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We can stop this austerity

BUILD A 24-HOUR GENERAL STRIKE



Paula Mitchell
London Socialist Party secretary

What a fantastic moment. Chants for a 24-hour general strike rang out along the Brighton seafront, as sun-seeking families lined the route of the National Shop Stewards Network march and applauded.

We saw a glimpse of how millions of people can be lifted out of the anger and fear engulfing them and transformed into a force that can change it all.

The trade union movement, organising 6.5 million workers, would be a mighty force if it acted in concert. Imagine the effect if all the schools, all the council workers, all the firefighters, all the government staff and NHS workers, out on strike and taking to the

streets, were joined by all the train staff, power plant workers, builders and electricians, and by cleaners, factory and shop workers.

That would have enormous power. And just imagine the effect that would have on workers not in unions, on unemployed people, young people and families. There could be a rising up of all those people hit so hard – and to be hit even harder yet – by pay freezes, benefit cuts, tuition fees, the closure of youth centres, the decimation of essential services and so on, and on, and on.

At the moment many see no hope. What can we do when our housing benefit is cut, our tax credits are cut, and the landlord says he's going to put the rent up? When the queue at the food bank gets longer, when the queue for every low-paid zero-hour contract gets bigger? Save the Children showed that the poorest children bear the brunt of the recession

and cuts, losing out on hot meals, new shoes, birthday celebrations, school trips.

What will it mean? More riots – the cry of the dispossessed? More people turning to the far right in despair?

But now, with the talk of a general strike, all that fear and struggle can be gathered up, organised, and made powerful.

And it can be given a voice. A new poll, reported in the Guardian, shows that by a wide margin people in Britain think we need to “fundamentally change the way our country and economy works”. They're right!

It doesn't take much imagination to work it out. How about, instead of £800 billion 'owned' by big corporations sitting in the bank doing nothing, we use it to employ young people and all those public sector workers who have been made redundant? Instead of the government giving money to

the banks, for them to sit on, refusing to loan, the money is used to build houses, re-build schools and re-open youth centres? Instead of the rich getting richer at our expense, we could plan, using the enormous wealth lying idle, for the benefit of all of us. Democratic socialist planning is not such a great leap of the imagination.

A 24-hour general strike won't sort all of that out in one go. But it would be so momentous that it could really dent the cuts programme, it could lead to the toppling of this weak government, and it could transform the ideas and the hopes of millions – if we can do this, what else could we do...?

STOP PRESS: as we go to print the TUC's 2012 Congress has just voted to support Motion 5, proposed by the POA prison officers' union which calls for a general strike against austerity. See pages 6&7



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After the Paralympics... Stop the Con-Dems' assault on disabled

With the Paralympics over, the Con-Dems attacks on the welfare of disabled people continue – such as the planned 20% cut in Disability Living Allowance (DLA), which many Paralympians rely on.

Chancellor George Osborne and home secretary Teresa May should not have been surprised at being booed by 80,000-strong Olympic Stadium crowds. Alongside the cuts, the Con-Dems' demonisation of disabled people as scroungers has resulted in record-high rates of disability hate crimes.

Socialist Party members comment on two aspects of the government's attacks.

Save the Independent Living Fund

Independent Living Fund user

On 13 September, Disabled People Against Cuts organised a 'Paupers' Picnic for Independent Living' in central London to raise awareness of Tory/Liberal coalition plans to close the UK-wide Independent Living Fund (ILF) by April 2015.

The fund was set up in 1988 as an extension of the social security and national insurance system. Following its closure to new applications in May 2010 and cutbacks in its central government grant, the ILF's 19,000 users now receive funding from a central pot of £330 million a year towards their personal assistance or care support.

This is used to employ personal assistants, buy help from a domiciliary care agency or fund additional support in Independent Supported Living schemes.

Each ILF user has a complex condition associated with their severe physical impairment and/or learning difficulty or autism. Many would, without the critical support of ILF funds, be living in residential care, relying on live-in volunteers or spending their day bored in the family home.

The development of the ILF revolutionised the social opportunities of a generation, and also meant the most vulnerable layers of people with learning difficulties could continue to live in the community or with their families.

The central fear of many ILF users



The Con-Dems have also closed Remploi factories photo SP Wales

was expressed earlier this year in parliament's Joint Committee on Human Rights when John Evans, a leading activist in the European Disability Forum and European Network on Independent Living, raised his worry that he may be returned to residential care in 2015.

ILF users and their families understand that, with ongoing cuts to social care, transferring complete responsibility for large care packages to local authorities will lead many to being reassessed and the loss of essential support, particularly with the new development of maximum expenditure policies.

The ILF does not fit with the coalition's 'localism' policy or the re-

source-led personalisation process and personal budgets where a social care funding allocation is identified through a questionnaire rather than a detailed, personalised assessment by a social worker that ILF users are familiar with.

ILF users and workers have a huge amount to lose. They must conduct a vigorous campaign to save the fund, linking with the ILF administrative workers' union, the PCS.

They must also demand Disability Rights UK withdraws its support for the Con-Dems' localism and personalisation policy, and actively defends both the ILF and local authority services from any further cuts.

Don't cut our Access to Work

Access to Work scheme user

I recently found out I had to reapply for Access to Work, a scheme to aid disabled people in work and help them to achieve work tasks as an able bodied person would do.

My situation has not changed at all in the three years I have been working and my support has remained the same.

I was interviewed over the phone about my claim with many probing questions. I was asked if I could travel to work by bus instead of using a taxi. I have four taxi journeys a week as I work two days, and it gets me door to door. Buses are very infrequent: I'd have to get to work two hours early and not get home till two hours after I finished work - all for a three mile trip!

Could I change my working hours to fit? No, I'm employed for a certain amount of hours - I can't change it. It seemed they wanted to know every last detail.

I came off the phone feeling very shaky and highly intimidated by the interview. It felt like I was being accused of claiming for things I shouldn't. I don't earn much at work and only get DLA and working tax credits to make my income up to something near liveable on. I certainly can't contribute any more than I already am.

I pay 50p in every mile for my journey to work and can claim back the rest. I don't think this is too unreasonable.

If this government wants disabled people to work they need to support the necessary adjustments needed. All the rhetoric about scroungers and benefit cheats makes disabled people out to be on the fiddle all the time when we're not.

The vast majority of people, disabled or not, just wish to earn a living and live comfortably. If that means we need extra support, the government or the employer should make the funding available to meet our needs.

Kick out Atos

Atos, which was scandalously allowed to sponsor the Olympics and Paralympics, continues to 'assess' (ie cut) disabled welfare claimants in exchange for £100 million a year from the government. Over 1,000 people have died after having their benefits withdrawn due to Atos assessments.

Even parliament's own work and pensions committee has said that just mentioning Atos triggers 'fear and loathing' among claimants. Channel 4 speculated Paralympic athletes and volunteers intentionally hid the Atos logo on their passes for the opening ceremony.

It seems the company doesn't put much effort into training its employees. As one person tweeted: "When being assessed by #Atos my sister, who has Down's Syndrome, was asked 'how long have you had the condition?' Unbelievable but true." No wonder that many of Atos's decisions are overturned on appeal.

Disability assessment needs to be taken out of the hands of big business gangsters like Atos and be run as a publicly owned, democratically accountable public service.

Save our NHS

Leicester: Marching to keep children's heart unit open

Steve Score
East Midlands Socialist Party

Around 150 people gathered at short notice on Saturday 8 September to show their opposition to the proposed closure of the children's heart unit at Glenfield Hospital in Leicester.

Cars hooted their support as the loud, chanting protesters marched up and down Belgrave Road.

The march was organised by 14-year old Ria Pahwa, the second one she has initiated, to add to the pressure on the government to review the decision. If the closure goes ahead, the nearest unit would be in Birmingham.

Ria is herself a heart patient and said that she could have died soon

after birth if the heart unit hadn't been at Glenfield. Campaigners and doctors have pointed out that the closure of this unit would undoubtedly mean a greater number of deaths.

An online petition - epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/35788 - has been signed by around 65,000 people so far with the aim of getting over 100,000 signatures and the decision reviewed.

The original consultation pitted different heart units against each other. The Socialist Party is opposed to the closure of any of the heart units, and believes it is part of the wider process of cutbacks the government is making.

