012

Britain: working class begins to 'rise like lions'

Dave Carr

A vitally important discussion among delegates focussed on the deep and protracted crisis in capitalism, and the impact of the government's austerity measures on Britain. The session was introduced by Hannah Sell, Socialist Party deputy general secretary, and summed up by executive member Clive Heemskerk. After a thorough debate, delegates agreed a British Perspectives document proposed by the executive committee.

Hannah began by saying that the last year was characterised by the entry of the working class movement onto the stage of history – shown in the strikes, demonstrations and other forms of protest. The Socialist Party has played an important role in initiating, organising and assisting in many of these events.

The session was preceded by a fraternal speech by PCS assistant general secretary Chris Baugh, who referred to the fantastic fightback by trade unionists in 2011 against the Con-Dems' attacks on living standards and working conditions – in particular, the TUC demo on 26 March and the two one-day strikes on 30 June and 30 November. PCS and other unions are balloting for renewed strike action on 28 March. Chris added: "To defeat this rotten government will take consistent generalised strike action."

But, as Hannah pointed out, because of the betrayal of the right-wing trade union leaders, it is not yet clear to all workers what is required to beat the government.

Increasing numbers are, however, drawing the conclusion that a fightback is necessary.

Despite the attempt by the right-wing trade union leaders to betray the pensions struggle, the strategy put forward by socialists and the left will mean that many workers are better prepared to fight the relentless attacks they face.

British capitalism continues to languish in the doldrums, with little economic growth and a reluctance to invest. The government is so wedded to austerity and neoliberalism that it will resist taking any serious measures to address this.

In dealing with the effects of the crisis Hannah referred to the "cold cruelty of the ruling class", exemplified by its decision to close Remploy factories, throwing 1,700 disabled workers onto the dole and the welfare reform bill among other vicious attacks.

Them and Us society

The outrageous bankers' bonuses, while savage cuts are being made to jobs, benefits and services, the widening inequality and 'slave labour' workfare schemes, are leading to widespread anger among people. However, the right-wing trade union leaders are holding back developing an opposition movement, falsely believing that taking action will damage Labour's election prospects.

For their part the Labour leaders believe that they can only get back into office by emulating the policies of the coalition government – hence Ed Miliband and Ed Balls saying that they won't reverse the spending cuts nor end pay freezes.

Building a left political alternative to Labour is vital and underlines the importance of standing anti-cuts candidates under the banner of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC – see page 2) in the forthcoming elections.

In intervening in elections and in the struggles of the working class the Socialist party will unapologetically put forward its socialist programme. As Chris Baugh pointed out: "Socialist internationalism is the antidote to the tyranny of the markets and capitalism."

Subjects covered in the discussion on 'perspectives for Britain' included Scottish independence and the referendum – with a speech by Philip Stott the general secretary of



photos Senan

Finance, introduced by national treasurer Ken Douglas and replied to by editor of the Socialist Sarah Sachs-Eldridge. Raising money is essential to finance all the party's work, so this session discussed the many avenues for doing this, including by increasing sales of the party's paper and other publications. Congress delegates were able to look at reports of the fundraising that has taken place over the last year, and how it has been spent.

CWI report, given by secretary of the CWI Tony Saunio. The congress concluded with a very inspiring report of the work of other sections of the Committee for a Workers' International and a singing of the Internationale. The CWI is working in 45 countries so it was not possible to hear about all of them, but the report touched on many, including on the US, Kazakhstan, Sri Lanka, Nigeria and Israel.

the Socialist Party's counterpart in Scotland. Dave Reid, Socialist Party Wales secretary spoke on political perspectives for Wales.

Other issues included unemployment and workfare, the crisis in the NHS, pensions and government attacks on public services, political representation of the working class,

racism, immigration and the far right, the Greens, the attacks on women's rights, housing cuts and homelessness, widening inequality, pay freezes, can the coalition last?, transport, and more besides. Further material on these issues will be carried in future issues of the Socialist.

