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Step up action to defend pensions!

Build a movement to:

KICK

OUT

THE

CON-DEMS!

AND END AUSTERITY

Rob Williams

National Shop Stewards Network national chair

Just when the Con-Dems thought it was all over and they'd won, the public sector pensions fight is back on! This opens up the possibility to re-ignite a dispute which has been the focal point for the resistance to the government's austerity agenda.

Workers across all unions will welcome this step, particularly now as the first of three annual pension contribution increases is snatched from their wage packets. Meanwhile the ultra-rich are sitting pretty with their

wealth up again this year!

The attack on pensions also means public sector employees face working longer and getting less at the end of it. Paramedics and care workers, for example, will be expected to work until they're 68 – with new starters threatened with working to 70!

Up to 500,000 public sector workers in the PCS civil servants' union, Unite in health, Ministry of Defence and the civil service, lecturers in UCU and members of the Nipsa public services union in Northern Ireland are striking on 10 May. They will be joined by RMT transport union members in the Royal Fleet Auxiliary also fighting to defend their retirement benefits.

The vote by Unison health members to re-

ject the government's rotten 'Heads of Agreement' shows the potential to fully re-build the strike coalition that filled Britain's streets last November.

The two-million plus strike on 30 November (N30) should have been the start of a sustained campaign of national coordinated action, which we believe would have not only defeated the government's attacks on public sector pensions but could have even dealt the Coalition a death blow.

The PCS has balloted its members to take action over attacks on pay, privatisation and jobs as well as pensions. This is part of a sustained strategy with action planned for June; sectoral action to complement the national coordinated action; and, with Unite, a call for

a trade union-led national demo against austerity before the summer.

Such a demo, on a weekend, taking up the questions of NHS cuts, regional pay, and pensions would give all those not striking on 10 May a chance to show their support for anti-cuts action and put pressure on the right-wing union leaderships. It could provide an answer to the many attempts to divide us; public sector workers from private, and along lines of gender, age, race, sexuality, disability, etc.

The 2012 budget showed a government of the rich for the rich, Murdochgate reveals the corruption at the top, with the media and police embroiled – but they are few and we are many. Let's use our huge potential strength to defeat all the cuts.



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what we think

A strategy to stop austerity and bring down the government of the super-rich

The Con-Dem coalition is increasingly showing its weakness. Calls for an inquiry into whether Culture Secretary Jeremy Hunt broke ministerial codes brings the Murdochgate scandal to the doors of Downing Street. By a margin of two to one people think the government is incompetent, a recent poll found.

Figures show that two years into the coalition's brutal austerity the economy is still 4.3% smaller than in 2008. The trade union, anti-cuts and youth movement urgently requires a strategy to fight all the cuts and defeat this government of the rich.

While workers will be delighted that there is strike action to defend pensions on 10 May (M10) there will also be concern that the strike will be smaller than the magnificent two-million strong strike on 30 November (N30).

The Socialist Party fought for the strike on N30 as a starting point of a mass campaign of industrial action to defeat the government. We argued for the next step to be a second 24-hour public sector general strike in January - also reaching out to the private sector.

The strikes on pensions in Unilever, on wages in Stagecoach and of course victoriously against the Besna by the 'Sparks' construction electricians, show that further coordination beyond the public sector was entirely possible. It would have terrified the Con-Dems and their big business backers and opened up the rifts between the Tories and Lib Dems.

However, as it quickly became clear, government ministers weren't the only ones nervously contemplating the prospect of a New Year of a mobilised trade union movement determined to maintain and step up the action.

The right-wing union leaders, led by Unison and the GMB and supported by the TUC leadership, were anxious to put the struggle into deep freeze by signing up to the government's 'Heads of Agreement' that would still mean working longer and paying more to get less.

While the right-wing leaders were attempting to dismantle the N30 coalition, unions such as the PCS have been working painstakingly to regroup those unions willing to take further action.

Unfortunately, while NUT took action in London instead of nationally along with UCU on 28 March, the prevarication of the leadership has proved to be a trend, firstly at their conference over Easter and then at their executive meeting. Not only will NUT not be taking part on M10, their involvement in further action in June appears in question. Incred-



Marching through Leeds on N30 photo Iain Dalton

ibly, the NUT executive is planning a meeting on M10, when thousands of strikers will be on the march!

But teachers are showing their anger and mood for action - on 28 March London teachers overwhelmingly demanded national coordinated strikes over pensions. But teachers are also taking action on a local basis against academisation, bullying, imposed changes, etc.

The rank-and-file Local Associations conference in Liverpool on 16 June (see page 4) and the NSSN annual conference in London a week earlier will be important opportunities for teachers and others to organise the demand for action.

The question is can the struggle develop? A meeting of the public sector unions

in the TUC public service liaison group or, if the TUC won't host it, under separate auspices is urgent.

The rejection of the government's 'deal' and support for sustained industrial action in Unison health, albeit by 50% to 49% on a turnout of 14% is, nonetheless, an incredible result and a brilliant achievement for union activists (see report on page 4).

The Unison leadership will try to point to the margin and turnout but the ballot was loaded against rejection. It is likely now that GMB members in health will also reject the government 'deal' as recommended by the leadership and both unions should be involved in action on 10 May or at least in June.

This should be broadened out to involve

workers in the local government scheme. The leaderships of Unison, Unite and GMB have claimed some concessions. It is true that the government has delayed the increased contributions until 2014 for various reasons - but they are still coming. It is far better to strike together now against a weak, divided and crisis-ridden government and win a famous victory.

Alongside working out the way forward on the industrial front, to defeat the government requires a plan for the political front too. Otherwise when workers go from the picket line to the ballot box they will be forced to choose between the main parties behind the cuts and privatisation they are fighting. Trade unionists need a political voice.

Labour does not provide any real opposition to government cuts, even carrying them through in the councils they control. A new mass workers' party is urgently needed.

TUSC

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition stand in the 3 May elections was a step in this direction (see page 5), backed by leading trade unionists such as Bob Crow, RMT general secretary and others. Leading members of the FBU, RMT, PCS, and NUT and other unions stood as candidates, gaining huge support from those who learned of the campaign, given the press blackout.

The government and the bosses should fear the re-igniting of this action, coming as it does as the cuts drive more and more ordinary people to take up campaigns against cuts to public services, such as, libraries and children's centres; to demand jobs and housing; and to defend benefits and rights.

These actions will lead millions of workers and youth to not just challenge the cuts but the whole austerity project and the capitalist system that demands it. Instead of accepting austerity demanded by the bankers and bondholders the ideas of genuine democratic socialist planning to meet the needs of the overwhelming majority will be increasingly attractive.

On 9 May the Queen's speech will bring the latest round of cuts into law. But the poll tax was made law by Thatcher - only to be made unworkable by a mass campaign organising 18 million people in non-payment. This eventually led to Thatcher's downfall. Let's make sure the action on 10 May is the start of a sustained campaign to stop the cuts and bring down this government of the rich for the rich.

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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 54498, London, E10 9DE

Rich list

The good times roll for the 0.00001%

Claire Laker-Mansfield

"Those with the broadest shoulders will bear the largest load... we're all in this together." These, David Cameron's famous words to his first Conservative Party conference as prime minister, asked ordinary people to close their eyes to reality.

Cameron asks us to join him on a journey to a make believe land where over-paid public sector workers with gold plated pensions, avaricious disabled people demanding welfare, and young people outrageously expecting a day's pay for a day's work, caused the economic crisis.

In his topsy-turvy world the greed of bankers, big business and the rich is a social good. Cameron 'rebrands' his friends with positive sounding labels in an attempt to conceal their parasitism. The rich are dubbed 'wealth and job creators'.

Richer by the minute

All of this, Cameron hopes, will help allay some of the anger felt by those who genuinely do create wealth (working class people) when they read this week's headlines. Because not only has the Sunday Times rich list revealed that those at the top are not suffering as a result of the cuts, we now find out that overall they are getting wealthier by the minute – all at our expense!

As public sector workers look forward to a lengthy pay freeze, paying more and getting less for their pensions or being forced to take up a place in the line at the job centre, the fat cats kick back and watch the money roll in.