There is more information online at www.socialistparty.org.uk/ issue/728/14946

London NHS protests - Saturday 15 September

South London

1pm, General Gordon Square, Greens End, Woolwich

Central Middlesex

● Re-open our A&E with full 24-hour service

Assemble 12 noon at Harlesden Jubilee Clock, High Street, Brent
March to Central Middlesex Hospital

Ealing

Marches assemble 10am at Southall Park and 11am at Acton Park
Both will march to Ealing Common for a 1pm rally

Bromsgrove meeting opposes A&E closure

On Friday 7 September, 150 people attended a meeting in Bromsgrove, Worcestershire, organised by the 'Save the Alex' campaign which is defending the Alexandra hospital in nearby Redditch.

52,000 people have signed the Save the Alex petition, and 1,000 have marched in Redditch.

Speakers included Bromsgrove Tory MP Sajid Javid, who told us spending on the NHS was increasing in real terms, while a NHS Worcestershire document says "funding available for healthcare will remain largely static over the next three years".

Javid said he opposed plans to close the A&E department at

Redditch and stated he was not convinced by the overall proposals. Maybe he said this with conviction or more likely because he sees a career change coming in a few years if he didn't!

Socialist Party and PCS union executive member Kevin Greenway pointed out that one way the money needed could be found was from a crackdown on tax avoidance and evasion by the rich.

But Javid thought this would only be temporary as the rich would leave the country. So, just as the banks were too big to fail, it seems the rich are too rich to tax!

Pete McNally
Worcester Socialist Party

Con-Dem housing measures - in 'the thick of it'?

Paul Kershaw

The government has announced a package to revive house building, including 'guarantees' for new homes said to be worth £10 billion. Developers and some of the big 'social' housing associations welcomed the package. Even housing charity Shelter approved.

But some in the press speculated about a panic to find a good headline for Mark Prisk, the new housing minister, being behind the measures – shades of 'The thick of it'.

There is plenty of bad news to divert attention away from housing and these measures will do nothing to help the housing crisis.

The proposals loosen planning laws meaning it is easier for developers to build on greenbelt land or to damage public amenities. Requirements on developers to provide affordable homes are also to be relaxed. You can see why developers would welcome this; easy profits!

But developers are already sitting on 'land banks' with planning permission to build over 400,000 homes. At the current rate of con-

Home ownership is a distant dream for many while private sector rents are soaring and 200,000 families live in overcrowded housing

struction it would take developers three and a quarter years to clear the backlog by building all of the new homes local authorities have signed off.

In London alone there are 93,000 houses with planning permission which haven't been started or are stalled by developers. In reality de-



The lowest number of housing starts in the UK since the 1920s

velopers are hanging back until the prospects are best to make a killing.

The Con-Dems inherited house building at an historic low from the previous Labour government and responded by slashing spending on social housing. Rather than the private sector rushing in to fill the gap, house building has continued to spiral down with indicators that this will get worse.

Housing crisis

Figures from the House Builders Federation show social housing planning approvals fell 41% between the first and second quarters of 2012. The problem isn't red tape, it is the refusal of banks to invest, the unwillingness of private developers to build and the inability of would-be homebuyers to buy, given pay cuts and job insecurity.

The credit boom prior to the banking crash is over and ordinary people are paying the cost. According to Shelter three-quarters of people say they would like to own a

home within the next two years but the average deposit is £27,000, more than the average person earns in a year!

On current trends, just a quarter of households will own their home with a mortgage in 2025. The reality is that home ownership is a distant dream for many while private sector rents are soaring and 200,000 families live in overcrowded housing.

New figures from homeless charity Crisis shows homeless applications up 27% in London and rough sleeping is up by a massive 43% in 2011/12 compared to the previous 12 months.

The media talks about these measures being a part of the government's 'plan B' to revive the flatlining economy. We need plan S! Take over the parasitical banks and major building companies; draw up a socialist plan of production based on people's needs and engage unemployed building workers to meet housing needs thorough a massive programme of construction and renovation.

'Red tape' bonfire puts workers at more risk

Ten years' ago the likelihood of a workplace inspection by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) watchdog was calculated at once every 8.4 years.

Since then, government cuts in the number of HSE inspectors means that a routine workplace

inspection is now likely to be once every 38.4 years ie a working lifetime.

Now, under the Con-Dems' plans to cut 'red tape', business secretary Vince Cable intends to abolish routine HSE inspections of shops, offices and pubs altogether.

If these plans go unchallenged it will mean, as RMT transport union general secretary Bob Crow says, "an all-out attack on safety" which will have "lethal consequences for workers and public alike as businesses are given the green light to cut corners".

More bad news from media mogul Murdoch

Not to be distracted by the ongoing phone-hacking scandals emanating from his now defunct News of the World tabloid, Rupert Murdoch has praised the appointment of former Colombian president (2002-10) Alvaro Uribe to the board of his News Corporation.

The fact that Uribe is accused of knowing about illegal wiretapping of journalists, judges and political opponents in Colombia when he was president is of little consequence to the

media mogul.

In fact, Murdoch senior venerated Uribe as "a transformative figure who saved his country's democratic institutions, revitalised its economy and restored the security of its people".

However, according to Human Rights Watch, Uribe's presidential tenure was "racked by scandals over extrajudicial killings by the army, a highly questioned paramilitary demobilisation process and abuses by the national intelligence service."



Bringing democracy - Murdoch style

Cabinet reshuffle Jeremy Hunt and demo rhyming chants

You might know Jeremy Hunt as just another Tory minister to get booed at the Paralympics. But this son of an admiral, Oxford educated and related to both the Queen and fascist Oswald Mosley, is now secretary of state for health.

His other 'achievements' include: a failed business in exporting marmalade to Japan, fiddling £20,000 in MPs' expenses; having to apologise to Liverpool fans and the families of victims of the Hillsborough stadium disaster after falsely claiming that hooliganism played a part in the 96 deaths;

Corruption and scandal seem to be the only way Hunt works

and avoiding paying £100,000 in tax after doing a nifty number through his company (nothing to do with marmalade!).

In his last post as culture secretary, after making department cuts of up to 50%, he hired his own parliamentary assistant, daughter of a Tory peer, on a permanent fixed contract.

He also played a part in the News Corporation scandal, overseeing the company's BSkyB bid which he refused to refer to the competition commission. The



Leveson inquiry into phone hacking activities revealed Hunt's improper contact with News Corp's James Murdoch, congratulating him on the success of his bid. The bid was eventually dropped.

He was also responsible for the security at the Olympics in which private company G4S, having been awarded a lucrative contract, failed to provide sufficient security personnel. The deficit was only plugged by mobilising the armed forces.

So this is the guy Cameron thinks is the best man to run our NHS. Corruption and scandal seem to be the only way Hunt works.

Health workers will be thinking of some rhyming chants for demos as we continue to fight for our NHS!

A health worker

Other lesser spotted ministers

Out of 27 ministers, 17 are Oxbridge educated and only four are women. Among the reshuffled are:

●Tory party chairman, Grant Shapps. Shapps was previously housing minister, but not a full cabinet member. Although he's been exposed editing his own Wikipedia entry, including deleting information about donations from estate agents, he has now been promoted to full cabinet status.

●Maria Miller was made minister for disabled people when the coalition took power in 2010. Since then she has been trying to close Remploy factories and push disabled people further into poverty.

As the new culture secretary she will also be responsible for women and gay rights policy. Her credentials for this include voting to cut abortion rights, being against gay adoption and in favour of defining homophobia, racial hatred and prejudice as "freedom of speech".

●Lib Dem right-winger David Laws has been made a minister in the department of education two years after being forced to resign as chief secretary to the treasury over fiddling his expenses. He had to repay £56,000.

As minister for children and families he will have a roving brief which, puzzlingly, includes responsibility for a review of the Trident nuclear defence system.

●The new environment secretary is Owen Patterson, brother-in-law of climate change sceptic Matt Ridley. Patterson has opposed the building of wind farms in Wales and also called for the ending of wind and solar power subsidies. Instead, he wants to fast-track the use of shale gas - the extraction of which is considered environmentally damaging - virtually ripping up the renewable and greenhouse gas targets.

His support for airport expansion also opens up the likelihood of a Tory u-turn over a third runway at Heathrow.

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Teachers must unite against Tories

Martin Powell-Davies

Member of the NUT national executive, personal capacity

Teachers have voted overwhelmingly for action against attacks on their pay and conditions. The results for the votes covering teachers in England were: In favour of discontinuous strike action 83.4%, no 16.6%. In favour of industrial action short of strike action 93.1%, no 6.9%. Similar majorities were recorded for the ballots in Wales and in sixth form colleges. Action will start on 26 September.

This government is going all-out to hound and demoralise teachers. On top of a pay freeze, we face 'pay-cuts-by-performance'. Schools minister Gove wants appraisal judgements and new 'teachers' standards' to be used to block pay-rises - or even to kick teachers down the pay scale!



