

NHS WORKERS RESIST CUTS

Support strikers at Mid Yorks NHS

Con-Dem cuts and privatisation plans put the NHS's whole future in jeopardy. But there is a growing resistance to this onslaught on our right to decent healthcare. 25,000 people marched in Lewisham on 26 January against the threat of losing the A&E and other vital services – and the hospital itself. Key to the struggle to defend our NHS is the role of health workers.

Iain Dalton reports on the inspiring strike action by Unison members at the Mid Yorkshire NHS Trust.

On Monday 28 February, low-paid admin and clerical workers at the Mid Yorkshire NHS Trust began five days of strike action against down-banding (meaning thousands of pounds in pay cuts). This follows four days of strike action in late 2012.

120 strikers joined picket lines across the three sites. The determined mood was spurred on by the dismissal and re-engagement notices sent by the Trust in an attempt to bully workers.

During the last strike Trust chief executive Stephen Eames said that he would meet the strikers 'anywhere, anytime'. But he's not been in a single negotiation with representatives of the strike committee.

On 31 January the Trust board is due to meet, with Eames in attendance. The strikers asked for speaking rights but were told it wasn't 'appropriate' for workers to address the meeting. The strikers were furious. They intend to make their voices heard, lobbying the meeting at the Trust headquarters at Pinderfields at 8am.

If the Trust doesn't back down after this action, the Unison branch is discussing balloting the rest of the workforce, as it is clear that they will follow this up by down-banding them too.

More attacks are in the pipeline – admin and clerical workers face another 'review phase', ie cuts. The Trust is also severely cutting back on services at Dewsbury hospital, where Socialist Party members have also been leading a campaign.

Pay cuts, department closures and privatisations are taking place up and down the country. In the South West an employers' cartel has been formed in an attempt to drive down pay and conditions.

Clearly the action taken by the clerical staff in Mid Yorkshire is inspiring other workers – so far £23,000 has been donated to the strike fund, mostly by Unison branches. And it is showing what the union can do to defend workers when these attacks come – locally hundreds have joined since the start of the action.

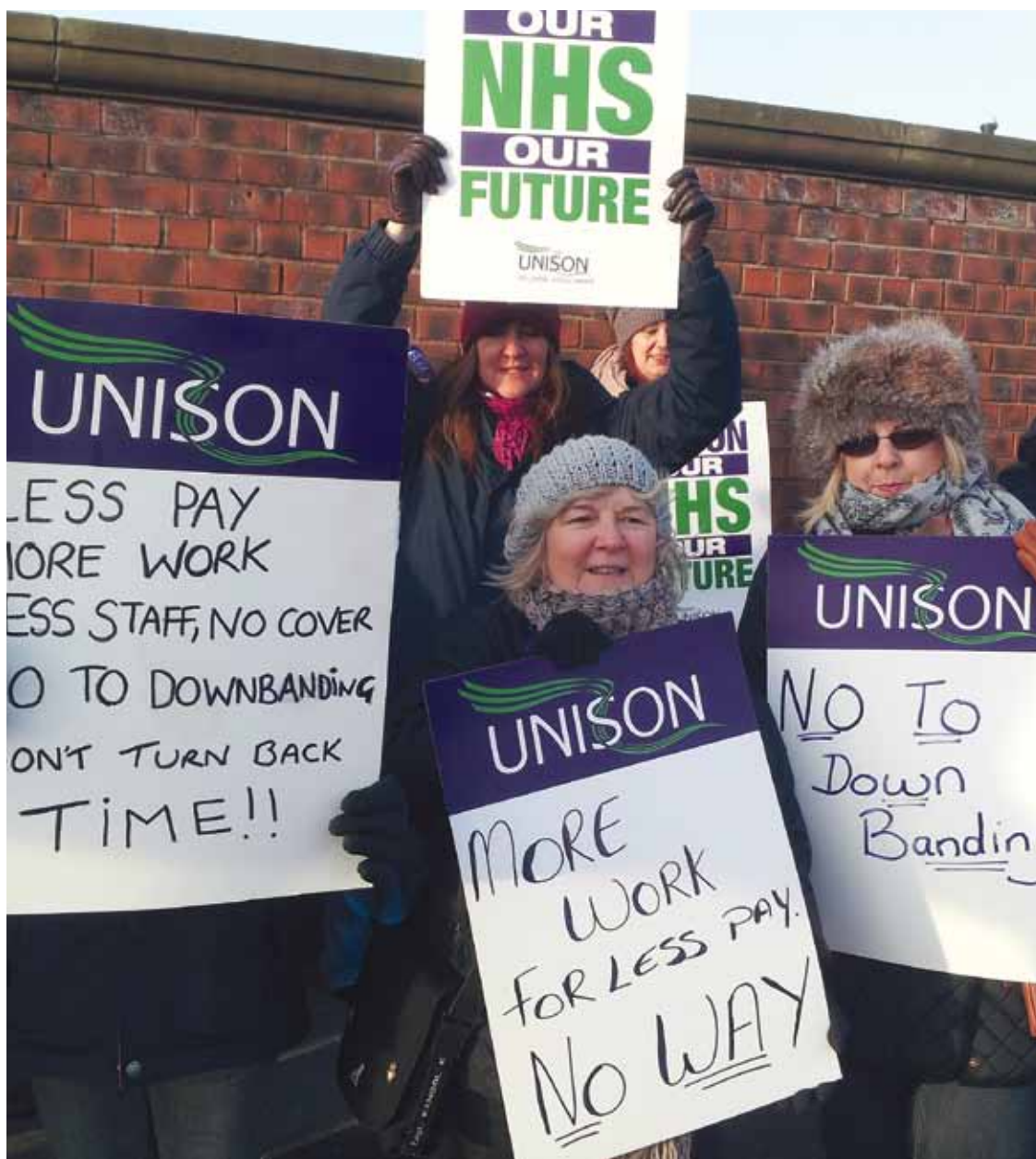
As elsewhere in the public and private sector, the bosses at Mid Yorkshire Trust are saying workers must pay for the economic crisis. But there's plenty of money to avoid these and other NHS cuts – but private healthcare and big business are leeching it out of our health service.

