



OUR HEALTH NOT THEIR WEALTH!

A London health worker

Hinchingbrooke hospital in Cambridgeshire is in debt to the tune of £40 million as it struggles to meet costs incurred from a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) scheme introduced by Labour.

Of course the Con-Dems' answer to the problems caused by privatisation is yet more privatisation. Circle Healthcare has been brought in to manage and 'save' the hospital.

In spite of early promises that the debt would be paid off, Circle stands to take half of the profit if Hinchingsbrooke makes

£6 million surplus in any year starting immediately!

Banks are endlessly bailed out with taxpayers' money so NHS staff and patients should ask why can't PFI debts accumulated by NHS trusts be cancelled. Then there would be no need for a private company to 'rescue' a hospital that has already been bled dry by the private sector.

'Savings' will be clawed back from Hinchingsbrooke. Circle have already renegotiated and reduced hospital cleaning contracts.

This is a dangerous step as hospital acquired infections may result. We saw the rise of MRSA infections in the 1990s when NHS cleaning was outsourced to the pri-

ivate sector. Patients admitted to hospital for routine procedures ended up in a worse state than when they went in!

Circle will also be keen to 'generate income'. They have not ruled out putting private beds into Hinchingsbrooke hospital which will have an adverse impact on the much lauded early drop in waiting times at the hospital.

Experienced frontline staff are being shed as voluntary severance schemes are rolled out. Unison, the largest health union, reports that there is a drop in staff morale as many are now fearful for their jobs. Staff who are stressed in this way will not be able to focus on delivering high quality patient care.

Circle has also managed to cut a lucrative deal with Cambridgeshire NHS trust as it takes on more hip, knee and shoulder replacement operations. This is a classic example of a private provider cherry picking highly profitable, closed-ended services from the NHS.

Companies operate to make profit and Circle plans to pocket £60 million from Hinchingsbrooke over the next ten years. This is money that could be going into improving NHS care rather than filling the pockets of company fat cats.

Staff and patients, led by the health unions, must unite and oppose all attempts to privatise our NHS before we lose it forever!

the **Socialist**

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what we think

End the insane cycle of youth joblessness

“Workers were idle because firms would not hire them; firms would not hire them because they saw no market for their output; and there was no market for output because workers had no incomes to spend.” This is not a description of 2012, although it could be, but J Bradford DeLong, a former deputy assistant secretary of the US treasury, writing in the Guardian about the 1930s Great Depression, a “form of collective insanity”.

The Con-Dems ‘madly’ insist that continuing their cruel cuts in an attempt at deficit reduction is the key to the economy’s, and our, ‘salvation’ despite a double, if not triple, dip recession. Paul Krugman is just one of a growing number of economists who agree with the Socialist - that not acting to end youth unemployment is ‘insane’. He explains that “there is growing evidence that the corrosive effects of high unemployment will cast a shadow over the economy for many years to come”.

In a dazzling display of talent a new generation of Olympians is breaking records set by their forebears. By brutal contrast 75 million 16 to 24 year olds globally have been thrown on the scrapheap of unemployment with no improvement of the situation in sight.

In Spain the youth joblessness rate is 53%, with similar levels in Greece and Italy not far off. In the US 54% of 18-24 year olds were employed last year, the lowest rate since 1948. In Britain the youth unemployment figure is 21% and almost one in three black, Asian and mi-

nority ethnic young people is jobless.

The TUC has shown that the number of young people who have been unemployed for more than a year since 2000 has increased by 874% (from 6,260 to 60,955), going up by 264% in the last year alone. Fixated on further cuts, many governments’ only attempt to bring the unemployment figures down is by arguing that the data are flawed.

For young people there is also a pay crisis. The Resolution Foundation think tank believes that under-30s suffered a 10% drop in annual pay between 2003 and 2010. Poverty minimum wage levels have exacerbated this.

Perfect storm of misery

The misery does not end there. Working class, and increasingly middle class, young people face growing hurdles to education, not least the up to £9,000 university fees and removal of EMA student payments. Mounting student debt is combining with scarce access to council or any affordable housing and rapidly shrinking benefits.

Tory London Mayor Boris Johnson brags that 60,000 apprenticeship posts have been created in London. But even with this drop-in-the-ocean effort the devil is in the detail - a report has found that 70% of apprenticeships went to existing employees.

Tory MPs present a council tax benefit cut as an incentive to the unemployed to work but cannot hide the fact - there are not enough jobs, and certainly not enough good jobs. In April, ONS figures showed an average of 5.7

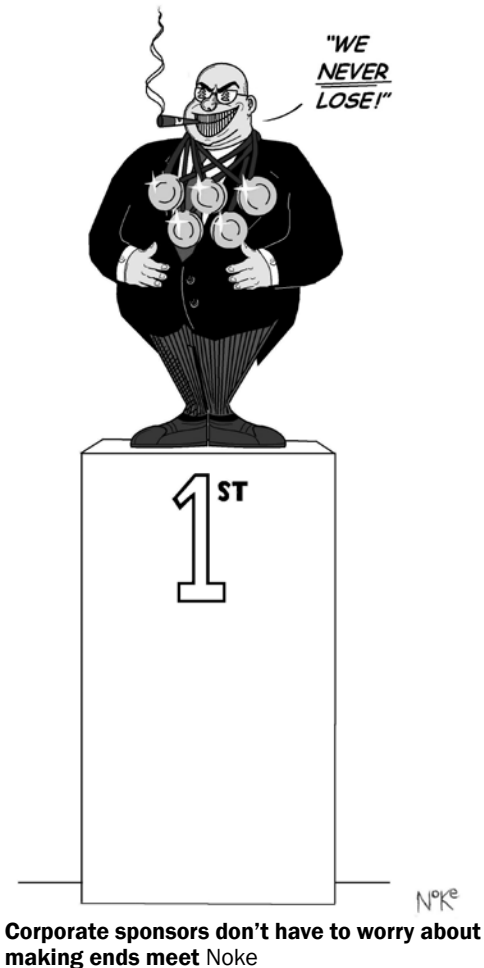
job seekers per vacancy - but jobcentre staff have explained that only about one in six of these is a real job.

What’s possible

The billions of pounds poured into the Olympics gives a glimpse of how a mass programme of public works could be unrolled, if there was the political will. For example, instead of watching the housing crisis gather steam, a socialist government would raise funds through democratic nationalisation of the banks and big corporations and a levy on the hundreds of billions of pounds sitting idle in the bank accounts and tax havens of big business and the super-rich. This could then be used to train a new generation of construction workers to build and refurbish much-needed homes.

We shouldn’t hold our breath that a future Labour government will act decisively on youth unemployment. Labour leaders have repeatedly committed to maintaining the Con-Dems’ cuts, including the increased pension age which punishes older workers while denying young people a chance on the job ladder.

Instead work should be shared out, without loss of pay, the retirement age lowered on a much-increased pension rate and a massive investment made in jobs in socially useful manufacturing and public services. It is urgent that the trade union movement comes forward with such a programme - to unite us, young and old, to fight all cuts.



Corporate sponsors don't have to worry about making ends meet Noke

Council tax benefit cuts: Reject the poisoned choices

Becci Heagney

Holding up her shoes with numerous holes in them, one woman at the Nottingham council tax benefit consultation started crying: “I can barely afford to eat or to feed my son. I can’t afford to put money in the electricity meter and these are my only pair of shoes; what else do you want from me?”

Another vicious attack on the most vulnerable has been launched by the Con-Dem government by slashing the amount of council tax benefit people receive. In fact, they want to completely abolish the benefit at a national level in April 2013.

Instead, local authorities will be given the responsibility of dishing out the money but with 10% less in the pot. Bob Neill, Tory Local Government minister, speaking on Radio 4 defended it as “an incentive for councils to get people back to work”.

The only proviso that has been set by the government is that councils should pay the full amount to pensioners and ‘protect the vulnerable’. As for who is defined as ‘vulnerable’, that’s for the council to decide.

There are currently almost six million people who receive council tax benefit. Of these, 62% are under 65 and many have 100% of their council tax paid for them. These changes will mean that people, already living in poverty in many cases, will be asked to cough up something towards it.

Every council in England is being asked to consult on the cuts they are making (Scotland has decided to make the 10% cuts elsewhere and Wales is passing the 10% cuts on to benefit recipients). But residents are only being given the choice of deciding who should be forced to pay

more. If completing the questionnaire for Harrow council, you can choose who should get more benefit: those who ‘can’t work’ or those ‘who can work but are unemployed’. There is no option for the council to fight this cut from the government.

Manchester City council is looking at cutting the benefit by 15-20% for everybody while others are looking at reducing the savings you can have while still being entitled to the benefit - Waltham Forest is asking if people with savings over £6,000 should have to pay more council tax.

Nottingham City council recently held consultation meetings, two of which took place in the most deprived areas in the city: St Ann’s and Bulwell. Each of these meetings had over 30 people at them, mainly unemployed and disabled people who are already suffering from the cruel attacks on benefits and the rise in the cost of living.