Young teachers fighting for more pay photo Paul Mattsson

As the scandal over GCSE grading has shown, the standards that teachers and schools are judged against are open to political manipulation too. We face a government intent on blocking oppor-

tunities for our students, trashing teachers, cutting our pay and pensions, attacking union facilities and widening school privatisation. Now the ballot result gives teachers the chance to stand up for ourselves

and for education.

The NUT and NASUWT, making up 85% of teachers in England and Wales, have issued common advice to members. It's vital that NUT and NASUWT members meet together in schools to discuss union advice and to plan ahead for the action in their school, encouraging every member to take part.

Regular local reps' meetings, comparing experiences across schools, will also be vital. The immediate battles may well be around appraisal and observation policies. Where schools are imposing unacceptable policies, strike action is the best response.

Where local authorities are ignoring union protocols, we need to be urgently discussing about escalating action to coordinated strike action in line with NUT advice. But, alongside this localised action, we also need to call national strike

action. That's what really hits the headlines and puts the government under pressure. It also most easily unites members from across different schools and regions.

The NUT has been talking to the NASUWT about national strikes but nothing has been agreed yet. Members of both unions need to demand dates are set for this term. Discussions about coordinating national action should also be held with unions like the PCS - and others like the firefighters and prison officers who have recently voted to reject the government's pensions proposals. Trade unionists must mass together from across the country on 20 October at the TUC march in London.

The NUT have asked that '68 is too late' is a key slogan on the day. But classroom teachers must make sure this isn't just a day to 'let off steam'. It has to be a springboard to rebuilding united national strike action.

Cleaners fight low pay on the railways

Elaine Brunskill

Low-paid cleaners from East Coast mainline and London Midland, working for the ISS cleaning contractor, were on a 24-hour strike on 10 September. Craig Johnston, RMT relief regional organiser, spoke to the Socialist from the picket line at Newcastle Central Station:

"One of the good things in these disputes is how we use new technology to keep in touch up and down the country. Photos and reports from our picket lines at London Kings Cross arrived on our Blackberries and mobile phones in Newcastle. There were cheers and clenched fists up here!

"The strike is rock solid. The number of striking workers on the picket line shows again that RMT cleaners are not prepared to accept misery conditions and wages from companies that are making mega profits and bonuses. We are determined and resolute to fight for a better deal.



On the picket line in Newcastle photo Elaine Brunskill

"It has been great to see Churchill cleaners [who are also fighting pov-

erty wages on the Tyne & Wear Metro] come down to give their support

before going into work. Also, the PCS came down to offer solidarity."

Leading trade unionist arrested on picket line

Steve Hedley, newly elected assistant general secretary of the RMT, was arrested on the picket line at Kings Cross station. He was later released without charge but this is clearly an attack on the democratic right to strike - which must be resisted.

RMT members were picketing at King's Cross on 10 September as part of the battle with ISS over low

pay. These workers are only paid the minimum wage of £6.09 an hour. All they were asking for is the London living wage of £8.30 an hour, travel passes which most rail workers get and holiday and sick pay.

At about 9.30am police started to hassle one of the pickets Steve stepped in to give advice.

He was told it was 'none of his business,' despite it being very

much his business as a union representative.

Although Steve never even raised his voice he was arrested on the basis of 'potential breach of the peace,' as he was later told.

He was hand-cuffed and humiliatingly marched through the station. Police said he would be released if the picket was stopped but Steve had to inform the police that the strikers

would be in place until 6pm.

Steve was detained for five hours, was never charged and has now made a formal complaint for false arrest and imprisonment.

The right to strike is threatened by the repressive policies of the Con-Dems and Thatcher's anti-trade union laws, kept on the books throughout 13 years of a Labour government. It must be defended.

Sheffield Labour council tries strike-breaking (and fails) in recycling depots

Alistair Tice

So Mr Jack Scott, cabinet member responsible for waste (mis) management in Sheffield, how much money did you waste this weekend on your strike-breaking operation?

Sheffield Labour council authorised a private haulage and waste company, MHH Contracting, to open their facility to the public and advertised it on the council website to try to break the effectiveness of another two days' strike action by GMB recycling workers.

Talks broke down on Friday when the GMB refused to suspend the

weekend strike and the latest offer was withdrawn. So 30-odd workers still face the prospect, in three weeks time, of being reduced to 23 hours a week on the minimum wage for the six winter months. This is the result of Labour council cuts and a privatised waste management service run by Veolia which has further subcontracted the Dump-it sites to Sova Recycling Ltd.

On hearing of this scabbing operation, with the support of the strikers, Socialist Party members organised a protest picket at MHH Contracting on Saturday morning. We intended to ask the public not to use the strike-breaking facility.

However in the two hours we were there, a total of one single car took waste in. But it took two MHH staff, two Veolia staff, two police officers, one inspector and two community support officers to make sure that seven Socialist Party members didn't cause a breach of the peace!

The strikers are incensed that councillor Jack Scott had organised this strike-breaking operation as talks were taking place. But they are grateful for the consistent support from the Socialist Party. Gordon, one of the Sova shop stewards, texted: "Top job today pal, fanx a mill 4 that, wish we cud have bin with ya... cheers pal, say fanx to all your crew".



No strike breaking! photo Yorkshire SP

Workers' unity against brutal bosses

Mick Whale

Secretary Hull NUT

Striking workers at the Cranswick Foods meat processing factory at Preston near Hull have won a temporary reprieve from brutal new working conditions.

Cranswick management want to speed up the track to further exploit the workforce.

A Cranswick worker explained: "At the moment, two of us working together are expected to process 500 carcasses an hour. Management want to have us working alone and have each one of us processing 350 carcasses an hour.

This is nearly a 50% increase in what we are expected to produce for no extra pay. In fact we haven't had a pay increase for ten years."

Management have not had to deal with a union and a strike before and they have clearly been shaken by the solidity of the strike and the determination of the strikers organised by the GMB.

The management have agreed to go back round the negotiating table and not implement the speed-ups for a month while negotiations continue. This is a reprieve rather than a victory but the strength of the union action has forced management back.

A particularly inspiring feature of the strike has been the unity of the overwhelming majority of the workforce who are Polish with the English workers.

This shows again that the labour movement and working class action can bring about unity.

The language difficulties have been at least partially overcome through the GMB producing leaflets in Polish.

As one English worker joked: "I can't understand a word they are saying but we all understand the words 'strike' and 'picket line'"

As the picket line broke up many of the Polish workers were chanting "GMB, GMB".

Socialist students: Fighting for education

Extract from the editorial of Megaphone, the magazine of Socialist Students

Fees tripled, EMA scrapped, youth unemployment skyrocketing. This government will leave behind a brutal legacy.

We are governed by the rich, for the rich. The real interests they serve are those of bankers and big business – the ‘1%’ or the capitalist class.

In an attempt to distract people from the true nature of its agenda, one of the government’s favourite tactics is to attempt to turn people against each other. The young are ‘feral’, ‘lazy’ and have a sense of ‘entitlement’, so they should be first to face cuts, is one argument.

But the people with the real ‘sense of entitlement’ are the banks and big business. After their casino capitalism led us to disaster, not only did they expect a bailout for their bad debts, but to be able to keep the profits in private hands and enjoy huge bonuses, just as before!

But, in Britain, students were first to break the silence on cuts, organising mass protests, walkouts and strikes against fee hikes and EMA cuts.

This year the fight for our future will have to continue. The Con-Dems are coming for our education. Uni fees being tripled means the

cost of a degree is now equivalent to a small mortgage. A three-year degree will set you back £50,000. Course fees for adults in further education (FE) are also being hiked. But while prices are increased, quality is set to be hit. Thousands of teaching and support jobs are threatened. This will leave students with overworked and undervalued lecturers, increasingly unable to deliver education at its best.

Privatisation

In higher education (HE) a plan for privatisation and marketisation is being formulated. David Willetts, universities minister, has stated openly that he wants HE institutions to stop thinking of themselves as part of the public sector.

Private companies are being brought in to run so-called ‘back room’ services. In reality this means education on the cheap. At London Metropolitan University, all services other than teaching and the vice-chancellor’s office have just been outsourced to the private sector.

The approval of new private universities, such as the ultra-elitist ‘New College of Humanities’, represent another strand of the effort to create an American style system of education – a system where the highest paying ‘customers’ get the best education.

These attacks must be fought. This autumn two key dates for young people who want to fight back will be the trade union demonstration on 20 October and the National Union of Students (NUS) national demonstration on 21 November. We need to ensure that these demos are as big as possible with tens of thousands of students attending.