Young, socialist and proud to be!

Sarah Wrack

The stage was literally stormed when the chair invited contributions to the discussion on youth and student work. This reflected the enthusiasm for both the congress and the campaigning.

Claire Laker-Mansfield introduced an inspiring session. She pointed out that since last year's congress there has been a number of protests and movements involving young people – not least young workers taking a lead in the pensions struggle. There was the Youth Fight for Jobs (YFJ) Jarrow March, the Occupy movement, workfare protests and, showing what happens when young people's anger is not organised, the summer riots.

Young Socialist Party members launched YFJ in 2009, in anticipation of mass anger against youth unemployment. Movements internationally, such as the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, where youth unemployment was a spur, and the Indignados in Spain, are evidence of this. Reflecting the concern of capitalist politicians the issue even made it on to the agenda of the world economic forum at Davos.

Enormous respect and support for YFJ from trade unions (seven of whom are affiliated to the campaign) was built up through the 330-mile Jarrow March for Jobs. But contributions to the discus-

sion from around the country demonstrated that Jarrow was just the start. Rachel Horwitz and Richard Brown talked about the need for trade unions to reach out to young workers.

There are plans for local YFJ campaigns in many areas, particularly demanding that local councils introduce an EMA payment substitute for students. James Ivens, youth organiser for Lambeth and Southwark Socialist Party, pointed out that Southwark has already done this. This fact should be used to pressure councils elsewhere to follow suit.

Suzanne Beishon, London youth organiser, outlined the crisis in housing in London which hits young people particularly hard. London YFJ has launched the campaign 'Forced Out? – Fight Back!' to highlight the scale of this problem in the capital.

Action and debate

Many good ideas of how to organise campaigning among young people were shared – including both meetings and action – with a flexible approach needed. For example Michael Wright spoke about the warm response to YFJ campaign stalls outside job centres in Bristol with further action planned for budget day.

Becci Heagney reported on campaigning in the East Midlands,



saying that alongside action there needs to be a forum for debate.

Another important area of work for young Socialist Party members is in the colleges and universities. Sam Morecroft and Chaz Lockett talked about building Socialist Students at Sheffield University and the importance of having a constant presence on campus, particularly during the first term. Alex Moore and Rebecca from Leicester referred to the interest in international events among young people.

Recently the focus for Socialist Student members has been trying to build for the 14 March NUS walk-out, many having to battle against resistant student unions. Nick Hart described this battle at Birmingham City University. Socialist Students played an important part in shutting the campus down almost completely on 30 November when

lecturers were striking in defence of their pensions. The conference was outraged when Nick described a visit to campus by NUS President Liam Burns when he said that it was impossible for NUS to have a position against all education cuts.

Riannon, Lloyd and others spoke of their experiences of participating in Occupy camps and the lessons about organisation and the need for a political understanding of capitalism they had drawn.

Lizi Gray, organiser of the Slutwalk protest in Newcastle, described how Labour had written to her threatening to end her membership – after she had resigned. She wrote back explaining she had joined a party that actually fights

To find out about joining the Socialist Party go to:

www.socialistparty.org.uk

cuts and included a 'join card' for the Socialist Party in her reply! Others spoke about their disillusionment with the Lib Dems.

24 speakers contributed to the discussion and highlighted what a broad range of youth work party members are involved in. In his reply Paul Callanan outlined the tasks facing young Socialist Party members in the next few weeks and months, including workfare protests planned around the country on budget day, 21 March.

Paul stressed the important role that the Socialist Party can play in youth movements by offering socialist ideas.



'Westenders' - omnibus edition

Rob Bishop

Gloucestershire Socialist Party and
Cheltenham Against the Cuts

We are being badgered to celebrate 60 years of Queen Elizabeth on the throne by a never-ending propaganda offensive. Tacky royal souvenirs (probably made in China) will be bought; street parties will be held and royal media coverage will torment us to distraction.