We were separated into groups and asked who we think should pay for this cut. One woman remarked, “We shouldn’t pay anything, what about the bankers and the rich who have caused this mess?”

Blame game

Other comments were unfortunately divisive and were encouraged by the council officers completing the consultation. Blame was quickly diverted from the government of millionaires to single parents, immigrants and people who are long-term unemployed.

Nottingham Socialist Party members attending these meetings put forward the idea that the Labour councillors could fight this attack and demand the extra money needed to pay the benefit to everyone who needs it, rather than passing

The following was sent to the Guardian in response to a letter by Labour MP Hilary Benn. The Guardian failed to print it despite printing letters from a number of Labour councillors.

To: Guardian Letters,
Labour’s shadow Communities and Local Government secretary Hilary Benn (Letters, 27 July) is absolutely right to denounce the “bombshell” being prepared by the Con-Dem government’s council tax benefit cuts. But he is shamefully wrong to say that local authorities have no option other than the “terrible choice” of deciding which section of low paid workers and the unemployed bear the brunt of these cuts.

Why don’t Labour-controlled councils, for example, declare now that they will maintain existing levels of council tax benefit support and, rather than cutting

other council services to find the funds to do so, announce that they will present the bill for meeting the funding gap back to the government? That’s what Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) councillors would do. Why not Labour councillors?

And then why doesn’t Hilary Benn pledge that an incoming Labour government would reimburse such councils if, for example, they were to use their reserves, or their prudential borrowing powers, to avoid making the council tax benefit cuts?

Hilary Benn laments “how few coalition MPs seem to have woken up to what they have voted for”. Surely councils up and down the country defying their legislation would shake them from their slumbers - as the mass poll tax non-payment campaign of the 1990s did for Thatcher.

Clive Heemskerck

this cut on. Councillor Glyn Jenkins, under pressure from the meeting in Bulwell, said that they “may have to think about standing up to them if things get any worse”. For a lot of people present, things couldn’t get any worse.

We collected around 40 names of people from various meetings who want to be part of a campaign and held a successful first organising meeting which looked at how we could stop this vicious attack. Already in the press, parallels are being drawn with Thatcher’s Poll Tax.

There is certainly a huge amount of anger that could be channelled into an anti-Poll Tax style campaign: building in local areas and linking up nationally into a mass campaign, defending people who are being threatened with being taking to court or imprisoned.

If there is a discussion in every town and city about how to respond to this cut and the farce of consultations being held by the councils, it could quickly snowball into a campaign.

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Friday 24 - Monday 27 August, bank holiday weekend

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www.socialistparty.org.uk/whatson



There could be pressure exerted onto the Labour and Green councils to resist this attack and force the government to save council tax benefit! If our councillors refuse to fight, local people should stand in next year’s council elections as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition and fight the government ourselves.

Socialism Today

The Socialist Party’s magazine The July-August issue includes:

● **The double dip** - capitalist crisis talks fail to come to terms with economic turmoil

socialismtoday.org

The government pick pockets qualified teachers from academies

Derek McMillan
Sussex teacher

The government has sneaked in a proposal to allow academies to use unqualified staff to teach children. This is overwhelmingly opposed by parents and teachers but people had their eyes on the Olympic Opening Ceremony while this measure was introduced. There was no discussion or negotiation.

The government is acting like pickpockets taking advantage of a

This is a dirty little trick to get education for the poor on the cheap

distraction. Instead of the pound in your pocket they want to steal the right for our children to have professional teachers. The government has dishonestly claimed that this will allow schools to make use of the services of brilliant men and women to come in and teach.

Well they can come in to school any time to answer questions from pupils about their brilliant work and if they wanted to teach they would have been brilliant enough to qualify as teachers.

The best money can buy

This is a dirty little trick to get education for the poor on the cheap. Their



photo the Socialist

own children? Oh well of course they will have the best that money can buy. It is the common people who only need amateurs.

Frances Maude wrote defending this decision but ended with the paragraphs: "The Education Secretary, Michael Gove, has now extended this freedom to Academy Schools so that they have the flexibility to employ linguists, scientists, engineers, musicians, university professors, and experienced teachers and heads from overseas and the independent sector who may be extremely well-qualified and are

excellent teachers, but do not have QTS status.

"I would like to reassure you though that these measures do not and should not detract from the vital role that strong qualifications play in making sure that the best quality teaching can be provided."

I don't know if he proof-reads his replies but anyone can see this is a blatant contradiction.

All teaching unions are opposed to this measure and it is up to members to make sure they act together against it. The education of our children will suffer if we don't.

Sean Rigg inquest: damning verdict for police

Michael Wrack

The inquest into the death of Sean Rigg has returned a damning verdict for the police. The jury found the police used "unsuitable and unnecessary force" which contributed "more than minimally" to his death.

Sean's history of mental health problems was known to the police and yet when they picked him up, he was not taken to hospital nor was any mental health professional contacted.

He was instead held down, face down with his legs bent back, for eight minutes in the back of a police van. When he was brought into Brixton police station he began losing consciousness, which the jury found the police responded to with a lack of urgency. He died, surrounded by police officers, due to problems caused by restricted blood circulation and lack of oxygen. Sean Rigg had no history of any related health problems.

The inquest has also resulted in the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) launching an investigation into the evidence given by one of the police officers.

Sergeant Paul White was found to have lied about checking on Sean while he was being restrained. White admitted this was not true after CCTV evidence contradicting his



Sean Rigg

statement was shown. Sean Rigg's brother Wayne was quoted in the Guardian as saying his family "have little faith in the IPCC, but now demand a fair and just outcome on this issue... [including] criminal charges being brought against Sergeant White."

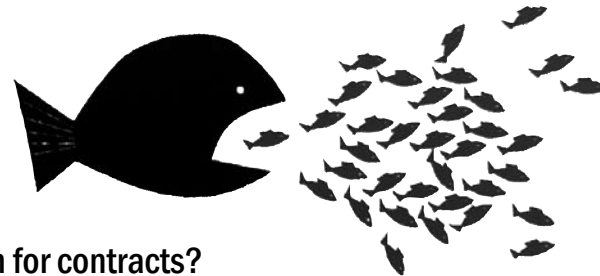
Not a single conviction

The Rigg family are right to have little faith in the IPCC. Since it was set up in 2004, 241 people have died in police custody (473 have died after any police contact). Not a single officer has ever been convicted in relation to these cases.

The inquest verdict was given one year on, almost to the day, of the shooting of Mark Duggan by police, which partly led to last summer's riots. His family are still waiting for answers as to why he was killed. Less than a month ago PC Simon Harwood was incredibly found not guilty in the Ian Tomlinson case.

The IPCC should be scrapped and replaced by a truly independent organisation to hold the police to account for their actions. This should be controlled by working class people, the most frequent victims of police brutality, through their representatives in the trade unions and local community groups.

Them...



Cash for contracts?

Cat Reilly, the unemployed graduate who took the government to court over their slave labour 'workfare' schemes, has lost her case.

The decision came just a week after the latest scandal related to the work-for-your-dole schemes. The Employment and Skills Group is one of the private companies with workfare contracts – paid public money to 'get people back to work'. The company is more than 50% owned by a company set up by John Nash and Ryan Robson, who just happen to be considerable donors to the Conservative Party. A spokesperson assured us that the donations didn't help secure the contracts in any way. If you say so.

reduced their 'labour costs'. According to the report, the costs of 'labour per unit' have fallen significantly in some of the countries worst hit by the crisis – 5.3% in Ireland, 4.4% in Spain and 3.6% in the UK. Of course 'reduced labour costs' really means slashing the jobs, wages and conditions of workers to increase profits.

Irony

A London housing association, One Housing, is threatening to cut its support workers' pay by up to £8,000 a year – 30% of their income. This would be devastating for already low-paid workers. Many will struggle to keep up with mortgage or rent payments – ironic considering One Housing claims it wants to increase its work with the homeless. These workers have already been through a four-year pay freeze. Unsurprisingly, the executives of the association – and their salaries of up to £135,000 a year – were exempt from this.

By numbers

(all figures from New Scientist 28 July)

1% of the US population controls
40% of wealth
1,226 billionaires in the world

2/3 of the UK's 1% 'work' in finance

50% of the world's population own just **1%** of wealth

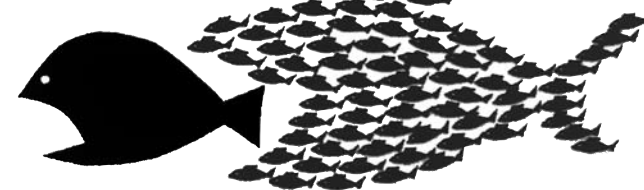
1.29bn live in 'absolute poverty' (living on less than \$1.25 a day)

3/4 OECD countries have seen a growing gap between rich and poor in the last 20 years

Deciphering jargon

The big business press was very excited by a recent study showing that many European countries have successfully

...& Us



What we heard

On 30 July, the Guardian's G2 carried an article by Ian Martin called 'Ten things I miss about the 20th century'.