But they can only be the start of the fightback. The 2012 NUS conference voted to call a national student strike. We have to fight to make this a reality. To be most effective, this kind of action should coincide with strike action by workers, who, unlike students, have economic power. This should be the start of building a mass campaign organised around the following demands:

- Reverse the Con-Dem fee hike
- Tax the rich to fund free education
- Bring Back EMA
- Reject all cuts and closures – defend every job, course and uni
- No to education run on the cheap, kick out the profiteers – no privatisation
- Slash rents, provide affordable accommodation for all – uni management must inspect private landlords for quality
- We need a society for the 99%. All the banks and big businesses should be owned publicly and controlled democratically by ordinary people



Get organised against Con-Dem attacks photo Paul Mattsson

- On the basis of capitalism, our future looks bleak. Changing the system is crucial.
- If you want to help build the fightback, join Socialist Students today

Read more in Megaphone.
Order your copy for £1 including postage and join Socialist Students, by contacting 07749 379010
www.socialiststudents.org.uk

Global youth unemployment rises

Lizi Gray
2011 Jarrow marcher

Since the end of the Youth Fight for Jobs 2011 Jarrow March, youth unemployment figures have continued to rise internationally, currently standing at 13% overall; the highest rate in Europe is Spain at 52%.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has predicted that these figures are only set to worsen over the next four years. The longer young people are unemployed, the more difficult it is for them to find work even if the job market improves, says the ILO.

The eurozone crisis has had a knock-on effect on other economies, with youth unemployment figures rising to 26.5% in the Middle East and to 27.9% in North Africa, a rise of 5% since the Arab Spring uprisings.

However, there has been a surge in fighting back by young people globally, from the Spanish Indignados to the Occupy movement beginning in Wall Street.

In the UK, Connexions offices are closing despite young people needing support to find employment. The Con-Dems point the finger of blame at those who can’t find work but the figures speak for themselves. Around two thirds of local authorities have more than five claimants chasing every va-



On the Jarrow march photo Paul Mattsson

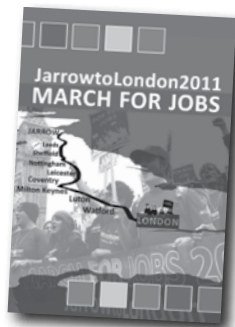
cancy – going up to over 50!

The ILO has suggested offering tax breaks to businesses as an incentive to employ more young workers.

Socialists demand an immediate 50% levy on the £750 billion held by the major corporations in their bank vaults. This would provide enough money to invest in developing socially-useful industry, but also to massively expand much-needed public services. For example, investing in a huge programme of house-building would provide much-needed homes and jobs.

Youth Fight for Jobs calls for:

- A living minimum wage for all – no to low youth rates
- No to all cuts – we won’t pay for a crisis caused by bankers and big business
- Investment in youth services and support for jobseekers
- Sharing out the work, without loss of pay, to solve problems of unemployment and long working hours



Anniversary pamphlet

Organising the Lost Generation – Jarrow to London 2011 March for Jobs

- Order now for £6 plus £1 postage (usual price £9.99) at leftbooks.co.uk or ring 020 8988 8777

Leeds: Young Tenants Fightback

Leeds Youth Fight for Jobs will lobby Leeds city council on Wednesday 12 September over housing issues as part of its ‘Young Tenants Fightback’ campaign.

Iain Dalton, Youth Fight for Jobs Yorkshire organiser said: “Finding decent, affordable housing is becoming an ever greater problem for

young people. A record high of three million 20-34 year olds still live at home, an increase of half a million in the last 15 years.

Many who do move out have no choice but to live in houses of multiple occupancy crammed in with other people due to high rent levels in the private sector. With only

limited social and council housing being built in the last 20 years it’s no wonder that the average waiting time for council housing is seven years.”

For more info contact YFJ Yorkshire organiser Iain Dalton on 07809839793 or yorkshireyfj@googlemail.com

Bristol: “We’re not lazy - we’re fighting back”

Outraged by news of the book Britannia Unchained, which brands working class people as lazy, activists from Bristol Youth Fight for Jobs picketed the surgery of Chris Skidmore, Tory MP for Kingswood and one of the right-wing authors of the book.

However, as we approached the office there was a ‘closed due to unforeseen circumstances’ sign on the door – Skidmore had done a runner! Maybe he did not have the confidence to back up his disgraceful book and would rather shut his

surgery, causing inconvenience to his constituents, than debate with protesters.

Despite Skidmore going into hiding, with the help of a hooter we kicked off the protest. Chants of ‘the rich, the rich, we’ve got to get rid of the rich’ and ‘Tories out’ could be heard as activists gave interviews to BBC Radio Bristol and distributed leaflets to the public. After about an hour, we marched on the shopping area, backed by shouts of support and tooting of horns.

Patrick McInally

Youth Fight for Jobs in action!

March for a future!
Saturday 6 October, 1.30pm
Commemorating Outdoor Relief Strike
Rally at Custom House Square, march through the Shankill and Falls. Belfast - Northern Ireland

In October 1932, thousands of outdoor relief workers in Belfast went on strike to fight for their dignity. Mass protests and rallies united Catholic and Protestant workers in the face of violence from bigots and the state. After two weeks of struggle, they won significant concessions. Youth Fight for Jobs has called this march from Custom House Square, where the rally that announced the strike was held, through the Shankill and Falls, the heartlands of the struggle, and ending with a rally at City Hall. We want to commemorate the

heroic struggle of 1932 and to send a message to the politicians and bosses that we will fight back too! The march date has changed so not to clash with parades on 29 September.

Youth Fight for Jobs fortnight of action
13-28 October
Contact youthfightforjobs@gmail.com for activities in your area

Scotland
March for Jobs and Public Services
Stirling to Glasgow STUC demo
17-20 October
Organised by Youth Fight for Jobs Scotland and the PCS Young Members
See youth-fight-scotland.blogspot.co.uk
youthfightscotland@gmail.com

NSSN lobby demands a 24-hour general strike

'TUC - name the date'

Sarah Sachs-Eldridge

Given the weather forecast, Brighton was the obvious destination on Sunday 9 September. But for up to 1,000 trade unionists and anti-cuts activists, boarding early morning transport from as far afield as Wales, Plymouth, Manchester, Yorkshire and Birmingham, and coming from all across the south and east of England, the appeal wasn't just a day in the sun.

With the TUC holding its 2012 Congress in the seaside city, this was a chance to demand that the official leadership of the labour movement steps up action against a long winter of austerity, threatened, if we don't stop it, to last for years.

The march, rally and lobby organised by the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) called on the trade union leaders to coordinate action in a 24-hour general strike.

History in the making

Closing the magnificent rally Rob Williams, NSSN national chair, described those attending as 'history makers'. Despite attempts by soon-to-be-replaced TUC general secretary Brendan Barber to pour on cold water, all the news around the Congress featured the question of a general strike.

Even before the coaches departed, it was clear that momentum for co-ordinated strike action was building. The delegation for Unison, the biggest public sector union, we learned through Twitter, had voted to support the Prison Officers' union (POA) motion, 'Motion 5'.

It says: 'Congress accepts that the trade union movement must continue leading from the front against the uncaring government with a coalition of resistance taking coordinated action where possible with far reaching campaigns including the consideration and practicalities of a general strike.' (See right for stop press)

Why is such action needed - and so supported? There isn't a worker, benefit claimant, young person or pensioner who doesn't know about austerity. In the autumn sunshine activists described the cold cruelty of the Tory-Lib Dem coalition.

Outdoor rally and march

At the pre-march rally starting just after 1pm, Phil Clarke from Brighton trades council welcomed us to a city whose workers have been serious about fighting cuts. 10,000 marched on the 30 November public sector strike day. The demand for further coordinated action was hugely popular. Katrine Williams from the Wales Shop Stewards Network and NSSN steering committee chaired this rally.

Speakers included Martin Powell-Davies, member of the national executive of the NUT teaching union; Nancy Taaffe, a library worker sacked through the cuts; Claire Laker-Mansfield on behalf of Youth Fight

for Jobs and Education; Steve Hedley, recently elected assistant general secretary of one of the most militant unions, the RMT transport union; and the president of the PCS civil service union Janice Godrich.

Janice said she would not have believed that there could be a tied vote at the general council, a traditionally conservative body to say the least, on a motion calling for a general strike to be considered. But there was, and, she finished, the task for the TUC now is not only to consider such action but to deliver it.