But do we really need the fairy tale fantasy of the real Royal Family, Britain's poshest and longest running soap? This celebrity reality show is not a tax-cheap production either, coming in at £180 million a year.

Some would argue, with tongue in cheek, that it offers value as over the decades it has produced enough political, financial and sexual scandals to keep the tabloids full to bursting.

Those with a more serious mind argue that the royal family represents the biggest welfare claimants in the country to which the government's proposed benefits cap will, of course, not apply.

Britain's first jubilee celebration was for Queen Victoria. Until then the diamond anniversary denoted 75 years - it was conveniently brought forward 15 years to rescue Victoria's plummeting popular-

ity with a one day celebration. The Archbishop of Canterbury of that era, EW Benson, summed up Victoria's diamond celebration pageant's political role by saying: "Days afterwards, everyone feels the socialist movement has had a check."

Similarly, Elizabeth's diamond glorification will offer a timely diversion from the misery of mass unemployment, service cuts, housing crisis, poverty wages, etc. At the same time it will boost the flagging fortunes of her dysfunctional but grotesquely rich Windsor family.

With Will and Harry, already at their young ages, worth £30 million each and Charles a billion plus she can expect some nice presents. I doubt it will include the British Street Party Ultimate Kit (reduced to £43) with its balloons, bunting, flags and streamers etc for street parties.

Neither will she be given such tasteful gifts as the Union Jack cake stand (only £3.99) or a royal carriage shaped cardboard vase (£6.99). All these handsome products are sold by a company owned by Kate Middleton's parents. But hurry while stocks last!

On the positive side, many will get another bank holiday. If you get paid for it, which some bosses resist and workers may have to fight for, this is welcome. But unlike the two million who went on strike to defend their pensions last November, this day



Protest at last year's royal wedding photo Paul Mattsson

off will not be cited as the cause of wrecking our children's education or economic ruin. Or will it?

The desperate Con-Dem government may repeat its defence that yet another public holiday is one of the causes for poor economic performance, as they incredibly did

over last year's royal wedding. The week of Diamond Jubilee celebrations should be more than enough to explain our economic demise for the foreseeable future and why more public spending cuts must be made.

The fuss surrounding the Dia-

mond Jubilee is a desperate attempt to boost the flagging popularity of the longest running soap opera in history and divert attention away from the economic crisis that is capitalism. As with Eastenders, I switched off years ago and will not be watching.

Those fracking Tories

There have been protest meetings across West Sussex against the danger of Hydraulic Fracturing ("Fracking"). The practice has been banned in France and Bulgaria after mass protests.

The water companies are already talking about hosepipe bans across the south-east. The public are being lectured about saving water. So it would take a madman to deliberately pollute thousands of gallons of the stuff.

The fracking process involves taking thousands of gallons of water out of the water supply

Fracking involves pumping water into the ground with a mixture of toxic chemicals

and mixing it with various things you'd rather not find in your glass.

They include benzene which is pleasantly carcinogenic with a dash of toluene, a central nervous system depressant. The delightful cocktail is rounded off with xylene which is regarded as a neurotoxin.

Sussex Conservative MP Francis Maude (the pensioners' friend!) is very relaxed about fracking although he's selling off one of his many homes in Sussex. He is equally relaxed about appointing his chum Lord Browne, a director of Cuadrilla, the fracking firm involved, as 'lead non-executive' to the Cabinet Office.

No wonder people round here feel the Tories can crack off.
Socialist Party reporter

Review The best of 'literary fiction'

Dave Gorton

Last year, an episode of BBC's Culture Show on British 'literary fiction' featured 12 debut novelists. Literary fiction, rather a pompous tag, denotes literature or writers that don't fit into any one specific genre, ie crime, thriller. The writing rather than the subject matter makes the book.

I chose three books from the Culture Show's list which promised to cover 'political' issues rather than just tell a story.