Number eight was 'working class MPs', including Socialist Party member Dave Nellist.

Martin says: "Who remembers Coventry's Dave Nellist? When he was an

MP in the 80s he insisted on taking only the average wage of skilled workers in his constituency. The rest he gave back to Labour, who in return expelled him for being too militant and then waited gormlessly for Neil 'The Welsh Mussolini' Kinnock to become prime minister. Today our House of Commons is just the Members' Pavilion at Lord's without the hats."

On the online version one reader commented:

"Dave Nellist is one of the all time greats. From Hansard: 'I heard one ambulance worker from Liverpool say about a month ago that he wanted only two things out of the dispute - an 11% pay offer and a tobacco pouch made from [NHS chief] Duncan Nichol's scrotum. I cannot deliver the second item, but I advise the minister that those workers will win their just desserts. They will not be deserted by the working men and women of this country.'"



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Vote No in Unison’s local government pension scheme ballot

A Unison member

Unison members in local government are being subjected to an avalanche of material from the union leadership, urging us to vote to accept the new pension deal, LGPS 2014.

The ballot ends on 24 August. What are they afraid of? They are scared that the members might get to hear an alternative point of view, that once they hear the actual facts that we will still be working longer, paying more and getting less, the members might actually vote to reject.

In one day I received five different emails and a text message from the union, plus the front page of the national website also urges a Yes vote.

The ballot paper arrived accompanied by another letter, also promoting a Yes vote. It is bad enough, if not unexpected, that our elected leadership voted to recommend a Yes vote.

The momentum that was created from the success of the 30 Novem-

ber strike was wasted, as the Unison leadership and others went in to negotiations with the government. They left PCS, UCU, NUT to fight on their own.

But now we are being instructed by unelected officials in the union that branches can’t campaign for a No vote, nor can stewards or members, even if the branch position was to reject the deal.

Whole branches have been threatened with disciplinary action for allegedly breaking rules, when in fact, it has been the unelected officialdom that has been breaking rules.

Despite the threats we won’t be silent. We are accountable to our fellow members, not the likes of general secretary Dave Prentis. That is why we have been campaigning for a No vote, through producing leaflets, posters, even our own text messages linking up stewards opposed to the deal.

Whatever the result will be, and it will be hard to beat the tidal wave for a Yes vote coming from the top, the fight will remain to reclaim Unison for the members.

We say No because...

Most people will still work longer. For those under the age of 55 the normal retirement age will rise in line with the new state pension age, with some having to work to 70.

Most will still get less because pensions will only be uprated with the lower CPI inflation rate rather than RPI.

Also the final salary scheme is to be replaced with a career average scheme. In 2006 Unison members fought to keep this and opposed the career average scheme. Most workers earn more in their last years of work.

Many will pay more. They say only workers earning over £43,000 will see a contributions increase. But some earning under £20,000 will pay more.

Also we’ve been paying more for the last four years and had no pay rise for three of those.

There are some improvements:

Part time staff will now pay contributions based on actual earnings, not the full time equivalent.

Staff transferring to the private sector can remain in the scheme from April 2014. But it’s not clear who will pay for this, councils or the companies.

Save now - lose later. There will now be a 50/50 option. Effectively you can pay half the monthly contribution rate and get half the benefits. The future costs of the scheme are yet to be resolved. This is a recipe for “vote now, pay more later”.

In brief

Remploy



Striking Remploy workers in the north east photo Elaine Brunskill

Workers at the Remploy factories fighting closure called off their 6 August strike in favour of workplace meetings to discuss further action including demonstrations in London and other cities.

The government has announced the closure of 27 of the factories by the end of the year and the future of another nine is uncertain. 18 sites are being sold off next year. 1,700 disabled workers are in imminent danger of losing their jobs.

The government has made the situation even worse by announcing that any company taking over Remploy plants will not have to provide a pension of a similar value to what the workers get at Remploy.

This comes at a time when Remploy management has announced that Remploy sales have increased by 12.2%. This bears out the workers’ argument that, with proper management, the plants could be developed as viable businesses.

Atos strike



Atos - unloved by disabled people and their own workforce

Staff working for Atos, one of the Olympics sponsors, have voted to strike over poverty pay. The admin staff are members of PCS and work for Atos healthcare, who run the work capability assessments for the Department for Work and Pensions, and Atos IT services. Strikes are likely later this month.

Pompey dockers’ victory

Quay assistants at Portsmouth International Port have voted to accept a deal which protects their existing contracts and means that overtime after midnight will be worked on a voluntary basis. This deal was hammered out after the workers voted unanimously for strike action.

Website

The Socialist Party’s website: www.socialistparty.org.uk carries more industrial and workplace reports and is updated daily. This issue of the Socialist covers two weeks - so keep checking the website for updates and more reports.

Tube cleaners fight low pay



Striking tube cleaners working for Initial and ISS in London demonstrate in Stratford just before the Olympics opening ceremony. They are striking again from 9-11 August in their battle against low pay and for an Olympics bonus. photo Paul Mattsson

Olympics bonus strike

Paul Stevens, RMT

RMT members in Transport for London ‘Customer Experience’ (Travel Information Centres, Contact Centres, Lost Property Office, London Transport Museum) held their second day of strike action on 3 August, to demand an Olympics Recognition Reward.

There were pickets and protests at Victoria Travel Info Centre, Albany House Contact Centre and TfL HQ Windsor House. RMT assistant general secretary-elect Steve Hedley has been to the fore throughout our dispute and, as always, was alongside us on the day.

As a ‘demonstration of their gratitude’ management conceded one of our demands and lifted their Olympics/Paralympics ban on annual leave just two days before the strike.

This was far too little, far too late;

the damage had been done. Prior to our decision to ballot, their dinosaur plan was for no annual leave from 25 July through to 9 September, the entire school summer holiday!

Until earlier in the year, there was an embargo on booking leave for the four months June to September! Management have refused to table an offer or even agree to accompany us to Acas.

As a demonstration of our gratitude, we’d probably look favourably on a ‘compensation package’ of just 1% of the £80,000 Olympics bonus top TfL directors stand to rake in!

Of the six TfL unions in dispute only RMT gave members the opportunity to ballot. 63% of votes were cast in favour of strike action.

We have demonstrated by striking that RMT members will not be cowed by a management that treats its staff, and worse still our partners and families, without the dignity and respect we deserve.

Swansea DVLA staff protest at embarrassment of job cuts

A DVLA worker

The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) Swansea branch of the PCS is holding a protest rally on 10 August at 12.30 outside the Department for Transport (DfT) Shared Services Centre in Swansea.

Shared Services provides administrative functions such as payroll for DVLA and other DfT agencies and is due to be privatised in 2013. The rally is also to protest at the decision of the Con-Dem government to close the DVLA local office network with the potential loss of 1,200 jobs.

DVLA Swansea workers have already walked out on 8 June, 22 June and 3 August as part of the dispute over job losses, privatisation, pay freeze and attacks on terms and conditions. The walkouts have lasted for two to three hours in addition to the national one-day strike held on 10 May.

The decision to close the 39 local offices has caused widespread anger not just in the offices due to close but in the Swansea headquarters as well.

These lyrics express the reaction of a PCS member after receiving a letter declaring him surplus to requirements. Mike Penning, the Transport Minister, is an embarrassment.

Sung to the tune of ‘Embarrassment’ by Madness:

Received a letter just the other day
Don’t seem they wanna know us no more
They’ve laid it down given us the score
Within the first two lines it bluntly read

You’re not to come and work for us no more
Keep away from our door
Don’t come round here no more
What on earth did they do that for

Mike Penning he don’t know what he says
He’s a disgrace to the human race we say
How can you show your face
When you’re a disgrace to the human race

No integrity, you’re an embarrassment
Yes an embarrassment, a living endorsement
The consultation you have cooked
Public opinion got overlooked

They say stay away
Don’t want you at work today
Keep away from our door
Don’t come round here no more

You’re an embarrassment!

Support Churchill cleaners

Churchill cleaners working on the Tyne and Wear Metro have taken a further 48 hours of strike action, starting on 6 August. They are fighting stingy bosses from a highly profitable company who had the audacity to describe a 0% offer as generous.

RMT regional organiser Micky Thompson told the Socialist: “We are frustrated that there is no engagement from the company. They are not prepared to respond despite supporting resolutions from the TUC and an Early Day Motion being put to parliament.”

Micky went on to say that Church-

ill bosses have adopted the position of an, “ostrich burying their heads in the sand – hoping the problem will go away.”

It is clear from the picket line and protest that the cleaners are determined both to fight for an improvement in their terms and conditions, and to continue the struggle for the re-instatement of sacked RMT member William Etchells.

Micky finished by saying that, “Nexus, DB Regio and the Integrated Transport Authority could all intervene and force Churchill Contract Services back around the negotiation table.”