"Join the union, join the fight - build a one-day general strike" rang out, as the ranks of trade union banners and NSSN placards processed through the city. So too did appeals for support from labour movement veterans, such as former Liverpool Labour councillor Tony Mulhearn and former Socialist Party councillor Dave Nellist.

And the march swelled as it made its way to the rallying point at the Metropole hotel on the seafront.

The trade union crowd

Linda Taaffe, NSSN national secretary, welcomed us and set out the task of the rally. This was not an opportunity to recount statistics that illustrate the horror of the Con-Dems' austerity programme, appalling as they are; this was a chance for us to set out what we are going to do about it.

The first speaker was Brighton activist and member of Unison's higher education group executive (HESGE) Shona McCulloch. She explained that, given her union's attacks on socialist and left activists, she had to speak in a personal capacity.

She smashed the idea put forward by right-wing trade union leaders that 'strike fatigue' had set in after the superb action on 30 November. In fact the opposite was the case as the HESGE proved by voting to ballot for two days' strike action over pay.

RMT general secretary Bob Crow made it clear that his union was backing the POA motion. He also ridiculed claims that the trade union movement was dead, saying he saw a lot of lively corpses marching on the 26 March TUC demo last year. Bob finished by demanding that the TUC not only vote for general strike action, but that a date is named as soon as possible after the 20 October demo.

Solidarity

A victim of the cuts followed. Mark Holloway, convenor of Remploy in Barking, east London, showed huge determination to fight

back, as have his comrades in Remploy factories across the country, by striking.

He explained that Remploy workplaces represent much more than factories: they are "small communities" and give families and carers much-needed respite. The standing ovation Mark received was testament to the huge solidarity for the Remploy trade union fighters.

Steve Gillan, general secretary of the POA prison officers' union, explained that the Remploy closures were part of his union's motivation when they put forward Motion 5. When the Con-Dems are tearing the fabric out of society while bailing out the banks, the trade unions have a responsibility to give a lead.

It's not the first time the POA has called for a general strike, but this time, he explained, they have sought wider trade union support with the aim of letting both the government and New Labour know that enough is enough.

With regard to the anti-trade union laws Steve explained that there was no intention to be reckless and risk sequestration - but that the best way to get rid of that repressive legislation was by pushing it aside.

Unison NEC member April Ashley, speaking in a personal capacity, made an appeal for solidarity with striking miners in South Africa. Earlier a Belgian rail worker had brought solidarity greetings from his union and a message of support was given from the Conlutas left trade union federation in Brazil.

Mark Serwotka, PCS general secretary, confirmed support for general strike action and said that as soon as the teachers' unions set a date for strike action in the autumn, the PCS would meet to organise to join them.

He gave very concrete proof of how effective it is to challenge the cuts - 1,000 jobs created in HMRC where strike action has taken place and 1,100 in the Home Office.

Huge applause met his final re-

marks: the Tories appear to be having internal difficulties. The best thing we can do on behalf of the people of this country is, when they're down, to kick them!

Steve, an electrician and Unite member, spoke about the campaign against the Besna contract, which threatened pay cuts of around 35%. It led to unofficial action and the seven construction companies backing down.

Strategy

Rob Williams referred to the disgrace on average one food-bank opening every week and explained that we are right to ask the question of what comes after 20 October. "What is necessary to resist the 85% of Con-Dem cuts still to come?"

"If teachers could be taking action, and if the PCS could be taking action, and all those in the middle of a four year pay freeze could be taking action and we put the call out to those in the private sector to coordinate their planned action - eg workers at a Remploy factory, or the sparks if the bosses don't honour the agreement or the rail workers or the bus workers - it is not beyond the realms of possibility that they could go out on strike on the same day."

He called on the hundreds of TUC delegates, trade union leaders and activists and anti-cuts campaigners in the huge room to take the NSSN's model

motion back to all the regions, workplaces and union branches.

Summing up the NSSN's tasks Rob said we have to "say what needs to be said and do what needs to be done."

Fight is on

Linda was then able to close the rally on a hugely positive note with the report that Unison's delegation had voted to join the pro-strike consensus. At this news of Unison being shifted to the left the rally rose to its feet.

The significance of a 24-hour general strike, only the start of what is needed, cannot be underestimated. It would be the first general strike since 1926 and would transform the situation. It would allow working class people to sense their power and strength as the most significant social force in society. Kicking out the Con-Dem coalition, fracturing and isolated, would be an obvious next step.

Following the rally, the lobby of the TUC a few doors down outside the Brighton Centre was a celebration of a historic day. The fight to get a co-ordinated 24-hour general strike is definitely on - and we had all played a part. The chant went up: "TUC - name the date!"

See www.socialistparty.org.uk for a longer report

Model motion

This [trade union body] is alarmed that a relentless barrage of even more austerity cuts is coming down the line, and will continue into the foreseeable future. Millions of workers, young people, the sick and the disabled face a lifetime of severe hardship through cuts to pay, conditions, benefits and services - the horrendous situation facing working people in Greece could be our future if we don't stop the Con-Dem attacks.

We believe austerity cuts must be stopped, and that the labour movement has the potential to force a massive U-turn on this Coalition government of the rich. If our trade unions were to organise action decisively together.

We urge all members, friends and families to come to the TUC demo on 20 October, and that this day is seen as the beginning of a new stage of action.

We urge all unions participating in the demo to follow up with a further coordinated 24-hour national strike of both public and private sector workers,

making direct calls to youth and students, the unemployed, and community campaigns to join in.

We, therefore, agree that this branch will organise a local/regional meeting to discuss how to progress these ideas put forward by the PCS and POA at the TUC.

We also call on the national executive of our union to work together with other unions to find the most appropriate way to coordinate the biggest possible joint strike.

See: www.shopstewards.net



STOP PRESS

TUC Congress passes motion 5

Following what was described by one observer as the best debate she had ever witnessed at a TUC congress, union delegates voted overwhelmingly in favour of 'motion 5'.

Although the wording of the motion qualified the general strike call, the sentiment and motivation behind it was made clear by the speakers in favour.

They pointed to the brutal attacks being made on the most vulnerable in society and on all workers by the Con-Dem government and the need for them to be stopped by the trade union movement leading powerful general strike action involving the public and private sectors.

Hard hitting speeches along these lines were made in favour of the motion by Steve Gillan from the POA, Bob Crow from the RMT (who seconded it), John McNally from the PCS and a number of others.

A Ucat representative had a big effect when he urged delegates not to make 'the mistakes of the past' in failing to lead action, and he reminded everyone that when the trade union leaders threatened a general strike in 1972 after the jailing of the Pentonville Five dockers, those workers were released.

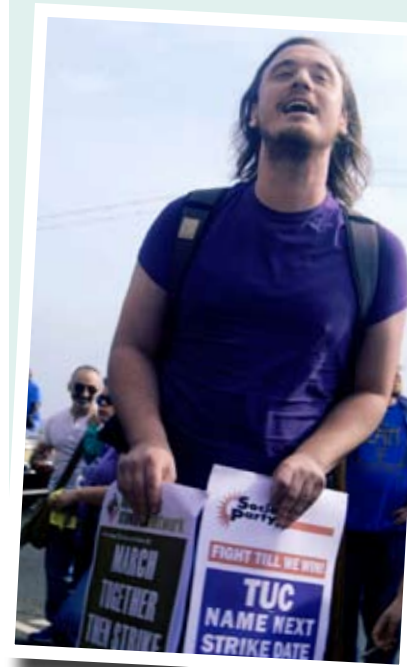
Opposition speakers tried to convince delegates to vote against the motion by claiming that most trade union members don't want a general strike, by arguing that it's impossible to achieve and that the call for one would be a propaganda weapon for the government.

In replying to the debate however, Steve Gillan, referring to those who argued that the government would use the call for a general strike as 'a big stick to beat us', answered forcefully: 'The government is already using a big stick against us, and it is hurting'.

The passing of this motion is a great step forward in the battle that has been waged to push the leaders of the TUC towards mobilising the weight of the trade movement against the government's cuts agenda.

Support delivered for the resolution from the large unions Unite and Unison, to add to that of unions such as the RMT and PCS, reflects the mood of rank and file trade union members in favour of decisive action to stand up to the government.

The Socialist Party and the National Stop Stewards Network welcome the passing of the POA motion; both have been at the forefront of spearheading and mobilising support for the calling of a 24-hour general strike.



Nationalise the banks

This is an extract of the speech given by Fran Heathcote, group president of PCS in the Department for Work and Pensions, in support of a motion from the Fire Brigades Union on nationalising the banks.

