

NHS CUTS... PENSION CUTS... RESIST CUTS! Build for a 24-hour general strike

The coalition government is looking increasingly lonely in its insistence on austerity. For the vast majority it is clear – it ain't working. Over 10% of European adults are unemployed, up by 50% since 2008. Living standards are falling through the floor. In Greece it's been reported that cancer sufferers are going from hospital to hospital in search of essential drugs while NHS cuts and privatisation plans here threaten the existence of a national health service. Europe, and then the world, is on the brink of further banking and economic crisis.

But the resistance to these failed policies is also growing. In Britain, as Dr Jackie Grunsell explains, that now includes plans by doctors to take the first day of industrial action in almost 40 years on 21 June. This will also show the potential for health workers to play a leading role in defence of the NHS.

Last month the British Medical Association (BMA) balloted members asking two questions: are you prepared to take action short of a strike and are you prepared to strike over the attacks to pensions similar to those faced by other public sector workers? In a 50% turnout the vote was a resounding yes to both. 81.9% of junior doctors voted to strike.

The usual propaganda from the government has begun, accusing doctors of being greedy and overpaid. However, with burnout already an issue in the profession, who would want a 68 year old demotivated doctor dealing with their care because they've been forced to work longer while paying more for a worse pension?

The fact that even this relatively privileged section of health workers has been driven to this action is a reflection of the anger that exists – not just over pensions but also the devastating attacks on

the NHS being carried out by the Con-Dems.

It is a shame the BMA didn't take action alongside other workers last November and the impact of the action will be limited as doctors are still being told to at-

82%

of junior doctors
voted to strike

tend their workplace and just do urgent care.

More decisive strike action co-ordinated with other health unions and the wider public sector will be necessary to push the government back. But the BMA now has a clear mandate to call that and escalate the action. Doctors need to step up the pressure to make this happen... the 21st will be a landmark day from which to demand further action.



photo Paul Mattsson

the **Socialist**

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Privateers not welcome at Sussex University

Shona McCulloch

Sussex University Union (personal capacity)

On 10 May 2012 University of Sussex management announced plans to sell off huge swathes of support services on campus by August 2013, privatising over 10% of jobs.

Over 30 key support services would be affected, including security - even in the context of recent reports of sexual assaults on campus - estates, health and safety, and dining - which has recently seen a multi-million pound upgrade.

Getting organised

Unison, UCU and Unite, who represent the affected workers, organised an open meeting on 17 May which hundreds of staff and students attended. Representatives from the trades and student unions spoke before discussion was opened to the floor and the outrage of the crowd was heard in full.

A united campaign was formed involving workers and students - it was agreed that: a vote of no confi-

dence would be held against vice-chancellor Michael Farthing and his executive group; demonstrations would be organised to oppose the two 'tendering' meetings which had been arranged for interested profiteers the following week; and, given the ruthless determination of Sussex management, that strike action would likely be necessary so plans to that effect must proceed with haste within the unions.

Socialist Party members in the campus unions are working to ensure that the necessary preparations are made as soon as possible, and with the full support of and under democratic control of the affected workers.

Demonstrations

The two demonstrations were hugely successful, with hundreds attending each and management forced to move the events to alternative venues. Speakers condemned the ideologically driven sell-off and Socialist Party members pointed out that 'support' staff are indeed the foundations of the university, without which it cannot function.



We have proposed that as a first step a 'committee of action' to resist privatisation and defend jobs and conditions should be elected.

This should have a majority of members from among directly affected staff. Members of the Unison, Unite and UCU branch committees should also be present and negotiators should be accountable to this committee and to mass meetings of the catering and estates staff.

It would make sense for the committee of action to co-opt students and other staff as observers to broaden the campaign, and joint demos and meetings should continue as well as linking the campaign to the wider union and anti-cuts movement in Brighton.

An indicative ballot should be held as soon as possible to establish that workers are prepared to resist privatisation by all means necessary

including 'work to rule' and strikes, rather than trade jobs and public money for minor concessions for a minority.

All action needs to be decided democratically by the members after discussion with the wider campus community.

The full version of this article is available at www.socialistparty.org.uk

Tory leader chauffeur driven while slashing services

Heather Rawling

Leicestershire NUT (personal capacity)

Imagine how angry I felt when I read in our local paper that the Leicestershire Tory council leader, David Parsons, had cost taxpayers more than £1 million in expenses and allowances over the past five years.

Last year I was told that the two learning centres that I managed would have to close. All staff, including myself, were made redundant. The minibus company that brought the children to the centre went out of business as a direct result of losing our custom.

The learning centres worked with underachieving children. Children, teachers and parents told us we had made a huge difference to the lives of the children we worked with. We restored their self belief and confidence.

The Tories tell us that there is no alternative to making cuts but councillor Parsons' £1 million would have kept both centres open for five years!

What did Parsons spend his expenses on? £210,000 funded his



photo Senan

chauffeur driven use of the civic Ford Mondeo car. Trips included being driven to and from the Formula 1 British Grand Prix at Silverstone for the past three years. He has also been chauffeur driven to London to have lunch with a reporter and to Heathrow airport on several occasions.

£64,000 went on moving his office a few hundred yards. Now, when I moved house a few years

ago, it cost less than £1,000 for the removal people to move all my belongings so I can't fathom why it cost £64,000 to move a few bits of office furniture.

Councillor Parsons has frequently said that we are "all in this crisis together" and we all need to make sacrifices. Well, we lost our jobs and the children lost some valuable support. What sacrifices have you made Mr Parsons?

Documentary shows impact of cuts

Derek McMillan

Mid-Sussex Socialist Party

The BBC programme 56 Up follows the lives of individuals in an unprecedented documentary narrative spanning the time since the participants were seven.

The most recent episode highlighted the plight of public services. Lifelong library service worker Lynn Johnson said "for the last 30 years I have been banging my head against

a brick wall but now nobody is listening. They say that the work I do, anybody could do it."

It is worth emphasising she lost her job as a result of "nice Labour cuts" not "nasty Tory cuts."

Now, rather than being able to take early retirement her husband has had to take on full-time work to make ends meet. "The goalposts keep getting higher" for retirement, Lynn commented. "People who started work assuming they could retire at 60, find the situation has

now totally changed."

She regrets the fact there "is no party of the left", although she says she is not political, and adds "they haven't got a clue what they are doing. Some people are never ever going to recover from it and unfortunately they will be quite devastated. We have no left-wing Labour Party any more. Tony Blair saw to that. They all veer to the right."

On the same programme a wealthy Tory barrister boasts that there is no class society in Britain.

Children still getting raw deal

Sarah Stonedale

The Con-Dems' cuts in child services have become a hotly debated topic. On 30 May Nick Clegg proudly announced that: "Every child should have a fair crack at the whip from the start" and "go on to fulfil their potential". I ask: who are you kidding?

Clegg was announcing a scheme where less than 1,000 two year olds are to benefit from free childcare a year early as trials are brought forward in ten areas of England.

The changes are intended to "introduce greater flexibility", allowing some parents to take advantage of the scheme, currently used by over 800,000 three to four year olds.

From September 2013, it is intended that 150,000 of the most disadvantaged two year olds will receive up to 15 hours a week of free pre-school education, increasing to 260,000 in 2014.

A fitting response or salty tincture? Average childcare costs are more than £5,000 a year vs. income of £26,000, child benefit has been slashed, child services have been cut by 40%. 58% of the 3.8 million children growing up in poverty have one member of the household working. Many parents are unable to afford to return to work because of childcare costs.

Between 1998 and 2011, child poverty was reduced by 900,000. But now it is expected to rise again by 300,000 by 2015/16. It is estimated that the consequences of child poverty cost society £25 billion per year. Who exactly is cracking the fair whip here?

In 2007 Unicef reported children in the UK were the unhappiest in the 'developed world'. I believe a village raises a child and that young people only reflect what society has put onto them. In the current climate of Con-Dem cuts, our children are being hit the hardest.

We say:

- Stop all cuts to jobs, services, wages and conditions
- Build for a mass turnout to the TUC organised demonstration on 20 October
- For a 24-hour general strike against austerity
- For councils that make a stand and refuse to implement the Con-Dems cuts
- For a new mass workers' party to be a political voice against the cuts
- An immediate 50% levy on the £750 billion lying idle in the banks of big businesses in Britain
- No to privatisation. Re-nationalise all privatised utilities and services under democratic workers' control and management, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need
- Mass investment into a programme of public works and socially useful job creation
- For a democratic socialist plan of production to meet the needs of all



photo Suzanne Beishon

We won't be a lost generation Fight for jobs and education!

Jubilee exploitation

Driven 100 miles from home, told to sleep under a bridge and get changed in public at 5.30am, then work a 14 hour shift for no pay. That's what was happening to one group of jobseekers while the privileged royals and their cronies enjoyed a cruise down the river during the bank holiday weekend.

The Guardian reported that 30 unemployed people and another 50 on measly apprenticeship wages were bussed in from Bristol to London to work at the Jubilee river pageant for security firm Close Protection UK, which has the contract to run security at the Olympics as well as the Jubilee.