Interview with Southampton rebel councillors 'We weren't elected to make cuts'

Two Southampton Labour Party councillors for Coxford ward, Keith Morrell and Don Thomas, have been investigated by the party whips. Their crime? Voting against cuts and defending a local swimming pool. (See the Socialist issue 727 and www.socialistparty.org.uk) The Socialist Party gives its full support to Keith and Don. We will also support any other Labour councillor who is prepared to join them while continuing to participate in the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, an electoral alliance that stands candidates against all the cuts. The councillors spoke to Southampton Socialist Party member Gavin Marsh.

Keith Morrell:

Don and I are convinced we are doing the right thing. We knew as soon as we were elected that it was only a matter of time before the Labour administration would be forced to make drastic cuts or privatise services.

I was named cabinet member for efficiency and improvement but resigned soon after. It became obvious that however much we tried to improve savings, it wasn't going to bridge the gap and I wasn't prepared to promote an agenda of cuts and privatisation.

Within a month of us taking power in the city, Labour had announced a mini-budget which proposed the closing of Oaklands swimming pool with an estimated saving of £250,000 a year.

We refused to accept this and voted against it in the council chamber.

Don Thomas:

I thought that voting against the cuts was going to be the hardest decision I would ever made politically, but it turned out to be the easiest. I feel like a weight has been lifted from my shoulder. When it came to the vote I didn't raise my hand I raised a clenched fist to the comrades in the visitors gallery! The public response has been incredible, I've got to stop

going to the local shop, it's only five minutes away but it takes me a couple of hours because everyone wants to chat and thank me for what I am doing.

Keith Morrell:

Some in the party have joked that we are the socialist conscience within its ranks. There is a lot of anger among our constituents that we are being punished for standing up on behalf of the working class people who voted for us.

It is an unacceptable decision to rob a working class district of its one and only leisure facility and we have been propelled into the front line because it happened in our ward.

All Labour councillors have to choose between dismantling local government or putting up a fight, inevitably against the coalition government.

The role of the local authority unions, especially Unite and Unison, is very important. They must be prepared to work with us and against the cuts. Unite nationally have passed a resolution in support of our position.

The trade unions must be prepared to take up the fight for all workers.

Workers are now more closely watching the Labour council and it raises the question of whether the



Councillors Don Thomas (third from left) and Keith Morrell (fifth from left) photo Southampton SP

Labour Party works in their interest? I think that it should.

We hear our colleagues say 'I didn't become a councillor to make cuts but...' Well, we didn't become Labour councillors to make cuts and we won't!

Simon Letts, cabinet member for resources, said after the election that 'officers always tend to exaggerate the situation'. Two to three weeks later he was describing the situation facing the Labour council as 'perilous'.

This is the backdrop to the discussions around next year's budget. They are already talking about establishing a Local Authority Trading Company (LATCO) effectively transferring adult social care to the private sector, who can reduce pay and conditions or services without the council directly getting the blame. I call this 'passing the buck'.

Don Thomas:

There is a line you draw in the sand and we will not budge.

Save Oaklands Swimming Pool!

Southampton Socialist Party members have been holding stalls in support of the campaign to save Oaklands swimming pool.

Our petition has gained hundreds of signatures. £118 was raised for our fighting fund in just one week.

People say that the government keeps telling us to keep fit and can spend up to £24 billion on the Olympic games, but why can't they keep our pool open? They see the wealthy 1% avoiding and evading tax and stashing their money away in offshore accounts and tax havens.

They know that the cost of keeping the pool open is a drop in the ocean. Many are aware that the Socialist Party backed Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition candidates in the May council elections who were opposed to all cuts, but many

of them voted Labour to oust the Tories. They now feel totally let down by the vast majority of the

The cost of keeping the pool open is a drop in the ocean

Labour councillors who have voted for deep cuts. Instead of cutting services, the council should set a 'needs' budget.

Jane Ward

Public Meeting
Save Oaklands Swimming Pool
Friday 10 August, 7pm
Lordshill Church, Lordshill District Centre, Southampton
Phone 02380 679876 for more information

TUSC: Keeping up the pressure on the austerity parties

Clive Heemskerck

TUSC national nominating officer

The last fortnight has seen the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) contest two more council byelections, taking to five the number fought by TUSC since the nation-wide local polls in May.

In Lincoln East TUSC won a decent 6.8% share of the vote, polling one vote for every seven that went to the winning Labour candidate. This follows the third place won by TUSC in Liverpool's Riverside ward in early July, with 115 votes (6.2%), coming ahead of both the Tories and the Liberal Democrats.

Critics of TUSC, however, were quick to pounce on the score in Stoke's Springfield and Trent Vale ward where, in a field of nine candidates, TUSC came in with a squeezed 1.3% vote. But the Stoke result was hardly a vindication of the idea of fighting the Con-Dems by 'staying with Labour', which lost the seat to the City Independents' group. With seven councillors already at least verbally opposing the Labour-controlled council's cuts, the Independents were seen by many as the most effective way to protest at all the establishment parties.

Sweeping general conclusions



TUSC stands against all cuts photo credit

cannot be drawn from a few council byelections, either 'writing off' TUSC or exaggerating the possibilities at this stage.

Across the five seats it has contested since May, for example, it is a fact that TUSC has polled more votes than the Greens. There have been five far-right candidates in these seats, including Ukup and, in Stoke, a BNP ex-councillor, but their aggregate vote is less than TUSC's. George Galloway's Respect party, meanwhile, has not contested a single byelection since May. But can any of these parties be dismissed as a future electoral force?

The most important fact is still the absence of a vehicle for working class political representation, given the transformation of the Labour Party and its broad acceptance of the capitalists' austerity agenda. Standing in elections as widely as possible is part of the task of building a workers' alternative.

TUSC conference

Saturday 22 September, 11am-5pm
Birkbeck College, Malet Street, London WC1E
Registration £5 waged/£2 unwaged
Check out the TUSC website at
www.tusc.org.uk

Welsh Labour: Red flag or white flag?

According to some historians the use of the red flag as a symbol of revolution and working class revolt dates from the 1831 Merthyr Rising. Armed workers and the unemployed seized the town, after sacking the debtors' court, and held it for a number of days against troops sent to put down the spreading revolt and associated strike action.

Trade unionists in Wales continue to commemorate the revolt and remember the unjust execution of Dic Penderyn. On 12 August there is a memorial walk organised by the NUT teaching union and supported by the PCS union and others. Participants will be encouraged to carry red flags in memory of the raising of the red flag of revolution in 1831.

This event will be joined by Wales' first minister, Carwyn Jones. The Labour Party, which he leads in Wales, is happy to celebrate revolutionary acts at a distance of 180 years but the current Labour Party spits on trade unionists fighting to defend their terms and conditions. Labour leader Ed Milliband refused to back public sector workers striking to defend pensions.

Welsh Labour often claims to be different from its big brothers



Some historians claim the red flag's symbolic use dates from the 1831 Merthyr Uprising

and sisters in Westminster. But the Welsh Labour government is presiding over cuts that threaten the Labour Party's greatest achievement, the NHS.

The Labour Party has abandoned the symbol of the red flag along with support for workers in struggle. Socialists celebrate working class fighters of the past by supporting struggles today and fighting for a fairer society, a socialist society.

SYRIA: IS THERE AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE DEVELOPING CIVIL WAR?

Niall Mulholland

Syria's agony continues unabated. Across the country there are indiscriminate attacks by the Assad regime forces and their militias, bloody sectarian reprisals by the armed opposition, refugee floods and humanitarian disasters.

The second city, Aleppo, is the latest focus of fighting between armed opposition forces and the Syrian army. Since the rebels entered Aleppo on 20 July, many residents have fled for Damascus and Turkey.

The battle for Aleppo is important for both sides. Larger than the capital, Damascus, it is the main economic centre, with an important manufacturing sector. The rebel Free Syrian Army (FSA) advanced on the city trying to capitalise on momentum they believed they made during an assault on Damascus and the bombing of a government intelligence meeting, which killed four generals. The Syrian army is gathering heavy armour and troops on the outskirts of Aleppo and stepping up its offensive.

Like the rest of Syria, Aleppo is made up of a patchwork of religious and ethnic groups. The majority of the city's population are Sunni Muslims or Kurds. There are also Armenians and other Christians from the Syrian, Maronite and Greek Orthodox churches. Many government employees in the city are from president Assad's Alawite sect. Until recently

ternational organisation to which the Socialist Party is affiliated) advocated democratically run workers' self-defence committees that could protect communities and cut across sectarian lines.

At the same time, the CWI called for this to be linked to a programme demanding the end of the Assad dictatorship and for fundamental democratic, social and economic change.

But crucially the mass protests lacked an independent working class leadership. This allowed sectarian and pro-capitalist oppositionist figures to partially fill the political space. Reactionary Gulf regimes, along with Turkey, and with Western imperialist backing, intervened with guns and money for the opposition, political strings attached, of course.

The US, Britain and France have long regarded Assad's regime as a troublesome obstacle to their impe-

It is the mass united movement of working people and youth that can remove despots and their regimes, resist imperialism and fight for real social and political change



A Free Syrian Army militiaman surrounded by death and destruction in Aleppo

sion in Syria. At home, it is suppressing the media and the Kurds, who are pressing their own demands in both Turkey and Syria.