The Observer's review called Adam Haslett's book *Union Atlantic* a "gripping tale of what happens when greedy corporate America collides with a stubborn old woman".

Set in 2001/2, it has echoes of the Barings Bank scandal. But it was written recently so 2007's worldwide banking collapse clearly has an effect on Haslett's writing.

Sadly, I found it unsatisfying. The old woman, Charlotte Graves, is an unlikely figure to represent anti-capitalism, and the garden party scene, presumably meant to represent the capitalist bubble bursting, is ridiculous.

In 1987, current Socialist Party councillor Dave Nellist was winning the Coventry South East seat in the general election. Across the city, Jim Powell was the defeated Conservative candidate. But this Tory's first novel, *The Breaking of Eggs*, dealing with Eastern Europe in the 20th century reads well!

Powell makes an all too easy comparison of communism with fascism as twin evils and wrongly claims that socialism/communism is an ideal for youth which we grow

out of as we get older. But he treats his lead character, Feliks Zhukovski, an unreconstructed Stalinist, with sympathy and the story, although far-fetched at times, makes the book a page-turner and a worthwhile read.

My third choice Stephan Kelman's *Pigeon English* has, since the programme was aired, already been shortlisted for the Booker prize. A bidding war between 12 publishers ended when Bloomsbury paid a 'high six-figure sum' - an incredible amount for a debut novel.

And it merits its praise. *Pigeon English* is tragic and funny in equal measures. The murder of Damilola Taylor on the North Peckham estate in 2000 is the story's real background.

Kelman delves into gang violence in inner-city London from the viewpoint of 11-year old Harrison Opoku, a recent arrival from Ghana in much the same way as Damilola's family had emigrated from Africa some years previously.

Kelman makes you think you're listening to an eleven-year old rather than a 30-something ex-local government worker: "In England they celebrate summer coming by everybody opening their windows wide up and putting their music on proper loud. It's a tradition. That's how you know it's summer. You have to do it when the sun first comes out. Everybody does it together."

And other events make brief entries into the dialogue: "Connor Green says the tube police have machine guns and if you run away they shoot you."

Pigeon English is a stunning debut and one I'd wholeheartedly recommend to all readers.

Kandahar - this was murder

The public in the UK were appalled at the deaths of six British soldiers in Helmand province. Then hard on the heels of that news was the massacre of 16 civilians in Kandahar.

The British soldiers at least had names and faces in the British media. The 16 civilians were just a number for most people. And naturally the authorities started talking about a "lone gunman" as a way of washing their hands of the affair.

The "lone gunman" was armed, trained and shipped off to Afghanistan by the military. They now act surprised when civilians get killed.

Remember that these are the people who bombed a wedding party in Kandahar in 2008 resulting in 37 villagers in Wech Baghtu dying, including 23 children and ten women. But it's OK. They apologised.

The 400 British deaths pale in comparison with the uncounted - deliberately uncounted - civilian deaths in Afghanistan. And the civilians who are shot down or blown up are not feted as 'heroes'.

Obama has finally realised the futility of this war and plans to pull out with the fig-leaf of "handing over to local forces." This mass murder in Kandahar will only feed the cycle of revenge killings and more lives will be sacrificed on the altar of American imperialism.

The likelihood is that the Taliban will end up in power after a further bloody civil war. This underscores the pointlessness of the sacrifice which the politicians hypocritically celebrate.

Derek McMillan
Mid-Sussex Socialist Party

Afghanistan: Immediate withdrawal of troops

As the Socialist predicted, the military adventure in Afghanistan, launched by western imperialism in 2001, has become a nightmare for the Afghan people.

Far from bringing 'democracy', rebuilding the war-torn country and making the world a safer place, the US-led occupation has propped up the corrupt Karzai regime of warlords, has presided over continuing mass unemployment and poverty, and has seen increased violence and an upsurge in Taliban guerrilla attacks.

