



Tories admit...

CUTS DON'T WORK



**But we'll
carry on
regardless**

Chancellor Osborne has had to admit the humiliating truth – his policies to revive the British economy aren't working. But his solution is to carry on with more of the same – make the working class pay more and do nothing about his tax-dodging, multimillionaire friends.

Councils across the country are cutting jobs and services. Now Osborne's autumn statement is rubbing salt into those wounds. It carries measures which will hit the poor and the most vulnerable the hardest. In fact everybody except the super-rich is facing rising bills and falling wages, as well as job insecurity and a bleak future.

We're definitely not 'all in this together'.

Big tax-avoiding companies like Starbucks, Amazon and Google are embarrassed that their antics have been exposed. It's not good PR. But they know that the chancellor will generally leave them alone, along with his rich chums.

After all it was Osborne who cut £3 billion from the tax office HMRC's budget in October 2010. This included axing 10,000 jobs.

When you look at this alongside the scandal of MPs still with their snouts buried in the expenses trough, it's no wonder that workers are fighting back.

The call for co-ordinated action against the cuts, low pay and the Con-Dem's austerity agenda in general is gaining support.

For example Unison's Scottish council has voted unanimously to instruct the union to "immediately take the necessary steps to promote with all STUC affiliated unions the need for a co-ordinated industrial action strategy, beginning with a one-day strike across Scotland."

Brian Smith, Glasgow city branch secretary and a member of Socialist Party Scotland explained that the trade unions "must step-up our campaign to defend wages, jobs, pensions and services by organising co-ordinated strike action across all sectors of the economy. At a time when Unison members are facing yet more pay cuts, further attacks on pensions and tens of thousands of jobs losses its clear the Con-Dem government will not stop unless they are forced back. A 24-hour general strike must be organised urgently to stop these attacks."

More on page 2

Failing coalition can be beaten

The National Shop Stewards Network has organised a lobby of the TUC on 11 December to call on the TUC to name the date for a 24-hour general strike. To support this demand, see www.shopstewards.net and get a copy of the model resolution.



Scottish Unison unanimously backs one-day general strike

Socialist Party Scotland reporters.

All 200 delegates representing 160,000 Unison members working in local government, health, education etc have unanimously supported a motion from the Glasgow city branch calling for a coordinated industrial action strategy, beginning with a one-day strike across Scotland.

The motion also calls on the Scottish TUC to coordinate the one-day strike in Scotland with action by

trade unions across the UK.

This needs to be repeated in other unions to force the STUC to name the day for a one-day strike of all affiliated unions as early as practical in 2013.

There is no shortage of issues that unions can ballot on. The Scottish National Party (SNP) government has imposed a second year of pension contribution increases for 250,000 workers in the NHS, police, fire service and the civil service. CoSLA, the local government employer dominated by Labour and SNP

politicians, offered a miserly 1% pay rise for 2013/14. This fourth year of effective pay cuts would mean local government workers will have seen a 16% drop in income since 2009.

Unison's Scottish local government conference agreed to go back to the employer telling them the offer is "unacceptable". A recall conference will be held in January where a strategy to reject the 1% and a ballot for industrial action will be debated.

The key role played by Socialist Party Scotland members in formu-

lating a fighting policy against austerity was clear from both conferences. A special bulletin for both events calling for a 24-hour general strike, a fighting policy on pay and highlighting the recent victory of the witch-hunted Unison Four were enthusiastically received.

The outcome of these important conferences also indicates the mood and desire for effective action by the Unison membership in Scotland against the savage attacks members face every day.

Yorkshire NSSN plans for future battles

The Yorkshire Shop Stewards Network conference held in Leeds on 24 November was attended by 45 delegates from 14 different trade unions from Hull, Scunthorpe, Sheffield, York, Harrogate and West Yorkshire.

The theme of the day was "fighting cuts and privatisation, build for a one-day general strike. Bring down the Con-Dem government".

Andrea Busfield, a striking medical secretary from Mid Yorks NHS Trust opened the conference with an inspiring speech about how the mainly women admin and clerical workers are fighting management plans to cut their pay by £1,700-£2,800 a year.

Other speakers included Ian Bell, Unite shop steward for electricians from BP Saltend, Hull, who recounted the Sparks battle against the "Scabby Seven" employers over the pay-cutting Besna agreement. "I'm more used to speaking in a car park, or on a hill or fence in front of 2-300 angry bears" he joked

Chris Skidmore, the president of Yorkshire area NUM, said that 540 miners faced redundancy with the

closure of Maltby pit. He recounted his own experiences at the Battle of Orgreave and the criminalisation of NUM strikers ever since. He said of the Labour government: "13 years, you can count on one hand what they did for us, it's a bloody disgrace."

Richard Chamberlain, the Leeds branch chair of the prison officers' union POA, "also known to the Tories as those buggers that went on strike even though it's illegal." He explained why the POA had proposed the motion at the TUC conference calling for consideration of a one day general strike.

National chair of the NSSN Rob Williams pulled together all the strands of the conference speeches by calling on the TUC to name the day for a 24-hour general strike, co-ordinating the public sector with private sector disputes.

Kevin Pattison, West Yorks CWU and Yorkshire rep on the NSSN steering committee, concluded the conference by explaining the need to develop the Shop Stewards Network in Yorkshire, and ten delegates volunteered to sit on a regional steering committee.

RMT cleaners: 'Prices are going up - but we get nothing extra'



Strikers at Newcastle Central station photo Elaine Brunskill

Elaine Brunskill

Train cleaners from Churchill and ISS, rail union RMT members, have taken further co-ordinated strike action against their unscrupulous bosses.

At Newcastle Central station strikers got a good reception. Transport users stopped to say they thought it was a disgrace that big businesses were giving massive bonuses out and evading taxes, while workers, such as the striking cleaners, were on the minimum wage.

One of the Churchill cleaners told the Socialist: "This is our ninth day of strike action. We're co-ordinating the action with workers from cleaning and security companies.

"It will culminate in a lobby of parliament on 11 December, where RMT general secretary Bob Crow and the RMT's parliamentary group convenor, John MacDonnell will be speaking."

The cleaner went on to say a north-east Labour MP had: "suggested we go to ACAS. I said the RMT don't do ACAS."

The cleaner told us of Churchill's shenanigans: "They originally offered double time to all staff working bank holidays.

Then they said if we wanted an increase in our basic pay they would give us an extra 5p an hour, but only if we received single time rather than double

time for bank holidays. We would lose out by this supposed offer!"

"Then they said this was their final offer - but they always say this until the next offer."

For ISS cleaners this was their fifth day of strike action. One of the ISS strikers commented: "We still have no answers. We're on £6.19 an hour, the minimum wage. The only time we get a pay increase is when the minimum wage goes up. There's workers on the picket line who've been working here for 8 or 9 years on the minimum wage. Prices are going up - but we get nothing extra."

The ISS cleaner ended by saying: "The company have posted up huge profits. They thanked us and asked us to keep up the good work. This was like a kick in the teeth."

The co-ordinated strike action of ISS and Churchill's has given the cleaners the chance to share their experience of fighting worsening conditions and highlight's the necessity of stepping up action against scrooge bosses.

• RMT members working for Carlisle on the Trans Pennine Express (TPE) joined the action. They held successful protests outside the TPE offices in Manchester and at Warrington Central station.
Hugh Caffrey and Adam Hemsley

In brief

All-out Christmas strike

After taking over 30 days of strike action over the summer, 20+ re-cycling workers, working at Sheffield's five Dump-it sites, thought they had secured an agreement to restore their working hours. The GMB trade union members had their hours slashed by the Labour council, Veolia and Sova. Peter Davies, of the GMB union said: "The agreement reached has been broken. We had a deal for Sova to handle a contract to recycle bulky waste which would have provided extra work. Staff would have been close to full-time hours over winter but it has been delayed and we do not know when the extra work will start. "Our members' hours have been cut to 27 per week, which is not enough to live on. "Sova have broken the agreement so we do not need to ballot to go on strike again." So the workers have announced that they will start indefinite strike action from 22 December.

Coventry cuts

Workers at Coventry city council have been hit by a sledgehammer blow with news that an extra 600 jobs are going to be cut over the next three years. The Labour administration gave unions just 45 minutes notice that the email announcing the cuts was going out. The council say they have no choice. But the choice is simple - which side are you on? The Con-Dems, or your own workforce and the people of Coventry. If they refused to implement the cuts they would get massive support from across the city and further afield. They could set a budget that meets the needs of the people of Coventry, as part of mass campaign involving unions, service users, all Coventry people, to demand more money from central government. Linking up with other local authorities, the government could be forced in to granting more resources to the city. Locally the unions, Unison, GMB, and Unite, with the teaching unions, need to co-ordinate to discuss 'battle plans', and a firm response to these attacks. If the council refuse to back down then the unions need to prepare for a programme of industrial action. This is looking increasingly like what it will come to.