The richest 1,000 people in Britain – around 0.00001% – have got 5% better off in the last year. Their individual fortunes added up make £414.26 billion. That's more than three times the government's own figures for



photo the Socialist

the shortfall in 2010 – £137 billion. Even if these people were forced to pay just a 20% tax on their accumulated wealth (what most people pay on their very modest incomes) this revenue alone could almost fund the NHS each year!

Not fooled

Cameron's attempts to pull the wool over our eyes will not wash. The wealthy, who the Con-Dem government protect above all others, acquired their riches through cruel exploitation. It is working people who produce all the goods and provide society's services.

Those in the rich list's dizzy

heights got there by creaming off a chunk of the wealth produced by workers and taking it for themselves. Now they ask for even more. As their crisis-ridden capitalist system fails we are asked to pay with our jobs and our services.

Working class people are not fooled by Cameron's trickery, searing anger is present on our streets. The fightback has begun. Mass strike action is planned for 10 May.

The 0.00001% should not sleep easy in their beds. The rest of us are demanding our fair share. The Socialist Party says let's take the wealth off the 1% and build a socialist society for the 99%.

The Ministers and the Mogul

Leveson exposes links between Tories and Murdoch

Ben Norman

It was a line which perhaps only the world's most powerful media magnate could have the audacity to use. As Rupert Murdoch sat before the Leveson Inquiry to answer questions on the practices of his British newspapers the aging mogul replied: "The Sun may be the only independent paper in the business." Cue barely suppressed laughter from journalists and mass tweeting of the Sun's most notorious, politically motivated, headlines.

While Murdoch answered, a political storm was engulfing Tory culture secretary Jeremy Hunt as it was revealed that he'd lobbied in support of Murdoch's takeover of BSkyB; a takeover he was supposed to be impartially monitoring. Hunt

is attempting to blame the whole fiasco on one of his political advisers and as we go to press, is still hanging on to his cabinet position.

Yet, while the connections between Murdoch's News International and the Tories continue to be exposed, perhaps Murdoch was being more honest than he realised. Murdoch has always been neoliberal, anti-union and Euro-sceptic, and these views are reflected across his media outlets.

However, he has never let political convictions override his business interests, and has consistently and unscrupulously used his influence to back any politician, from Thatcher to Blair to Cameron, who will further those interests.

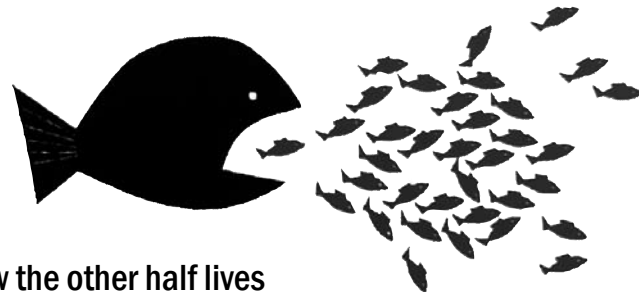
Labour supporters with short memories may argue that Murdoch and his malign influence is

a unique problem, but from Lord Beaverbrook and Robert Maxwell, to Richard Desmond and the Barclays Brothers, all capitalist media magnates have acted in the same way. Murdoch is merely the most efficient at furthering his class interests.

While the enquiry continues to expose serious corruption between all sections of the British ruling class, from media magnates to police commanders and senior ministers, no verdict by Justice Leveson will bring these practices to an end. If a ruling class exists its representatives will always collude to further their interests.

Socialists support an independent inquiry, which is democratically accountable with trade union representation, and a genuinely free press.

Them...



How the other half lives

Chancellor George Gideon Osborne assured us recently that he's not quite wealthy enough to be eligible for the 50p top rate of tax which he just scrapped, so wouldn't personally benefit. But he's not quite one of us either. Osborne's father, Peter, made his fortune co-founding a posh textile and wallpaper company (about £100 a roll if you're interested). In a recent interview with the Financial Times magazine, Superior Interiors, Peter gave us a glimpse of life for the Osbornes – he was recently lent a villa in Mustique (a private island in the West Indies); the most common staples in his fridge are Manchego cheese and sweet-cured bacon; he gave two £200 bottles of wine as a thank you gift and enjoys £35-a-bottle bath oils.

a pitiful 11p this October and remain frozen at less than £5 for under-21s. But it seems even the current rates are too much for some companies – P&O Ferries pays some of its staff a basic salary of only 75p an hour! Even working the eleven hours a day, seven days a week that they do, it only amounts to £250 a month. To add insult to injury the company is now threatening to withhold customer tips that staff rely on, unless performance targets are hit. Carnival Corporation, P&O's parent company made £1.9 billion profit in 2011.

Military games

Six lucky areas of London are getting their very own...land to air missile. The chosen sites include two residential buildings. Apparently this is necessary to protect us all from the threat of airborne terrorist attacks during the Olympics this summer. Perhaps that has something to do with the spiralling cost of security for the Games. The main security contractor, G4S's costs for 'programme management' has risen from £7 million to £60 million and 'operating expenses' from £3 million to £65 million.

How our half eats

The number of people in the UK needing to use food bank services has more than doubled in the last year. 128,697 families were given emergency food supplies by the charity organisations last year. There are now more than 200 food banks across the country, with more opening every week. With food prices soaring, jobs being cut and wages and benefits attacked, more and more people find themselves having to choose between eating and heating or between feeding themselves and feeding their children. And that's with 90% of the cuts still to come.

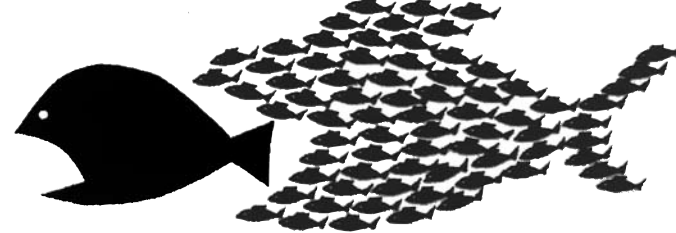
Poor & Overworked

Many people were rightly disgusted recently when it was announced that the minimum wage will be increased by

'Beds in sheds' taskforce

The government is setting up a special taskforce to deal with the rapidly rising numbers of people sleeping in sheds – many being charged outrageous rents by greedy landlords, despite squalid conditions. But the very fact that the government has been forced to take action shows that it's a different type of taskforce that's really needed – one of construction workers to embark on a mass building programme of good quality, affordable housing.

...& Us



#TUSC this week

@nickparker

#TUSC candidates going down to support ASLEF train drivers on strike to defend pensions. We support trade unions!

@gregrandall1970

Just got the London mayoral candidates' election addresses. Not one of them even mentions the cuts let alone pledges to fight them. #TUSC

@NancyTaaffe

There's virtually a whole town been built 4 the #Olympics & homeless get cleansed. Tis San Paolo-isation #TUSC

@River_Sider

#Mayday reminds us of #workingclass fighters who died 4 right to vote. Now we need to fight 4 new #workingclass party worth voting for #TUSC

@BenR2010

Community campaigners present award to @davenellist for all hard work he's done #ReElectNellist #TUSC



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Unison leadership 'woefully inadequate' in face of cuts

Roger Davey

Unison health Service Group Executive (SGE), personal capacity

Unison's health conference could have been a golden opportunity to establish a national strategy and campaign to defeat the relentless attacks unleashed by the Con-Dem government. However, it is clear that the union leadership has no credible programme to resist, except that of waiting for a Labour government, the party who is partially responsible for the position we are in.

Much of the debate revolved around the privatisation of the NHS and the growing attacks on our pay and conditions. Delegate after delegate spoke passionately about the impact privatisation and the financial cuts would have - how the market and privatisation would destroy the principles of a comprehensive health service free at the point of delivery.

Care that was once provided free by the NHS would no longer be available without incurring a cost. In essence it would mean unnecessary pain, illness and death for the majority, while for the minority (private companies) it would mean profits and increased wealth.

It was also pointed out by, among others, Unison general secretary Dave Prentis, that Labour built the bridge over which the Con-Dems

have travelled to destroy the NHS. It prompted one delegate to say we should therefore smash the bridge, in other words, break the link with Labour. Of course, this is never allowed to be debated at any Unison conference.

Delegates also spoke about the avalanche of attacks that were being prepared by the government on health workers' living standards. In fact, it seems likely that every reform we've ever gained is now under threat.

We need a clear commitment to national industrial action in order to safeguard our hard-won rights. But again we were left unclear what the strategy is.