PCS welcomes this motion from the FBU.

Much of the banking sector was nationalised by Labour in 2007-08 - not in the interests of working and middle class people but to prop up the broken financial system that was brought to the verge of disaster. To date this has cost £500 billion in total. But what have we got to show for it?

I live in the North East and Northern Rock was taken over in 2007 after selling dodgy sub-prime mortgages in the scandal that triggered the credit crunch. I'm sure we can all remember the queues of people trying to get their savings out. But last November, four years after being bailed out, the profitable half of it was sold to Virgin for £747 million - less than half of what the taxpayer injected into it when it was split in 2010.

80% of RBS has been nationalised yet it is being investigated as part of the Libor scandal which fixed interest rates between banks.

The Libor also affected the mortgages and loans of ordinary people and penalised them. Small business people have been swindled, with one person reportedly paying back extra £70,000 on her loan because of the illegally fixed interest rate.

Incidentally, these are the people who can be won behind the union movement, when we take joint action and show that we're the most powerful force that can resist the Con-Dems and their rich friends.

Even Liberal Democrat peer Lord Oakeshott said this week: "It's time we used the stick on the banks we own and nationalise RBS instead of force feeding them carrots." Millions of our members are struggling to pay their mortgages or ripped off by the banks and small businesses who can't get credit wouldn't think that this is a radical motion.

If the banks were nationalised and democratically run, taken out of the control of the greedy fat cats, it wouldn't just open up the door to cheap mortgages and loans.

It could be the platform for a totally different type of society that represented the 99% of us who would benefit from the type of socially useful investment on a massive scale that could ensure decent jobs, housing and public services for all. This is our alternative to Cameron's austerity.

photos Sarah Mayo, Dave Gorton, Arti Dillon, Paul Mattsson, Pete Mason

[illegible]

Quebec Solidaire's electoral gains show potential for left

Bruno-Pierre Guillet

(Alternative Socialiste - CWI Quebec) and **Joshua Koritz** (Socialist Alternative, CWI in the US)

On 4 September, Quebec voters elected the Parti Québécois (PQ) to lead a minority government, with Pauline Marois as the first female prime minister in Quebec's history.

On the heels of the mass student strikes, PQ was always likely to win as it promised to scrap the hated "law 78" – an unprecedented set of repressive measures brought about by the outgoing Parti Libéral du Québec (PLQ) government to confront the student strike – and to freeze the PLQ's tuition fees hike.

Pre-election polls had predicted a tight race between the PQ, the ruling PLQ and the 'Coalition Avenir Québec' (CAQ), a new centre-right party formed by the merger of Action Démocratique du Québec and the forces around the anti-corruption figure, François Legault.

The surprise of the elections, however, was the strength of the PLQ, which won only four fewer seats than the PQ, and received 31.2% of the vote as compared to the PQ's 31.9%. The failure of the PQ to provide a clear alternative road to the PLQ's pro-business policies prevented a more decisive victory for this party.

Despite this, the hated outgoing prime minister, Jean Charest, the principal opponent of the student movement, lost his seat.

CAQ received 27.1% of the vote, but only won 19 seats. This was a disappointment to the CAQ who hoped to capitalise on its anti-corruption credentials. Its leader, François Legault, exposed PLQ ministers awarding contracts to mafia-controlled firms in return for campaign contributions.

The small left party, Québec Solidaire (QS), was the only party in the elections which took up the demands of the student movement, including prominent demands for not just reversing tuition fee hikes, but for free higher education.

QS gained an additional member of the Quebec parliament going from one deputy to two, and doubled its share of total votes from 3.3% in 2008 to 6% this year.

Due to its support among the student movement it made large gains, coming in second or third place in several districts. Significantly, the party has also doubled its membership in the last period, with around 13,000 now in its ranks.

PLQ, the traditional conservative



Demonstrations of up to 400,000 took place against the rises in tuition fees

party of Quebec, ran on its record of imposing austerity and refusing to give an inch in its struggle with the students over tuition fee hikes, presenting itself as the defender of "social peace" and against "the power of the street".

PQ, the main party of the Quebec sovereignty movement, made sympathetic overtures towards the student movement but was clear in its support for austerity and tuition fee hikes.

The tacit support it got from the main trade union federations, as well as from the two most moderate students associations, has, however, enabled it to boost its supposed 'leftist' credentials in the eyes of some working class and student voters.

CAQ, which is openly hostile to the trade unions, had campaigned with the slogan: "It's enough, we need change". But declared it would use the police to force students back to class if necessary.

Student movement

These elections, marked by smaller political formations making significant electoral breakthroughs, showed growing cracks within the two-party political system.

This system has traditionally dominated Quebec politics since the 1970s – with the two main pro-capitalist parties, the PQ and the PLQ, alternating in power. The erosion of support for these two parties, and the growth of support for QS in particular, reflect the rising openness for a left challenge to the status quo.

These elections took place in the

wake of the student strike movement which ended just before the elections as student associations voted one by one to return to classes. The strike movement began on 13 February and lasted through August, including demonstrations as large as 400,000.

Struggling also against the draconian "law 78", the student movement lost momentum over the summer, slowly losing steam while continuing nightly "casseroles" (demonstrations where people bang pots and pans). By the time the election was called, students and the larger working class had grown tired of continual struggle.

The right wing of the student movement, represented by the leadership of the Fédération Étudiante Collégiale du Québec, argued within the movement for a "truce" and threw its support behind its traditional allies, the PQ.

Classe, the largest and most radical of the student associations, was split between an abstention trend, which argued that the solutions for the movement could not be found in elections and that they should be ignored, and supporters of QS who largely did not press the debate.

As a result, the Classe leadership largely ignored the elections and simply called for the struggle to continue, as it crumbled beneath their feet.

Post elections

The electoral success of Québec Solidaire clearly expresses the shift to the left within an important layer of young people in the course of the past months, and shows a hint of the

potential for the building of a mass party arguing for a socialist alternative to the present crisis.

The momentum of QS' success should be used as a springboard to start a militant, grassroots campaign within working class communities and towards the trade unions, in response to the ongoing bosses' offensive, but also against the austerity attacks that will inevitably come under the PQ's rule. QS should also articulate demands for the trade unions to break with the PQ.

The PLQ and CAQ together have more seats than the PQ and could theoretically form a coalition government. If moves are made in that direction, this would likely cause a new round of elections to be called in the spring, as such a coalition would be extremely unstable.

The elections were successful for the ruling class in this phase of the struggle against tuition increases.

The students have now returned to class and, due to law 78, are compressing their entire spring semester into the month of September. The PQ has indicated it will repeal the repressive aspects of law 78 and put a freeze on tuition hikes, but has promised to return to the issue of increasing fees.

For now, these elections only represent the end of one chapter of struggle. A new generation of fighters has been emboldened and radicalised through the student mass movement.

The student strikes are a preview to the movements of the larger working class that will shake Quebec society in the months and years to come.

The Committee for a Workers' International

The Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) is the socialist international organisation to which the Socialist Party is affiliated.

The CWI is organised in 45 countries and works to unite the working class and oppressed peoples against global capitalism and to fight for a socialist world.

For more details including CWI publications write to: CWI, PO Box 3688, London E11 1YE. email cwi@worldsoc.co.uk

www.socialistworld.net

The CWI website contains news, reports and analysis from around the world. Recent articles include:



USA: One year since Occupy shook the world

How the movement radicalised workers and young people.

Greg Beiter, *Socialist Alternative* (CWI supporters in the USA)



South Korea: Hyundai workers fight for a living wage

Campaign for permanent contracts continues.

Kim Changwoo, (CWI Seoul)



Spain: Protest leaders arrested in Malaga

Release the detainees! Solidarity messages needed.

socialistworld.net

Honduras: Privatised cities in the global economy

John Sharpe

The Honduran government has agreed to hand over land to international finance to build three new privately run cities from scratch. These cities will have their own laws, courts, police, taxes and immigration rules. Work is planned to start building these states within a state early next year.

Edmundo Oreilana, a former attorney general and a member of the Honduran congress predicted these "charter cities" would allow multinational companies to set up

protectorates. He told a Honduran newspaper: "We are going to see long eternal queues like we see in Palestine for people to go to work in Israel."

That the government has said these cities can issue identity cards reinforces that view. Workers will be reduced to migrant labour in their own country.

Predatory foreign capital will demand the crushing of workers' rights, the right to organise, the right to strike. While 65% of the eight million-strong population live below the poverty line, wages and conditions will be driven down

still further.

Honduras is already one of the poorest and most unequal countries in the world; ten families control 90% of the economy.