A Unison steward

PCS protests

Members of the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) protested outside their workplaces on 30 November, against the government's attacks on their working conditions. At the same time there was a 24-hour strike by the 8,000 PCS members in the Department for Transport against cuts and privatisation.

Unison witch-hunt

In light of their previous climb-down on the witch-hunt, Unison have now agreed to drop a second disciplinary case they have had pending for a year and a half against Glenn Kelly.

Website

For more on these issues, see the Socialist Party's website: www.socialistparty.org.uk.

Nothing to lose - Tesco drivers vote for indefinite strike

Alistair Tice

180 Tesco drivers, members of Unite the union, at the supermarket giant's distribution hub in Doncaster have announced an indefinite strike from 7 December.

They have voted to reject the latest "completely unsatisfactory" offer to settle a long-running dispute.

Having already taken eight days of strike action, a planned four-day strike was suspended to allow talks with conciliation service ACAS.

But conditions attached to the company's offer would mean substantial cuts to drivers' redundancy terms and their chances of re-employment.

In August, Tesco, not content with £3.8 billion profit last year, transferred their Doncaster transport workforce to Eddie Stobart Ltd (ESL) to cut costs.

Then ESL, whose own drivers are on £2.50 an hour less than the Tesco drivers, issued notice of termination of employment on 5 September. There was no promise that the drivers will be re-employed once the 90

days are up.

So the Tesco drivers feel they have nothing to lose now by going on all-out strike and hitting Tesco hard in its busiest Christmas period.

ESL claim that it can service the Doncaster distribution centre using its existing network of drivers and vehicles is untrue.

During the earlier strikes ESL had to bring in agency and scab drivers.

As well as strong picketing, the drivers will leaflet customers at Tesco stores and hold a march into Doncaster.

And the tank, which appeared on the picket line last month, is expected to be seen again!

A victory for the Tesco drivers could be vital in stopping the 'race to the bottom' that Tesco and other big businesses are trying to drive through.

These workers need the support of the whole trade union movement.

•Please send messages of support to the Unite shop steward Trevor Cheetham: lynncheetham@yahoo.co.uk

Workfare schemes failing

We need real job creation

James Ivens

We will never be good enough. Millions strong and most of us young, all of us ready to work. We will never be good enough for Iain Duncan Smith.

Results for year one of the coalition's welfare-to-work scheme arrived last week. The targets were not overly ambitious. Only 5.5% on placements needed to find jobs. They only needed to keep them for six months. And with only 3.5% making it, they couldn't even manage that.

But Iain Duncan Smith forgives! He explained to the BBC: "how difficult that is for people who have been, you know, scarred by being out of work for a long time." Perhaps it would be easier, Iain, if you weren't filling positions with unpaid placements. Workfare puts long-term jobseekers in workplaces.

Adding to the problem

Inflation has driven up living costs with no real pay increase. Even so, poverty wages still mean more than the dole. But if you're on workfare, you're not paid wages. You are 'paid' your dole. If you decline? Your dole is withdrawn. This is slave labour.

The government's goal is giving the jobless "skills" and "experience" to make them more employable. This focus on our supposed failings is a transparent ploy to shift the blame.

The screamingly obvious reality



photo Senan

is there are more jobseekers than vacancies. A child could see that letting employers take unpaid labour means still fewer paid jobs.

Duncan Smith points to improved figures for June and July. These were the months of the Jubilee and Olympics. We'll just have those every year, shall we?

And most of those taking part have skills well beyond the shelf stacking and till operating offered. Limited only to these skills, the government is treating us as nothing more than workfare lackeys.

The pathetic 'achievement' of 3.5% of those on workfare finding six months' work is also questionable. Six months is not a career. And

10.5% of the workforce, like me, is "underemployed" - not working enough hours to make ends meet.

While the bosses' politicians point the finger at workers, Serco, A4e and others grow fat on the proceeds of enforcing workfare scams. This programme is a naked ideological assault from head to Tory toe.

The Socialist Party says scrap slave labour. Use the money to invest in real jobs for all on a living wage - for life, not just six months. For free education, proper training and decent benefits with no compulsion.

Unemployed and working for free? We're more than good enough. It's Iain's class that's holding us down.

Victory for teachers strike

After revelations that the academies programme has run up a £1 billion overspend, which other schools are now being asked to pay for, anger against the government's flagship education policy is growing.

Academies allow private companies to take over the running of schools. A huge public robbery has taken place. Billions of pounds worth of public assets - schools buildings, land and so on - have been handed to the private sector.

It is also increasingly evident that academies can be used to attack teachers' pay, working conditions and union rights. But as this report from Stratford Academy in east London shows, education workers, with support from others affected and from communities, can win battles against academies.

After protracted strike action, teachers at Stratford Academy went back to the classroom with their heads held high, winning big concessions from the head teacher and governors.

The strike was triggered by the Academy management's outrageous demand that staff must individually promise not to take part in the NUT and NASUWT's joint action campaign against excessive workloads, or have 15% of their wages docked every month.

The staff refused to submit to these demands and took strike action on 25 October, followed by 8 more days of strikes over the next three weeks. The strikes and parents' support for teachers left management with no option but to negotiate.

After talks on 27 November, the unions and school produced a joint

one sentence statement: "Following constructive talks facilitated by ACAS, all sides have agreed to a process of further discussions to deal with outstanding issues".

The strike was suspended and teachers at Stratford will be reintroducing their unions' joint national action (short of strike action) in opposition to excessive workloads. Last week teachers' docked wages were returned.

The future

The striking teachers also demanded all threats of future wage cuts were dropped and that guarantees would be given about classroom observations and other workload issues. Given the growing militancy of striking teachers, with parents' backing, it is clear that rank and file

teachers would only suspend the strike if their main demands were met.

Although the teachers' dispute now appears to be getting resolved to teachers' satisfaction, areas of concern for both teachers and parents remain, in particular the heavy-handed management culture and unaccountable governors.

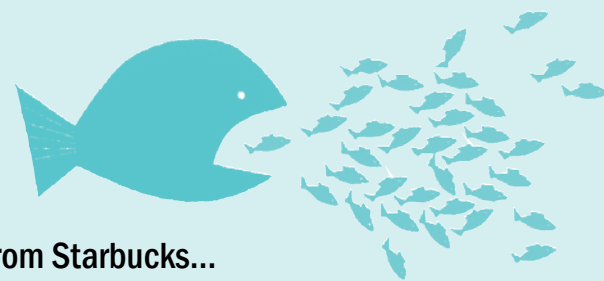
On 27 November, the chair of the governors, John Swallow, wrote to Niall Mulholland, co-ordinator of the Stratford Concerned Parents, stating the governors refuse to meet Niall.

Swallow alleged that Niall "disrupted" a parents meeting organised by the head. In truth, up to 200 parents revolted against the actions of the senior management that provoked the strike. Swallow insulted other parents by asserting that he "would not want a repeat" of a meeting between a Concerned Parents' delegation and senior staff.

The governors' chair and the head, licking their wounds, have no intention of being held accountable to the parents. But Stratford Academy Concerned Parents are committed to campaigning for real representation and accountability and working closely with the teachers' unions. This will include resolute opposition to any attempts by management to victimise either parents or teachers.

East London Socialist Party members

Them...



Hot air from Starbucks...

The ever-generous Starbucks has agreed to carry out a review of whether it maybe possible, at some point, to pay a little more tax. The main reason being that the company recognises the fury their customers feel at multi-billion Starbucks avoiding its tax bill while they're struggling to get by. Yet they still claim they are paying the right amount. Funny that they might decide to pay more then. It seems they've thought of other ways to scrimp and save though - 7,000 of the companies' staff have been forced to sign new contracts including cuts to paid lunch breaks, sick leave and maternity benefits.

...and the politicians

Eyebrows must be raised when George 'the slasher' Osborne says he's going to cut down on tax avoidance by rich individuals and wealthy multinationals. On average, each Revenue and Customs (HMRC) tax inspector brings in £600,000 a year. Fat cat tax dodgers use complex schemes developed by greasy palmed accountants to avoid paying tax on their lavish profits. Osborne's latest fool proof plan applies the same logic as his scorched

pared to the £1.2 million held by the top 10%. But the biggest gap between rich and poor is in pensions savings - the top 10% have pension savings averaging £742,000 - compared to just £4,000 savings for the poorest 50%.