Dave Prentis's speech, in which he talked about the success of the pensions strike on 30 November, was at best low key. Of course he failed to mention that since the strike the leadership have done everything in their power to end the dispute without winning any substantial gains.

It was also clear that Prentis had nothing to offer on the issues facing health workers and indeed the threat to the NHS. He and the leadership are coming under increasing pressure from the membership to be seen to do something to fight back against the government.

Although he didn't mention it in his speech, Prentis now seems to be supporting the idea of a national



Defending the NHS photo Sarah Sachs-Eldridge

trade union demonstration against the cuts to be held in the autumn. This is welcome, but is woefully inadequate. A demo should be held earlier but more importantly it needs to be combined with a programme of industrial action and mass campaigning.

Shadow health secretary Andrew Burnham addressed the conference and answered carefully hand-picked questions. Although he stated that Labour would repeal the Health and Social Care Act it is clear that he did not reject the idea of private companies having a ma-

jor role. He did not disown Labour's 'reforms' which did so much damage to the NHS.

During the debates it was noticeable that Socialist Party members led the opposition and put forward a clear strategy and programme.

We have entered a decisive period not just for the union but also for the NHS. It will determine whether we have an NHS providing comprehensive free healthcare or a US-style system. It will also decide whether we have a democratic, fighting trade union or one that is destined to suffer more attacks from the government.

In brief

Pension privatisation

Hundreds of pension staff were forced out of the public sector on 1 May. The government agency that administers pensions of 1.5 million working and retired civil servants became the first 'mutual' in the civil service. The 500 'My Civil Service Pension' staff had this move thrust upon them without consultation. PCS members have been taking industrial action against the transfer.

Tanker drivers

Following eight days of Acas talks, Unite is recommending that tanker drivers reject the latest proposals. 2,000 drivers are being balloted across seven oil distribution firms and the consultative ballot closes on 11 May. Unite is rebalancing the 530 drivers working for Hoyer after the original ballot was challenged. Unite says the employers have given some concessions on health and safety and training but issues around standards, security, pensions and sub-contracting still have not been resolved.

Train drivers

Drivers working for East Midlands Trains are engaged in a series of one-day strikes throughout May. The 450 Aslef members are striking because the company wants to reduce pensions contributions from July, saving them £2.1 million. The company says this will not affect pensions benefits but the union says these calculations are unreliable, particularly since the company may not even be running the franchise in a couple of years.

Sunderland College

Staff at Sunderland College are being balloted for strike action over £10,000 pay cuts. UCU members are angry because the college wants to cut the salaries of 150 lecturers and downgrade 70% of its workforce. Lecturers would be paid £8,000 a year less than the UK average for full-time lecturers. The ballot closes on 18 May.

Important NUT meeting

After the decision of the NUT national executive not to call action in June (see page 2) an important meeting of NUT branches (Associations) has been called.

• Local Associations for National Action - Organise for a confirmed calendar of action. Saturday 16 June 11am - 3.30pm, Quaker Meeting House, 22 School Lane, Liverpool L13
For more information: <http://electmartin1.blogspot.com/>

Tube ballot

The transport union RMT is balloting cleaners employed by ISS and Initial for strike action and action short of a strike. The workers on London Underground are fighting for a pay increase, an Olympic bonus in line with other tube staff, a sick pay scheme, free travel passes and improvements to their pension scheme. The Tubelines staff working on maintenance and other projects recently went on a 72-hour strike to gain parity with other tube workers over travel concessions and pensions. The RMT is engaged in a battle to claw back the cuts to wages, services and conditions which damaging attempts to privatise the tube have brought about.

Teachers stand up to bullying head... and to...

Alistair Tice and Chris Bingham

If your school has 21% of students with some form of special educational needs, would you sack your Special Educational Needs Coordinator (Senco)?

If you needed to get rid of eight teaching posts to save money but eight teachers have resigned, three non-teaching staff have resigned and six teachers have agreed to work part-time, would you continue to make your Senco compulsorily redundant? Of course not, but that's exactly what the headteacher at Swinton comprehensive school in Rotherham is doing.

That's why two dozen teachers at the school, members of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) took a second day of strike action on 27 April. Significantly a lot more teachers came to protest at the school gates compared with the first strike ten days ago.

While still cautious and hesitant about picketing, they were angered by the head's intimidatory attitude, standing at the school gates with the estates manager, taking photographs of them.

Apparently the head had boasted that on the first day's strike no one had stopped at the picket line. Well the school was shut that day and there wasn't a picket line because



Picketing in the rain photo Alistair Tice

NASUWT colleagues are supportive. But the head kept the school open on 27 April to try to defy the strike, so NUT branch and regional officials did picket, despite the head's threats of calling the police.

School students asked for leaflets from their striking teachers, we saw one confiscated by the head.

Clearly he is a bully who has succeeded in demoralising staff to the

point where nearly a third have left in just over a year.

NUT members are standing together and growing in determination. As one teacher said: "We've got to win this."

• Please send messages of support to Ralph Dyson, Rotherham NUT joint divisional secretary, ralphdyson@yahoo.co.uk or tel: 07759853915.

5-term years

On 25 April, NUT staff at Bilborough College Nottingham took strike action against cuts to front-line teaching services.

This is the latest in a string of strikes by teachers in Nottingham because the city council wants to move to a five-term year. Teachers have been striking for one day each week for the last three weeks, with large protests in the city centre.

I interviewed local NUT rep Diane Fletcher. She said that last year the teachers had agreed to a temporary increase of 10% in workload. This was the equivalent of half an A-Level group extra. This took time away from supporting students and one-to-one contact time.

Now the 10% increase in workload is being made permanent and management are refusing to negotiate.

Diane hoped they wouldn't have to take more strike action in the future but also said that they needed to win the fight against these cuts which would be damaging to both teachers and students.

They will be escalating their action to two days. Parents meetings are also being planned across the city to support the teachers.

Helen Pattison

UCU joins 10 May strike - student solidarity needed

Lecturers and academic staff in most of the UK's universities and colleges will be joining other public sector workers on strike on 10 May against attacks on pensions.

Despite over a year of negotiations, the government refused to make any substantive shifts on a pensions deal that would see lecturers working into their late 60s, taking home less money for their work

and facing poverty when they retire.

Work by Socialist Students this week helped convince the National Union of Students (NUS) to continue its paper position of supporting lecturers in their fight. But, as the "national" walkout on 14 March showed, the NUS leadership are not serious about backing up their words with action. It falls to ordinary students to show our support

for our lecturers.

To safeguard education for future generations and to minimise disruption to it now, we students have a duty to stand with our lecturers and to make the 10 May strike effective.

If there's strike action at your college or university, don't go in - instead, join your lecturers on the picket line.

Meanwhile, negotiations on uni-

versity lecturers' pay remain inconclusive, with employers still offering lecturers a real-terms pay cut of 3%. The failure of the employers to make up for three years of pay cuts could lead to a new round of strikes in the autumn of 2012.

Edmund Schluessel
Cardiff University UCU, personal capacity and Cardiff University student

TUSC: the electoral alternative to the parties of the rich

All together in Liverpool to support TUSC mayoral stand

Dave Walsh

300 people attended the Liverpool pre-election rally for mayoral candidate Tony Mulhearn and other Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidates across Merseyside.

Rapturous applause was given to Tony Mulhearn when he condemned the greed and corruption of the bankers and prescribed that the banks be taken into public ownership.

He also condemned Liverpool Labour leader Joe Anderson for his cowardice in putting through cuts on behalf of millionaire government ministers.

Transport union RMT president Alex Gordon and civil service union PCS assistant general secretary Chris Baugh talked about the reaction of rail workers and civil servants to attacks on jobs and pensions.

Both said the way forward was planned, coordinated industrial action but also agreed that workers must have a political voice which can only start to be achieved when other trade unions get behind TUSC and abandon the Labour Party.

A Unite union representative from Mayr-Melnhof Packaging (MMP), Phil Potter, spoke about their lockout and subsequent sacking and how their employer took advantage of the anti-trade union laws to attack unionised workers in the print trade.

Children's author Alan Gibbons spoke about the attacks on libraries and pointed out that developing countries such as South Africa and India were expanding their libraries while the sixth richest country in the world was closing 600 of ours.