Assad and opposition

However the role of Western powers and reactionary Gulf regimes are no reasons to support the Assad regime. It is not some sort of 'bulwark' against imperialism, as some on the Left in the region and beyond portray.

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, resist imperialism and fight for real social and political change.

While it may only be a matter of time before Assad falls, the conflict shows no sign of a quick ending. "With or without Bashar al-Assad as its leader, Syria now has all the makings of a grim and drawn out civil war," warns Vali Nasr, an academic and former advisor to Obama's special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan (New York Times, 28 July 2012).

While Assad has lost control of parts of Syria and the opposition is buoyed up, claiming the regime's power is seriously eroding, the conflict is likely to become protracted. The high profile defection of some military and diplomatic figures, including Riad Hijab the recently appointed prime minister, has given the impression of a regime in slow-motion collapse. Yet Assad shows no sign of standing down.

To date, Assad has shown he has the military power and enough support in Syria, including from many Sunni business people, to keep fighting. But, although it appears unlikely

at the moment, the possibility that Assad could be ousted by a palace coup cannot be ruled out.

While the opposition has made some ground and is now reportedly using heavy weaponry, it is divided "among some 100 groups without clear political leadership," according to Vali Nasr.

Moreover, the reactionary character of the largely Sunni-based, pro-big business Syrian National Council, which is linked to the Free Syrian Army and their Sunni-elite Gulf backers, means that many of Syria's Alawite, Christian and Kurdish minorities, as well as some Sunnis, fear what would follow Assad's overthrow.

The summary execution of unarmed pro-regime fighters by opposition militias in Aleppo, widely viewed on YouTube, will only deepen the fears of Syria's minorities.

Jihadi organisations are reportedly establishing a foothold in the east of the country, including al-Qaida group, Jabhat al Nusra (Solidarity Front). Foreign jihadists have entered Syria from Turkey, the Caucasus, Bangladesh and the Gulf Arab states, which is helping to stir up divisions within the opposition leadership.

Many of these fighters are battle-hardened veterans of the conflict in Iraq during US occupation. The jihadists in Iraq are, in turn, emboldened by events in neighbouring Syria. The al-Qaida-linked Islamic State of Iraq killed hundreds in July, alone.

Sectarian conflagration

Even if Assad decided to leave office or was removed by his own ruling clique, his military machine, dominated by the Alawite sect, and its allied sectarian militias, could fight on.



Hundreds of thousands of Syrians have fled to Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan

Syria could face the terrible prospect of breaking up into ethnic enclaves, like the former Yugoslavia, bitterly fighting over territory for years. This would resemble a re-run of the Lebanon's civil war (which lasted from the mid-1970s to the early 1990s - up to 200,000 died) but on a greater scale. An added horror would be the current regime's chemical and biological weapons being deployed.

A sectarian conflagration would most likely embroil other countries in the region. Turkey, Iran, Israel and the Gulf States could be drawn into the maelstrom. The Syrian conflict has already spilled over into Lebanon, where the Assad regime has support from Hezbollah, which is part of the coalition government.

The Syrian army has shelled Lebanese villages. Fighting between Sunni and pro-Assad Alawites in the northern Lebanese city of Tripoli and other areas has left scores dead. While the main political forces in Lebanon want to avoid an escalation of Sunni and Shia clashes, regular shootings and kidnappings in Beirut have raised fears of a slide towards sectarian conflict.

Western intervention

While the US is reportedly concerned about the Syrian opposition - the White House remains 'haunted' by memories of the catastrophic fall-out from its backing of the Mujahadeen guerrillas during the 1980s war in Afghanistan - the Western powers are concentrating on supporting and aiding the Free Syrian Army and other armed oppositionists. They do this primarily by enforcing sanctions

against Damascus and by giving Gulf States the green light to arm and fund the opposition and for Turkey to provide logistical support.

The White House is also taking direct, covert action to support Assad's armed opponents. According to a Reuters news agency report (1 August 2012), president Obama signed a se-

Syria could face the terrible prospect of breaking up into ethnic enclaves, like the former Yugoslavia, bitterly fighting over territory for years

cret order earlier this year authorising US support for the armed opposition, including the deployment of the CIA and other US agencies. This led to "noticeable improvements in the coherence and effectiveness of Syrian rebel groups in the last few weeks".

Tory foreign secretary William Hague recently confirmed that Britain is also giving covert support to anti-Assad forces.

The US and other Western powers hope such actions will eventually see the downfall of Assad. However some pro-Western commentators warn that Assad's fall would be a Pyrrhic victory. It would just be the beginning of even greater conflict in Syria and the region.

They counsel the White House to



The estimated death toll in the Syrian conflict stands at 20,000

work towards a 'transitional plan', to create a post-Assad power-sharing arrangement that 'all sides' can agree on. This would entail a UN 'peace-keeping' force. To reach such an agreement would mean involving Russia and Iran, Vali Nasr believes, who may come to see the writing on the wall for Assad.

Even if such a scenario was eventually cobbled together after much more bloodshed and destruction, it would not bring democracy, stability or prosperity for Syria.

It would see the imposition of a Western military-dominated regime, involving reactionary pro-capitalist and sectarian-based forces. It would be no answer to the needs of the Syrian masses and working class.

Working class

The working people and the poor in Syria face a desperate situation and the real danger of being engulfed in ethnic and sectarian warfare. Socialists everywhere must do all they can to help the workers of Syria to build class unity to resist and overcome these divisions.

In the current situation, these are herculean tasks. Yet there is no other way to successfully unite the masses to overthrow the brutal Assad regime, to oppose the meddling of local reactionary states and imperialism, and to win real democratic rights and fundamental social and economic change.

Despite their terrible plight, the Syrian masses are not alone. Their fate is inextricably linked to the ongoing revolutionary movements in Tunisia, Egypt and elsewhere throughout North Africa and the Middle East.

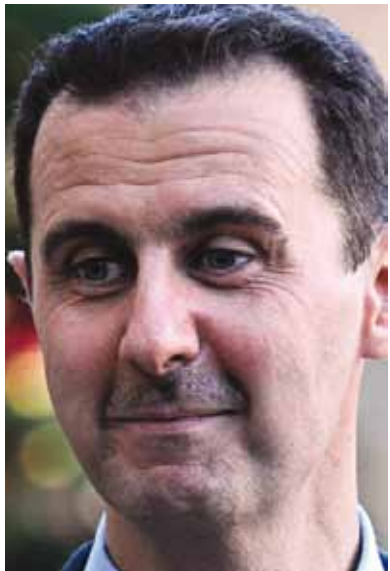
There have been 18 months of revolution and counter-revolution and the process is far from over.

While sectarianism is on the rise in Egypt, so too is class struggle, as a new wave of strikes and occupations sweeps the country. Egyptian workers are not waiting for the new government to improve their lives. They are building their own organisations and taking independent action. This is the model to follow!

By practically and politically linking up the class interests of workers in Syria, Egypt, Tunisia and throughout the region, workers' mass organisations, such as independent trade unions and new mass parties, can be built.

By basing itself on a united workers' programme with socialist policies for fundamental change - democratic workers' control and management of the economy to transform living conditions, creating jobs with a living wage, free quality education, health and housing and so on - such a movement would inspire workers and youth all across the region to unite to kick out the tyrants and imperialism.

This would lead to a struggle for a voluntary and equal socialist confederation of the Middle East, in which the rights of all minorities would be guaranteed.



Assad has unleashed his state forces to crush the opposition

Aleppo saw relatively little violence. Now the bloody death-toll across the country, estimated at around 100 a day in July, is set to dramatically rise as the battle for the city is fully joined.

Popular movement

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 elite. Bashar al-Assad's dictatorship responded to the wave of mass protests against 40 years of dictatorial rule - widely seen as part of the 'Arab Spring' - with vicious repression.

Brutal suppression of demonstrators led some activists to take up arms. The Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), the socialist in-



[illegible]

Markets force savage austerity measures on Spanish workers

Recent public disagreements between Europe's political elites over how to contain the eurozone debt crisis have increased capitalist speculators' nervousness, leading to a sharp increase in borrowing costs for Spain and Italy's governments. One aspect of the crisis they all agree on, however, as Socialist Party (Ireland) TD (MP) Joe Higgins explains below, is to make the working class pay for the capitalist crisis through cuts in jobs, living standards and public services.

Lest anybody thought they had gone on holidays for the summer, the dictatorship that is constituted by the financial markets reasserted itself with some vehemence this week by pushing the cost of borrowing to the Spanish state to over 7%.

The markets are clearly stating that the same merciless ruthlessness that was deployed against the Greek people will now be visited on the Spanish nation.

As in all their dealings, the profits of the financial speculators come before all else and if the Spanish working class have to be further bled economically to achieve this, well that's capitalism.

In the wake of the most recent revelations of a horrific crisis in the Spanish banking system (following a property bubble which, like Ireland, is dragging down the domestic economy), a new round of horrific austerity has just been announced. Over the next two and a half years the plan is to raise €34.4 billion in extra taxes and secure €22 billion in cuts.