Financially stretched

A poll by the Which? consumer organisation has shown what was already becoming clear. Millions of people are

1.5m
households
have had to
use unplanned
overdrafts or pay
day loans

financially struggling. 10% have defaulted on a loan, credit card or housing payment. 1.5 million households have had to use unplanned overdrafts or pay day loans. With Osborne promising more cuts in his spending review and admitting that the attacks will continue into the foreseeable future, only more people will be pushed to breaking point.

10,000
jobs set to be cut
from HMRC by
2015

earth cuts agenda. HMRC will have 10,000 of its jobs cut by 2015, unless we stand up and fight against it.

Ian Pattison

Wealth gap

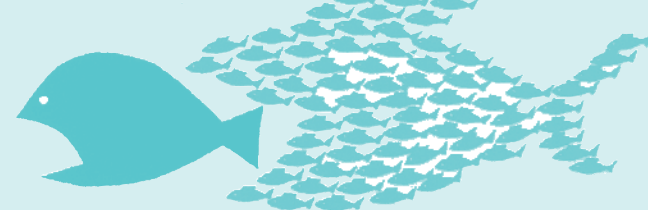
A report by the Office for National Statistics has further shown the concentration of wealth in society. The richest 10% of the population in Britain own 40% of the wealth. They are 850 times as rich as the poorest 10%. The bottom 50% of households have just £4,400 of cash, property and pensions com-

Student suicides

Huge debt from extortionate fees, crippling housing costs, high graduate unemployment, cuts to courses and less and less contact time with lecturers. It's depressingly understandable that between 2007 and 2011, as the economic crisis bit, student suicides rose by 36% among male students and almost doubled among female students. The pressure of juggling university work with part-time work to get by, all the while fighting to maintain decent grades to make your thousands of pounds of debt worth it, mean that for the majority of students 'university' means depression and stress. Gone is the ideal of university being about learning, life experience and finding meaningful employment.

Suzanne Beishon

...& Us



Have you got news for the 'fishes'? Email: editors@socialistparty.org.uk

What we heard

"We dream of strikes". These were the exact words spoken by a London street cleaner when told about the NSSN campaign for a 24-hour general strike. He had lived through privatisation of street cleaning service and could see exactly what it meant - worse pay, conditions and rights.

He was frustrated not to see more Unison activity to unite the multi-ethnic workforce in action. But he also said that now Polish workers like him have decided that this is their home - they must be prepared to fight for their rights.

Emma Smith



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The rotten establishment

Just as arrogant bankers flaunted their wealth while they helped crash the economy, so establishment politicians, press barons and some police have had their arrogance and contempt for 'the plebs' - the mass of working people in Britain - revealed in a seemingly ceaseless series of revelations of corruption and abuse of power.

From hacking, to Hillsborough, to blacklisting and blatant robbing of the public, Britain's establishment are spoilt rotten by power, and working people are getting sick of it.

Leveson report will not end abuse

Even Leveson's tame report exposed the rotten and corrupt relationships between different parts of the British state's establishment. Appalling abuses took place with impunity as press, politicians and senior police enjoyed cosy relationships.

The media is now full of debate about a 'free press'. But we don't have a free press! Do ordinary people own our big newspapers? Of course not. Rich people do, and they do it to buy power and influence.

Murdoch owns four papers and satellite TV. The press barons are part of the ruling establishment and use their media to defend their rotten system, a system founded on the wealth of a few and

impoverishment of the many.

They are the image of George Orwell's 'trash' media from "1984". Poisoning people and setting one group against the other to deflect the flak from themselves.

Leveson hoped his report would be accepted by all three political parties. That in itself indicates its timidity. It is little more than a beefed up version of what exists and allowed such abuses in the first place. After the experience of toothless watchdogs like gas price regulator, OfGem, who'd imagine OfHack would be any more effective? However, media barons are demanding that they police the press, and there is a serious attempt to bury his report by them and many politicians.



Lord Leveson. His report irritated the media barons but failed to challenge their dominance

Leveson whitewashes press, police and the political establishment

How do socialists see it? Dave Reid from the Socialist Party Wales, gives a socialist view.

Lord Justice Leveson's report castigated the activities of the press but, like most judicial inquiries, brushed over the corruption of important elements of the capitalist establishment like the police and politicians. Like the inquiries of Lord Widgery and Lord Justice Taylor into the Bloody Sunday massacre in Derry and the Hillsborough disaster, Leveson absolved the representatives of the ruling class.

His report disregarded the exposure of corruption of police officers by the press, dismissing them with an eye-rubbing "I have not seen any evidence to suggest that corruption by the press is a widespread problem in relation to the police."

That statement in itself discredits

the whole report.

And most workers would balk at his belief that there was "no credible evidence of actual bias" in favour of Murdoch's bid for Sky TV by former culture secretary Jeremy Hunt.

The report's main conclusion, that there should be some mild statutory controls established to rein in the worst excesses of the tabloid press, has split the Con-Dem government and raised the possibility that Cameron could be defeated in the House of Commons.

But despite the issue widening fissures in the government and the justifiable outrage at the sickening activities of the tabloid media, socialists and trade unionists should oppose Leveson's call for state regulation of the press. Instead we

should demand a much more radical democratic public control of the means of press communication and the media in general.

The press was called the "fourth estate" by the 18th century conservative Edmund Burke. It has effectively a quasi-constitutional role in acting as a check on the activities of the main wings of the state but also to defend them against challenges to their monopoly of power.

The capitalist class in Britain has long protected this institution as its exclusive preserve. Like other state institutions that govern Britain, working class people have virtually no influence on how the press's power is exercised. The mass circulation press is 100% owned by powerful capitalist interests, referred to as "press barons" - itself an indication of their status.

Media magnates support one pro-market party or the other, usually the Tories. So when they and the Tories wail about the threats to "freedom of the press" they are really defending the free operation of the Tory press to act as the fourth estate in the interests of the wider capitalist class, fighting any threats to their interests. Charlotte Church correctly dubbed it as "corporate speech, not free speech" on Question Time.

While people are actually being imprisoned in this country for statements made on the social media, mainstream newspapers can print scurrilous attacks on labour movement organisations and individuals with impunity.



'Laugh out loud' Cameron

they could be more of a burden on the smaller papers funded by the pennies and the pounds of working class people than the wealthy corporate press.

The political party registration system, for example, was set up in response to the corruption of the pro-capitalist parties in the 1990s, but its effect has been mainly to hamper the activities of left and workers' political parties.

The Socialist Party was forbidden on spurious grounds from even registering as a party that can stand for election by the Party Registrar, while corrupt practices within the main parties continue behind the scenes.

Question of ownership

Instead, a much more radical democratisation of the press must be campaigned for.

An independent inquiry into the activities of the press should be established by the trade union movement, involving representatives of victims of the press like the Hillsborough Families Campaign, the families phone-hacked and others who have been harassed like Tommy Sheridan as well as the NUJ and media unions.

And socialists must campaign for a real free press. For the resources of the press corporations to be taken out of the hands of the press barons and opened up to reflect the views and needs of the 99% of the population not just the interests and the whims of the top 1% through public control of the means of publication.



Rupert Murdoch - major shareholder of UK government plc?

– of a rotten system

MPs: Still at the trough



Employment minister Mark Hoban - cushioned from recession

As well as an arrangement where MPs rent houses from each other -which helps them get their hands on a nice London property- MPs are still suffering from 'expenses dependency'.

Money they paid back when public pressure put the heat on them has since often been quietly refunded.

Sir John Butterfill got £15,000 back after returning money used to help run his servants' quarters. Cheryl Gillan, former Welsh secretary, was refunded £4.47 for pet food. (What's shocking is that they even bother to claim it!)

Employment minister Mark Hoban said the "unemployed have taken benefits for granted as a way of life and must roll up their sleeves and stop playing the system".

Is that the same Hoban who claimed £35 for a toilet roll holder, £100 for a chrome shower rack and £79 for four silk cushion covers at his second home?

These real 'benefit dependents' will vote soon to cut the money of many of the poorest people in Britain. The trouble is they think everybody else is as rotten as they are.

Con-Dem coalition in crisis

Leveson:

The enquiry into press abuse has provoked further divisions in the Con-Dem coalition. Nick Clegg, desperately seeking to create distance from his Tory partners spoke in opposition to Cameron's response.

Can their coalition survive until 2015? If met by a determined trade union and workers' movement, then no. But faced with a Labour opposition that agrees with cuts they may still be able to drag on.

Economic failure:

The coalition's austerity programme is miserably failing. It is pushing millions out of work or nearer to poverty.

The economy is grinding to a halt, yet the deficit is not reducing. They now admit the pain will go on for another decade!

All that unites the coalition is agreement that working people must be made to pay for the crisis.