Raph Parkinson said how, as a young man in the 1980s, he saw the benefits first hand of a

Support the electoral opposition to cuts: www.tusc.org.uk

socialist council, which included Tony, fighting back.

Morag Reid, TUSC candidate for Rock Ferry in Wirral, said the fightback must begin now or young people would have no future.

Chair Roger Bannister announced that Liverpool playwright Jimmy McGovern and band member from the Farm, Peter Hooton, were there in support of Tony's campaign.

The meeting didn't finish until 10pm but everyone stayed until the end and many queued at the stalls to take bundles of leaflets to deliver in their own area. £820 was raised in a financial appeal for the TUSC candidates and 60 people stayed later still to talk to organisers.

Coventry: Campaigning against Labour's cuts friendly bubble

Ben Robinson

At a fantastic Coventry election rally over 80 people came along to hear the case for a socialist alternative to the big business parties.

Dave Nellist, Socialist Party councillor for St Michael's ward, standing for re-election, highlighted just some of the campaigns he has supported as a councillor.

He explained that without the Socialist Party, campaigns ranging from opposition to 'academy' schools, to challenging wars in the Middle East, would not have been heard in the same way.

Campaigners from the Save Foleshill Baths group presented Dave with an award as a show of thanks for his work in supporting their campaign.

Alex Gordon, TUSC lead candidate for the London-wide list Assembly election, spoke about the importance of building a working class alternative to the main parties' cuts agenda.

Dave Goodwin, an RMT transport union rep in Rugby and a TUSC candidate, called for others like him that are sick of the government's policies to stand up and do something about it.

From the floor a PCS civil service union rep explained that he used to vote Labour before moving to Coventry and realising that there was a viable alternative.

The Coventry Labour Party is so keen on maintaining a cosy cuts-friendly bubble that it



Dave Nellist (left) on a Save Foleshill Baths lobby photo Coventry SP

is concentrating its election resources on trying to get rid of Dave Nellist, despite there being several marginal Tory seats in the city.

George Duggins, the deputy leader of the Labour-led council, told the Coventry Observer that Labour 'pinpointed' St Michael's ward and 'put a lot of work into winning it.'

As Dave told the local paper: "The fact Labour are more interested in getting rid of a left-wing critic speaks volumes about their role on the council."

workers who have suffered from capitalism's incessant drive for profits and to re-commit ourselves to fighting to end it.

He said that trade unionism is founded on the principles of solidarity and unity; that an injury to one is an injury to all.

In that spirit, Ronnie called for a fight against all cuts and a vote for TUSC on 3 May.



London: Standing candidates with 'bottle' to fight cuts



RMT leader Bob Crow has said we need a new mass party that represents working people, and building TUSC is a step towards that photo Senan

There was only standing room left as almost 100 people attended the Waltham Forest Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) public meeting for the London elections to hear RMT transport union general secretary Bob Crow, and TUSC candidates Nancy Taaffe and Jenny Sutton.

Nancy, a library worker made redundant by the east London council's cuts, said that libraries were a great achievement for working class communities, the 'NHS for the mind' as put by Harry Potter author JK Rowling.

Waltham Forest has 37 Labour councillors and two Labour MPs. But instead of being any sort of resistance, the council has implemented the Con-Dems' cuts, sacked workers and closed buildings, including three libraries.

Nancy said that councils should set 'needs budgets' instead of implementing cuts on behalf of the government, but doing that needs political leaders with bottle.

Jenny, a further education (FE) lecturer and chair of the London UCU union FE section, spoke about

how FE is being changed to suit the needs of employers instead of the needs of students, and this change started under Tony Blair's New Labour government.

Bob Crow explained why the RMT was officially supporting TUSC. The union had asked its 50 London branches whether it should support TUSC or Labour, and not one branch gave support to Labour. The Labour Party today is nothing like the one that a predecessor of the RMT had helped to set up at the start of the 20th century.

Instead we need a new mass party for working people, and building TUSC is a step towards that.

Bob said there was no such thing as 'responsible capitalism', as it's a system based on inequality, and he spoke of the need for socialism.

Following a very enthusiastic response from members of the audience who spoke, the finance appeal raised almost £300 and people took away armfuls of leaflets and window posters to help spread the word about this challenge.

Bob Severn

"Bankers and the three main parties expect us to pay for their crisis. Public and private, employed and unemployed, women and men, young and old, black and white, disabled and able-bodied, we need strong trade unions and a political voice for working people. It is why I call for support for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition candidates in the London Assembly elections."

Chris Baugh, PCS civil service union assistant general secretary

Fighting for media coverage

The almost complete press blackout for the London Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition assembly election campaign was finally broken - albeit briefly - on BBC One's Question Time.

The contribution I made from the Question Time audience exposed the government "of the rich for the rich", the £750 billion stashed away by big business and the £120 billion that goes unpaid in tax, and that the Labour Party will not pledge to reverse the cuts.

The TUSC list in London is backed by the trade unions RMT and London FBU and has the backing of three trade union general secretaries. We won a lot of support from the studio audience, most of whom took away TUSC postcards.

But it was before the recording that some of the real cut and thrust took place.

Presenter David Dimbleby claimed that Question Time is 'our show' and that we can say what we like.

But TUSC candidate Ian Leahair was able to show that the programme carves out working class, anti-cuts voices. Why didn't they ask Ian, a FBU firefight-

ers' union executive member, to sit on the panel?

I asked if they edit any of the audiences' points - Dimbleby said no, but that was not the experience of Socialist Party members in previous Question Time audiences.

In the unbroadcast warm-ups, I managed to get on the trial panel to engage in debate, and also in the warm-up question with the real panel.

The warm-up question was about Labour peers telling voters to vote for Ken Livingstone to be London mayor through gritted teeth.

I pointed out that, with hundreds of thousands of people losing their jobs and services, if Livingstone stood up against the cuts he would romp home.

We hope our brief appearance will help give confidence to all those watching that fighting back is worthwhile.

But it is outrageous that we have to fight our way into the debate like this - trade unionists standing in the elections, fighting for a political voice for the millions against the parties of the millionaires ought to be headline news.

Paula Mitchell

Don't accept the misery of austerity

Hannah Sell
Socialist Party deputy general secretary

Britain is in the depths of economic recession. The threat of unemployment, poverty and even homelessness hangs over the lives of millions of people. Unemployment is climbing towards three million, average incomes fell by 3.5% in 2011 and homelessness increased by 14%.

But Britain in 2012 is a tale of two countries. While the majority face cuts to their living standards a few at the top are rolling in cash. The gap between rich and poor is greater today than at any time since the second world war.

The Sunday Times rich list has broken records in 2012. The combined wealth of Britain's richest 1,000 people swelled by almost 5% to £414 billion, reaching the highest amount ever recorded by the 24-year-old survey.

Chancellor George Osborne's budget laid bare, even to those workers who had illusions in the Tories, that this is a government of the rich and for the rich. Taxes were cut both for the big corporations and the 1% of the population who earn over £150,000 a year. Meanwhile further cuts in public spending were announced. All the misery we have suffered so far is less than 10% of the cuts this government has got planned.

Escalate the action

But we do not accept that there is no alternative to taking this pain. Nor do the hundreds of thousands of workers who will be striking to defend their pensions on 10 May (M10). Those workers understand, along with millions of others, that the only way to stop the endless austerity we face is by organising a mass campaign of defiance.

The government has declared war and the only possible response is to escalate the action, both in defence of pension rights, but also broadening the struggle against the government's austerity onslaught, and in defence of the rights of the trade unions to organise effectively.

In 2011 the workers' movement in Britain gave a glimpse of its potential power – with the strikes on both 30 June and 30 November and with the 26 March demonstration, the biggest trade union-led demonstration in over a century. Unfortunately, the leadership of the TUC, along with the leaders of Unison, the biggest public sector union, betrayed the mighty movements of 2011 by agreeing to a 'heads of agreement'

with the government which does nothing to protect public sector workers' pensions. As a result the strike on M10 will not be as powerful as the massive strike of two million public sector workers that took place on 30 November 2011. If that action had continued, there is no doubt the government would have been stopped.