Unemployment benefits are to be cut. Public sector workers, already hit by sharp wage cuts, are in line for a further axing of jobs and wages. The higher VAT rate goes from 18% to 21% while the lower rate which

encompasses even food, goes from 8% to 10%. Already 25% are unemployed with youth unemployment at a crushing 50%.

The recent EU Summit agreed in principle that the European Stability Mechanism could directly fund the Spanish banks.

This was to save face for the Spanish prime minister Rajoy with a desperate pretence that the Spanish government would not find itself in the same position as Greece, Portugal and Ireland.

Troika

In these countries, every three months, cold blooded bureaucrats from the European Union, International Monetary Fund and European Central Bank – the 'Troika' – arrive in their capitals to determine whether they are inflicting sufficient pain on their people to keep up the disastrous policy of salvaging the European bankers, speculators and financial system generally from their crisis.

Currently the sharpest opposition to the effects of austerity is being mounted by striking coalminers [who have temporarily returned to work on instructions from their trade union leadership] especially in the north west autonomous



Anti-austerity protesters take to Spain's streets

region of Asturias.

There are about 8,000 miners with up to 30,000 downstream jobs depending on them. Rapid closure is certain if a savage 63% cut in subsidies announced by the government in June is implemented.

The subsidies are also for programmes of diversification to other forms of enterprise in the mining regions as mining is due to be phased out by 2018.

Relatively small in numbers and facing misrepresentation and abuse in the establishment media, the miners' strike to save their communities has inspired millions across Spain. They marched to Madrid ar-

riving on 11 July and were greeted by tens of thousands of supporters. Coming to plead their case, their government sent riot police and rubber bullets to greet them.

One week later the movement against austerity broadened with possibly millions turning out in 80 cities in opposition.

The establishment in the European Union is worried. Spain has a population of 37 million. It is the fourth largest economy in the Eurozone and the twelfth largest worldwide. A default here would bring the financial markets system crashing down.

But they are also worried about

popular resistance to their austerity agenda to bailout that system.

As in every other country in the EU, the political party that the Spanish working class built to represent it is in the camp of the establishment and austerity, but the Spanish workers have a long tradition of struggling for a different way going back to the revolutionary movement for socialism that was crushed by the fascist Franco in the 1930s.

A renewal of that revolutionary tradition would set Spain, and indeed Europe as a whole, on a radically different course from the unrelenting crisis and despair that capitalism in crisis means.

Brighton pensioner jailed for non-payment of council tax

Bill North

Socialist Party, and former chair of Brighton and Hove Anti-Poll Tax Federation

In 2011 Brighton and Hove became the first local authority in Britain to be run by the Greens. The Green manifesto looked forward to "a just and equal city where everybody is treated with kindness, respect and dignity".

On Thursday 26 July Brighton and Hove city council successfully applied to have Josephine Medhurst, an 80 year old pensioner, jailed for ten days for non-payment of council tax. Family members told the Socialist Party that the bill – around £3,000 – was incurred by her deceased husband over a decade ago.

Green voters might well be asking: "Where's the dignity in that?"

At an earlier hearing magistrates found that Mrs Medhurst's non-payment was due to "culpable neglect" and told her to pay the totally unrealistic amount of £20 a week. When she couldn't make the payments they jailed her.

A council spokesman claimed that "repeatedly over a number of years" the council had tried to help; and no doubt Green councillors will point out that the case was started by the previous (Tory) administration. But that is completely irrelevant. Mrs Medhurst is in prison because of the actions – or lack of actions – of the

Green-led council which could have stopped the court case at any time over the last year.

So what has been achieved by jailing Mrs Medhurst? She doesn't have the money, her family don't have the money and the council doesn't have the money. Once a debtor has been imprisoned there's no further action the council can take to enforce payment. The most that the council – to its shame – could expect to gain was to frighten her and her family.

Benefit cut

All this has happened during the same month that the Green council has published its "preferred alternative" to the coalition government's plans to abolish the national system of council tax benefit.

Con-Dem plans would mean a £2.5 million cut in council tax benefit locally. The Green's "preferred" response would mean that everyone below pensionable age would be charged at least 10% of the council tax.

In one way this is worse than when Thatcher brought in the hated poll tax at the end of the 1980s. At least then the Tories brought in a token increase in benefits, pretending it would compensate the poorest in society. The Greens have come up with their proposals at a time when benefits are actually being cut!

There can be no doubt that more people would fall into debt. How

many of them would the Greens be willing to put in prison?

Before last year's council elections Brighton and Hove Socialist Party warned the Green Party that by refusing to challenge government cuts they would be forced into attacking local services. We rejected their argument that the best they could do was protect the vulnerable (although even we did not predict that they would try to 'protect the vulnerable' by sending some of them to prison!).

We called on the Greens, and every councillor claiming to oppose the cuts, to build a movement in Brighton and Hove and help build a campaign nationally to demand a restoration of the cuts in funding.

We called on them to set a budget to reflect the needs of the city's population, not the dictates of the cold-hearted Tories and their Liberal Democrat playthings. Instead, the Greens have allowed themselves to become licensed bullies, trying to intimidate working class people in an effort to raise council tax revenue.

- No to jailings or punitive measures for non-payers who cannot afford to pay
- No cuts in council tax benefits or any council services and no to privatisation
- Build a mass challenge to this and all future governments to demand lost funding is returned to the city

Kazakhstan: Vadim hunger strike ends in victory

Vadim Kuramshin, a well-known human rights activist in Kazakhstan, has ended his hunger strike after the authorities agreed to resume his trial. Kazakhstan is a police state ruled by the family clique of despotic president Nursultan Nazarbayev.

Earlier in the year, Vadim's campaigns against torture in prisons forced the governing party to agree to a 'national strategy' to end this widespread procedure. However, shortly after, Vadim himself was arrested.

Vadim is the victim of a carefully orchestrated plot by the Kazakh secret services. Vadim had been given a video of officials receiving bribes. He released the video online and prepared a press conference.

However, he was then convinced to go to the official and attempt to

reclaim the bribe, and was arrested in the process. Now the state is claiming that Vadim was using the video to blackmail the official!

Karibai Kusainov, who gave Vadim the video and then convinced him to reclaim the money, is now the state's key witness against Vadim.

Because of the gaping holes in the state's case, the stooge judge stopped proceedings to give prosecutors more time to prepare. It is an improvement that Vadim's case has been resumed, but does nothing to change the nature of the charges against him. We must demand his release, along with all political prisoners in Kazakhstan.

See campaignkazakhstan.org for updates and to send trade union donations to this solidarity campaign



Vadim Kuramshin

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.

Poodle to McNugget

It is official. No less a person than Mr Tony Blair, Labour's 'legacy Tzar' of the 2012 Olympics, insists that McDonald's and Coca-Cola sponsoring the Games is absolutely fine. It is unlikely millionaire Blair has ever had to eat in a McDonald's, smell the kitchens or attempt to digest the food. In the groundbreaking film *Supersize Me*, Morgan Spurlock monitored the effects of a McDonald's diet over 30 days. These included a 13% increase in body mass and a cholesterol level of 230. In the American system 200 is the maximum safe level! Seemingly this is regarded as ideal for youth sports by Blair. Ever ready to grovel to the corporations, the man who started out as Bush's poodle is now McDonald's new Chicken McNugget.

Derek McMillan

Empty words

As a kid, I loved listening to a Peter Sellers sketch called "Party Political Speech", in which Sellers spoke, as a politician, for nearly five minutes but managed to say precisely nothing. I was reminded of that sketch when Ed Miliband spoke at the Durham Miners' Gala. But, as great a comic actor as Sellers was, Miliband managed to outdo him, because he spoke for ten minutes without saying anything, other than a not-exactly-earth-shattering promise that a Labour government will invest in producing 'clean coal', and paying tribute to past Labour leaders who've spoken at the Gala. Ed, if you think that you can get some of the 'glory' of 'the good old days' to rub off on you by appearing where John Smith, Tony Blair and Gordon Brown didn't dare to venture, it ain't gonna work!

A Kent worker

Labour's legacy

Jim Thomson wrote a good article (Socialist 26 July) about Richard Branson's Virgin Care taking over Devon's children health services. One more point could be added. NHS Devon had to put the services out to tender following Labour's "Transforming Community Services" directive in 2009. This required all Primary Care Trusts to become commissioning-only organisations, meaning that NHS Devon could no longer provide these services itself. The Con-Dem government's Health and Social Care Act accelerates the privatisation that the last Labour government enthusiastically promoted.

Jon Dale

"Beacon of hope"

In June, I met Dimitra, a member of the Socialist Party's Greek sister party, Xekinima, in Thessaloniki. It was two and a half weeks before the election. Dimitra outlined the social havoc caused by austerity measures including: teachers reporting their pupils fainting in class through lack of a proper diet, chronically ill patients who cannot afford medicines and the rise in homelessness. She contrasted this with the huge sums of capital that have been taken out of the country by wealthy individuals, the interference in Greek elections by EU political elites and the slanderous insults hurled at Greek people by corporate media outlets. Dimitra took me to a Syriza open assembly meeting at the Aristotle Uni-

versity where I listened with interest to a lively debate before giving a message of solidarity from the Socialist Party. I made it clear that simply the prospect of an anti-austerity Syriza government would act as a beacon of hope to workers across the European continent.