The firm claims the work was not compulsory because nobody would lose their benefits. But all participants were told that if they didn't do it for free this time, they would have no chance of being paid to do similar work during the Olympics this summer. And what's worse, they were all promised paid work until they got on the bus!

Close Protection UK would like us to understand their plight – apparently they have spent £220 on training for each person taking part and another £100 on uniform. That's very 'generous', but what does it have to do with their not paying a day's wage for a day's work?

The scheme is part of the Con-Dems' Work Programme – supposedly all about getting people back to work but increasingly obviously just about using the unemployed to help big business increase their profits without having to pay anything out in wages.

A better way to 'get people back to work' would be investing in a programme of public works to create millions of socially useful jobs.

Sarah Wrack

Youth unemployment sky-rocketing

According to the latest United Nations International Labour Organisation (ILO) report (Global Trends for Youth) the number of unemployed young people worldwide has risen by four million since 2007.

Some 13% of people aged between 15 and 24 – that's 75 million – are jobless. In the European Union that figure rises to 20%. In Spain and Greece it is over 50%.

Last year, the Middle East and north Africa witnessed uprisings and revolutions against various dictatorships but these movements, often triggered by pressing social problems such as mass unemployment and poverty, fell short of overthrowing capitalism and landlordism. Consequently youth unemployment has risen 5% on the 2010 regional figure to 28%.

The ILO reckons that six million people are so disillusioned they have given up looking for work. Many of this 'lost generation' could drift into criminality as a result.

But even those with skills are increasingly finding it impossible to secure full-time jobs and instead are being forced into part-time and unskilled work.

This pessimistic report also says



YFJ Jarrow march for jobs arrives in London photo Senan

Campaigning for EMA and youth services

Recently complaints have been made to local police about young people hanging around outside shops on King Street, Kidsgrove, near Stoke. This can be intimidating for local residents and groups have been dispersed by the police.

However, while this may solve the immediate issue, it does not tackle the root causes of the problem. Take a look at local employment figures, youth facilities or an evening bus timetable and it's clear how little meaningful activity is on offer for the young.

Youth unemployment in the last year has increased across Newcastle-Under-Lyme by a staggering 13% and those with jobs are often forced to take fewer hours than they want or jobs for which they are hugely over-qualified.

The government's solution to this? Unpaid or poorly paid 'apprenticeships' in shop work etc which offer no guarantees of a job afterwards and very little in the way of directed learning.

The government scrapping of EMA student payments has meant local youth struggle to find money for the travel, equipment and food they need to continue in education after 16 - 500 fewer young people enrolled at Stoke-on-Trent college this year.

So the Socialist Party has launched a petition calling on our local councillors to fight for Newcastle-Under-Lyme council to restore EMA to give our young people a better chance and to improve youth services in Kidsgrove to help give youth a meaningful role in our society.

If you live in the area and want petitions to use or to find out more about our campaign please call/text Becky on 07968598048

Becky Carter

the job prospects for young people will remain bleak for the next four years.

All the ILO can suggest for a remedy is to give employers (more) tax breaks. In other words bribe employers with public subsidies to engage more young people.

This and many other fixes have been tried and failed. Fundamentally the report fails to understand that the capitalists won't invest in jobs if the rate of profit isn't sufficient.

The socialist conclusion to this impasse is simple: change the system!

Dave Carr

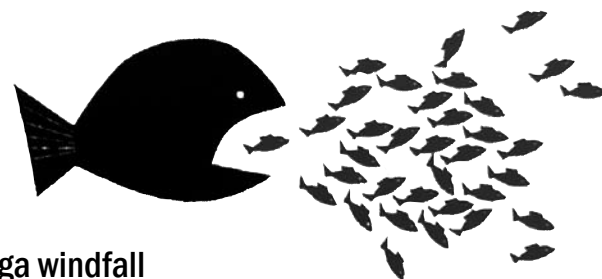
Organising the lost generation Youth Fight for Jobs and Education national meeting

Sunday 10 June 10.30am – 4pm
University of London Union, Malet Street, London, WC1E 7HY

Speakers include:
● Brandon Madsen, Occupy Homes Minnesota campaigner
● Helen Flanagan, PCS civil servants' union, National Executive Committee member
● Suzanne Beishon, organiser Young Londoners Forced Out campaign



Them...



Wonga windfall

£1 billion. That's the estimated value of pay-day loan company Wonga if it decides to go ahead with floating on the stock market. It is thought that Errol Damelin, founder of the company, which makes its profit by

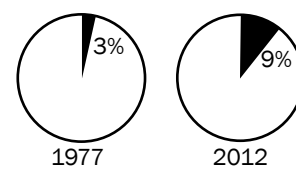
£100m

Founder of Wonga stands to make from floating the company on the stock market

ripping desperate people off with interest rates of over 4,000%, owns 10% of the company which could put him in line for a £100 million windfall. Presumably it wouldn't take the company long to make that – Martin Lewis has calculated that if a Wonga customer borrowed £100 and made no payments for seven years, they would owe more than the entire US national debt!

A tale of two Jubilees

The Institute for Fiscal Studies has published a report comparing spending and work now with the Silver Jubilee in 1977. The headline story is that we're paid twice as much now as then but there were many more facts hidden in the report. The income share of the richest 1%, for example, had trebled. There has been a significant decrease in the proportion of men in work, especially the young and the old. And Thatcher's destruction of manufacturing is clear to see – the proportion employed in this industry has reduced by 25% to 10%.



Richest 1%'s share of wealth

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Going back in time

While most places in the country are having broadband internet installed as quickly as possible, two areas in

Cumbria are having theirs removed. Cable & Wireless Worldwide says that funding had run out and so the service is no longer economical. The organisation which secured the original funding, the North West Development Agency was abolished as part of the Con-Dems' cuts. Local residents have pointed out that broadband has drastically improved life in the remote area. But if there's no profit to be made, you can be sure a private company won't be doing it. That's the madness of the market for you.

Olympic crack down

The Met Police are preparing to pre-emptively arrest anyone they think might disrupt the Olympics. They claim they will only target 'known criminals' and won't use these powers against people planning protests. But after the same tactic was used before the Royal Wedding last year, we're not convinced. Plus, the Met are also using Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (Asbos) in a similar way to keep individuals away from the Games. These have already been used against protesters, such as those who occupied Leyton marshes recently to try and prevent them being taken over for use in the Olympics.

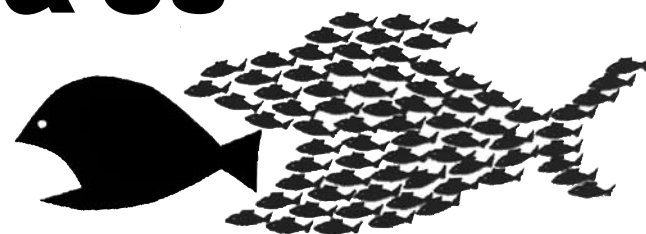
Empty pockets

Disposable incomes will fall in the UK for the third year in a row according to the Centre for Economics and Business Research. Food, clothes and fuel costs are all rapidly rising while wages are stagnant. Someone still has money to spend though – sales of luxury goods are up 7%.

Warsi in trouble again

Lady Warsi, co-chair of the Conservative Party, is building quite a collection of investigations. Warsi's alleged expenses fiddling was already being investigated by a Lords inquiry and considered by the police. And now she faces a possible investigation into breaking the 'ministerial code' for taking a relative of her husband's on a government visit to Pakistan without letting anyone know they also happened to be business partners. But while Cameron has referred her to the adviser on the ministerial code, he has yet to do the same to culture secretary Jeremy Hunt for his role in Murdochgate – why's that we wonder?

...& Us



Tickled on Twitter

Can you tell which boat in the flotilla was Cameron and Osborne's? it was the one making a u-turn...



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Solid strikes show that Veolia privatisation is rubbish

Chaz Lockett

Private waste management contractor Veolia have met with solid resistance in their attacks on workers' pay and conditions in Sheffield.

On 2 June workers walked out for four days of strikes over the bank holiday weekend, which will bring the total to seven days of stoppages over the last two weeks.

Veolia, contracted to manage recycling and bin collection in Sheffield by the city council, are carrying out £500,000 of 'savings' in order to maintain the profitability of the contract. This is because of cuts in the waste management budgets by the Labour-controlled council.

These savings will primarily come from slashing the opening hours of the five Dump It sites, and cutting pay, conditions and jobs.

The company earns £1.2 million from its council contract and selling unusable scrap, but its subcontractor SOVA makes a further £1.8 million by selling on its so-called 'recycling', totalling at least £3 million made from the people of Sheffield.

This is especially shocking considering that until recently Veolia's

website claimed that all of their recycling proceeds went to charity!

The morale of the strikers was high in Shirecliffe, with the prospect of further strike action being seen as necessary and desirable - with management being forced to operate the Dump It centres themselves.

Veolia truck drivers are already refusing to cross picket lines so it is likely that a significant victory could be possible. Three further consecutive days of strike action have already been planned.