But it still can be! Socialist Party members, alongside other trade unionists, have fought for the pensions action to continue. The M10 strike is an important step in this direction, which we now need to build on. A further one-day public sector strike needs to be combined with an immediate national

Britain in 2012 is a tale of two countries. While the majority face cuts to their living standards a few at the top are rolling in cash. The gap between rich and poor is greater today than at any time since the second world war

weekend trade union-led demonstration against austerity and in defence of our NHS.

Prominent in the campaign against austerity should be complete opposition to regional pay, which is an attempt to weaken the power of the trade union movement by ending national pay bargaining. Regional pay will make far worse the already higher levels of poverty which exists in some parts of the country. In the north east, for example, over 40% of children live in poverty.

Alternative to austerity

However, alongside fighting to stop the cuts we also need to put forward an alternative. Austerity is not only the diet for workers in Britain; it is also what is being offered to workers in Ireland, Greece, Spain and most other countries. All parties that accept capitalism also accept austerity. The Liberal Democrats have shown that no cut, no privatisation,

no tax break for the rich, is too distasteful for them to sign up to.

But unfortunately New Labour also does not oppose austerity, and has made it absolutely clear that if elected they would not reverse the Con-Dem cuts. Labour leader Ed Miliband is so craven that he is not even willing, as the ex-social democrat Socialist Party candidate, Francois Hollande, has done in France, to promise to increase taxation on the super-rich. Even promising to re-introduce the 50p tax rate for income over £150,000 is too much for Ed!

That is why it is crucial that the workers' movement begins to develop its own electoral voice. The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition has stood anti-cuts candidates in this year's local elections in order to begin to develop such a voice. Candidates included leaders of important militant trade unions such as Alex Gordon, president of the train workers' union RMT, and Joe Simpson, deputy general secretary of the prison officers' union, POA.

To fully represent the interests of workers, anti-cuts candidates need to stand on an anti-capitalist and socialist programme. In Britain the result of the capitalist crisis is that the economy today is still 4.3% smaller than it was when the economic crisis began in 2008. Nor is there any prospect of a return to healthy growth, the best capitalism has to offer Britain is prolonged stagnation. Yet there is no lack of profits being made. There is an incredible £750 billion sitting in the vaults of Britain's major corporations. They do not invest it because they cannot find a profitable outlet.

Privatisation

The privatisation of public services, not least our NHS, is in large part motivated by big business's search for a profitable outlet. What a condemnation of capitalism today. Capitalism has always been based on the drive for profit, which comes from the exploitation of the majority, the working class. Yet for all its brutality and exploitation, in the past capitalism did drive society forward – developing industry, science and technique.

Today British capitalism is utterly parasitic, reduced to making profits from the privatisation of our public services and gambling on the stock markets.

In 2012 manufacturing only accounts for 10.5% of Britain's economy. New Labour in power followed the path set by the Tories before them, and watched the manufacturing industry shrink while the City spiralled out of control.

The rich get richer...

£120bn avoided and evaded tax every year, mainly by the super-rich

£750bn sitting idle in British banks

77 billionaires in Britain and Ireland

5% increase in wealth of the richest 1,000 people in the last year

50p tax rate for those earning over £150,000 a year scrapped

17 millionaires in the cabinet

102:1 executive to worker pay 2011

£250,000 cost of a parking space at luxury apartment block 1 Hyde Park

photo Paul Mattsson

...the poor get poorer

2.65m unemployed

22% young people unemployed

30% British children live in poverty

14% increase in homelessness in 2011

129,000 forced to use food bank services last year

240,000 public sector job losses June 2010 – June 2011

70,000 seriously ill and disabled people to lose some or all Employment and Support Allowance this week

10% of cuts implemented so far



The M10 strike action is an important step in the pensions battle photo Paul Mattsson

As we warned, the stock market frenzy brought the economy to the brink of Armageddon in 2008. Since then all three of the major capitalist parties have started to talk about the importance of 're-balancing the economy'.

But the manufacturing and finance sectors of the economy are intertwined, and no amount of pleading will convince the major banks and corporations to invest the money in industry instead of stashing it away.

Socialists demand an immediate 50% levy on the £750 billion held by the major corporations in their bank vaults. This would provide enough money to prevent any cuts in public services, but also to invest in developing socially-useful industry.

Instead of the madness of the market, we argue for a rational, socialist solution. Britain currently has over one million unemployed young people while workers are being forced to keep working 'until they drop', to 68 and beyond.

Why not provide free high quality education and training for young people, with jobs at the end: including as teachers, nurses and doctors, firefighters? This would improve the quality of public services, allow workers to enjoy their retirement, and give young people the possibility of a secure future.

This could be combined with introducing a 35-hour week, with no loss of pay. In Britain, low pay means that full-time workers work the longest hours in Europe, while millions of others languish on the dole or can only get part time work. We demand that the work is shared out.

Housing crisis

Britain has an acute housing crisis. In 2010 only 95,000 properties were built, overwhelmingly in the private sector. The building of council housing has almost completely ceased. Other 'affordable' housing is also in short supply and is not affordable. The government is demanding that all social housing rents move towards market levels.

In Newham, the borough where the Olympics are being held, shiny new buildings now dominate the landscape but, with 32,000 on the housing waiting list, only 348 of the new properties will be available for social housing after the Games. Meanwhile the homeless are

being shipped to Stoke-on-Trent, a city blighted by one of the highest unemployment levels in the country (see also page 11).

Socialists argue for the obvious solution. Between 1949 and 1954 an average of 230,000 council houses were built every year. Why not launch a new mass council house building programme in order to provide high-quality affordable housing for the five million people who are waiting for social housing? Building workers could be put to work, not on slave labour pay, but with union rates of pay and conditions.

This in turn could be paid for by the increased tax income from those drawn into work and the cuts in housing benefit payments – not at the expense of tenants as now – but because there would be affordable housing for all rather than slum landlords making a fat profit from people's misery.

Socialism

All of these measures together could eliminate the scourge of unemployment and offer a decent future for the whole population. We fight for every one of these measures, but we also recognise that they will never be implemented fully and permanently on the basis of capitalism. Faced with a determined working class, big business can be forced to give us concessions. However, in its relentless pursuit of profit, capitalism would then come back with other ways of making the working class pay for the crisis.

That is why we need a socialist solution. For a start we call for the nationalisation of the big banking and finance companies. Compensation should be paid on the basis of proven need – but without one penny going to the speculators who are demanding that the working class pay for the crisis for which they bear responsibility.

It would then be necessary to introduce a state monopoly on foreign trade – so that it would be a democratically elected government, not the market, controlling imports and exports including capital.

A socialist nationalised banking sector would be democratically run by representatives of banking workers and trade unions, the wider working class, as well as the government. Decisions

would be made to meet the needs of the majority, for example offering cheap loans and mortgages for housing and for the planned development of industry and services and ending all repossession of peoples' homes.

However, that would only be the start. That is why a crucial step towards solving the economic crisis would be to take the big corporations that dominate Britain's economy into democratic public ownership. In Britain 150 companies control between 70% and 75% of the wealth. By taking them over – again with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need – we will be able to harness all of the currently unused capacity. A socialist plan of production could be introduced to meet the needs of the population and the environment, instead of being driven – as today – by the lust for profit.

Of course, capitalism is an international system, and any alternative could not stop at the shores of Britain. But just look at how quickly the revolutionary movements spread around North Africa and the Middle East in early 2011.

If a democratically elected socialist government in any country was to begin to implement the kind of programme outlined here, it would act as an enormous inspiration to workers in the rest of the world struggling against capitalism's devastation of their living standards. The ideas of genuine democratic socialism would be unstoppable.

If you agree:
Join the Socialist Party!

Web www.socialistparty.org.uk

Phone 020 8988 8777

Text 07761 818206

Email join@socialistparty.org.uk



All three main parties accept capitalism and austerity photo Sheffield Socialist Party

Capitalist crisis: 'Up to half of all Icelandic families are bankrupt'

Per-Åke Westerlund

From Offensiv, newspaper of Rättvisepartiet Socialisterna (CWI in Sweden)

Iceland's economy is growing again after the deep recession that struck in 2008. But the economic and political crisis is far from over.

During one week in October 2008, the country's three major banks collapsed and the stock exchange index fell from 9,000 to 14!

GDP (the total output of goods and services) fell by over 10% and the unemployment rate increased sevenfold. None of the 320,000 inhabitants could escape the blast.