Cameron and Obama say their 'mission' will continue despite the failure of the

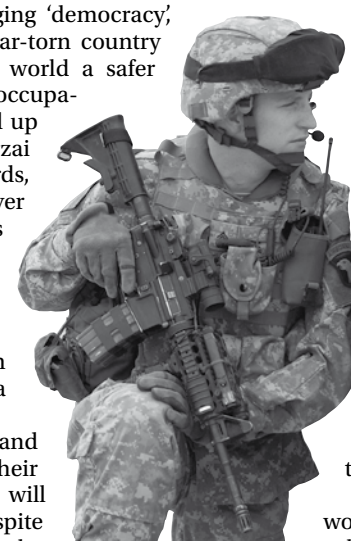
occupation and the rising death toll among coalition forces. Yet the latest ITV online opinion poll says 55% of the UK public support the

immediate withdrawal (up from 48%) of troops from Afghanistan.

● Build a mass movement in Britain to bring home the troops! Spend government money on jobs and public services not on war.

● Let the Afghan people decide their own future. For democratic rights in Afghanistan, and the building of independent organisations of workers and the poor.

● For a socialist world, free from terror, exploitation and war.



Widespread fraud alleged as Putin wins presidential poll

'Communist' Party and neoliberal opposition fail to win mass appeal

Rob Jones, CWI, Moscow

The election of Vladimir Putin to the office of president of Russia, is surrounded by allegations of widespread voter fraud. It sparked new opposition mass street protests on 5 March against the continuing rule of Putin and the rich elite around him. Tens of thousands took to the streets and hundreds of protesters were arrested in Moscow and St Petersburg.

According to Russia's electoral commission, Putin won 64% of the vote, Gennady Zyuganov, the Communist Party leader, won 17%, the neoliberal Mikhail Prokhorov got 8%, the far-right Zhirinovskiy won 6% and Just Russia's Mironov got under 4%.

It assures Putin of victory in the first round, but it is widely recognised that the "administrative vote" (that is people who are forced to vote under the threat of sacking or other sanctions by employers, universities and the like) is worth 15-20%.

On this measure alone, Putin probably 'honestly' received around 40-45% of the vote. Significantly, he failed to win a majority of the vote in Moscow.

The Communist Party has nothing to celebrate with 17%. Their vote in the presidential elections ranged between 30% and 40% in the 1990s and fell to 17.7% in 2008. In last December's parliamentary election, they gained 19% of the vote.

In the months since, Moscow and the rest of Russia were rocked by massive protests calling for the downfall of Putin. For the Communist Party to get its lowest vote in 20 years is a disaster that cannot be explained away completely as a result of fraud.

It is reported that the oligarch Prokhorov, participating in his first election, won one of the most significant results. In Moscow and St Petersburg, he gained 17% of the vote, knocking Zyuganov into third place.

However, Prokhorov, a representative of the Russian Union of Industrialists, renowned for demanding a 60-hour working week, is an ally of the Kremlin.

He was unofficially delegated the task of establishing a right-wing neoliberal party by the Kremlin to cut across the support of the more independent Yabloko party and other opposition forces. Yabloko was refused the right to participate in the presidential election.

Sergei Mironov, from the Just Russia party, gained under 4%. This party was set up by the Kremlin, partly to help give the illusion of 'pluralism', but also to act as a 'leftish' poll of attraction to undermine the vote for the Communist Party.

Putin's votes

How can these results be explained, given that there have been four major demonstrations mobilising hundreds of thousands of people in Moscow since December's fraudulent parliamentary election?

According to opinion polls, up to 42% of the population supports the protests. One poll suggested that 15% of the population is prepared to participate actively in protests. Yet the four 'anti-Putin' presidential candidates only received 24 million votes in total.