The Green Party, who hold two seats on the council, are planning to table a motion on 13 June demanding an end to the cutbacks in the waste management budget. Although this fails to see that the root cause of these attacks is privatisation, it is certainly a positive move.

The GMB union will coordinate a demonstration to coincide with the council meeting where recycling workers may be joined by bin workers, whose jobs and hours also face massive cuts following a planned move from weekly to fortnightly bin collections.

This will of course receive the full and vocal support of the Socialist Party in Sheffield.



On the picket line at Shirecliffe photo Alistair Tice

Tyne and Wear Metro cleaners - 100% vote for strike action

Churchill cleaners working on the Tyne and Wear Metro have returned a 100% vote for strike action against their stingy bosses who had the gall to describe a 0% pay offer as generous!

And this is despite Churchill's pre-tax profits increasing by a massive 81%.

Craig Johnson, RMT relief regional organiser, commented: "Churchill workers are not prepared to accept poverty wages from these privateers, and are prepared to fight for a better deal."

Poor pay and conditions

This company wants to stamp down on workers' pay and conditions. Metro cleaners are on minimum wage, have no sick pay scheme, no pension scheme.

Also, they are the only Metro workers who have no free travel - on the system they keep clean.

The RMT is asking for support

for Churchill cleaners in their fight for better wages and conditions.

You can tell Churchill Cleaning Services what you think by emailing: regional director: simon.wrenn@churchillservices.com, senior area manager: Louisa.Clarke@churchillservices.com, operations manager: Mark.Whyte@churchillservices.com

The cleaners have also voted overwhelmingly for strike action over the victimisation and sacking of a Churchill worker.

On a Sunday he was working alone on a busy Sunderland Metro line, which is usually worked from Monday to Friday by two people.

When his shift was finished he wrote in the works comment box that more staff were needed. Because of his comments he was fired for bringing the company's name into disrepute, and for trying to ruin a company/client relationship!

Fight civil service office closures

Aron Fielder

PCS rep, personal capacity

On 25 January, it was announced to staff in revenue and customs (HMRC) that offices were being considered for closure as part of a process called the HMRC change programme or workforce management programme.

One such office is Wingfield House in Portsmouth - which is near the city centre and has a customer enquiry centre attached to it. The office has about 500 members of staff and was the largest office being considered in this round of cuts. Until recently I was based there.

HMRC reps and members in Wingfield House have campaigned heavily to keep the office open, including a deputation to Portsmouth city council, where the council members agreed to oppose such a closure.

But on 23 May, it was announced to staff that HMRC will vacate the building. Members have been told that their jobs will be accommodated at another HMRC site (Lynx House) to the north of the city.

Lynx House is a one storey build-

ing that accommodates 800 staff in the daytime and 250 in the evening. It has already taken in staff from HMRC offices in West Hampshire and in previous questions to management it has been indicated there is no further capacity at Lynx House.

It seems the move will be achieved through desk sharing and part time working. The enquiry centre would be centralised in Lynx House, 3.5 miles from the centre and £4 return on a bus.

As well as these cuts, equal - if not worse - cuts in the number of staff in the Department for Work and Pensions have been made in Portsmouth. Also the Land Registry has closed without any reason given as to why the jobs are not required in Portsmouth. The DVLA, who currently have a customer-facing presence near Portsmouth city centre, are considering centralising all customer-facing work to Swansea.

PCS members are determined to continue the campaign to defend these jobs and prevent any cuts as a result of the office closures. With each cut the government is decreasing the value of the public services that most public sector employees strive to provide.

In brief

Victory at Ratcliffe

After the walkout of over 600 construction workers at Ratcliffe-on-Soar power station near Nottingham, Unite health and safety rep Jason Poulter has been reinstated. Jason was suspended by management for carrying out his health and safety duties. Workers believed this was in revenge for their success in defeating the Building Engineering Services National Agreement (Besna) which would have reduced pay and attacked terms and conditions. But the defeat of the Besna has obviously given these workers confidence to stand up to the management. Leading stewards from Ratcliffe will be attending and speaking at the NSSN conference on 9 June. (See page 11)

Vote Steve Hedley

Steve Hedley, the London regional organiser of the transport union RMT, is standing for assistant general secretary of the RMT. The ballot opened on 28 May and will last about six weeks. Any RMT member wanting to help Steve's campaign should contact him on 07545 530526. • See issue 719 of the Socialist for more.

Olympics payment

Transport union RMT has reached an agreement with London Underground over arrangements during the Olympics. Existing agreements will be protected and staff will be paid up to £1,000 in recognition of the pressures from the predicted additional three million journeys a day. But the union is still pressing for staffing levels during the Olympics to be increased to improve safety. The RMT is arguing for a full-scale mock emergency evacuation to be carried out, especially in the light of recent breakdowns.

Boris Bike ballot

At the same time, staff working on the Boris Bikes cycle hire scheme are being balloted by the RMT for strike action and action short of a strike. The dispute is over the imposition of changes to working hours and shift patterns by the operator Serco Barclays, and their refusal to negotiate a payment for the extra work during the Olympics.

Socialist Party website

For more industrial, trade union and workplace news, see the Socialist Party's website: www.socialistparty.org.uk

Save our pensions!

Leeds North West Socialist Party

University of Leeds Unison members held a day of action on 31 May over attacks on the PAS pension scheme, a final salary scheme for non-academic staff. Staff held a lobby of the University Council as well as a public rally for decent pensions earlier in the day.

Around 70 people attended the rally which opened with solidarity greetings being given from Leeds UCU, Leeds Against the Cuts and the National Pensioners Convention.

As speakers from the floor pointed out, many low-paid, part-time workers struggle to afford pension

contributions. Others drew the link with other disputes over pensions with the same theme of work longer, pay more and get less, as well as calling for coordinated action with academic staff and students.

Around 60 Unison and Unite members came along to the lobby to confront university council members.

Union members view this as just the start of a campaign on campus and seem determined to meet any attacks with determined resistance. The t-shirts distributed by the Unison branch expressed the feelings of many workers: "Get Angry and Fight Back".

DVLA workers strike to defend services

Members of the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) took strike action on 1 June against government plans to close all 39 of the DVLA local offices, ten enforcement centres and three processing centres. This would mean there would be no face-to-face services for DVLA customers and would also mean 1,200 job losses.

PCS points out that the government is making these cuts as part of their austerity measures but that it is a false economy. Not only will it put more people on to the dole queue but will also mean a rise in vehicle excise duty evasion which will cost the exchequer tens of millions each year.

In Nottingham, PCS members walked out at 3pm. This is the start of a month of rolling action by PCS in the Department for Transport (DfT). Jan Watts, DfT Midlands branch secretary, spoke to the Socialist: "It's been a fantastic success here. All members have walked out apart from two managers. So I'm really proud of everyone."

"We're doing this today because we're all under attack. It will mean that everything will need to be done via the post or the internet, which we don't think is a viable service for the public. And also, putting another 1,200 people out of work in this economic climate is completely

nonsensical."

The action was solid at the Leeds office, with not a single member of staff left inside. Management had to close the office prior to the walk-out to ensure back office tasks were completed before the long bank holiday weekend.

Mike Mackie, assistant branch secretary of PCS DVLA Northern branch said: "All 39 DVLA workplaces took industrial action today. In Leeds, every one of my comrades walked out showing a fantastic level of support. This is against attacks directly to our jobs and our workplaces, including closing all 39 local and enforcement offices."

Iain Dalton and Becci Heagney

Cameron's former spin doctor, Andy Coulson, is charged with lying

Tommy Sheridan conviction must be overturned

Philip Stott

Socialist Party Scotland

Andy Coulson, David Cameron's former director of communications, has been arrested and charged with perjury as part of the Strathclyde police investigation into evidence given at the Tommy Sheridan trial in 2010.

Coulson, who was called as a witness by Tommy Sheridan during his perjury trial, denied in court knowing anything about a culture of phone hacking at the News of the World (NoW) when he was editor, or payments to corrupt police officers.

"I don't accept there was a culture of phone hacking at the NoW. There was a very unfortunate, to put it mildly, case involving Clive Goodman. No one was more sorry about it than me; that's why I resigned," Coulson said at the time.

He went on to say: "All I can tell you is that, as far as my reporters are concerned, the instructions were very clear; they were to work within the law and within the PCC [Press Complaints Commission] code. It's in their handbooks."

Bob Bird, the Scottish editor of the NoW also said in court he knew nothing about the hacking of Tommy Sheridan's phone by Glenn Mulcaire (the private detective used by the NoW) or any other surveillance methods used by the NoW.

He also claimed he could not find email correspondence between the NoW and Glenn Mulcaire about the paper's investigation into Tommy Sheridan. Bird said they had been "shipped off to Mumbai". This turned out to be a lie.

Collusion

Within a few months of giving this so-called evidence the "industrial scale" phone-hacking scandal broke in all its ferocity following the Milly Dowler revelations. Coulson resigned as Cameron's spin doctor and by July 2011 the toxic News of the World had been forced to close after 168 years of publication.