The author, Haukur Ingvarsson, told the Danish newspaper, Information, about his grandfather: "First, he lost all his savings. Then he lost faith in the society he had so proudly been a part of building. And finally he lost his mind... Four or five months later he was dead."

Today, when economic growth seems to be coming back, the after effects of the crisis remain: "Up to half of all Icelandic families are bankrupt, many have stopped paying their bills and even people with good education and permanent jobs are under severe pressure," summarizes Information.

Devaluation

How can the economic recovery and the calm that seems to have replaced the big protests of 2008-09 be explained?

The main reason for growth is a gigantic devaluation. The Icelandic krona fell at one stage by 77% and is now at about 50% below its previous value. This has increased tourism and fish exports.

The krona's value reduction also increased the foreign debt. But the Icelandic government guaranteed only lenders in the country. "Much of the cost of debt restructuring was borne indirectly by foreign creditors, who took significant losses when the banks collapsed," says the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in its latest forecast (World Economic Outlook, April 2012).

In response to the many angry demonstrations and to avoid a total collapse, the Icelandic government decided on several temporary measures: an end to foreclosures, suspension of debt payments for housing, a rule that no one should have housing debt of more than



Icelanders protesting in 2008 following the country's financial meltdown

110% of the household's annual income, etc.

The cost of these measures and the state bank takeover was financed with loans from IMF of \$10 billion - up to €20,000 per Icelander.

Negotiations of individual housing loans have subsequently led to reductions of debt and temporarily reduced interest rates. But these kind of negotiations have been completed for only 35% of all households.

Several of the measures have only been possible because Iceland has so few inhabitants. But it remains yet to be seen the degree to which Iceland managed to put households back on their feet, the IMF report concludes. "Significant problems remain," the Financial Times said in a recent analysis. The average household has lost 30% of its purchasing power since 2008. Household debt is still above 200% of disposable income.

Still, one-quarter of the reorganised bank debt is "bad loans." One reason for the debts continuing to be so high is that they are pegged to inflation, currently 6% annually, while wages have remained constant or decreased.

The political crisis is at least as great as the economic one. The Social Democrats and the Green Left formed a government when the old right-wing government was thrown out in elections in 2009. But today, both parties have halved their support compared to two years ago. The Social Democrats have fallen from 29% to 14% and the Green Left from 21% to 8%.

Hopes that the two parties stood for a different policy were dashed quickly. Instead, the new government turned to the European Union (EU), in the rest of Europe associated with the relentless cuts in pensions, public sector jobs and wages. This has opened up the way for the Independence Party, who sat in the previous government and now is leading in the polls.

Public opinion wants something new. "Almost half of respondents could not indicate how they would vote in elections to parliament today.

Of those responding, a fifth sympathised with a party that currently had no representation in Parliament," reports islandsbloggen.com.

Alternative

A new party, Unity, formed by Lily Mósesdóttir who left Green Left (critical for example, of the fact that household debts are not written down more), got above 21% in its first poll, but has since dropped to 6%.

The search for something new has led to a comedian being elected mayor of Reykjavik. A television show host leads the polls for the presidential election in June.

The outgoing president, Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson, is widely discredited since giving support to the bankers.

The bankers, many of who have kept their private jets and fortunes, are still hated. "People in Range Rovers and black suits went in re-

cord time from being role models to be symbols of corruption and greed," noted Information.

Three lawsuits are also catching interest. Few believed that former prime minister, Geir H Haarde, would be sentenced for his role in the crisis.

As most Icelanders expected, he will face neither fines nor jail. He was only found guilty of failing to inform other ministers of his government and cleared on all charges of responsibility for the crisis.

During the trial, both Haarde and the witnesses only affirmed that they did everything they could to stop the crisis. But in reality, the state pumped money into the banks until the day of bankruptcy, as the Iceland blog pointed out.

The EFTA (European Free Trade Association to which Iceland belongs) court is suing the Icelandic government for claims by British and Dutch governments for British and Dutch losses in the Icelandic Icesave bank.

A third trial started recently, with bankers and their role in the crisis on the stand. Maybe it can provide additional information about the course of the crisis.

Shortly after the Icelandic crisis, the capitalist crisis erupted in a number of European countries and Iceland partially went into the shade. But the crisis is not over.

The need for socialist and genuinely internationalist answers are as great today as in 2008. Policies conducted within the framework of capitalism put the costs of crisis onto workers and ordinary people.

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:



May Day 2012: Celebrate working class history and fight for new victories

International workers' day and the socialist alternative to austerity and barbarism.

CWI



Irish referendum: Trade union leaders decide not to take a stance on European fiscal treaty

Socialist MEP calls for unions to advocate 'No' vote on austerity treaty.

Paul Murphy, MEP, Socialist Party (CWI, Ireland)



Sweden: Chinese premier's visit met by vociferous democracy protests

CWI supporter Zhang Shujie and other activists protest Wen Jibao's visit to Stockholm and Gothenburg.

CWI reporters, Sweden

Kazakhstan: Socialists jailed by regime

Sarah Zhakupova

Kazakhstan Socialist Movement

Larissa Boyar, a prominent member of the Kazakhstan Socialist Movement, and two other opposition activists - Baxatjan Torevozhina and Kanat Ibragimov - have been arrested and imprisoned.

On the morning of 28 April, as protest demonstrations were due to begin against the harassment of people over home loans by banks, these 'dissenters' were grabbed by police directly from their homes. By 7.30pm they had been sentenced to 15 days' immediate detention.

The Kazakhstan Socialist Movement and the campaigners of the ONJ (Leave the People's Homes

Alone) have had huge pressure put on them in the run-up to the demonstration. They were not able to talk to each other on the phone and relatives were intimidated with the threat of being sacked from their work.

At the 'trial', the prosecution used a video of a press conference given on 24 April where Larissa had called all active and concerned citizens to fight together with the Kazakhstan Socialist Movement.

As is usual for opposition activists in Kazakhstan - the former central Asian Soviet republic, run by a dictatorial clique around president Nursultan Nazarbayev - the trial judge made a politically motivated and totally unfair judgement.

At the same time a show trial of 37

striking oil workers in Zhanaozen, west Kazakhstan - who were brutally attacked by armed police on 16 December last year, leaving many workers dead - is continuing.

The most active members of Socialist Movement have had criminal proceedings initiated against them with fines imposed of up to 300,000 tenge (around \$2,000). Leaders of the Socialist Movement and of the independent trade union Zhanartu - Ainur Kurmanov and Esenbek Ukteshbaev - have been pursued by the authorities and have had to go abroad.

Thanks to the international solidarity of socialists numerous protests have been organised around the world in the form of pickets and rallies at Kazakhstan embassies. A

campaign is now needed in support of the organisers of the 'Dissenters'.

●Release Larissa Boyar, Baxatjan Torevozhina and Kanat Ibragimov!

●Drop all charges and stop harassment of the 'dissenters'

●Protests to the Prosecutor General's Office of the Republic of Kazakhstan: email: Gp-rk@prokuror.kz And to: The Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 33 Thurloe Square, London SW7 2SD. email: london@kazembassy.org.uk

Copies to campaignkazakhstan@gmail.org and kazakhstansolidarity@gmail.com

More information - www.campaignkazakhstan.org

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.

Alternative to recession

So the UK's officially back in recession - the dreaded double-dip that all the so-called experts were predicting we would avoid. Workers don't need official statistics to tell us the economy's in a mess. We see it in every pay slip - frozen pay levels and increased pension contributions (for those lucky enough to have a pension). We see it in the bill every time we buy groceries or top up the car. While government ministers and financial experts queue up to tell us things are beginning to improve, the rest of us suffer and try to make ends meet in austerity Britain. The Welsh government has dusted off its "cuts are too fast, too deep" routine, with Labour First Minister, Carwyn Jones proclaiming this mantra at every available opportunity. But he has no real alternative to offer - a precipitous collapse back into recession under the Tories or a prolonged slide into stagnation under Labour. Either way promises a grim future for working class communities in Wales. Cuts equal misery and further economic problems - end of! That's why we've been stressing the need for a genuine socialist alternative to the double-headed support of Tories and Labour for the failing market and cuts.