So, in his budget Osborne will impose more cuts and job losses

and allow real wages to decline further while trying to pass the blame onto the unemployed. He will offer a sop of a weak measure against the wealthy to try to avoid escalating the outrage already felt by people.

Byelections: Voters reject establishment

It was a disaster for the coalition as they were hammered in the recent three byelections in Rotherham, Middlesbrough and Croydon North.

In shocking results, Tory votes plummeted leaving them with a second, fourth and fifth place, almost losing two deposits. The Liberals suffered even more for being the Tories' lapdogs. Coming third, fourth and eighth!

They did lose two deposits and saw their share of the vote over the last six by elections fall from 19% to 7%. They fell behind Ukip who replaced them as the main protest vote recipient. Many LibDems in the Coalition 'jungle' must think: 'I'm a Liberal - get me out of here!'

Right wing Tories are now urging their party to do a deal with Ukip to avoid electoral Armageddon in two years time. Fear of defeat has led to the Tories planning to loot state assets even faster proposing ever more ridiculous privatisations.

In a wider comment on the political establishment, there was little enthusiasm for the opposition either. Labour leaders had repeated their intention to continue Con-Dem cuts.

Labour won all three byelections but on small turnouts, meaning only roughly 16% of the possible electorate felt motivated enough to trust them to combat the Con-Dems.

As Tories cuddle Ukip, so Labour are wooing the Liberals. There's not much sign of political principle around! It makes you wonder if they all think the same, why do they exist?

The job of Socialists in the years ahead is to replace the disillusionment felt by millions with a view of how we can change things.

For TUSC campaign report and more on Ukip see page 10



photo Paul Mattsson

Employers' illegal blacklists

The scandal of workers being black-listed merely for being trade unionists or even for just raising health and safety concerns has deepened in recent days.

Ian Kerr, the only person to have been convicted, gave evidence to parliament.

Kerr was Chief Executive of the Consulting association which coordinated blacklisting on behalf of 44

of the largest construction firms in the UK.

Many workers have had their lives ruined by blacklisting. Kerr admitted how widespread it was.

Seasoned trade unionists may not have been too surprised at bosses' dirty tricks, but to find that just being professional and giving safety advice on buildings etc must have been a shock to many workers.

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what we think

System change needed

Don't throw things at the telly - fight back!

Working people face attacks on their wages, jobs, services or benefits.

These attacks will be decided by often wealthy MPs still found to be milking their expenses. They preside over a society that more and more resembles the books of Charles Dickens. Where young female students are encouraged to sell sex for sky high tuition fees or a pensioner starves in a shed after being evicted from his house.

Blacklisting of workers, MPs' expenses and phone hacking abuses have been revealed. But when their dirty hands are exposed they try to cover up as the scandal of Hillsborough revealed. In this world full of new Mr Bumbles, Fagins and an utterly corrupt establishment it's little wonder that people are increasingly disillusioned.

This was reflected in record low voter turnouts for police commissioner elections of only

10% in many cities, which showed people's lack of faith in the system representing them in any way.

Governing parties were hammered in November's byelections. But Labour's victories didn't reflect huge enthusiasm for them, despite the hatred of the Coalition parties. Mass voter abstentions reflect a feeling that none of the establishment parties offer working class people a voice.

Britain's rulers are rotten and there's only one thing that unites them. Making us pay for their crisis and 'dividing and ruling' us to achieve that. They threw pensioners against students when fees rose, Private sector against public sector when they wanted to cut pensions, now they want everybody to blame benefit recipients.

But they can be fought. Scottish Unison's call for a one day strike across Scotland and

the UK is a clear call to action as is the refusal of councillors in Southampton to vote for cuts. Working people and youth must unite to fight back.

But we must go further than resisting attacks. Things are rotten for a reason. While the system that spawns such a corrupt elite continues, so will all the abuses, injustices and inequality.

The capitalist free market system demands we suffer and the politicians and press are merely the instruments of enforcing that.

Elite

They have had it all their own way for over 30 years and the result? The mother of all economic crises and a sick society, made more unbearable by their arrogance. When Leveson reported, Andy Coulson and Rebecca Brooks were appearing in court.

One or two of the elite may get rapped knuckles - don't bank on it - but as well as fighting every cut or injustice, the real answer is to change the system. If the super-rich 1% carry on owning the vast majority of the

wealth they will continue to pull the strings.

We need a voice. Imagine if there was a mass party that said what we all know - that cuts are just a way of making workers pay for the bankers' crisis. Such a party would oppose them. Imagine if that party was also part of the campaigns in workplaces and communities, if its leaders were workers, trade unionists, pensioners and young people.

A new mass workers' party will need a programme that shows how jobs, services and benefits could be paid for without making other working class people suffer. The Socialist points to the hoarded billions of the mega rich - an estimated £800 billion they hide away in bank accounts as they can see no easy route to a quick profit. What about a 50% levy on that as a start to pay for investment in jobs, homes and the NHS?

But fundamentally it's about ownership - and that means nationalisation of the banking system and also the taking back of all the privatised utilities and services that the 1% vultures are grabbing.

So don't waste energy shouting at the TV. Get involved instead.

SCOTLAND REFERENDUM WHAT SORT OF INDEPENDENCE SHOULD SOCIALISTS CAMPAIGN FOR?

The fallout from the world economic crisis, which has brought savage austerity for the majority in its wake, is also threatening the possible break-up of multi-nation states, including Spain, Belgium and Britain. These developments pose important questions for socialists. Philip Stott outlines the approach that the Socialist Party Scotland is taking towards the 2014 independence referendum in Scotland.

The 2014 referendum is going to take place against the backdrop of an unprecedented economic crisis. Tory Toff, David Cameron's Con-Dem government is attempting, and to a degree has already succeeded, in 'unleashing hell' against the working class, the poor, the unemployed and the disabled.

Now we are told the austerity programme of the Westminster government will go on and on. The Bank of England governor quietly declared in November that "the UK could be stuck in a low growth environment for years."

Millions of workers in Scotland and elsewhere in Britain have taken action in mass demonstrations and strikes, including the magnificent public sector shutdown on 30 November 2011. Internationally, general strikes – most recently in Spain, Portugal Greece and Italy – have emerged as a key weapon of working class struggle against the tsunami of austerity.

A yes vote

While campaigning for the building of a 24-hour general strike in Scotland (see front page) and throughout Britain, Socialist Party Scotland is also supporting a yes vote in the independence referendum in 2014.

However, we will also campaign to expose the utterly false outlook of the SNP leadership, and many on the left, who believe an independent capitalist Scotland would represent a significant step away from austerity and brutal cuts. This is ruled out unless decisive measures are taken against capitalism.

The inability of the bosses' system to develop the productive forces is creating a wasteland that only a democratic socialist planned economy can fundamentally resolve.

Our central demand, which we will champion in the referendum, is the need to fight for an independent socialist Scotland. This would form part of a voluntary socialist confederation with England, Wales and Ireland as a step to a socialist Europe.

The slogan of a socialist confederation is a crucial one as it sums up the idea of working class unity and cooperation, an essential counterweight to capitalist nationalism that seeks to divide the working class.

Programme

Our approach flows from the Marxist programme on the national question. While standing for the maximum unity of the working class of all nationalities, we also support the right of nations and national minorities to self-determination, up to and including, the right to form an independent state.

However, we don't always and in all circumstances support separation. A critical factor in weighing up what our demands should be is the existing political consciousness, in particular the outlook of the working class and young

people. In other words who is supporting independence and why?

In the late 1970s Militant – the forerunner of the Socialist Party – did not advocate independence for Scotland, which was then supported by only around 6% of the population. During the 1979 referendum for a Scottish assembly we called for a yes vote for devolution expressed in the slogan: "A socialist Britain with autonomy for Scotland."

Today that slogan would not take account of the changed consciousness of many working class people in Scotland. The democratic aspirations and outlook of the Scottish people have changed significantly since then.

Support for a Scottish parliament, and also independence, increased dramatically during the 1980s and 1990s; the consequence of the anti-working class Thatcher government, the hated poll tax and the mass de-industrialisation of Scotland.

The Tories were wiped out in the 1997 general election in Scotland. In the referendum of the same year on whether Scotland should have a devolved parliament, 70% voted yes with 60% backing a parliament having tax raising powers.

But the failures of the Scottish parliament to deliver for the majority of the Scottish people and the coming to power of another vicious anti-working class Tory government in Westminster, without legitimacy in Scotland, has added further fire under the cauldron of the national question.

The SNP's electoral victory in 2007, and in particular their crushing victory in 2011 has left the British ruling class with no choice but to accede to a referendum on Scottish independence.