Coulson's arrest is a disaster for Cameron who has been desperate to distance himself from 'Murdochgate'. His government is currently under siege for their obvious support for Murdoch and his bid to take 100% control of BSkyB.

Jeremy Hunt, the Tory culture secretary, claimed he was only "sympathetic" to Murdoch's bid. In reality he was placed in post following Vince Cable's resignation to try to ensure that the bid was passed.

The fallout from Murdochgate included the resignation of the head and deputy head of the Metropolitan police who were exposed as having helped cover up widespread criminality at News International.

Under mass public pressure Cameron was forced to sanction the Leveson inquiry. There are also three separate inquiries by the Met police into aspects of the phone-hacking scandal, including one looking at payments by journalists to corrupt police officers.

Operation Rubicon

Labour MP Tom Watson, who has played an heroic role in helping to expose the rotten and corrupt practices of the Murdoch empire (see the review of his book - 'Dial M for Murdoch' - in Socialism Today, advert below), travelled to Scotland to hand in a dossier to Strathclyde police in 2011.

The information contained within it led to the setting up of Operation Rubicon which has seen 50 police officers investigating possible perjury by witnesses during Tommy's trial, evidence of phone-hacking in Scotland, data protection breaches, including email hacking, and possible payments to police officers.

It is this operation that has led to the arrest and charging of Andy Coulson after being detained by police at his home in London and driven to Glasgow to Govan police station. It will now be up to the Scottish Crown office to decide whether to proceed with a perjury trial.

Tommy Sheridan, who has fought a titanic battle with the News of the World over the past six years which included a 2006 defamation victory over the now defunct paper, said: "We were led to believe by Mr Coulson and his acolytes at News International during my trial and the initial phone hacking investigations that the problem was a rogue reporter. It's the equivalent of the bad apple in the barrel. Well I think we all know now there is no bad apple in the barrel, what there is, is a rotten orchard full of bad apples."

"We now have a start to what will



Tommy Sheridan marching in support of victimised workers photo Socialist Party Scotland

hopefully become criminal charges and hopefully Mr Coulson won't be lonely, but he'll be joined by colleagues in the future."

His solicitor, Gordon Dangerfield, added: "We have very strong grounds of appeal and will be lodging a full appeal in due course. We believe that when the whole truth comes out, the public will be given an entirely new perspective on what the Tommy Sheridan trial was really about. It is safe to say that many people will have their eyes opened for the first time."

Unsound conviction

Tom Watson said: "Tommy Sheridan was convicted on an eight to six verdict of a jury in a Scottish court. Mr Sheridan lost his liberty and is still the subject of restrictions on his movement."

"The detention of Andy Coulson further highlights why Mr Sheridan's conviction was unsound. It is now abundantly clear that members of the jury were not in full possession of the facts. If they knew what the police now know, it seems impossible not to conclude that Mr Sheridan would be a free man."

"His conviction should be urgently reviewed. And if the first minister has any honour, he would launch an immediate inquiry into illicit in-

Lothian and Borders police carried out that inquiry and millions was spent trying to secure a politically driven conviction of Tommy

formation techniques practiced by News International's employees in Scotland."

The aforementioned first minister, Alex Salmond, has been largely silent over the scandalous actions by Murdoch and News International. He even wrote an article for the first edition of the newly launched Sun on Sunday earlier this year.

Salmond is the only politician in the Western world who has maintained a close relationship with the

pariah Murdoch - including inviting him round to his official residence for tea and biscuits a few months ago.

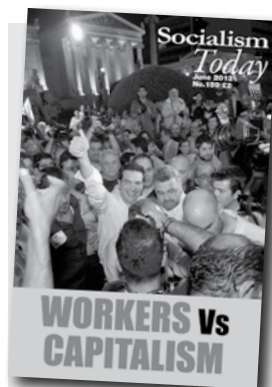
The Socialist Party has consistently opposed the political vendetta faced by Tommy Sheridan and his family and supporters.

The Tommy Sheridan perjury conviction hinged on the unprecedented decision by the Scottish Crown to pursue an inquiry following Tommy's 2006 defamation victory over the NoW.

Lothian and Borders police carried out that inquiry and millions was spent trying to secure a politically driven conviction of Tommy - who was a key leader of the mass anti-poll tax movement that ended the career of the iron lady Margaret Thatcher in the early 1990s.

Andy Coulson and other News International figures gave evidence that subsequently has been proved to be false.

The conviction against Tommy Sheridan is indeed unsafe and unsound and should be overturned. A full trade union-led public investigation should also be carried out into this political vendetta against one of Scotland's leading socialists.



Socialism Today

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June 2012 issue includes:

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SYRIA: Is there a way to avoid a bloody civil war?

The killing of 108 people near the Syrian town of Houla shocked and appalled people everywhere. Particularly abhorrent was the cold blooded murder of 49 children, many of them shot at close range. The sectarian tensions fuelled by this barbaric act raise the terrible spectre of a slide towards broader conflict and all-out civil war. As always, working people and the poor will suffer the most. Is there an alternative trajectory for the Syrian people? Niall Mulholland looks at the prospects.

For 15 months, mass protests against the 40-year dictatorial rule of the Assad family have taken place in many parts of Syria. Initially they were part of the 'Arab Spring'. However, in the absence of an independent working class movement leading the struggle, and with the increasing intervention by reactionary regimes like Qatar and Saudi Arabia, as well as imperialist meddling, the Syrian conflict is increasingly taking on the character of a civil war with mounting sectarian overtones.

Western powers, particularly the US, Britain and France, were quick to condemn the Houla atrocity. They put full blame on the Syrian regime of President Bashar al-Assad, who denies all responsibility. Certainly many eyewitnesses and survivors accuse Syrian armed forces and the Shabiha gangs, which routinely carry out killings and abductions of oppositionists, for the Houla slaughter. UN investigators say there are indications that the Shabiha carried out at least some of the killings on 25 and 26 May.

Yet the words of the imperialist powers are deeply hypocritical and sickening. Hundreds of thousands of civilian lives were lost in Iraq and continue to be lost in Afghanistan due to Western invasion and occupation. In imperialism's quest for power, influence and access to resources, controlled pilotless aircraft attacks take place daily in Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen. The day fol-

lowing the Houla massacre, a Nato drone strike in eastern Afghanistan blew to pieces eight members of one family.

Like the brutal Assad regime, the Western powers justify using overwhelming military force by claiming they are attacking "terrorist" targets. In both cases, these state-sanctioned indiscriminate attacks amount to summary executions and potential war crimes.

Around 15,000 people have died in Syria, reportedly mainly at the hands of the Syrian army and pro-Assad forces, since the uprising began in March 2011. Under Obama's administration, over 500 civilians were blown up in air strikes in Pakistan alone, 175 of them children.

Loggerheads

The US, backing the Syrian opposition, and Russia, backing the Assad regime, are increasingly at loggerheads over the worsening situation in Syria. This is reflected in disputes on the UN Security Council over how to deal with Syria.

Russia and China have voted against US, British and French sponsored anti-Assad resolutions. Despite the rhetoric, the US and Russia positions have nothing to do with the plight of the Syrian people. It is all to do with the interests of their respective ruling classes and those of their closest allies.

The US, Britain and France make it clear that they want to see the end of Assad's regime. They have long regarded it as a troublesome obstacle to their imperialist interests in the region. In its place, they want to see a pliant, pro-Western administration. Following last year's revolutionary overthrow of two key Western allies in the region, Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak, the imperialist powers are also determined to ensure the popular revolt in Syria does not go beyond 'acceptable' boundaries (ie towards an independent class position) and that it is channelled to their advantage.

The US is using the failure of the Kofi Annan 'peace plan' to threaten taking action "outside of the Annan plan" and the authority of the UN Security Council, with the support of its closest allies in the Syrian conflict, Britain and France. This echoes the infamous 'coalition of the willing' led by George Bush and Tony

Blair that illegally invaded Iraq.

Russia, on the other hand, regards Assad's regime as a crucial ally in the region, which allows it access to a Mediterranean naval port. The Russian foreign minister indicated that he may be prepared to pursue a so-called 'Yemeni solution', entailing Assad being removed from power while much of the structure of his government would remain in place.

This is modelled on an Arab League plan that saw Yemeni president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, step down from power earlier this year, after months of mass opposition protests.

However the Kremlin is resolutely opposed to any Western military intervention, particularly after the bitter experience of last year's Libyan conflict. Russia supported a UN Security Council 'no-fly zone' resolution. But the Western powers used the resolution to authorise armed Nato intervention in Libya, diverting the revolution, overthrowing Colonel Gaddafi's regime, on their terms, and installing a pro-Western regime.

Nato

Assad shows no signs of stepping down soon. Although Syria is hit by trade sanctions, a significant part of its population, including many Sunni business people, has not yet broken decisively with the regime. Damascus also gambles on the West being unable to make a direct Libyan-style military intervention.