The votes 'for' Putin are made up

image not available

of three distinct elements. There is undoubtedly a layer of the population, probably between 20% and 30% of the electorate, who currently support Putin. Sections of big business, a large proportion of those who work in the state structures and "ordinary people" across the classes, credit Putin with restoring 'order' after the chaos of the 1990s and regard him as a 'guarantor of stability'.

At a victory rally in central Moscow on election night, with tears rolling down his cheeks, Putin celebrated his win against "those who

Putin probably 'honestly' received around 40-45% of the vote. Significantly, he failed to win a majority of the vote in MOSCOW.

want to usurp power" and "split the country up". This will have helped him maintain support of those who may otherwise vote for the far right or the 'Communists'.

The second part of the vote 'for' Putin is made up of manipulated and fraudulent votes. It is estimated that 15-20% of all votes cast result from the use of the so-called "administrative resource". Throughout Russia, those who hold power in local and regional governments, and company managements, instruct their staff how to vote.

This is added to by outright fraud. The practice of "carouselling", first used in last December's election, also appears to have been widespread. This involves bussing people (who are paid) from one polling station to another to vote for Putin. One such group was filmed assembling at a Moscow airport, where, after receiving about €30, they were shuffled around a number of nearby polling stations.

These methods are in addition to the traditional vote fixing in the more authoritarian regions of the country. In Chechnya, according to the Chechen electoral commission, 99.7% of the electorate, on a 99.6% turnout, voted for Putin, with Zyuganov in second place!

A third element of the support for Putin, however, was the support he won from a layer of potential opposition voters. The Putin camp played successfully on the record of the neoliberal leaders of the opposition. When they were in power in the 1990s, the neoliberal politicians were not keen on democracy, to say the least, and oversaw capitalist 'shock therapy' that plunged millions into poverty and the enormous enrichment of a clique of oligarchs.

'Communist' Party

It appears that the Communist Party failed to win any extra support to add to the layer of elderly electors that normally vote for the party. This is partly due to the policies Zyuganov used to fight this election - a chauvinist appeal to bring the "Russians" (as opposed to all the other nationalities living in Russia) back to their "rightful place" in the world.

Zyuganov also placed himself firmly at a distance from the opposition protests that have rocked Moscow in the past months. Members of the Communist Party, apart from a few dissident elements, have been noticeable by their absence from the protests.

The leadership of the opposition protests is now going to find that people will question their tactics much more. The idea that Putin could be defeated by voting for any of the other candidates has clearly not worked. The position of the majority of the Left - to vote for either Zyuganov or Mironov - has been shown to be a blind alley.

Workers' government

The CWI called for the opposition rank and file to mobilise working people and youth, campaigning in workplaces and among students, to build genuine committees of action in opposition to the election fraud.

The CWI believes the post of president should be abolished. The Duma (parliament) elected last year was also on the basis of fraud. The CWI calls for real democracy - for the convening of a genuinely democratic constituent assembly to which the working class and the oppressed can send their representatives to decide how society should be run.

Socialists call for a majority workers' government with socialist policies. A workers' government would end poverty, joblessness, homelessness and low pay and carry out massive funding for decent housing, education and health etc.

To work towards this goal, the CWI calls for the creation of independent trade unions and to campaign towards building a mass workers' party with a socialist programme that can challenge the rule of big business and its representatives in the Kremlin.

This entails bringing the country's vast wealth, including the oil and gas industries, into public ownership under democratic workers' control and management, so that living standards can be transformed.

Opposition protests

The CWI will play an active part in opposition demonstrations, advocating that the protest movement appeals to the working class in urban and rural areas to join it. The opposition movement needs to be democratically organised, through the convening of mass assemblies, linked at local, regional and national levels.

It must struggle against Putin's monopoly of power and the mass media and his undemocratic regime; and for real democratic rights and for a free and independent media that is nationalised and democratically run, so that it is representative of all views in society.