Sensitive approach

Socialist Party Scotland takes an extremely sensitive approach towards workers and young people who support or are likely to support independence. There is a chasm of a difference between the outlook of a young person who will vote yes to independence in 2014, hoping that it would offer a way out of mass unemployment and poverty, and that of Scottish multi-millionaires like Tom Hunter and Brian Souter

who also back independence.

On the one side is the nationalism of the aspiring ruling elite – big business and the SNP leadership. They seek to establish an independent Scotland so that they can continue and deepen the exploitation of the working class as in other capitalist nations. On the other side is the nationalism of the working class who want to break free from plummeting living standards, poverty and brutal social cuts.

Our programme for the referendum therefore has a two-fold character. Firstly, to defend and articulate the democratic demands of currently around one million people, overwhelmingly working class, in Scotland who support independence. Secondly to build a campaign that raises the need to break with capitalism.

This means exposing remorselessly the nationalism of the SNP's leadership who see capitalist independence as a way of maintaining the grip of the capitalist elite on the throats of the majority.

Support for independence

Support for Scottish independence is highest among the working class and young people. In January 2012 a poll for the Scotsman newspaper found support for independence at 39% in Scotland as a whole.

However, among those aged 18 to 24 year-olds this rose to 45%. For those described as being from "deprived backgrounds" 58% backed independence as opposed to 27% for those from "affluent backgrounds".

If the referendum was held tomorrow it is most likely a majority would reject independence. However, it is possible that this can change in the run-up to 2014 as the economic and social crisis of capitalism deepens further.

The desperate situation facing the working class can add petrol to the flames of nationalism. The SNP leadership will attempt to argue that only the powers of independence offer a way out of Tory austerity. Although in reality the SNP's economic programme is not fundamentally different to that of the two Labour Party Eds – Miliband and Balls – who support cuts, but at a slower pace.



The 2014 independence referendum will bring into sharp focus the need for fighting socialist policies and a new mass working class party to implement them

Our programme for the referendum has a two-fold character. Firstly, to defend and articulate the democratic demands of around one million people, overwhelmingly working class, in Scotland who support independence. Secondly to build a campaign that raises the need to break with capitalism

Yes Scotland

The main pro-independence campaign – 'Yes Scotland' – is a top-down body dominated by the SNP. It also has the backing of the Greens and the rump of the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP). It organised a 10,000 strong demonstration in Edinburgh in September.

The character of Yes Scotland is illustrated by the fact that it has a CEO, Blair Jenkins, who was former head of news at BBC Scotland and STV. Scandalously, the SNP, Greens and the SSP have all tried to prevent well known socialist and Solidarity member Tommy Sheridan being involved in the campaign because he is a "controversial figure".

Yet, SNP leader Alex Salmond is able to invite the pariah of the western world Rupert Murdoch to his official residence for tea and biscuits without criticism!

Radical Independence Campaign

This campaign was set-up by the split-off from the Socialist Workers Party in Scotland and involves a range of academics and intellectuals grouped around the Scottish Left Review magazine and the Jimmy Reid Foundation.

RIC held a 700-plus strong conference in November attended by Greens, socialists and SNP activists and a layer of young people. However the not so-radical RIC explicitly stands for a capitalist independent Scotland. "What we want is a Nordic-style universal welfare state with a mixed economy model". A model which has been discarded by the ruling class in Sweden.

Most of the left organisations in Scotland are participating in either Yes Scotland and/or RIC but are promoting the idea that an independent Scotland would automatically be a 'progressive, more equal, less neoliberal society'.

SNP's two faces

At the Scottish National Party's conference in October, SNP leader and First Minister Alex Salmond set out his stall for a yes vote in the referendum by wooing the working class. "We face a Westminster government hell-bent on pulling our society apart at the seams. Austerity, a one-way street, with tax cuts for the rich and benefit cuts for the poorest, billions to be spent on new nuclear weapons while families struggle to heat their homes. What kind of brave new world is this? Now is the time for Scotland to seize a different future."

The SNP has replaced Labour as the largest party in Scotland both electorally and in terms of membership. The 2011 Scottish elections saw the SNP achieve an overall majority winning 53 of the 73 first-past-the-post constituencies, including a majority of the seats in the working class strongholds of Glasgow and West of Scotland.

With a relatively skilled populist leadership under the guidance of Alex Salmond, the SNP has partially and temporarily filled the vacuum that exists for a mass workers' party in Scotland.

While implementing the Con-Dem cuts to the letter on public spending they have also carried through some relative progressive measures, putting a certain distance between themselves and Labour. They have refused to implement the attacks on facility time for trade union reps announced by the Con-Dems, ended PFI/PPP privatisation schemes (by implementing their own PFI-lite alternative), scrapped tuition fees, introduced free prescriptions and frozen the council tax.

Meanwhile, Scottish Labour have moved even more decisively to the right, demanding an end to the "something for nothing culture" under the SNP in Scotland. Labour leader Johann Lamont has called for an end to free tuition fees, free prescriptions, free personal care and demanded council tax rises. Under these conditions the SNP and independence can seem the only option for many.

we will share a Queen, we will have a social union".

The SNP's vision for independence involves slashing taxes for the profit-hungry corporations, locking the country into a neoliberal currency union, maintaining the symbols of inequality like the undemocratic Royal Family and making Scotland a paid-up member of the imperialist, nuclear alliance of Nato.

These pro-capitalist policies and the cuts being carried out by the SNP in government will be unable to answer the doubts and hesitations that exist among significant sections of the working class about independence.

The SNP point to oil and gas reserves, as well as the potential for renewable energy to underpin the economy of an independent Scotland. Yet they would leave these key industries in the hands of multinational corporations with the vast majority of the resources salted away to line the pockets of the billionaires.

The 2014 independence referendum will bring into sharp focus the need for fighting socialist policies and a new mass working class party to implement them.

Unlike the majority of the left, Socialist Party Scotland is not prepared to dip our socialist banner.

Today and for many years more to come, savage austerity is all this system has to offer. The only alternative for the working class, young people and the poor is to build a mass movement against austerity – with an immediate 24-hour general strike as a first step. More fundamentally, we need a complete break with capitalism in the form of decisive socialist measures.

We raise our socialist programme in Yes Scotland and other pro-independence events, and we are also initiating with others the idea of a Trade Unionist and Socialist Campaign for the Independence Referendum. The campaign is based on promoting an independent working class voice. This campaign's founding conference will be held in March 2013.

Socialist Party Scotland says

● **Nationalise**, under democratic workers' control, the oil and gas industry and the renewable energy sector. This would release billions to invest in a massive programme of job creation and apprenticeships, to rebuild our public services and invest in a major housing programme

● **Bring the banks and finance sector into public ownership** under democratic working class control

● **Renationalise** gas, electricity, transport and the privatised sectors of the economy.

● **Tax the rich and big business.** Increase the minimum wage and end the attacks on welfare

● **No to Nato.** Trident and all weapons of mass destruction out of Scotland. Invest in socially useful jobs.

● **Abolish** all anti-trade union laws

● **Reverse the cuts.** For a Scottish government representing working people, the unemployed and the poor that defends jobs, wages, public services and pensions and refuses to make cuts to pay for the crisis

● **For a socialist plan of production** in an independent socialist Scotland as part of a voluntary confederation with England, Wales and Ireland as a step to a socialist Europe

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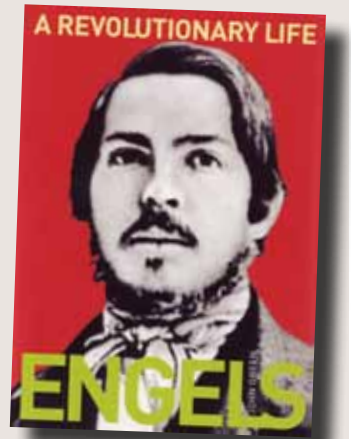
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● **World Perspectives** Peter Taaffe looks at the key events for 2012 and outlines the way forward for class struggle

● **Catalonia** As capitalist crisis deepens, issues of self-determination and workers unity come to the fore.

● **Hurricane Sandy** Class divides highlighted by storm

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Food banks without politics don't help

In a slightly shorter version of an article previously published on the Food Bankers' blog, Nancy Taaffe explains her severe misgivings about food banks.

Every Saturday the Anti-Cuts Union has a stall in Walthamstow campaigning against cuts. The Labour council has passed a budget taking £65 million away from local services. Children and young people's services have been decimated by cuts. I lost my long-time job in a library.

The three main political parties say there's no money but that's a lie. £750 billion is locked away in banks by the rich, who see no immediate way to make a profit so they sit on the money and let it collect interest. £120 billion is squirrelled away through tax evasion. 1,000 of Britain's richest people increased their wealth by £155 billion last year, enough to wipe out the nation's deficit overnight.