Pepe Lobo, president of Honduras and wealthy landowner, came to power in November 2009 after stitched up elections, which followed a military coup in June of that year. He has already granted massive concessions to international big business.

Lobo has appointed "globally respected international figures" to a "transparency commission" that will appoint city governors.

They include extreme neoliberal 'Chicago Boy' economist Paul Romer (who dreamt up the whole scheme in the first place but is now getting cold feet), a retired Singapore former Brigadier General (Singapore is a city state), a banker and a consultant from Bain and Co (founded by US Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney).

These free-market, neocolonial enclaves will revive memories of the Standard Fruit Company and the United Fruit Company which dominated Honduras for much of the 20th century.

The shame of sexism in sport

Suzanne Beishon

The 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games showed women's sport at its best. For Britain, there were stunning performances from Jess Ennis, Eleanor Summers and many others. A record 70,000 watched Team GB women's football team. For the first time female athletes from every nation present competed in the Olympics. The US's women medalists accounted for 63% of their massive total.

The USA 4x100m women's relay team smashed the 27 year old world record and Gabby Douglas ("I just made history and people focus on my hair?... You might as well just stop talking about it.") became a gymnastics double gold winner.

There was 16 year old Ye Shiwen's record-breaking double swimming gold win and the inclusion of women's boxing (after fighting off attempts to make them wear skirts to "differentiate themselves from the men"). However, the veneer of equality soon came unstuck when Japan's women's football team (ranked third in the world) flew into London economy class while the men's team, ranked 20th, arrived fresh out of business class.

With Team GB's first medal came scathing criticism from Lizzie Armistead who told her post-race interview: "The sexism I have encountered in my career can get quite overwhelming and very frustrating."

18 year old weightlifter Zoe Smith, who passed the British world record, took to her website after sexist comments on twitter followed the programme 'Girl Power: Going for Gold'.



Competing in the women's shotput in the paralympics photo Alison Hill

Angrily she hit back: "We don't lift weights to look hot, especially for the likes of men like that. What makes them think that we even want them to find us attractive? Shall we stop weightlifting, amend our diet to get rid of our 'manly' muscles, and become housewives in the sheer hope that one day you will look favourably upon us and we might actually have a shot with you?!"

Even the Sun criticised NBC's slow-motion montage of female

athletes jumping, sprinting and bouncing, with close-ups of their pants as 'porny'. The Metro in the US took Getty Images to task with their feature: "What if every Olympic sport was photographed like beach volleyball?"

40% of Team GB's medals were won by women. But were sponsors investing in women's sport, which over 60% say they would like to see more TV coverage of? The USA's best weightlifting medal hope ahead

of the games had to live on \$400 a month and donated groceries to support herself until, after a Think Progress petition, one sponsor took her on. A big gun like Adidas? No, a small web advertising company.

A dozen male rowers, some of whom didn't even qualify for the Olympics, were reportedly given BMW cars by dealers of the Olympic sponsor but none were given to the gold winning female rowers. 0.5% of sponsorship in the UK went to elite

women's sports compared to 61% for men's with team sports cleaning up the rest.

As for TV coverage the women's world cup final was the planet's most tweeted event in 2011, but women's sport amounted to only 5% of all sport shown.

Sexism in sport is increasingly seen as unacceptable. No one criticised Lizzie Armistead's outspoken interview. When Fifa president Sepp Blatter was introduced for the women's football medal ceremony, virtually all the 80,203 crowd booed the hypocritical presence of the man who said in 2004 that women footballers should "wear tighter shorts and low cut shirts... to create a more female aesthetic" and attract more male fans.

Millions were inspired by the rise of women athletes, many of whom fought against a sports world that is built against their success. But we are unlikely to see the huge investment into women's sport needed to build on these athletes' achievements.

The government was under pressure to keep funding Olympic sports but has only guaranteed the same meagre £125 million until the next games. The same Con-Dem government has crippled schools sports programmes by slashing funding from £162 million to £65 million a year until 2013. And school sports facilities are still being sold off.

Rather than looking rosy after Britain's biggest medal haul since 1908, the future for not just women's sport, but sport as a whole in a set-up dominated by big business sponsors and capitalist cuts governments, looks bleak.

BBC radio review: Poll Tax

The Reunion rewrites history

Naomi Byron

BBC Radio 4's The Reunion recently had a programme on the anti-poll tax movement of the late-1980s and early 1990s, Britain's biggest mass movement of civil disobedience for centuries.

Bizarrely, the programme's makers did not even invite anyone from Militant (now the Socialist Party), the organisation whose tactics and strategy defeated the poll tax and Thatcher. Tory poll tax exponent Lord Baker was there but not us – it was like discussing public service broadcasting with representatives from the Murdoch media empire and a few journalists from privately owned newspapers.

Virtually every mention of Militant attacked our role with no right to reply. Danny Byrne from Bristol was active in the All-Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation but his main qualification for being on the programme seemed to be that he was not a member of Militant. He said that Militant played a good role in the beginning, but as the campaign grew we just wanted to control it, and it only succeeded because people like him helped build such a campaign that we couldn't.

The programme makers could only rewrite history so outrageously because we were excluded. In fact it was the strategy and tactics developed by Militant of mass non-payment (involving 14 million non-payers), clogging up the courts, as we campaigned for mass turnouts of people summonsed for non-pay-



The important victory against the poll tax courts on the Isle of Wight - impossible without Militant supporters photo the Socialist

ment, and legal challenges at every stage. This made the poll tax unworkable and forced Thatcher out of power.

This strategy could only be developed because of the close connections Militant had developed over decades with the labour movement and working class communities. Our approach was designed to mobilise the largest number of people to defeat the poll-tax, while explaining, in an accessible way, the need for socialist change.

There were many heroic class fighters who agreed with Militant over the main tactics needed to defeat the tax, though they disagreed with us on socialism. But without Militant's clear lead on strategy, and our branches up and down the country which could turn as one to prepare for the next stage of the

battle, the poll tax campaign would have been much smaller, weaker and more divided. It certainly would not have won the rapid, clear victories it did.

Many more people could have been jailed; thousands could have had their goods seized by the bailiffs or poinded (seized) by the sheriff officers (the equivalent of bailiffs in Scotland) and Thatcher would have stayed in power longer. Rather than wanting to control the campaign, Militant led the drive to involve fully as many non-payers as possible at all levels.

If you want to know how the anti-poll tax battle was won, and lessons for today's anti-cuts battle, come to our meetings and discussions, such as Socialism 2012. Sadly the BBC seems less than keen to shed any real light on the matter.

Cable attacks health and safety

Derek McMillan

Con-Dem economic wizard Vince Cable has outlined his plans to ditch health and safety checks. We all know tabloid jokes about health and safety regulations. However, we expect to buy food that won't make us ill, and to work in a safe environment. It is the "red tape" the government wants to destroy that ensures this is so.

Unsurprisingly Alex Eichmann, head of regulatory policy at the Institute of Directors, welcomes government efforts on deregulation "Excessive regulation costs time and money, both of which

businesses would rather spend on developing new products, hiring staff and building up British business both here and abroad." He failed to mention what a good idea "deregulating" the banks turned out to be.

It's ABC to any union health and safety rep that if a company can maximise its profits at the expense of its employees' health and safety it will do so.

The only guarantee that employers will exercise a "duty of care" for employees is strong union organisation. Union health and safety officers will have to take on the role which the Health and Safety Executive shamefully abandoned.



Trade unions still have to fight for health and safety photo Paul Mattsson

We need a political voice to fight austerity

A conference of Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) supporters meets in London on 22 September. In a significant development, the transport union RMT national executive last week elected an official delegation to represent the 80,000-strong union at the event. Clive Heemskerk, TUSC's national election agent, gives a preview of some of the issues that will be discussed.

Next steps in filling the vacuum

Developing strategies to: “overcome the blind loyalty to Labour of some trade unions” is one of the mandates given to the RMT's delegation to September's TUSC conference.

There certainly has been no shortage of denunciations of Labour's ‘austerity-lite’ policies from leaders of the Labour-affiliated unions.

Responding back in January to Ed Miliband and Ed Balls' endorsement of public sector real-term pay cuts to 2015, Len McCluskey, the general secretary of the biggest affiliate, Unite, denounced the “national government-like consensus where, as in 1931, the leaders of the three big parties agree on a common agenda of austerity to get capitalism – be it ‘good’ or ‘bad’ – back on its feet” (The Guardian, 17 January). But as the RMT rightly ask, what has actually been achieved to change Labour's policy?