The British foreign minister, William Hague, recently threatened that no option is ruled out in dealing with Assad, raising the prospect of Western military action against Syria. But last year's Nato attacks in Libya cannot be simply replayed in Syria, a country with a much larger population and with state forces that military experts say are more powerful and better trained and equipped.

Assad has at his disposal an army of 295,000 and 300,000 active reservists. Last year, Nato was able to fly thousands of missions over Libya at will, firing missiles with little or no retaliation. But Syria has over 80 fighter aircraft, 240 ground attack aircraft, attack helicopters and over 4,000 surface-to-air missiles, as part of an air defence system. A land invasion would require "monumental effort", Western military strategists admit. Western troops would face being intractably bogged down in large and hostile urban areas.

The various proposals to aid the opposition and to weaken the Syrian regime, short of a direct military offensive - 'humanitarian corridors', 'no-kill fly zones', 'safe areas' and 'no flying zones' - all require offensive military operations.

So-called 'civilian havens' would have to be secured, almost certainly requiring ground troops, and then defended from attack, requiring air power. British defence strategists admit that any military action against Syria would "almost inevitably lead to more bitter and bloody civil war".

Furthermore, Syria's complex sectarian make-up - a Sunni majority alongside Christian, Alawite, Druze, Shia, Kurdish and other minority ethnic or religious groups - means that a Western military intervention could trigger a conflagration in a region with many sectarian and ethnic fault lines.

Even without direct Western military intervention, Syria continues to slide towards 'Lebanese-style civil war'. This is aided and abetted by the direct involvement of local right-wing regimes and world powers which either support the opposition or the regime.

The region's reactionary Sunni Arab powers, led by Saudi Arabia and Qatar, are using the Syrian crisis to bolster their position against Shia regimes. With US and Israeli backing, the Sunni regimes are confronting Iran, Syria's most important ally in the region.

Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and other Gulf States, each of which pursue their own agenda, are reportedly funnelling money and arms to the opposition in Syria, with tacit US support. At the same time, a senior commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards admitted last week that Iranian forces are operating

in the country in support of Assad.

Patrick Cockburn, the veteran Middle East journalist, wrote that armed rebels "could probably start a campaign of bombings and selective assassinations in Damascus" (Independent on Sunday, 03/06/12). The Assad regime would retaliate with more savage 'collective punishments'. Damascus would be "the victim of the same sort of hatred, fear and destruction that have convulsed Beirut, Baghdad and Belfast over the

past 50 years."

Sectarianism is deepening. The minority Christians fear the same fate as their co-religionists in Iraq, who were 'ethnically cleansed' after the 2003 US-led invasion. The Assad regime exploits and fans these fears to maintain a base of support from among the Christian minority, as well as the Alawites, Druze and Kurds.

The Syrian conflict has already spread to bordering Lebanon, where the Assad

regime has support from Hezbollah, which is part of the coalition government. Fighting between Sunni and pro-Assad Alawites in the northern Lebanese city of Tripoli left 15 people killed at the weekend. In recent weeks, the fighting dangerously spread to Beirut, raising fears of generalised sectarian conflict re-erupting in Lebanon.

The working class of Syria and the region must firmly reject all forms of sectarianism and any imperialist intervention or interference.

Intervention

The March 2011 uprising in Syria began as a genuine, popular movement against Assad's police state, the erosion of social welfare, high levels of poverty and unemployment and the rule of the rich, corrupt ruling elite.

In the absence of a strong, united working class movement with an independent programme, the courageous mass street protests appear to have been largely sidelined and overwhelmed by an array of fractious, armed opposition groups. While many Syrians remain committed to revolutionary change and resist sectarian provocations, increasingly, the leaders of these forces are influenced by reactionary regional regimes and imperialism.

Islamist fighters from Iraq's Anbar province, Libya and elsewhere have reportedly joined the assorted Syrian armed opposition. A large car bomb attack in Damascus that killed scores of people in May is widely blamed on opposition fighters linked to al-Qaida.

The Syrian National Council (SNC), an exiled opposition group, demands a UN Security Council resolution authorising "the use of force" against Assad, paving the way for Libya-style Nato intervention.

While many Syrian people face a desperate situation and some may genuinely hope outside military intervention can help, the Libyan events show that Nato involvement does not bring peace and stability. The number of deaths spiked after Nato began its air attacks over Libya. The war-ruined country today is dominated by hundreds of competing militias running fiefdoms.

Around 150 died in tribal fighting in southern Libya in March. The country's supposed central administration, the unelected, Western-imposed, National Transitional Council, runs its own notorious militia, the 70,000-strong Supreme Security Committee. No doubt the bourgeois, pro-imperialist opposition Syrian leaders seek to be delivered to power, in a similar fashion, by Western military might.

Revolutions

However the threat of imperialist intervention in Syria and the increasing involvement of the reactionary Saudi and Qatari regimes are no reasons to support the Assad regime. For socialists the alternative was displayed during last year's revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, as well as the early promise of the 2011 Syrian revolt.

They showed that it is the mass united movement of working people and youth that can remove despots and their regimes and fight for real social and political change. The

resurgent revolutionary movement in Egypt, following the unjust outcome of the trial of Mubarak and his henchmen, underlines that only thorough-going mass action by the working class and youth can bring about real change.

The working people of Syria, from whatever religious or ethnic background, have the right to defend themselves from Assad's state machine and all sectarian militias. Socialists call for the immediate formation of independent and democratically elected and controlled workers' defence committees, to defend street protests, neighbourhoods and workplaces.

This needs to be linked to working people taking the initiative once again in Syria, building committees of action in all communities and workplaces, as the basis for an independent workers' movement.

One of its tasks would be to independently investigate those responsible for the Houla slaughter and all other massacres and sectarian killings. This would also expose the full role of the Assad regime and its proxy militias, as well as the regional and imperialist powers.

As elsewhere, the United Nations is incapable, because of its subservience to the world's major powers, of preventing atrocities against civilians or resolving armed conflicts in the interests of working people.

Following the Houla massacre, "mourning" strikes hit parts of Syria. Street protests against Assad continue in some cities, including parts of Damascus. It is vital that all such protests adopt an anti-sectarian, pro-working class character. A united workers' movement in Syria would develop workers' protests, workplace occupations and strikes, including general strikes, to cut across sectarianism and to strug-

gle for the overthrow of the Assad regime. A class appeal to poor rank and file soldiers to organise against the army tops, to form trade unions and to join the protesters, could split and neutralise the murderous state forces.

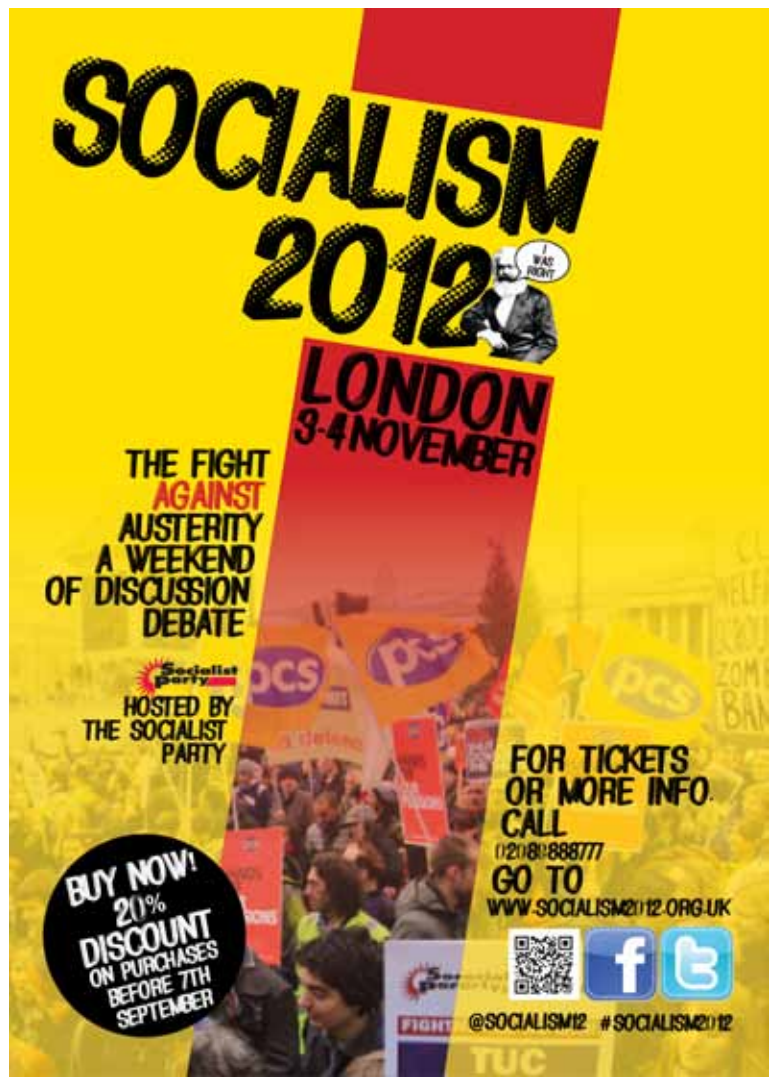
Syrian workers from all religious and ethnic backgrounds need a party of their own, with independent socialist policies. Such a party with mass support can successfully resist sectarianism and the poisonous 'divide and rule' policies of Assad, the regional right-wing Sunni and Shia-based regimes and hypocritical imperialism.