Ben Golightly

Olympic legacy

Living within sight of the Olympic Stadium, I have been forced to consider the implications of the government's latest move to defend the games from 'bad-dies'. I am not keen on having ground-to-air missiles on the roof - think of the scorch marks - but what would happen if one of the things ever got fired? Admittedly I get most of my knowledge of aerial warfare from Star Wars films, but if something needed to be shot down and a missile actually hit it, wouldn't all the resulting debris kill most of the people below? I'm sure Wing Commander Blimp might have already thought of this but I just thought I'd mention it. Looks like the 'legacy' of the Games for east London could be even worse than we feared.

Margaret Graham

Torture Inc.

British politicians condemned Libyan leader Gaddafi and sent forces to aid the fight against him. However, British capitalism's attitude was the same as

British security forces and former Labour Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw. Belhaj alleges that British officials provided intelligence which let the CIA detain him and his pregnant wife in Thailand in 2004.

He says US and Thai agents tortured them before returning them to Gaddafi's Libya where they received further abuse. This appears to be 'extraordinary rendition', the transfer of prisoners to regimes with little concern for human rights via secret prisons. This case shines a light into the murky corners of the British security establishment and the lengths they are willing to go to in defence of big business interests. However, we are unlikely to get any clear answers. Shamefully the case could even be heard behind closed doors. However, Straw is no innocent in dealing with dictators. When home secretary in 2000 he allowed General Pinochet, who was in London then, to return home to Chile after the ex-dictator had been indicted by a Spanish judge for complicity in torture.

Tom Baldwin

Privatising peer

Lord Hutton is well-known to public sector workers. He originated the plan that we should work longer, pay more and get less in pensions. Remember we are all in this together so of course the Labour Peer (Yes, a Labour peer!) has had to take on the role of chairman of the board of a privatised pension scheme delightfully named "My Civil Service Pension", MyCSP.

The media portrayed it as an employee-owned business "like John Lewis". John Lewis should sue for defamation of character!

Cutting pensions and privatising the retirement fund management is something no employee asked for. The employees will not own 75% of the business and certainly won't be allowed to sack the chairman. Sacking Hutton is mild compared to the views of most civil servants I've spoken to. They would prefer more draconian measures.

Derek McMillan

Farmer George

George Galloway says his main political mistake was standing for "state ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange... I'm not saying, at all, that everything in the private garden is rosy. There's just more flowers than there were in the state garden." Guardian, 30/4/12)

All those who oppose brutal austerity, with misery meted out to the vast majority, celebrated George's victory in Bradford West. It represented a kicking of what George has so eloquently called "the three cheeks of the same backside", the Lib-Con-Lab consensus on cuts.

But austerity is not a natural phenomenon - it is a product precisely of the failure of 'free market' capitalism. George should be confident in making the case for an alternative society based on democratic public ownership of at least the decisive summits of the economy. That is exactly what candidates standing for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) are doing. Under the media radar an army of workers, campaigners, young people and trade unionists, motivated by the belief that there's an alternative to the 'private' garden, is finding big support.

Emma Smith

NUS conference

Support for left and for action

Ian Pattison

Socialist Students national chair

The National Union of Students (NUS) conference is usually the place to see undemocratic manoeuvring by unelected bureaucrats and New Labour careerists. But this year it was different!

In an unprecedented showing, the left won almost every major debate and vote on policy. There were whopping majorities in favour of a national demonstration this autumn term against the brutal government attacks facing education, and for a national college student walkout to demand the reinstatement of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA).

These votes were despite the NUS leadership's failure to build for the 14 March walkout against education cuts and privatisation. Socialist Students was the only organisation that genuinely built for the 14 March walkout.

Edmund Schluessel, UCU (lecturers' trade union) member and Socialist Students, argued for unity between students and education workers to defeat the attacks on education. He called for student backing of the joint strike action by UCU and other public sector trade unions on 10 May over pensions.

Delegates also voted in favour of a robust anti-cuts strategy, and a 'defend the right to protest' motion that criticised the repressive role of the police and the use of 'kettling' on demonstrations.

One of the highlights of conference was the election of left-winger Vicki Baars to the position of Vice-President for Union Development.



Workers and students should unite to fight the cuts photo S.Beishon

Vicki is the first left-wing vice-president in eight years. Even 'The Delegate' (a right-wing NUS conference bulletin) commented: "Such an inroad could in the years to come prove to be the opening of the NUS floodgates for left-wing candidates". Vicki won by a strong margin, beating the second placed candidate by 60 votes.

But the right-wing won every other leadership position and is likely to retain control of the NEC. Incumbent NUS President, Liam Burns, a New Labour supporter, was re-elected, pushing the 'left' candidate into fourth place.

However, left-wingers on the NEC and Vicki as vice-president can give confidence to student activists to hold the NUS leadership to account on their promise of a national demonstration and a walkout in the autumn term.

Usually at NUS conference left-wing delegates talk about the issues that affect ordinary students, while the dominant faction, the National Organisation of Labour Students (NOLS) turns the whole event into a farce.

But this year, even right-wing candidates felt compelled to talk to the left.

Former sabbatical officer at Leeds University Union and now NUS Vice-President for Higher Education elect, Rachel Wenstone, devoted almost her entire election speech to taking credit for the work that Leeds University Against Cuts had done during the 2010 student movement; even though she had made a key speech last year against NUS holding a national demo!

This year's NUS conference represents a sea change in NUS. The radicalisation of a big layer of students during the 2010 student movement has finally had an effect on the leadership of our union.

Socialist Students stepped up our campaign work in NUS this year. Socialist Students stood Edmund Schluessel from Cardiff University and Jarrow Marcher Lizi Gray from Newcastle College to the Block of 15 open NEC places.

Edmund and Lizi gave the best speeches, where their strong campaigning record shone through. The results are announced on 3 May.

The government's fractured energy policy

A dangerous gas extraction practice - 'fracking' - will likely get government approval in Chancellor Osborne and energy secretary Ed Davey's new "dash for gas".

'Fracking' pumps carcinogenic liquids deep underground, breaking open gas-containing rocks, poisoning the water table and releasing the potent greenhouse gas methane into the atmosphere.

Cuadrilla Resources, whose drilling in Blackpool alarmed residents when it seemingly caused two earthquakes, claim gas resources which could last the UK more than five decades are trapped in Lancashire shale. However the British Geological Survey suggest roughly 20-40 days of extractable gas.

Since fracking gas wells tend to dry up quickly, six to eight wells per square mile will be required around each of the tens of sites to be explored, in order to wring the maximum from the UK's shale gas resources, including as many as 800 in Lancashire and more in areas such as Sussex, the Guardian reported (17/4/12).

Gas is falsely considered a 'clean' fuel compared to its carbon cousins oil and coal. A recent study by Nature (7/2/12) showed that leaking

natural gas - methane - from fracking gas fields makes gas no cleaner than coal. This is because methane is a more powerful greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide - 100 times more powerful in the first two decades of its release, and 25 times over its lifetime. The earthquakes in Blackpool deformed the structure of the well, a potential source of leaked gas, among many others.

Renewable energy threatens the profits of the energy industry. The government's main concern seems to be keeping energy industry profits healthy!

Pete Mason

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Planning for the Planet explains how and why capitalism has failed to tackle global warming and other threats to the environment, including nuclear contamination. This book puts forward an alternative of a democratically managed socialist planned economy that could create the conditions where environmental problems are solved.



towards any despot - work with them when it suits you and turn against them once the writing's on the wall (and then try to win influence with their replacement).

A former Libyan dissident, Abdel Hakim Belhaj is taking legal action against

Social dumping won't solve the housing crisis

Labour-run Newham council in east London decided recently to try to uproot 500 local families and dump them in Stoke, 160 miles away! Tory Westminster council also wants to kick out poor tenants. Britain's housing crisis is getting deeper. Andy Bentley of Stoke Socialist Party comments.

Newham is one of London's poorest boroughs. 25% of its children live in poverty, according to Save the Children, while billions of pounds are being spent on the nearby Olympic Park.

Newham council asked Brighter Futures Housing Association in Stoke-on-Trent to find homes for up to 500 families who are suffering from the housing benefit cap imposed by the government. But if government cuts continue, these families would find no 'brighter future' in Stoke or any other part of Britain.

Officially Stoke has over 3,000 individuals or families waiting for social housing but the real figure is much higher. Youth unemployment is at 22% and child poverty stands at 19%.