Ged Travers

Overcrowding myth

"Too many people in the country!" "We are an overcrowded nation!" These hoary old myths are regularly taken out for a walk when population census figures come out. How can people be surplus? A labour 'surplus' should surely mean there is labour available for practical deployment to improve the economy! There is, after all, plenty of work to be done! Do we have enough houses, hospitals, schools, public transport, etc? And if improving productivity meant, over time, that less labour was needed to produce these things - why not reduce the length of the working week and share out the work? Only capitalism can make labour 'surplus'. Capitalism is not able to utilise the labour resources available to it. It cannot even utilise the money available to it - the £750 billion languishing idly in corporate treasuries, for example. And as for labour, three million people out of work represents three million man-years of potential production going to waste. Capitalism fails its own key performance indicators! It claims to be the best system for efficiently deploying productive resources to best effect. Well it is not doing that.

Steve Appleton



Olympic football

I have attended two Olympic football matches - one at Old Trafford, Manchester and one at Coventry. At Coventry, the stadium was only a third full. Much of this was due to sponsors giving seats to clients (some undoubtedly as a bribe to clinch deals). There should be a strict (and very small) cap on the number of seats sponsors can reserve! The ground lacked a bit of atmosphere because there were only spectators on two sides of the pitch. They had dozens of bag searchers with very few bags to search! And there was a ridiculous number of police for a small game where there was no prospect of trouble. There were masses of free buses laid on which was welcome and efficiently organised. All public transport from major bus and rail stations was free - all clubs should offer this!

Clive Walder, Birmingham

Review:

The Olympics opening ceremony

Sarah Wrack

The reaction of the right wing to the Olympics opening ceremony says it all. It was attacked in a racist, reactionary, anti-working class article in the Daily Mail (later taken down from the paper's website because of the number of complaints and replaced by one calling the ceremony "Marxist propaganda") and on Twitter by Aidan 'Nazi-stag-do' Burley. Labour MP John McDonnell summed up why it got this reaction: "Tories railing against Danny Boyle's ceremony because it was our culture and recent history essentially from a working class perspective." An Australian newspaper, the Age, added: "This is a country of royals and aristocrats, but Boyle's show rejoiced in the commoner."

The usual format of this sort of event - the perfectly coordinated parades, intricate human pyramids, feats of pyrotechnics - leaves us impressed, maybe even awe-struck. But Danny Boyle's didn't just impress, it engaged. Every working class person in the country could identify with bits of what they saw - reading under the covers as a child or head-banging at a rock gig - in a way that isn't possible with synchronised gymnasts wearing permanent smiles.

There were royals and celebrities, of course, but these were a side dish, not the main meal. The undisputable stars of the show were the 600 NHS workers swing dancing, the 500 Olympic site construction workers lining the tunnel as the torch made its entrance, the young volunteers jumping up and down on giant beds or dancing together in the two-up, two-down.

It wasn't a programme for socialism. But, in the main, it was a celebration of, by and for working class and young people. 7,500 people volunteered to take part and spent about 150 hours each rehearsing. The Sports Illustrated review called it "a celebration of protest and dissent" - it featured the suffragettes, the Jarrow March, the NHS, Muhammad Ali, three songs that were banned at the time of their release and the first pre-watershed TV lesbian kiss.

Some on the left claimed it was wrong to feature the health service given the attacks it is facing. But



600 NHS workers volunteered in the ceremony

it sent a message to the rest of the world - to the Tea Party camp in the US who claim publicly funded healthcare leads to 'death boards' - to show the place the NHS has in the hearts and minds of the people who benefit from it.

Working class

The historical scenes weren't the making of a rounded-out history book but they did give a glimpse of the role of the working class. Isambard Kingdom Brunel and his capitalists looked on and directed from afar as the workers toiled and heaved to bring about the industrial revolution.

Yes, the Queen and prime minister sat in the fanciest seats in the stadium. But the scenes of the young couple meeting, nervously but excitedly flirting, texting and changing their 'relationship status' weren't for their benefit. They were for the young people everywhere who know this ritual all too well. The soaps, the pop music, Mr Bean, the giant Voldemort - they were for us.

I sang along with Dizzee Rascal, Bowie and the Sugababes. I laughed at Mr Bean and even, I have to admit, the Queen's Bond sketch. I went 'oooo' when the factory chimneys burst out of the ground and when

the Olympic rings were forged. This atmosphere of participation spilled over even into the formal bits of the ceremony. The athletes skipped, laughed and posed for phone pictures in their procession.

Should we point out the construction workers who weren't there because of the blacklisting that took place against trade unionists at the site? Absolutely. Should we highlight the discrepancy between the moving scene of promising young athletes lighting the cauldron to 'inspire a generation' while their peers outside struggle with unemployment and education cuts? We will continue to. Should we shout from the rooftops about the empty seats, the inflated costs and the corporate control? At every opportunity. But should we allow that to ruin our enjoyment of this fantastic

Socialists are not 'spoil sports'

event? No. Socialists are not 'spoil sports'. We can appreciate art, music, sport and culture for the skill and potential of people that they show. Working class people should be able to enjoy entertainment and celebration. And this was one of the better examples of both.

Portsmouth fans fight to save Fratton Park

"We will never die!" was the chant which echoed down the line as fans marched to save Portsmouth football club from closure. With only days to go before the deadline for liquidation passes, the fans marched in hope that out of the club's crisis a historical opportunity for fan ownership could arise.

The club's administrator, Trevor Birch, claims that unless a buyer comes forward by 10 August Fratton Park will shut its doors and there will be no more football in the city. Currently there are two rival bids. One is from Portpin, run by former owner Balram Chanrai, who is seeking a repayment of his £19 million investment.

The other is from the Portsmouth Supporters' Trust, which this week announced its intention to table a

£3 million bid, with a local businessman to be installed as a chairman, backed by a loan taken from the city council to purchase Fratton Park.

The trust propose a share scheme for fans, however the bid proposal claims that five 'fans' who have donated 'five figure sums' will become associate directors, while one 'fan', local businessman Iain McInnes, will become chairman by virtue of a 'six figure sum' investment.

Profit motive

The danger with such an approach is that it gives businessmen, who like previous owners will be interested by profit and a short-term return on their investment, a way to buy the club, under the banner of the trust,

using supporters' money and a loan from the taxpayer!

While the crisis at Fratton Park does present a historic opportunity for fans to reclaim the game, it would be a mistake to simply hand control of the club from big business to small business! Rather than creating a board-in-waiting based on investment size, the trust should lay out a plan for full fan ownership and management.

The trust should be run democratically, with season ticket holders and trust members voting for the board. Trust meetings should be open to all fans who can participate in re-building the club, the team and the future of football in the city of Portsmouth.

Ben Norman

84% of BBC viewers have watched at least part of the Olympics. Tens of millions of people in the UK alone are tuning in every day - people who never expected to care have been caught up in Olympic-mania. We saw amazing shows of human talent - Jessica Ennis, Mohamed Farrah, Usain Bolt -

a cheer roared out whether they were 'Team GB' or not. The Socialist congratulates all competitors and medal winners. Here our readers report on some of the other Olympic news and share their thoughts on all-things-Olympics - the good and the bad.

Critical Mass arrests

End attacks on democratic rights

Ian Pattison
East London Socialist Party

Film director Danny Boyle's spectacular 2012 Olympics opening ceremony surprised many by featuring protest movements and making light of the establishment.

However, while 27 million in Britain and hundreds of millions more around the world watched suffragettes and cycling doves of peace on the BBC, 400 cyclists were being kettled outside the Olympics Park, 182 of them were brutally arrested.

Those arrested were part of the pro-cycling London group Critical Mass that cycles around London to promote cycling the last Friday of the month since 1994. Some may even have been inspired by Bradley Wiggins Tour de France victory.

Following arrest the cyclists were denied food for hours, only given a small amount of water, with some prevented from using the toilet for almost seven hours - after which police accompanied them into the toilets. A video of the arrests shows a police officer pepper-spraying an elderly disabled man and elbowing him in the face.

A Muslim cyclist fasting for Ramadan, was denied water altogether



Critical Mass cycles around London the last Friday of the month

by the police, even after he began to feel faint. Protesters who tried to give him water to drink were arrested on trumped up charges. This is just the latest example of how the government and the police are using the Olympics to clamp down on the right to strike and protest.

The 182 arrested cyclists have

been banned from disrupting other Olympic events, or taking a bicycle into Newham, the London borough that hosts the Olympic site. The state is trying to intimidate other people from protesting around the Olympics or at any other time.

All charges and these conditions should be dropped immediately.

Contradictions and ironies

Keith Dickinson

While I enjoyed 'super Saturday' I've been struck by a number of blatant contradictions and ironies.