A socialist programme - calling for workers' democratic control and management of the economy to transform living conditions, create jobs with a living wage and free quality education, health and housing - would inspire workers and youth to join the side of the revolution.

Under a genuine socialist banner, as distinct from those so-called 'socialist' forces supporting Assad, the popular revolt against the Syrian regime would appeal to workers in the region to spread the revolution.

By linking up the ongoing revolutionary movements in Syria, Tunisia, Egypt and elsewhere throughout North Africa and the Middle East with a socialist programme for fundamental change, the working class could kick out the tyrants and inflict mighty blows to the region's decrepit capitalism and interfering imperialism. This would carry over into a struggle for a voluntary and equal socialist confederation of the Middle East, in which the rights of all minorities would be guaranteed.

Revolution and counter-revolution in the Middle East will be discussed at Socialism 2012 - see advert below



[illegible]

Ireland: Austerity Treaty Pyrrhic victory for the political establishment will rebound

The 31 May referendum on the Fiscal Treaty in Ireland was passed by a 60/40 margin on the basis of a turnout of 51%. The Fiscal Compact Treaty includes a series of budgetary rules which institutionalises austerity and further erodes democratic rights by significantly increasing the powers of the European Commission. Socialist Party in Ireland reporters examine the vote and future perspectives.

In the referendum big business interests and EU 'leaders' demanded a 'Yes' vote. Working class people in Greece and many other countries, who increasingly see the need for a united struggle against austerity and capitalism throughout Europe, hoped a 'No' vote would give an impetus to such a struggle.

However, the result cannot be taken by the government as a major victory or as an endorsement of austerity. As one government minister admitted, those who voted Yes did so with "extreme reluctance" or as the editorial in the Sunday Independent commented: "Far from being a vote of confidence in Europe, or the government for that matter, the sullen Yes this referendum secured from a grudging citizenry was an act of despair."

The Socialist Party and its most prominent public representatives, TDs (MPs), Clare Daly and Joe Higgins and MEP Paul Murphy, fought a strong and effective campaign and this was commented on by many.

Intimidation

The Yes campaign was based on threats and blackmail. The text for the Fiscal Treaty was agreed last summer but in February an addition was made which said that only countries who accepted the Fiscal Treaty would be able to access funds from the soon to be established European Stability Mechanism (ESM). The ESM is the new fund of €700 billion to bailout bankers and speculators and create a stable euro.

This blackmail clause, which was supported by the Irish government, was a gun to people's heads to vote Yes, or face a ruinous financial collapse.

People were threatened that without sources of funding/credit there would be immediate catastrophic austerity in 2014, much worse than anything up until now; that the Budget due this December would also be much worse if there was a No vote; that a Yes vote would result in stability, investment and jobs but a No vote would cause the opposite etc.

Many media commentators did the bidding of the establishment and helped focus the whole debate on the funding issue, avoiding a real discussion on the actual contents of the Fiscal Treaty and the effects of austerity.

The result is also a comment on the current mood and general political consciousness. There is a near universal understanding that austerity is bad for the economy and



Socialist Party referendum poster

there is a broad mood against it, as seen in the recent organised and active opposition to the household tax. That mood is strongest among the working class and those most affected by the huge cuts, new taxes and austerity of the last years.

Fears

However, for significant layers, including the middle class and some better off sections of the working class, the fear of austerity was trumped by the greater fear of potential financial collapse when the current EU/IMF bailout programme finishes. While many didn't fully believe the threat that the EU would withhold funds if there was a No vote, they plumped for what they thought was the least risky option.

The Fine Gael/Labour coalition government even tried to incorporate François Hollande's presidential victory into their campaign, peddling the idea that austerity can go hand in hand with growth and claiming that significant growth packages were in the offing, once the Treaty was passed.

On the other hand they pointed to the economic collapse and instability in Greece as a consequence of struggling against austerity and non-observance of the bailout conditions.

The absence of an understanding that there is an alternative to the diktats of the markets and capitalism, or the possibility and plausibility of socialist policies, also affected people's confidence to vote No. This was made much worse by the acquiescence of the trade union leaders for the last 25 years but in particular their refusal to launch any struggle against austerity.

Hardening opposition

Taking all of these factors into account, the fact that 40% voted No is significant. The Yes vote was based on strong majorities in middle class areas, including large votes in rural/farming areas. In contrast tallies indicate that in many towns and in

many working class districts in the cities, the No votes were as high as 70%, 80% or even 85%.

Fine Gael Taoiseach (prime minister) Enda Kenny and others once again promised that there would be an economic recovery during the campaign. However, the economic and debt crises in the eurozone are getting worse and will expose the government's false promises.

Kenny has also stated definitively that there will be a deal with the EU to reduce the unsustainable and crippling bank debt.

As it becomes clear that there isn't a recovery, that there isn't a reduction in unemployment and that any changes in the bank debt will be dependent on new vicious austerity attacks, Ireland will be wracked by the kind of instability that the establishment say they are so desperate to avoid.

With more austerity and a deepening capitalist crisis, there can be a dramatic change in terms of what people see as what is possible and necessary and a real answer. People will be less susceptible to diktats, intimidation and manipulation and much more open to hear real and radical solutions, including socialist policies.

Political fall-out

This isn't a major boost for the government. On the other hand if they had lost the referendum, they would have been dramatically weakened. To get the Treaty passed it made promises that it will not be able to fulfil, and so the undermining of the government will speed up as the crisis persists and worsens.

The Labour Party in particular is experiencing a decline in its support. After just over a year in power it has already lost nearly 50% of its vote in a recent opinion poll. There have been many reports of Labour getting a rough and hostile ride in working class areas during the campaign. This pressure on and inside Labour is likely to get much worse.

Even though on the losing side,

the main beneficiaries from this campaign will be Sinn Féin and the United Left Alliance, the two main forces on the No side.

Sinn Féin got a lot of media coverage on the No side and their campaign had an impact. They based themselves on opposition to austerity and chose to emphasise that more than turning the attacks on democratic rights into a sovereignty or national rights issue. They implied that a better deal could be wrung from the EU and limited their overall criticisms of the EU and the system.

The Labour Party ironically tried to expose that while Sinn Féin are supposedly trenchantly opposing austerity in the south, they are imposing vicious austerity in the north. However, the truth of Sinn Féin's hypocrisy was lost as Labour, of all people, had no credibility in making this attack and it had no impact.

It is still the case that there are working class people who will not in any circumstances vote for Sinn Féin. However, at the same time it seems that Sinn Féin is likely to be the main beneficiary of the political crisis embracing all the traditional government parties, unless a real, genuinely left and working class alternative can be built.

The issue is, can the conditions develop for the launching of such a left/socialist force in advance of the impending social and political explosion? In this, how the struggle against the household tax will unfold can be of crucial importance.

Socialist Party

The Socialist Party went into this campaign in a stronger position than previous European referendums. TD Clare Daly performed very strongly in a whole series of appearances and debates, which included prominent government spokespersons and ministers.

This referendum was particularly important for MEP Paul Murphy. Numerous commentators have referred to Paul as one of the most capable and articulate representatives of the No side.

In March, and then again during the campaign in May, the party arranged for leaflets to be dropped into every household in Dublin, well in excess of 400,000 homes. The Socialist Party also organised mass leafleting in key working class communities in Cork and in many other towns and cities.

Party members put up posters from the household tax campaign and from the United Left Alliance. However, it was the Socialist Party's own posters and billboards that had a real impact in the campaign and provoked much comment. Saturday's round-up of the campaign in the Irish Times referred to the Socialist Party's "ubiquitous referendum posters".

The campaign provided a very good platform from which the Socialist Party and the United Left Alliance can grow.

The struggle against the household tax is likely to develop as it appears that the government and the councils will try to bring people to court. 50% of households have not registered. Then we will have a huge opportunity to fully put this vote to the side and to build a movement that can really fight this government, the EU and their austerity.

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:

Kazakhstan: Scores of oil workers jailed

Strikers punished for state's murderous attack on peaceful gathering of oil workers and their families.

*Report from Campaign
Kazakhstan*

Egypt: presidential candidate most identified with revolution wins 22% of vote

Muslim Brotherhood and pro-Mubarak candidates face second round run-off.

David Johnson, Socialist Party

USA: Anti-foreclosure activists arrested

Continuing actions planned following eviction attempts and arrests.

Occupy Homes MN

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.

Back into work?

I want to tell you my experiences of getting 'help' from a private sector company to get me back into work after being unemployed for a year. They have an agenda of getting the jobless on their contract back into work at all costs. They don't care what your wages or working conditions or length of contract will be. Their eyes are on the payment the government gives their firm per head of re-employed people. My personal experience is that they will defend the employment agencies' bad practices and persuade you to work for them (which I refused to do) and in addition, persuade you to work for nothing as a supposed route into a job. I rejected that out of hand.