For example, Mid Yorkshire Trust pays 'consultants' Ernst & Young £3 million a year, and £40 million a year goes on repayments for PFI privatisation contracts.

It is urgent that a mass movement is built, taking inspiration from the determination of the Mid Yorks workers, to kick the profiteers out of the NHS and defend all our jobs, pay and public services.

• Please send messages of support to
midyorksunison@aol.co.uk

See pages 2, 6 and 7 for more on the NHS



The Mid Yorks strikers are inspiring other workers photo Iain Dalton

The 82% publicly owned Royal Bank of Scotland, bailed out by the government in 2008 for £46 billion, is expected to pay £250 million worth of bonuses this year.

That adds up to the annual pay of around 8,300 nurses. There are 4,500 less qualified nurses, midwives and health visitors employed by the NHS than in 2010.

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25,000 march to save Lewisham hospital

On 26 January a massive mobilisation of 25,000 people marched against proposals to close the A&E and other major facilities at University College Hospital, Lewisham.

This was a real community demo. The scale of support for the campaign was shown by the presence of the local football team Millwall's bus at the closing rally. Such was size of the march that it had to move off about half an hour early so that everyone could join.

Support

Despite it causing traffic to come to a standstill, many drivers tooted their support for the protest. Among the many union banners were the National Shop Stewards Network and Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition.

This was the second demo organised against recommendations in a paper authored by Special Administrator Matthew Kershaw who was commissioned by the Con-Dem government to do a hatchet job on

NHS services in South London.

It was in anticipation of 1 February when Kershaw will submit his plans to Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt for rubber-stamping. Petitions, letters and marches have been organised, but these alone will not save Lewisham Hospital.

Socialist Party members on the demo raised the idea that our strategy must be based on the health trade unions and pressure on them to ballot their members for strike action to save the NHS, solidly backed by the community.

A workers' occupation of Lewisham Hospital could be organised to stop equipment being removed and facilities run down. Over 2,500 Socialist Party leaflets calling for strike action to defend Lewisham A&E were taken by demonstrators.

This attempt to attack jobs and services at Lewisham Hospital is not the first. During 2006 the then Labour government proposed the closure of A&E, maternity and paediatric services.

Socialist Party councillors Chris Flood and Ian Page launched a petition opposing the attacks to

build up pressure on MPs and councillors.

Chris Flood proposed a motion to the council for 'referring back' Labour's outrageous plans. Although Labour and Lib Dem councillors opposed this, pressure eventually forced the government to back down and the hospital was saved then.

Labour

But this time round it is Labour councillors and MPs who are giving lip service to the campaign to oppose the closures, while at the same time pushing through £28 million of council cuts to jobs and services over the next three years. They are doing the Con-Dems' dirty work.

Recognising the links between all the cuts to jobs and public services, one street cleaner clearing up after the demo proudly displayed a Socialist Party Save our NHS placard in his cart.

At the end of the march, demonstrators were queuing up to sign the Socialist Party petition in defence of



photo Paul Mattsson

NHS services in south London.

They recognised that we need to save all NHS services and not allow the campaign to be just about

defending Lewisham A&E at the expense of other NHS services in south London.

Susanna Farley and Chris Newby

Heatherwood hospital campaign shows determination

Eighteen months ago a group of activists met to discuss how best to resist plans by NHS bosses to close our local hospital. The campaign has involved anti-cuts activists from Bracknell, Ascot, Windsor and Slough, drawn from local trade unions and political groups.

We have collected 23,000 names on our petition, which opposed the closure of Heatherwood or any of its services and we produced a People's Consultation which nearly 3,000 local people signed up to. This opposed all closures and demanded that the hospital remain an NHS hospital.