Stoke's Labour council demolished hundreds of good homes but the money has run out to build the replacement homes they promised. The council has built just 17 council bungalows since 1987! £35 million of cuts to jobs and services were carried out last year with another £24 million both this year and next.

The government cuts housing benefit and tries to blame tenants for claiming more to pay their rent! But it's only the landlords charging high rents that gain. Cutting housing benefit hits not just unemployed people - 80% of those claiming housing benefit in London are working.

The number of people officially registered as homeless rose by at least 14% in the last year. Nationally five million people, two million households, are desperate for social housing. Homelessness, high rents and lack of decent affordable social housing is a national problem that can't be solved by 'social dumping'. What is needed is a mass building programme of high quality, affordable council houses.

From 1949 to 1954, 230,000 council houses were built on average every year. A similar building programme today would provide work for hundreds of thousands of unemployed building workers, and also immediately cut the amount of money paid to private landlords in housing benefit.

It could also provide proper apprenticeships for thousands of unemployed young people to train as the next generation of bricklayers, joiners, electricians, plumbers etc. It could be paid for by collecting the £120 billion unpaid corporation tax that big business don't pay every year!

In the past even Tory governments, under mass pressure from the working class, supported a mass house building programme. Instead of trying to 'export' a 'local problem' to another area, Newham Labour council's time would be better spent linking with such a fightback and calling on other Labour councils like Stoke's to do the same.



Affordable housing, not Olympic flats at Olympic prices photo Suzanne Beishon

Needed - new and affordable homes now!

A London housing worker

Newham council's proposals highlight the severe lack of reasonably priced housing in London. Many councils enthusiastically promoted the Tories' so-called 'Right to Buy' laws; all of them failed to build new homes. So now they all rely substantially on the private sector to meet housing need. Newham shows that this approach has failed.

In April 2011 the Con-Dems introduced Local Housing Allowance (LHA - private sector housing benefit) caps of £250 a week (1 bed), £290 (2 bed), £340 (3 bed) and £400 (4 bed or more). They also reduced the benchmark for LHA from average rents to the bottom 30% of rents.

London workers on average wages find it impossible to obtain housing in many parts of the city. In particular, households who are forced out of more central areas put pressure on the supply of private sector rented housing in many outlying areas.

With thousands in temporary accommodation, councils such as Newham are reduced to desperate measures. Newham did not just approach a landlord in Stoke, they approached 1,178 others!

To make matters worse, the Con-Dems nationally, with local councils' cooperation, are raising council and housing association (HA) rents to close to market rents. They also

intend only to increase LHA once a year, in line with the Consumer Prices Index, so when private rents increase LHA will not keep up and low paid workers will have to make up the shortfall.

The Con-Dems also intend to introduce a Universal Credit Cap on benefits at £500 which will reduce the money many households who lose employment have for rent to well below market rents. Labour supports the principle of caps on benefits.

Divide and rule

Young people fare even worse. Single under-35s will be expected to share accommodation. A new 'bedroom tax', being introduced shortly, will penalise council and HA tenants who have a spare bedroom through a cut in housing benefit.

Rather than face up to this crisis of their own making, right-wing politicians seek to divide and rule by making false claims about priority being given to new immigrants to obtain council and HA tenancies.

In reality these tenancies are severely rationed for all applicants and almost all will be on waiting lists for years without being successful. Only eligible applicants in severest need will succeed. So people are forced to rely on the perils of private landlords - an option which the Con-Dems are even trying to deny them.

Nancy Taaffe, a Trade Union-

...if the Olympic village was used for social housing after the election it would be more than big enough to house the people Newham want to move to Stoke.

ist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidate in the London elections has pointed out that if the Olympic village was used for social housing after the election it would be more than big enough to house the people Newham want to move to Stoke. But no establishment parties have any answer to the housing crisis.

Rent caps should be introduced immediately to make private sector properties affordable. Councils should give their environmental health sections the resources to take action against landlords of dangerous properties. Legal aid should be available to help tenants enforce their rights. Council and HA rents should be no more than £100 a week.

Most importantly a large programme of new building of genuinely affordable housing is needed urgently. Trade unions should actively campaign on housing issues. A good first step would be to support the Londoners Forced Out campaign (website londonersforcedout.com) just launched by Youth Fight for Jobs.

Spectacular 'free market' failure

Private rents in Newham rose by over 150% over the last five years and one in three households in the borough is on the council house waiting list. In 2009, 28,629 households were on the waiting list. The charity Shelter said this would take 24 years to clear so long as no one else was added to it!

Since then the housing situation has got worse, ironically after the council's clampdown on slum landlords who had profited from renting out garden sheds and ramshackle buildings to

poor people.

Newham council, like other local authorities, is not building new homes for affordable rents. And with the construction industry in a slump, neither is the private sector. The number of new housing starts in Britain is the lowest since the 1920s.

Relying for housing on the 'free market' has been championed by successive governments since Thatcher's days. Clearly, it has spectacularly failed working class people.

Simon Carter, Newham

Are we living in the 19th century?

I am a candidate for TUSC in Winchester and a working class mother of three children. I am on less than income support every week to feed my children and recently due to a major accident my son has had I have to spend over £30 of this amount a week to go to hospital and back.

Tonight I read the ideas of the other parties standing in Winchester. The one that hit me most was the Labour candidate who

suggested we deal with the homeless problem by putting families in spare attics in the city.

Are we living in the 19th century? Let's just put people in cellars, several families to a room! Do they really expect the working class to believe this hype or are they preaching to rich people who would like to see the poor disappear so they do not have to deal with them anymore?

Adele Guntrip

FIGHT PRIVATISATION

SAVE OUR LIBRARIES

Over the last year more than 100 libraries have either been closed, are now run by volunteers or have been made into social enterprises, ie privatised. Here Paul Callanan, Socialist Party member from Greenwich, south London,

describes the onslaught by a Labour-led council carrying out government cuts. He also explains the huge battle, led by the Unite union, including Socialist Party members, involving possibly the first strike against cuts in libraries.

Celebrations around the declaration of the “Royal Borough of Greenwich”, included letting off fireworks in front of huge crowds of 30 and paying over £130,000 for miniature statues of Tudor kings and queens for the enjoyment of the masses in the town hall.

But workers in Greenwich have been outraged that the council have found the money for Royal celebrations, while carrying out cuts that will devastate workers and their families.

On 30 April, library workers were transferred to Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL), which employs staff on poorer pay and conditions than the council. But a magnificent two-day strike by Unite members closed eleven out of 13 libraries.

GLL are terrified of the bad publicity generated by a strike. They claim they are a worker-led company but out of 5,000 staff only 1,400 are permanent. The rest are casuals.

GLL threatened legal action against the strike. Strike action on 30 April and 1 May had to be postponed. But this is only temporary. A new notice will be issued and strike action will begin again. This is a campaign that Unite is determined to see through.

In sharp contrast, there has not been even a message of support from Greenwich Unison. This branch is still under the control of regional officials following a vicious witch-hunt. This shows that had the strike's leaders remained in Unison, the leadership would have done all it could to block a campaign against this privatisation, let alone strike action.

A march has been organised for 5 May in order to build for further industrial action and cement public support. There will also be a strikers' benefit evening.

GLL have made clear that following the transfer, there will be a “harmonisation” process, in reality to bring library staff down to GLL levels.

GLL negotiators have confirmed that new library staff will be employed on poorer pay and conditions.

But the cat shot out of the bag when the council refused to accept a potential compromise whereby staff would be seconded over to GLL rather than transferred. This compromise would have meant staff staying as council employees, giving a better safeguard against attacks on pay and conditions.

This dispute has highlighted the limited protection offered by TUPE. The legislation only gives protection at the point of transfer. All employers need do is find a reason to attack pay and conditions not linked to the transfer – usually by crying poverty. This has happened to workers again and again and that is why this dispute is so important.

A victory in Greenwich can set an example across the country and will inspire Unison activists to take on their leadership and demand a fighting strategy.



Demonstrating against the council's plans photo Paul Mattsson

March To Save Our Libraries: 5 May, assemble 11.30, Eltham Centre, Archery Road, Eltham SE9.

Benefit Night: 11 May, Woolwich Theatre, Wellington Street, Woolwich, SE18. Tickets for the benefit available via onay.kasab@unitetheunion.org

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!