A friend told me how as a volunteer he's been instructed to bring a spare shirt so he won't be recognised in his uniform if called on to fill the scandalously empty seats.

While meals for those volunteers have been inadequate no such hardship is suffered by the super-rich who've docked their super-yachts in the east end, replete with chefs and all!

But the most striking thing about the Games is how they give a glimpse of what can be achieved over a relatively brief period of time.

They showcase human ability, when abundant resources are available: the skills of the building workers and technicians; the effort and abilities of the service workers, in-

cluding the shop workers; the extra hours and patience required of the transport workers, and not least the years of training by young athletes from around the world to reach these peaks of sporting ability.

Will similar efforts be made to build the million affordable houses that are urgently needed by working and middle class people in Britain? This would create many thousands of jobs, and bring far more lasting pleasure to us all.

Legacy

But now the questioning about the 'legacy' of these Olympic venues will undoubtedly start. They have been built with taxpayers' money so why can't they remain a national asset? Surely they could be used for training grounds locally as well as future national and international events.

Commentators correctly com-

mend athletes for providing the 'inspiration for a generation' but where are working class youth able to exercise and train?

Over recent decades Tory, Liberal and Labour councils have collaborated with property developers to sell off thousands of school playing fields and community sports grounds. The Con-Dems have approved the sale of 21 already and Labour approved over 200 sales during its 13-year reign. For many this leaves only privatised sports centres, which most can't afford, but Cameron and Coe don't want to know about those difficulties.

The whole of the Olympic Park and other venues and facilities should be democratically nationalised to provide homes and leisure and sports facilities for all working class people, and the workers who have run them so well kept on, creating thousands more jobs.

Dave Nellist says:

Give away the tickets for the empty seats!

Many in Coventry raised eyebrows after the first Olympic Football match in Coventry stadium - ahead of a national outcry over empty seats for high-demand London Olympics events.

While many people up and down the country were priced out or unlucky to get tickets in the bidding process, it seems London 2012's many sponsors had so many corporate tickets they didn't know what to do with them. Which is exactly what they did... nothing - leaving many arenas and stadiums half empty for

events and matches.

Coventry Socialist Party's Dave Nellist has led the fight against Olympics corporatism and has called for the thousands of unsold and unused tickets to Coventry's Olympic events to be given away free to the ordinary people and families of Coventry to enjoy.

He said: "If the Olympic experience means anything, give them away to families, schoolchildren, colleges or local sports clubs. Coventry should lead."

Coventry Socialist Party



Olympics postbag

Cycling death

Dan Harris, a 28 year old man from Wanstead lay dead after being hit by an Olympic media bus. The tragedy took place in Leyton not far from the games. Dan's is the tenth cycling fatality in London so far this year and the 62nd in Britain. Aside from the fact that London's provision for safe cycling is woefully inadequate this latest accident clearly illustrates the fact that the Olympic authorities and Transport for London have failed to provide safe cycle routes to and from and around the Olympic park.

I had some experience of this the other day when on the way to photograph the RMT cleaners strike outside Stratford station. The usual route along the canal was abruptly stopped around Hackney Wick by a major armed police roadblock complete with high security metal barriers of the kind that are used in Downing Street and other high security locations.

I then had no alternative but to use very busy and dangerous roads, including passing through the notorious Bow Interchange where two cyclists were killed within three weeks of each other last year.

This is bad enough for regular London cyclists but even worse and potentially more dangerous for tourists unfamiliar with the area. The situation is clearly totally unacceptable and must be challenged at every opportunity.

Paul Mattsson



U-turn

One of the most important developments at the 2012 Olympics has been the organisers' u-turn. The speed with which the organisers went from "the venues are full to the gunnels, there are no empty seats" to "there are empty seats at every Olympics" was breathtaking.

The casual observer will think this is easily achieved but of course it can only be done after years of dedicated training, preferably as a politician, in the arts of fibbing, being economical with the truth and pretending you never said the opposite in the first place.

Pete, Worcester

Mad system

So sport under capitalism means arguably the most prestigious event in the world has loads of the seats empty despite huge demand to get tickets. It's a bit like how housing works under capitalism - plenty of empty houses and five million waiting for council housing - what a mad system we live under!

Alec Price

Olympic truce?

The three headed dog (Cameron, Clegg, Miliband) that guards the hell that is capitalism has pronounced that it's wrong to strike during the Olympics - that it's a time of national celebration. Well the workers at Remploy Newcastle are not celebrating, having been told that the government is closing their factory on 17 August. Yes, during the Olympics and just in advance of the Paralympics. It appears the idea of an Olympic truce only applies to workers and not to the

bosses or their government. For them the class war continues.

Norman Hall, Gateshead

Protest

Despite the Olympics being an immense merchandising opportunity it was good to see some British protest shown in the opening ceremony. A Socialist Party member, Lizi Gray, who is a descendent of one the original marchers, led the Jarrow Crusade through the stadium dressed as Red Ellen. We also got a glimpse of the suffragette movement which was very welcome. Strange how they missed out the 1926 general strike, anti-poll tax movement, the 2003 anti-Iraq war demo - all things that the British ruling class want to forget about.

Paul Phillips

Socialist Games

In a socialist society we will still have the Games, I think, as human beings won't stop pushing themselves to see how far they can go - in sport, in art, music, in any field. But like anything else we will democratically plan the Games. No wasteful (and corrupt) bidding process, no mad rush to finish the stadium on time, no traffic chaos (and no need for a residents' exodus, as seems to have happened in London this time). And no sponsors or brand police! Far more cities would have Olympic standard sports facilities anyway as sports facilities would be upgraded across the board.

Paul Gerrard

Olympic boost?

Prime minister David Cameron and London mayor Boris Johnson boasted that the 2012 Olympic games would result in a huge cash boost for the capital's retail outlets and tourist attractions. But while the Games have attracted an estimated 100,000 overseas visitors this pales beside the usual 300,000 tourists who visit London at this time of year.

The Association of Leading Visitor Attractions reported a 30-35% fall in numbers going to museums and theatres, etc, in the past two weeks compared to the same period last year. Chief executive of Nimax Theatres complained: "For my six theatres, last week was the worst this year." West End shops also reported a 12% drop in sales from last year, while hotels have had to slash their high prices as bookings have slumped by 30%.

This is a spectacular own goal for Tory politicians like Johnson - whose predictions of "huge pressure" on the capital's creaking transport infrastructure has clearly put off visitors - and for greedy hoteliers, whose exorbitant charges have priced themselves out of business.

The government was hoping for a £13 billion Olympics "turbo-charge" to the UK's flatlining economy over the next four years. Instead, the bubbly is looking decidedly flat.

Dave Carr



Hmm...

"I was at the Beijing Games, in 2008, and one of the lessons that we took away from that is that full stadia create the best atmosphere."

Jeremy Hunt

MARCH TOGETHER

on 20 October and then

STRIKE TOGETHER

to stop all cuts

With over 350,000 public sector workers already sacked and over one million young people on the dole, it's terrifying to think that the vast majority of the cuts are still to come – unless we fight them!

These cuts aren't necessary. £120 billion of tax goes unpaid every year largely by big business and the rich. £750 billion is sitting in big business bank accounts as the fat cats see no profitable investment – it seems they're waiting to be handed guaranteed income from the privatisation of services such as the NHS.

The Trades Union Congress is organising a national demonstration in London on 20 October. The National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) is committed to making this demo even bigger than when 750,000 people demonstrated on 26 March 2011. But 20 October can't be the end of the campaign, but a new beginning. The NSSN is lobbying the TUC's autumn conference to demand that this march is followed by a 24-hour general strike.

Steve Hedley, who was elected as the RMT transport union's assistant general secretary at the end of July, explains why he is joining the NSSN lobby.

"I'm lobbying as we want to ensure that there's action from the TUC. We believe that a general strike, starting with the coordination of a 24-hour general strike, is the only way that we're going to stop the cuts coming through.

Apparently there's only been about 30% of the cuts made so far so we're still facing a massive onslaught.

It's good that the TUC has organised a demonstration in October, but this alone is not going to stop the government. We can only do that by coordinated industrial action. It's very important that the delegates at the TUC feel strong enough and feel supported to demand that of their leaders.



Steve Hedley photo Paul Mattsson

There are people in the trade union leadership who would see the 20 October march as a bit of a relief valve to get rid of all the pressure building up from workers who want action against cuts, let people walk up and down and then they've done their bit, but that's not the case.

The demonstration needs to be an organising demonstration. We then need to have a series of local meetings after that demonstration and our unions, both nationally and locally, should set up strike committees and decide how we're going to take this on because at the minute we're not taking it on.

The RMT is a small union but we're a very active union and we punch above our weight, so we hope to be intricately involved."



Lobby the TUC to call a 24-hour general strike Sunday 9 September Brighton

Assemble 1pm, The Level Park, Union Road, Brighton BN2
Speakers include Bob Crow, RMT, Steve Gillan, POA and Mark Serwotka, PCS

For updates and transport information see www.shopstewards.net

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!