It is still an open question if the planned protests will develop and expand greatly, or whether they will temporarily peter out. But Russia has entered a new phase. Putin will be a much more vulnerable president, this time. For many Russians, he only promises a Brezhnev-style era of stagnation and huge social inequality.

The ongoing crisis in the world economy will have a big impact on Russia's oil and gas-dependent economy, which can lead to a fast decline in living standards. Putin's election win will be seen as a pyrrhic victory. The developing situation in Russia is highly volatile and increasingly will see collisions between the working class and poor and the ruling elite.

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.



Natalia Sokolova

Kazakhstan: Oilworkers' lawyer freed from prison Step up campaign to end all state repression

Natalia Sokolova, who was sentenced last August to six years in prison for defending striking Kazakhstan oil workers, has been set free. A Supreme Court judge ruled on 8 March that she should be allowed home on certain conditions, including that she does not continue her legal work for a period of two years.

Activists in the opposition movement and their supporters worldwide greet this decision as an important victory and see it as the direct result of international and local pressure through protests and campaigns.

The Kazakhstan regime, far from easing its repression against the workers' movement, has just pushed through legislation which squeezes the already minimal rights of workers to organise and strike. It is also pursuing through the courts 43 workers arrested after state forces shot and killed peaceful protesters in Zhenaozen last December.

Human rights lawyer and prison conditions protester, Vadim Kuramshin, is still being held pending a trial on trumped up charges. Leaders of a small opposition party called Alga have also been jailed.

On Saturday 24 March, demonstrations against the Nazarbayev regime are being held simultaneously across Kazakhstan in all the major urban centres. Campaign Kazakhstan - backed in Britain by, among others, Bob Crow of the RMT, Joe Simpson of the Prison Officers' Association and Jeremy Corbyn MP - is calling for protests around the world in the week leading up to this date. (Contact the Socialist Party for local details)

For the release of all political prisoners in Kazakhstan and the dropping of all harassment against workers' leaders and lawyers.

For details of all these issues, see www.campaignkazakhstan.org and www.socialistworld.net

FIGHT BACK AGAINST ATTACKS ON PENSIONS

Nick Parker
President, Lincoln and District TUC

Work longer. Pay more. Get less. These three attacks on public sector pensions led to 30 November - the biggest strike in recent British history. The three attacks on the table have not substantially changed.

Millions of working people will look at their pay packets next month and see that they've had extra to pay in contributions to fund the bailout of the bankers and shore up the British economy.

And so, a group of key trade unions including PCS, NUT and UCU are preparing to call on their members to strike again on 28 March, following the outcome of consultative ballots.

I don't want to use this opportunity to have a go at the leaders of unions who aren't striking. Their members can weigh up for themselves if they saw the magnificent strike on 30 November as a "damage limitation exercise", as one leading trade union leader said.

What I would like to do though is to call on as many working people as possible, in the public and private sector, if not taking strike action that day, to think about taking annual leave or a long lunch and join your striking brothers and sisters on the

picket lines and the lunchtime demonstrations.

Just like the Roman empire, this government relies on the tactics of 'divide and conquer'. Public sector versus private sector. Old versus young. And now, they hope, union versus union.

It is our task to defeat the attempts to divide our movement. In reality, the government is weak - like a punch-drunk boxer. Our task is to give it a knock-out blow.

On 30 November Tory leader Cameron tried to rubbish the strike action by calling it a "damp squib". He was forced to retract. But Labour leader Ed Miliband failed to back the action.

Let's draw the lessons from this and start to build strong, fighting trade unions and a new mass political force rooted in the trade unions and the working class communities who will back trade union members when forced to take action against the coalition government.

STOP PRESS

- The TUC Womens Conference has voted to support any industrial action to defend or improve pensions.
- The teachers' union NUT will be restarting action on pensions with a regional strike in London on 28 March. This is subject to urgent consultation with the London divisions of the union.



United on the 30 November strike demo in London photo Paul Mattsson

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 un-recycled 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!