My local Food Bank runs a stall every Saturday next to the Anti-Cuts Union and asks the poor of Walthamstow to donate tins and toiletries to the destitute of Walthamstow. But we, the poor, shouldn't pay for a crisis we didn't create.

Food banks are often set up by well-intentioned people who want to help, but does a food bank without politics actually help? Poverty is not like a hurricane or a flood, it's man-made and it can be human-solved.

We regularly had protests outside the town hall, demanding that Labour councillors set a needs budget and reject cuts but they all voted for them. I stopped my local MP Stella Creasy (a big proponent of Food Banks) in the street (as I was losing my job) and asked her to make a public statement condemning cuts to libraries and children's services but she wouldn't.

Why? Because getting behind the consequence of cuts is far easier than fighting a pre-emptive battle... if you're a career politician. When three million public sector workers took industrial action in November 2011 for decent pensions to prevent



Lobbying Labour councillors photo Paul Mattsson

poverty in old age the same MP who stands behind the Food Bank stall wouldn't support them.

It seems to me if you're crushed by poverty then you get patronised and pitied. But if you stand up and assert yourself through your trade union then you get condemned. It's the hypocrisy I can't stand, the councillors who voted to sack me all support food banks.

Poverty

My Liverpool grandmother told me of the poverty her family endured in the 1930's, of picking up orange peel in the road to gnaw on to alleviate hunger pains. She also described the humiliation many mothers endured from "charitable organisations," standing in a cold church hall with children clawing at your skirts putting your case to the parish fathers why you should have money to survive.

Often these "parish fathers" were local businessmen and factory owners who paid poverty wages and were vicious if 'their' workers struck

for decent pay and decent working conditions. The working class rebellion after World War Two was a revolution against the humiliation of poor relief and welfare administration built on 'charity'.

If Food Banks got political and mobilised those they feed to get organised then I could support them. If, like the unemployed movements of the 30's, they stirred people up to fight for revolutionary change, I would get right behind them.

Oscar Wilde said: "We are often told that the poor are grateful for charity. Some of them are, no doubt, but the best... are never grateful. They are ungrateful, discontented, disobedient, and rebellious. They are quite right to be so. Charity they feel to be a ridiculously inadequate mode of partial restitution, or a sentimental dole, usually accompanied by some impertinent attempt on the part of the sentimentalist to tyrannise over their private lives...."

"Disobedience, in the eyes of anyone who has read history," he said, "is man's original virtue." Long live disobedience!

Challenging Jack Straw MP

In October, the Lancashire Telegraph (LT) serialised former Labour cabinet minister Jack Straw's memoirs. Peter Harris, one of six Labour Party members expelled from Straw's Blackburn constituency party, wrote this letter to the LT, challenging his version of the expulsion and witch-hunt of socialists in Blackburn.

Jack Straw in his autobiography records his recollections of the events surrounding the expulsions of six Blackburn Labour Party members in 1984 for supporting the ideas of the then "Militant" newspaper.

I agree with former Labour councillor Don Rishton (LT, October 9) that the expulsions from the Labour Party were there to ensure primarily that Jack Straw would not be de-selected as Labour's candidate.

I also want to point out that at no stage did I ever threaten any person in the Labour Party and did not turn up in 'commando boots' threatening the Labour Party chairman.

Yes, I did ask Eric Smith for the names of the General Management Committee delegates as they had received two 100-page documents with unsubstantiated criticisms of ourselves and our activities. But Blackburn Labour Party would not circulate a word of our reply!

The occupations of the six ex-



Jack Straw

pelled were a 'special needs' school-teacher, a trade union lecturer who has since received an MBE, a probation officer, a lawyer, a junior manager and an unemployed youth. And if such threatening activities were being carried out, why was no police action taken?

Those expelled were very active Labour Party members. I was the

delegate to the party annual conference.

Others included the Young Socialist secretary, the Women's Section secretary and the Anti-Racist chairperson.

These expulsions have to be seen in the wider political context of the time: the miners' strike, the battle by councils such as Liverpool to refuse to make cuts, and of crucial importance, the ideological argument going on in the Labour Party for its political direction.

Was it to become, as we and others on the left argued, a campaigning socialist party or a pale reflection of the liberals? We explained then that an attack on ourselves and our ideas was a pretext to attacks on the Left in general.

Unfortunately, those concerns have been borne out. The Labour Party now is another capitalist party incapable of defending and improving the living standards of ordinary working class people.

the Socialist postbag

Do you have something to say?

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Comedians' party?



UKIP leader Nigel Farage

The rising popularity and respectability of UKIP shows just how fed up with the mainstream political parties people must be. You would have to be pretty desperate to support a man who complains about the EU gravy train then claims £2 million in expenses. One Rotherham voter is quoted in The Guardian: "What d'you call him? Le Fage? I saw him on the telly. He should be a comedian." This is about right. But Labour's disgusting record of supporting cuts and lining their own pockets is unattractive to working class voters. The manufactured story about parents being unable to foster children because they are racist and this being linked to their UKIP membership played right into the hands of the UKIP comedians. If you listen for five minutes to Farage you realise that a UKIP/Conservative coalition would not be a laughing matter. More tax cuts for the rich and more welfare cuts for the 99%, all washed down with a dose of rage against immigrants. UKIP want Tory education minister Gove as leader - that's all you need to know!

Derek McMillan

Recipe for floods

During recent devastating floods in Britain government ministers boasted that flood defences have protected many properties. What these Tory politicians (and also representatives of the last Labour government) don't mention is that many more homes and agricultural land could have been spared flooding had the Environment Agency not had its budget repeatedly slashed over the years.



In October 2010, chancellor George Osborne cut spending on flood management by 17% for 2011, rising to a 23% cut by 2014-15. At the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) up to 8,000 jobs have been axed. Among the disappearing jobs are

people employed to clear debris, or call in the Environment Agency to remove obstacles, clear waterways and maintain river banks when they threaten to cause blockages. Some 9% of these frontline maintenance posts will have gone by 2015.

A combination of extreme weather events and budget-cutting government ministers seems a recipe for further flood disasters.

Simon Carter
east London

A tale of two unions

In the 1 December issue of the Economist, the paper praised the shop workers union Usdaw, labelling its partnership deal with Tesco as "a model of union-management concord". But Tesco, one of Britain's most profitable companies, have unilaterally ignored this same partnership deal several times this year over pension age and bonus payments amongst others. Of course the Economist is an ultra-free market magazine, supporting the government's austerity measures. It is no friend of trade unionists or of ordinary workers.

Interestingly, the article contrasts Usdaw's timid leadership with the rumours that PCS and Unite could merge in the future. They fear the country's biggest trade union having a militant union leadership that has seen the government make concessions over the summer and has been a champion of the call for a 24-hour general strike at the TUC.

PCS is a left-led union, with Socialist Party members a major part of that - if only retail workers could have a union leadership like that...

Dave Ingham

Rail safety risk



The RMT's picture of the broken rail

Another scandal has emerged over rail safety. The rail union RMT has released a picture of part of a railway line on the InterCity East Coast with a five inch gap in the track!

Apparently the gap had been identified as needing a repair but it took four days for anything to be done. Clearly a train could easily have been derailed on this busy line.

The government are desperate to reprivatise this line and they are obviously prepared to take risks over safety to keep the service going whilst they do this.

Once again the poison of privatisation and cost-cutting is putting human life at risk.

Margaret Graham
Walthamstow

November byelections Building an anti-cuts alternative

Dave Nellist, Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition chair, speaks to the Socialist

“November was an unusual month. You can wait a long time for a byelection and then six come along in one month. The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) contested three of the parliamentary byelections, getting 220 votes (1.3%) in Manchester Central, 277 (1.6%) in Middlesbrough and 281 (1.3%) in Rotherham. 1,412 (1.6%) votes were also obtained in the Bristol mayoral election, in which TUSC received some local media coverage.

Where there are many byelection candidates, with little serious media coverage for TUSC, and, as in Manchester, historic low turnouts, then TUSC votes at this stage are certainly not large enough to be challenging for seats. But that is not the only reason we are standing in elections.