Matt Davis

Campbell's media soup

Labour spin doctor Alistair Campbell (Blair's Rottweiler) told the Leveson Inquiry that Blair's entourage thought there was a problem with the relationship between the Murdoch media and politicians. But there's no evidence they ever did anything about this "problem". Turning his talents elsewhere, Campbell will now be a spin-doctor for a firm whose clients include McDonalds (who hired million-dollar lawyers to attack two individuals for handing out leaflets), Vodafone (whose tax affairs are a public scandal) and Google (who have scant regard for the privacy of anyone who uses their search engine). He will also work for Tesco because every little helps. Another client is Vladimir Putin. Is this a step up or down after working for Blair?

If anyone wanted more evidence of New Labour's moral and political bankruptcy - well you couldn't make it up, could you?

Derek McMillan

Nightmare at Liverpool Street

Every Londoner is dreading delays during the Olympic Games but transport staff will be right at the sharp end of it. "It's a nightmare already," a rail worker and member of the RMT union at Liverpool Street tube station told me.

"We've only got four staff on the station at the moment, plus the supervisor who's just come down and we're constantly busy all day long, even on a quiet day. They've taken the fan away on one of the hottest days of the year. There's not a single big water bottle for staff to drink to keep us cool. We've been told to drink emergency bottles of water kept for customers who are overcome by the heat instead. "A Central Line train was taken out of service so we had to hold people here because there was no service for a while. We've got five vacancies for station staff which still haven't been filled, and it's only two months to the Olympics."

Naomi Byron

Jumping ship?

Howard Clarke (Socialist 719) is right to worry about Quarbin Malik joining Respect in Bradford - until his defection

he was deputy chairman of the city's Tory party. Now he is paraded on Respect's website and is a candidate for Respect's National Committee.

But he isn't the only person jumping ship - one Respect council candidate was Dawud Islam, who stood as the Green candidate against Galloway in the recent Bradford West by-election. Cuts are being pushed through by the Green council in Brighton. Green councillors have been part of cuts coalitions with the Lib Dems and Tories in Kirklees and with Labour in Leeds. The Green candidate I stood against (as a TUSC candidate) in Leeds said in debating with me that we should only talk about 'mitigating' the cuts.

Bradford people hope that Galloway and Respect's five new councillors will challenge the savage cuts. Using their platform as councillors to build the anti-cuts movement and push for an alternative 'needs budget' in the council chambers would build them further support. One newly elected councillor visited pickets at Bradford College on 10 May to offer support to the strike, but Galloway hasn't yet responded to an invitation to address Bradford Trades Council.

**Iain Dalton
Leeds**

Red queen?

Before going to our Anti-Jubilee BBQ and Party in south Wales on 5 June I had to work. To celebrate the Queen's 'special holiday' my employer paid its staff time and a half that day. I am loath to make a profit out of the Jubilee so have decided to donate my 'half' to the party fighting fund, what better destination for money made in the name of the Queen then to use it to fund socialist revolution!

Scott Jones

Canteen campaign

A campaign at Leeds Trinity University College to re-open the canteen at weekends gained a partial victory. The canteen shut at weekends in January, so students in part-catered accommodation could not get hot food during the weekends.

The student union launched a campaign against the closures which Socialist Student activists were involved in, demanding the canteen be re-opened. The canteen still hasn't been re-opened at weekends but management have conceded that from September, they will be providing hot food in another area of the university during the weekends.

Tanis Belsham-Wray

Reclaim the game

I watched the FA Women's Cup final on TV - an excellent game. But you don't see the FA Men's Cup final - that's just the FA Cup final, played in Wembley stadium.

Women's FA Cup finals are held in much smaller, less renowned stadiums. And when the match resulted in a penalty shootout, Sky TV showed male pundits discussing a men's game that was due to start in half an hour or so.

Socialists say that anyone interested in playing football should be given equal opportunity to do so. As much respect should be given to the women's game as the men's.

And if football was run as socialists suggest, then we may be able to afford to go and see our teams play without breaking the bank on the price of a ticket!

Jaime Davies

TV review

Britain's hidden homeless

Bob Severn

On 28 May, BBC3 broadcast Britain's Hidden Homeless, presented by rap artist Speech DeBelle. The programme follows "sofa surfers", who aren't included on homeless counts, and how their situation affects their physical and mental health while putting strain on the people they stay with.

Speech DeBelle was homeless a decade ago and wrote about her experience of being in a hostel in songs that helped win her a Mercury award. Like the people she follows, her homelessness was a result of a relationship breaking down.

She finds the housing situation worse now than ten years ago. It's more difficult to get a hostel place due to increasing homelessness and cuts in their funding from government. Meanwhile, rental prices have increased enormously.

In London, where the average price for renting just a room is £650 a month, five people are chasing each room to let. In her search for a room Sam, a 26 year old unemployed graduate, keeps getting told by landlords that they'll have "no DSS".

Sometimes she sleeps on her mum's sofa, but she can't live there as it's a one-bedroom flat and staying would also mean her mum, who has been made unemployed, has her housing benefit affected.

Sam also stays at her friend's home, but she can't stay there permanently either as it is student accommodation. Sam living there would mean the property becomes liable for council tax.



Speech DeBelle

The programme also shows Sam applying to several job vacancies, also reflecting the few jobs available for the million unemployed young people. Eventually she gets a job, though Speech says people working cannot claim housing benefit. While this may be true for Sam, many housing benefit claimants are actually low-paid workers.

Stephen was a sofa surfer before becoming a rough sleeper. The programme shows him staying at a church-run night shelter that only has funding to open a few months at a time.

The programme also follows Jordan, a rough sleeper in Accrington, Lancashire, who gets support from a charity daycentre. Another sofa surfer, Nikita from Surrey, eventually gets an interview for a YMCA hostel place. Nikita gets the place, after passing the YMCA's strict admission test.

Speech DeBelle says that hid-

den homelessness is making a "lost generation" of young people, taking away their energy and talent, and that almost anyone could end up homeless.

The programme shows the results of the Con-Dems' cuts to housing benefit and in funding to homeless charities and to councils. Speech praises the role of homeless charities. But housing campaigners would question why the cuts have been made or why housing prices have risen so much. They would also say something about the lack of affordable social housing being built and suggest solutions.

The "Young Londoners - Forced Out?" campaign is bringing together trade unionists and young people to fight for the needed affordable housing in the capital.

• See londonersforcedout.com
Britain's Hidden Homeless can be viewed at www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer until 4am on 24 June.

Disabled activists accuse IDS

Following an interview in the Daily Telegraph with Tory minister Iain Duncan Smith, who made outrageous attacks on disabled people, 400 signatures were collected on a letter asking the Telegraph for a right to reply to what IDS said.

Linda Burnip from Disabled People Against Cuts, one of the signatories, sent a copy of the letter to the Socialist after the Telegraph refused to publish it. We print excerpts below.

Let us first deal with the 'big lie' in the interview. Iain Duncan Smith believes that the current system of DLA (Disability Living Allowance) application conceals "massive fraud". What evidence does he base this assertion on other than his evident prejudice against disabled people?

His own department (the Department for Work and Pensions) estimates that fraud accounts for only 0.5% of DLA claims. Since when did one in 200 become "massive"? In fact DLA is one of the benefits with the lowest levels of fraud.

Secondly there is his use of the phrase "festering at home" to describe disabled people with lifetime awards of DLA. This not only betrays Iain Duncan Smith's appalling attitude towards disabled people but also a complete misunderstanding of DLA.

Many thousands of disabled people use their DLA to maintain themselves in work (eg in paying additional transport costs). The DWP estimates that 550,000 people will lose all or part of their mobility support when the Personal Independence Payment is introduced.

So when that mobility support is withdrawn, tens of thousands of disabled people will become unable to afford to go to work. Is this an outcome that Iain Duncan Smith desires?

But why should Smith's ignorance of the consequences of reform come



Disabled people take their protest to Parliament photo Paul Mattsson

as a surprise? The Equality and Human Rights Commission has just issued a damning report showing that government ministers failed in their legal duty to carry out equality im-

pact assessments on their proposed welfare reforms. Then, as now, it seems that the government prefers willful ignorance to care and compassion.

National Shops Stewards Network

The “hot breath on the back of the trade union leaders’ necks”

Rob Williams
NSSN chair

On 9 June the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) is holding its sixth annual conference.

The NSSN was initiated by the RMT transport workers’ union in 2006 and had its launch conference a year later. The potential of this organisation was clear, with the authority of one of the most militant unions behind it, and the Socialist Party immediately gave the NSSN its full support.

It wasn’t long before the PCS civil service union, Communication Workers Union, National Union of Mineworkers and the POA prison officers’ union also officially supported the network.

Now with the National Union of Journalists, six national unions back the NSSN. This is along with many trades councils, union branches, shop stewards’ committees and individual stewards, branch reps, union activists and anti-cuts campaigners.