When this year's Labour Party conference – the third now under

the Con-Dems – assemblies later this month there is no possibility that ‘the two Eds’ will be overturned. The idea that Labour can be reclaimed as a party that would stand up for working class people will once again be disproved in action.

Another case is the fate of Unite executive member and Lambeth Labour councillor Kingsley Abrams, who is still suspended from his council's Labour group for opposing cuts.

If Unite cannot get one of their own executive members reinstated with the right to vote for union policy – against sacking Unite members, for example – what can the affiliated unions achieve?

Len McCluskey also made the point that Labour's embrace of austerity “leaves half the country disenfranchised”, including the half a million demonstrators on the TUC's ‘march for an alternative’ in 2011. That was 18 months ago and an-

other TUC demonstration will take place on 20 October. Would marchers respond more positively now than they did (not) then to the idea that the only way they could be ‘re-enfranchised’ is to ‘join Labour to change it’?

Isn't it time for the Labour-affiliated union leaders, or at least those who oppose the cuts, to join the call for a new vehicle for working class political representation?

The key function of TUSC is still to act as a catalyst in the unions for this idea, and how to drive it home in the events ahead will be the main theme of the conference's opening session. One platform speaker will be PCS civil service union vice-president John McNally on the recent members' ballot decision to open up this non-affiliated union's political fund to back anti-cuts candidates in national elections, another sign of the mood developing in the unions.



RMT general secretary Bob Crow speaking at a TUSC election meeting in Walthamstow photo Senan



Campaigning for affordable housing in the London Assembly elections photo the Socialist

For councillors who stand up to the Con-Dems

One way to hasten the process of developing working class political representation is to ensure the widest possible TUSC challenge in electoral contests, including those outside the general election cycle. This mainly means contesting local council elections, including byelections, which also brings into relief the clear no cuts position of TUSC compared to Labour's ‘slower and fairer cuts’ mantra.

The conference will discuss a draft ‘core policy’ platform for the 2013 local elections, which will become the minimum basis for someone to apply to be a TUSC candidate.

The platform points to the dual character of the Con-Dems' attacks on local government services, and the workers who provide them.

Councils have experienced one

of the biggest ‘departmental cuts’ in government spending which will see, by 2014-15, a 27% fall in funding compared to 2009-10.

But also, under what the TUSC platform describes as “the Con-Dems’ hypocritical banner of localism”, from April 2013 councils will have new responsibilities, for health and well-being boards, social fund ‘crisis payments’, and council tax benefit levels – all with reduced funding.

It is not true however that councils have ‘no option’ but to pass on the cuts. Councillors have a choice. If even a handful of councils adopted TUSC's policy – opposing all cuts to jobs, services, pay and conditions in the first instance by using reserves and prudential borrowing powers, while mobilising a mass cam-

paign around a budget that meets the needs of the local community and demands that the government makes up the shortfall – the Con-Dems would be forced to retreat.

Even one councillor in each local authority taking a stand, if they used their position in the council chamber to appeal to those outside, could give confidence to trade unionists and community campaigners to fight.

This session will hear from the TUSC-supporting Walsall councillor Pete Smith. Also speaking is the TUSC candidate in May's Liverpool mayoral election, Tony Mulhearn, one of the ‘Liverpool 47’ councillors who in the mid-1980s defied the Thatcher government and won lasting gains for the city with such a strategy.

Reviewing TUSC's structures

The final conference session will discuss how TUSC's structures need to develop.

Earlier this year the TUSC national steering committee established a working group ‘commission’ as part of a review of TUSC's structures. An initial report will be presented at the conference, with plans for the discussion to continue.

TUSC was established in January 2010 and has seen a greater level of trade union leadership and involvement than any other ‘comparator’ organisation. But the RMT is the only trade union formally represented on the TUSC steering committee, presently the final representative body of the coalition at a national level.

There are unions where there is clear support for TUSC but which have political funds that currently can not be constitutionally used to finance parties – or where the union is affiliated to Labour – where formal participation in TUSC by official union bodies is just not possible at this point.

Steering committee

The present structure of TUSC tries to overcome this problem by enshrining the participation of named leading trade unionists on the TUSC national steering committee in a personal capacity, with provisions to replicate this in local steering committees or branches.

Decisions are taken only on a consensus basis. This federal approach has worked well to date, with no organisation or trade unionist involved feeling that they have been ‘bounced’ into lending their name to an action taking place under the banner of TUSC.

However it is not an ideal arrangement as TUSC develops in the future. One dilemma is how to involve individual supporters of TUSC who are not leading trade unionists or members of the Socialist Party or the Socialist Workers Party (who both have representation on the steering committee), while not diluting

the role of the trade unions as currently enshrined.

The TUSC Independent Socialists Network was established to give representation on the steering committee for individual supporters of TUSC but further development is necessary, for example, establishing a representative basis for a decision-making national conference.

But it is wrong to say, as some submissions to the Reviewing TUSC's Structures discussion imply, that TUSC is ‘narrow’ – out of 384 applications to be a TUSC candidate since 2010 only two have been turned down – or ‘undemocratic’. What is involved here are different methods of organisation.

It is worth recalling that ex-Labour deputy leader John Prescott saw the ‘one member, one vote’ constitutional changes which neutered the unions' role in the Labour Party as more significant in changing Labour than the abolition of its socialist ‘Clause Four’. These issues need to be patiently discussed, and the TUSC steering committee is committed to doing that.

In fact, the federal character of TUSC and its consensus method guarantees unity with equal rights to both the organisations and the serious trade union figures involved, not the domination of one group over others. And the steering committee has sought to widen the socialist organisations participating, where they represent some forces, approaching both the Communist Party of Britain, the main force behind the Morning Star newspaper, and Respect.

But these discussions should not distract from what hopefully will be the focus of the conference. That is, as the RMT argues, to work out how to secure “widespread trade union support for TUSC”, which can “provide a nucleus” for “the hard, long-term task of rebuilding political representation for working class people and communities” in the harshest period for workers since the depression-wracked 1930s.

NHS under attack

STOP THE CLOSURES, STOP THE CUTS

Steve Wootton and Robin Clapp

Two Bristol health trusts are pursuing a 'money-saving' merger, it has been revealed. One of the most startling proposals would be the closure of the central A&E unit in the Bristol Royal Infirmary (BRI), leaving a city of over 500,000 people with just one emergency facility at Southmead.

Minor injuries units would be expected to cope with any overflows. This would be madness unleashed, catastrophic in its consequences for patients and staff alike.

This comes as 20 of the South West health trusts have formed a consortium to drive down NHS workers' pay and conditions. And in one of the Bristol trusts, the local press has announced that 1,000 workers are now on 'zero-hour' contracts.

None of these crude cuts were in the Bristol Health Services Plan that went out for consultation a few years ago.

It trumpeted the launch of two Private Finance Initiative (PFI) projects; the building of Hengrove Community hospital and the redevelopment of Southmead hospital, and the concurrent effective closing of Bristol's third hospital at Frenchay.

PFI schemes, expanded under the Con-Dems and Labour before them, must be paid for, over and over

again by the public. It is this that in part lies behind the employer's attempts to cut services and attack the workforce. It is estimated that the initial cost of the Southmead PFI is to be £627 million, but over 30 years the NHS will pay £2.1 billion!

Financial advisors Operis reported: "The construction contract is valued at approximately £430 million, plus an additional £20 million in advance works."

Over a 30-year concession period, the construction and maintenance group also expects to earn a further £170 million for facilities management and lifecycle maintenance services."

£170 million would fund vital NHS services across Bristol for a 30-year period. Looks like it could instead be going to the private sector as profit!

Going bust?

It is clear that the Southmead PFI deal is unwieldy and this lies behind the attempt to seek a merger with the BRI trust. So could the Southmead project go bust?

Already the South London health-care trust has effectively gone bankrupt due to PFI which costs the trust £1 million a week.

The coalition government, faced with the potential financial time bomb that is PFI has decided to embark on a review of its use. But existing PFIs will not be included or re-



PFI schemes have drained NHS budgets of vital resources photo Paul Mattsson

negotiated. The lawyers' fees alone would be exorbitant.

New health minister Jeremy Hunt might be smiling now, having so far ridden out Murdochgate.

But he's about to learn what was

meant by a former Tory chancellor who said, 'the NHS is the closest thing the British have to a religion.'

The trade unions and entire communities must rally to the defence of our imperilled hospitals which are

being dismantled daily. The battle is on and the task is to link all these local struggles together around co-ordinated national industrial action and the urgent calling of a 24-hour general strike.

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!