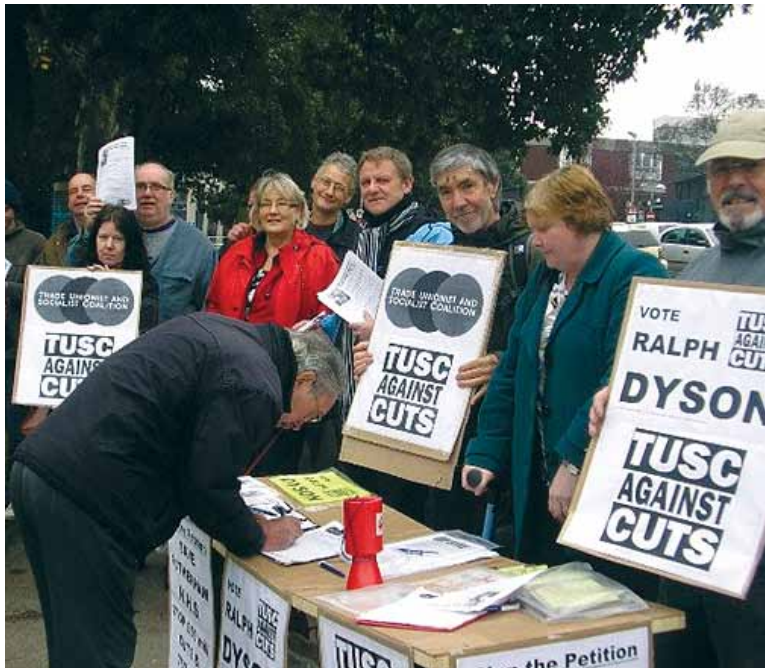
A petition, even of tens of thousands of signatures, doesn't automatically lead to a government body or a council changing its mind. Its real value is that it represents tens of thousands of conversations with people on why that issue was important.

In the same way, during the November election campaigns, thousands of conversations were held with people who, even if they didn't vote TUSC at this stage, at least now know that we exist and are trying to build an anti-austerity, anti-cuts electoral platform for working people

Respect

Respect did not materialise as a serious alternative, getting a lower vote than TUSC in Manchester, albeit with a higher vote than TUSC in Rotherham.

I was asked during November why TUSC and Respect were competing against each other. I made the point that we have written, over the summer, to Respect, but unfortunately were unable to get a reply



Once the big party limousines have gone, TUSC campaigners are still fighting the cuts photo Yorkshire SP

to have a proper dialogue. In any event, TUSC and Respect are not the same. TUSC aims to create a new independent voice rooted in the organisations and communities of the working class. Respect has had breakthroughs, but only in certain selective areas, and does not pursue the work in the trade unions that TUSC does.

Building TUSC

The job is still to discuss with union and anti-austerity activists, the importance of building a genuine, independent political voice for people faced with three parties singing the same tune, albeit in slightly different keys.

TUSC's steering committee will be meeting mid-December to discuss the broader issues arising out of the November elections.

A TUSC trade union forum will

be held in the New Year, at which the work done so far in discussing with activists in the RMT transport union, PCS civil service union, the Fire Brigades Union, the Prison Officers Association, the National Union of Teachers, the University and College Union and other unions not affiliated to Labour, can develop. We will also continue to work with activists in Labour-affiliated unions such as Unite and Unison who are trying to break the link.

TUSC is looking to stand 400 candidates in the council elections of May 2013, which should enable it to get more serious media coverage, in particular from the BBC."

The real winner was "fed up of all of them"

Ukip protest vote

The United Kingdom Independence Party (Ukip) saw an increase in its share of the votes as a layer saw it as a means to protest against the three main parties.

Millionaire-backed Ukip can sound different to the Lib-Lab-Con-sensus but in truth it shares the same central aim: make the working and middle classes pay for capitalism's crisis. Ukip was part of a small pro-cuts rally in May 2011. Its website states "the coalition's cuts do not scratch the surface of Labour's deficit" and calls for reduced tax for big business and the rich.

Ukip's leader, Nigel Farage, puts on a Boris-esque, likable buffoon character to attract voters and mask the anti-working class, pro-big business and xenophobic policies of his organisation.

To the establishment, while problematic, Ukip is nonetheless a more palatable, right-populist, protest vote to the fascist-led British National Party.

For sure, they would also rather promote Ukip than the real, anti-cuts, socialist alternative that TUSC offers.

That is why in the past four years

To the establishment...

Ukip is nonetheless a more palatable, right-populist, protest vote to the fascist-led British National Party

Farage has made 12 appearances on the BBC's Question Time, only second to Lib Dem business secretary Vince Cable.

In the May local elections, the BBC headlined "growing support" for Ukip. This followed an average vote - in the seats it contested - of 13%, compared to 6.2% for TUSC. In the Liverpool Mayoral election, TUSC got over twice Ukip's vote.

Voters are increasingly rejecting the establishment parties. But if a credible, anti-cuts alternative is not built, right wing groups such as Ukip can be undeserved beneficiaries of people's anger.



The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is an electoral alliance that stands candidates against all cuts and privatisation. It involves the RMT transport workers' union, leading members of other trade unions including the PCS, NUT and POA, the Socialist Party and the Socialist Workers Party. **Read the latest TUSC bulletin at www.tusc.org.uk**

Ballot box reports

Rotherham

Alistair Tice

Rotherham TUSC election agent

After the TV cameras and chauffeured-in politicians had left the Rotherham byelection count, TUSC campaigners were out the next day alongside Unison members opposing NHS cuts.

TUSC's Ralph Dyson became known as the candidate against the £50 million hospital cuts, with over 3,000 petition signatures collected in the three week election campaign.

Wherever TUSC went - the town centre, bus station, hospital, council offices, mosques, schools, estates - we received a friendly response and seemed to be everyone's second preference. But, under first past the post, that doesn't get many votes!

281 voted for TUSC - 1.3% - about what we expected, but only 170 votes behind the Lib Dems.

Before the election, the far-right targeted the town with two demonstrations, supposedly protesting against the alleged "Asian grooming cover-up", but in reality trying to sow racism and division.

Labour's electoral machine excluded a local Asian councillor and imposed an external candidate, leading to over half the selection meeting delegates walking out.

At the count, Labour members were mightily relieved to keep the seat they've held for 80 years. While their majority almost halved due to the low turnout, their vote share increased slightly to 46%. Disgust with the resigned MP Denis MacShane's expenses fraud did not break traditional Labour loyalties, especially among older voters with an undying class hatred of the Conservatives.

With eleven candidates, protest votes were divided among many parties.

Ukip received its highest parliamentary vote - 21% - after cynically exploiting the removal of East European foster children from Ukip-member foster parents to gain huge publicity and sympathy. While handled clumsily, it has emerged there were multiple reasons - not merely the foster parents' political affiliation - for why the children were removed. Also, the placement was always intended to be temporary,

with the aim of placing the children with carers who could speak their first language.

The racist British National Party came third with 1,804 votes - 8%, down from 10% in May 2010.

Yvonne Ridley, the former Express journalist and Taliban-hostage who converted to Islam, came fourth with 1,778 votes. Despite Respect nationally not responding to TUSC, locally their new supporters in Rotherham, especially Asian women and youth, are very open to joint campaigning with TUSC against the cuts and against the far-right.

The English Defence League candidate, masquerading as an independent, got 29 votes and was beaten by spoilt ballot papers!

The real winner though was "fed up of all of them" with two-thirds not voting. This shows the opportunity for TUSC to build an electoral alternative, rooted in the trade unions, which can appeal to all working-class communities, especially those most exploited and disenfranchised under the corrupt capitalist system.

Middlesbrough

Alan Docherty

Teesside Socialist Party

John Malcolm, TUSC candidate and Socialist Party member, polled 277 votes in the Middlesbrough byelection on 29 November.

This was the first time that TUSC stood in Middlesbrough. People on the streets were supportive of our anti-cuts and pro-public service message. As a candidate, John was known by trade union activists and health workers.

Labour expected to win this, one of their safest seats, with little effort. Their candidate promised to have a constituency office and hold regular surgeries. This was to counter criticism that Stuart Bell, the deceased MP, refused to hold surgeries and spent a lot of time in France.

Labour also promised a 'jobs fair'. But there aren't many vacant jobs here!

Labour gained 60% of the vote. UKIP came second, but with only 1,990 votes, not far ahead of the Lib Dems and Tories, both decimated compared to previous elec-

The reality was a 25% turnout; 3 out of 4 people did not vote! Just 15% voted Labour

tions as a punishment for their austerity policies.

The maverick Peace Party candidate, with a lot of money spent on its campaign, gained over 1,000 votes with sizeable support from the Asian community.

The BNP vote was slashed from 2,000 to just over 300. This was despite the BNP getting media coverage that was denied to TUSC.

Labour claimed after the election they had the overwhelming support of the people of Middlesbrough. The reality was a 25% turnout; 3 out of 4 people did not vote! Just 15% voted Labour; and if Labour does not seriously oppose austerity their vote will decline even further.

NHS in Wales under attack

Mass action needed to save our health service

Claire Job

Nurse and Socialist Party member

In England, NHS users face the relentless drive to privatise so that ruthless private bosses can make a fortune with no regard for the service they are supposed to provide.