The NSSN was formed in preparation for the period of capitalist crisis and austerity we are in now. We’ve organised active solidarity to defend those being victimised and are proud of supporting trade union reps who have successfully seen off attacks by their employer, like the RMT members tube drivers Eamonn Lynch and Arwyn Thomas, and Paddy Brennan the Honda Unite convenor.

Pressure on union leaders

We’re not here to replace the trade unions but to act as a vehicle where rank and file reps can channel pressure on to the unions and particularly the leaders. Two of the clearest examples of how that can happen is the public sector pension struggle and the ‘sparks’ dispute.



NSSN lobbying for united trade union action against austerity photo Paul Mattsson

When Cameron, Clegg and Osborne announced their cuts programme, the NSSN was confident that there would be resistance from working class and middle class people. But we were adamant that the trade unions were absolutely central to leading this opposition, due to the economic weight of the organised working class. It was necessary to place demands on the union leaders and not allow them to avoid their responsibilities.

Therefore, we saw one of our prime roles as raising the idea of co-ordinated strike action against the cuts. Our message was clear on our leaflets and placards on the massive 26 March Trades Union Congress (TUC) ‘March for the Alternative’.

Over 700 shop stewards and activists came to our lobby of the TUC

the day before its September 2011 conference on the theme of a 24-hour public sector general strike.

The NSSN also gave out hundreds of thousands of leaflets in the run-up to the TUC conference, including on the 30 June 2011 (J30) strike which saw 750,000 civil servants from PCS striking alongside teachers and lecturers from the NUT, ATL and UCU unions.

The pressure put on union leaders, including by the NSSN and its lobby of the TUC conference, helped lead to the historic 30 November 2011 (N30) action.

Unison on strike

For example, following J30, the Unison leader Dave Prentis said that his union “would never strike alongside PCS”. Five months later, that is exactly what Unison members did, together with most other public sector unions.

The strike on N30 of over two million public sector workers, arguably the biggest single day of strike action since the 1926 general strike, is not only the highest point of the last year, it has transformed the consciousness of the leading activists in the union movement.

The Con-Dems, the Tory media, and even unfortunately many of the union leaders, say that the pensions battle is now over with a ‘sensible’ agreement – meaning public sector workers have to work longer, pay more and get less.

The NSSN allied itself to militant public sector unions like PCS before N30, when the movement was on the offensive, and after when the right-wing union leaders like those in Unison and the TUC looked to settle the pension dispute and in the process throw away the huge momentum built up by the strike.

We lobbied the TUC on 19 December 2011 against a shabby pensions agreement that was little different to what was on ‘offer’ before N30. We helped build for a big turnout when PCS Left Unity boldly organised at short notice an open conference on 7 January 2012 as part of regrouping those unions still prepared to fight on to defend pensions.

The 400,000 strong strike on 10 May, when PCS linked up with Unite in the NHS and the civil service, the UCU, Immigration Services Union (ISU) and Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (Nipsa), along with the brave prison officers from the

POA who took unofficial and illegal action, is the fruit of this labour. It offers the possibility of reigniting this struggle.

The massive police demonstration that day and now the strike vote of the British Medical Association, which saw 92% of junior doctors voting for action, shows how isolated the government is and why serious coordinated action can defeat them. We will continue to do all we can to make this possible, including supporting the rank and file NUT Local Associations conference on Saturday 16 June in Liverpool. This is open to all teachers, organised to force their unions and particularly the NUT back into the pensions fray.

We also welcome the TUC organised 20 October national demonstration against austerity. Such a demo has been a major demand of ours this year, although we think that it should have been called much earlier. But it can’t be left at just a march. It should be the platform for further coordinated strikes, up to and including the N30 coalition, but also beyond it to reach out to the private sector.

Sparks’ victory

The marathon and victorious struggle of the Sparks – the electricians, pipe-fitters and plumbers in the construction industry – shows how the years of retreat in the union movement can be reversed. The NSSN has supported this struggle from the beginning. It showed how rank and file workers can force the union leadership, in this case Unite, to take the dispute seriously.

As a result of countless protests in London and around the country, Unite general secretary Len McCluskey turned to his organising department and pushed the conservative officials aside, changing the tempo of the struggle. Eventually through the threat of an official strike against Balfour, the biggest of the ‘Dirty 7’ companies, their new Besna contract and the planned 35% pay cut was smashed.

The ripples of this victory are still being felt throughout the industry. There was a stoppage by Crown House workers at Heathrow terminal two in the middle of May. 600 construction workers walked out at Ratcliffe power station, Nottinghamshire, on 29 May to defend suspended health and safety steward Jason Poulter.

Over 1,000 workers at Sellafield power station, Cumbria, also walked out at the end of May to defend the jobs of two reps. On 31 May there was a stoppage at Alford Gas in Northwich, Cheshire.

A new period has opened up in Britain. The threats to our terms and conditions, trade union rights, the NHS, public services and the welfare state are real and devastating

...let’s all march together to show our anger against the cuts, but let’s use that to say clearly that we’re going to strike together – public sector and private sector – before the end of the year

if the employers’ and their government’s offensive succeeds. Workers’ organisations are central to resisting this onslaught and the sparks have shown that victories can be won.

The job of the NSSN is to be the ‘hot breath on the back of the union leaders’ necks’. The TUC must campaign for a massive demonstration against austerity on 20 October. Our approach should be: let’s all march together to show our anger against the cuts, but let’s use that to say clearly that we’re going to strike together – public sector and private sector – before the end of the year.

85% of the government’s cutbacks are yet to be made. Our movement has the potential power to stop this increasingly weak and divided government making those cuts. Let’s do it!



On the N30 London demo photo Paul Mattsson

National Shop Stewards Network Sixth Annual Conference
Saturday 9 June, 11am-4pm
Friends Meeting House, London NW1 2BJ

Speakers include:

Bob Crow, RMT general secretary
Mark Serwotka, PCS general secretary
Rank and File construction electrician
Kevin Courtney, NUT deputy general secretary

Where Next in the Pensions Dispute?
A meeting for all teachers

Local Associations National Action Conference
Saturday 16 June
Quaker Meeting House, Liverpool L1 3BT
Registration from 10.30am

For more information see: <http://electmartin1.blogspot.co.uk/#/2012/05/liverpool-conference-final-agenda-and.html>

ENERGY BILL PUTS PROFITS BEFORE THE PLANET

SOCIALIST PLANNING NEEDED

A recent poll has shown 68% support – 80% among 18-44 year olds – for building wind farms across Britain. But, instead of investing in renewable energy and creating green jobs, the Con-Dems are cutting wind power subsidies and listening to the big six energy companies. Leaked documents have shown that the government is trying to weaken the European Union's already low renewable energy and energy efficiency targets. Meanwhile the new energy bill again shows that the government's climate change strategy has more hot air than renewable power. Steve Score, East Midlands Socialist Party secretary, writes.

The Con-Dems' energy bill favours big business, subsidises nuclear power and does not really tackle climate change.

Britain has an energy crisis. Many power stations, both nuclear and fossil fuel, are coming to the end of their lives. The government claims it is attempting to reduce carbon emissions to deal with global warming, but admits 'the market' has failed to sufficiently invest in new power stations let alone in renewables.

Yet their 'solution' is to propose subsidies to the big energy companies that will favour nuclear power while not adequately speeding up the replacement of carbon producing fossil fuels with cleaner renewable technology like wind, wave and solar power.

These nuclear subsidies - illegal

under European law - are hidden by the "contracts for difference" system proposed in the bill which guarantee prices to companies.

Nuclear fission is not a "clean alternative" to fossil fuels. The risks were highlighted by the Fukushima nuclear disaster in Japan last year.

The Max Planck Institute of Chemistry in Germany recently produced a report claiming that major nuclear accidents such as the core meltdowns in Chernobyl and Fukushima are likely to happen once every ten to 20 years, far more frequently than previous estimates. A single accident could affect millions of people.

Some argue 'but the Fukushima nuclear plant was badly situated in an earthquake zone, ours aren't'. But do we trust profit-driven energy companies? Were the same assurances of safety not made on behalf

of Fukushima in the past?

In addition, there is the lack of a plan for the safe storage of nuclear waste over the hundreds of thousands of years that would be necessary. The financial cost is of course borne by the taxpayer, not by private companies. But we could also bear the cost in terms of safety!

Addressing climate change, safety, and the need for clean energy cannot be left to big business and 'the market'. The energy industry must be nationalised as part of a democratic socialist plan that can invest in and develop renewable energy.

A rapid shift to renewables is needed, alongside other measures such as development of public transport and the conservation of energy. Nuclear fission should not be part of that plan. Genuine international cooperation is necessary.



cartoon Alan Hardman

But capitalism is incapable of dealing with these issues; this is why a socialist policy is so necessary!

- Nationalise the energy industry
- Boost research and implementation of alternatives, including renewable energy generation and conservation
- No to nuclear power
- For a socialist plan of energy production to tackle climate change and defend the environment

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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!