While Welsh politicians are quick to point out these attacks on the English NHS, they remain silent about the fact that years of underfunding and now deep, deep cuts are undermining the founding principles of the NHS in Wales every bit as surely.

The Welsh government has major plans to reshape the NHS in Wales.

These cuts have led to shortages of doctors and other staff, jeopardised the quality and safety of healthcare and threaten the sustainability of services Welsh people depend on

By 2014/15 spending per head of the population on health in Wales will be lower than in any other part of Britain.

The seven health boards in Wales are drawing up individual plans and five have got together to produce a 'South Wales Plan' that will cut the number of hospital beds, reduce the number of A&E units and specialise services in fewer hospitals.

This will mean increased travel

time and reduced accessibility for the people who depend on these services most. The health boards are currently in an 'engagement' process - they have published 'options' and will finalise their plans in January 2013 and enter a consultation period.

The Welsh health boards have to find nearly £300 million of 'savings' - around 5% of their combined budgets. This is on top of similar savings already identified in the previous year and the £1 billion estimated to have been cut from health budgets since 2005.

What the cuts will mean

These cuts have led to shortages of doctors and other staff, jeopardised the quality and safety of healthcare and threaten the sustainability of services Welsh people depend on.

The South Wales Plan will end the concept of the general hospital as we know it and result in only four or possibly five centres providing what many of us would consider essential services - A&E, maternity, paediatrics - across the whole of South Wales.

It has been confirmed that Morriston hospital in Swansea, the Heath in Cardiff and a new hospital planned for development in Gwent will be saved. But which will be closed of Prince Charles in Merthyr, Royal Glamorgan in Llantrisant and Princess of Wales in Bridgend?

Outside of these four or five hospitals, services will be downgraded to mean:

- No paediatric inpatient beds
- Midwife only led maternity services
- Minor injury units as opposed to A&E services.

These plans mean reduced access for urgent medical care for lots of people. Public transport, even in urban areas like Llanelli, Bridgend



photo Suzanne Beishon

and Meryth, is appalling - infrequent, unreliable and expensive. In some areas, even just outside bigger towns and cities, transport is almost non-existent at weekends or in the evening. And public transport budgets are also being slashed.

The Welsh Ambulance Service is creaking at the seams - stories have been circulating in the press of staff shortages and their budget is up in the air. For four months running they've failed to meet the target of answering 65% of calls within 8 minutes.

The problem with the plan is not just the distance travelled to get to hospitals in an emergency. There is also the fact that, whenever somebody requires urgent in-patient care, they will be removed from their friends, family and community - all those things that add up to an essential support network for working class people.

The people of Wales are being told by the health boards that our view of the NHS (being the provision of hospital care) is outdated. They are modernising by downgrading hospitals. District general hospitals as we know them are old fashioned they say.

Fight for every hospital

It is true that many people would prefer to be looked after at home but delivered properly, community services are not the cheap option. Cutting hospital cover and not being able to invest in community services adequately is a scary proposition.

These plans represent massive cuts to the NHS in Wales and campaigners will fight for every hospital, ward, service and bed. It is vitally important that we link up health campaigners from every area of Wales. We can't have a situation

where politicians argue for the saving of local services but accept that they must be paid for by cuts elsewhere. Or as a Llanelli Labour MP said on the march to Save Prince Phillip A&E: "Let's keep politics out of it; this is about fighting for Llanelli."

In 2007 the Wales Assembly was thrown back when they attempted cuts - campaigns that sprung up across Wales forced a halt on the downgrading of hospital services. That sort of victory can be achieved again.

But the threat to our NHS is greater this time around. To win will take linking trade unions, health workers and community campaigners. We want the health service to be what it was founded to be. We can win but there is not a moment to be lost and we need to commit to the struggle for an NHS for Wales that meets the needs of all people in Wales.

Demo against South West pay cartel

A 24-hour general strike to defend the NHS

Dominico Hill

Over 2,000 trade unionists and their families marched in Bristol on Saturday 1 December to protest against the recently formed NHS employer, South West Regional Pay Consortium.

A leaked document from the cartel shows they intend to rip up terms and conditions wholesale. Everything is up for grabs - NHS workers will have to work longer hours, get fewer holidays, less sick pay and a cut in wages. If that wasn't enough, national pay bargaining and all shift allowances will be scrapped.

Strategy

The Unite and Unison unions called the demo together with the Bristol and District Anti-Cuts Alliance. The demo was angry and lively. I spoke to dozens of people, arguing the case for a 24-hour general strike to defeat the cuts. Not one disagreed or thought it was unreasonable or unrealistic, though quite a few did not know that their own trade unions officially support the call for a general strike.

At the rally trade union officials denounced the cartel's proposals



photo Senan

without putting forward any strategy to defeat them.

Mervyn Rees, the failed Labour candidate in the recent mayoral elections in Bristol, was greeted by a chorus of boos. He stuck to general platitudes, 'fairness', 'a modern Bristol', 'going forward in the 21st Century', and failed even to mention Labour's commitment to repeal the Con-Dems' legislation on the NHS.

Only the Bristol and District Anti-Cuts Alliance speaker got a roar of approval when he called on the unions to name the date for a 24-hour general strike.

We gave out hundreds of National Shop Stewards' Network bulletins. The demonstration, which was called at short notice and given minimal publicity, shows what can be achieved if the unions put their full resources into a campaign.

Campaign to save Lewisham A&E continues



Around 10,000 NHS staff and local people demonstrated on 24 November against the closure of Lewisham hospital's A&E department and other services. The government and its cuts-hungry special administrator may have hoped that was the end of the protests. It most certainly isn't!

A meeting organised on 29 November by Lewisham Keep Our NHS public attracted hundreds of angry local people, who applauded the work that had already been done building a community focus for resistance.

But one of the demonstration's main slogans was "We won't die for the PFI" and the government has its axe poised for destruction this month and next. Speakers from

the floor, including health worker and former Socialist Party councillor Chris Flood, proposed the main step that workers have to consider when major attacks on jobs and services threaten - strike action. Chris' view was echoed by other speakers.

Strike action is not an easy option but most health workers agree that it is far better to have hospital services restricted for a few days of determined strike than to see them permanently destroyed through Con-Dem cuts and closures!

More and more NHS workers realise that such bold trade union action would gain enormous support and give new force to the campaign against cuts and closures, to cancel the PFI debts and save our NHS.

Health unions should take action to save our NHS



Michael Wrack

Proposals have been announced to close four accident and emergency (A&E) units in north west London: Charing Cross, Central Middlesex, Hammersmith and Ealing.

NHS North West London claims these proposals were backed by public consultation. But the consultation was only over which four out of nine hospitals in the area would lose their A&E units, with no option available to oppose all cuts and closures.

The consultation received around 17,000 responses from a population of two million, representing a "public support" of less than 1%. On top of this, 66,000 people who signed petitions opposing the plans - almost four times as many

as responded to the official consultation - have had their voices practically ignored, or more specifically counted as 18 opposing votes (one per petition).

Shaping a Healthier Future, the cluster of NHS Trusts involved, claims the decision is based on the service needs of the area, which would apparently be better served by having less A&E units.

A more believable reason for the closures is the £1 billion of savings the Trusts say they need to make in the next three years. This £1 billion is part of a total £5 billion cuts being made in the NHS across London, tearing the service apart.

South London Healthcare Trust has already become the first NHS Trust put into administration, with Lewisham A&E under threat just six months after reopening. This situation will be repeated elsewhere unless a successful national campaign to defend the NHS is fought.

Good campaigns are being fought locally in these areas to defend local services, but must be linked to the wider picture of generalised attacks on the NHS. Focusing only on saving local services leads to the situation seen in north west London, with service users asked which services should be closed.

For the campaigns to be successful they must also involve, and ideally be lead by, the health trade unions. Local union branches must involve themselves as key elements to community campaigns, while simultaneously putting pressure on union leaderships to build for national action.

The TUC has already voted to "consider the practicalities" of a general strike, and health workers should make this a key demand of their campaigns. They should also join the National Shop Stewards Network lobby of the TUC General Council on Tuesday 11 December to demand that a date be named.

Red alert!

- Hospitals are full to bursting because of a beds crisis. NHS England now has a third less beds - 211,617 in 1985, compared to 140,449 today
- Death rates at 12 trusts are "worryingly high", with four more having high weekend death rates, reports the Dr Foster Hospital Guide
- The Con-Dems want £20 billion NHS 'efficiency savings' - cuts - by 2012
- Since 2001 the Tories have received £1.4 million from big stakeholders in Circle Healthcare, the first private firm to run a NHS hospital (Hinchingbrooke)
- The Health and Social Care Act 2012 will break up and privatise large parts of the NHS - unless we fight its implementation

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!