We organised three days of action with rallies and marches through Ascot. We have saturated the local press with our literature and letters and one local paper has supported our campaign.

Come rain or shine we have been out on the streets with leaflets and petitions, always receiving an enthusiastic response from the local community.

We defeated the original plan to close the hospital and sell the land. At a public meeting of around 500 people at Ascot Racecourse the NHS bosses presented their plans to close the hospital.

Every speaker from the floor, including hospital staff, expressed total opposition to the plans. The closure plans were withdrawn at that stage. We celebrated this victory while being aware that this was only a partial success.

We can win

The NHS bosses came back with plans to close a number of services at the hospital including the birthing centre, the rehabilitation ward and the minor injuries unit.

A bitter battle has been conducted against these plans over the last few months. We defeated a 'pre-consultation exercise' but this was ignored by the Trust and they pushed ahead with the consultation which concludes at the end of January.

While we are not assured of victory, we have shown that with a fighting leadership involving the whole community, we can challenge cost-cutting policies.

**Terry Pearce, chair of
Defend Our Community
Services and member
of Save Heatherwood
Hospital Campaign**



Campaign forces retreat on ambulance station closure

"You can't win", I was told by one onlooker as we marched through Hinckley protesting against the possible closure of our ambulance station.

However, after a three month public consultation on residents' views, petitions signed by hundreds of local people and a march of more than 100 people, the East Midlands Ambulance Service (EMAS) is reconsidering its plans.

New options

The Chief Executive of EMAS has stated that Hinckley's ambulance station is likely to be kept open, with the possibility of a new station being built to house an even greater fleet of ambulances than at present.

In addition, the original proposal to close down 66 ambulance stations across the region and replace them with 13 large central hubs and 131 tactical deployment points has now been supplemented by three other options, including keeping things as they are.

A discussion on this issue has now been postponed from January to March while EMAS carry

out "further analysis". This retreat is important but we need to keep up the pressure on union leaders to defend our ambulance service nationwide and to fight cuts to any of our public services.

Helen Gadsby



Keep pressure on to save EMAS



Needed: a strategy to stop the destruction of the NHS

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Life as an NHS worker: bullying and stress

A recent survey of staff in the Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust found a high level of dissatisfaction among mental health staff working for the Trust. Staff complain of inadequate training in the vital areas of health and safety and equality and diversity.

The Trust is among the worst in the country for effective team working. 13% of staff have been bullied by a colleague, with 2% of respond-

ents reporting being physically attacked by their co-workers.

In addition, many trained nurses are being forced to work 12-hour shifts. Staff report exhaustion and are frustrated because they are too overworked to provide a quality service.

Staff cannot expect their managers to support them. The Trust is among the worst 20% in the country both in terms of support from line managers and of effective action

from the employer regarding bullying or harassment.

Staff reporting work related stress cannot depend on the organisation for assistance. Worker's intention to leave their jobs is at a very high level.

I am sure other workers are suffering in a similar way and want to feel they are not alone.

**Sharon Mitchell
Brighton and Hove Socialist Party**

Austerity's utter failure

Dave Griffiths

West Midlands Socialist Party

Tory Chancellor Gideon Osborne still tells us austerity is working, but the government managed to take economic growth below 0% not once, not twice but now into a 'triple dip'.

The Con-Dems claim more are working than ever. This hides the brutal reality of low-paid, precarious and insufficient work. But if – as the latest figures say – the economy shrank by 0.3%, then more people must be making less. The productivity fall that this indicates reflects the parlous state of British capitalism.

'Oops' said Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg, 'perhaps we should have invested earlier.' But instead the Con-Dems launched an orgy of attacks on wages, jobs and working people's benefits – but not benefits for banks.

Even their International Monetary Fund mates tell them it isn't working and other pals in the markets threaten their 'Triple A' rating.

While misery is piled on to the vast majority of people, in 2012 the world's richest 100 people 'earned' \$240 billion. Oxfam says this is enough to end extreme poverty four times over.

In 30 years, the top 1% saw their share of wealth triple from 5.7% to 15.4% while the obscene wealth of the top 0.1% – 60,000 people – rose



Canary Wharf. The free market economic model has resulted in a long-term economic crisis photo A Hill

2.49m
UK unemployment
489,000
UK job vacancies

five times to 6.1%.

The big divide in the UK is between a small group of the super-rich and nearly everyone else.

This new 'corporate feudalism', brought to us by the free market Tory, Liberal and Labour parties alike, is strangling the economy.

Stuart Lansley of Bristol University says: "Britain has been building a new form of inequality, close to the searing gap of the Victorian era..."

"Most of the rich's income surge has come not from... building a more robust economy triggered by an entrepreneurial leap forward but the very opposite – a clever process of wealth and income transfer from the bulk of the working population."

"Until this gap begins to close... the economy is likely to remain locked in crisis."

In other words, the free market has contributed to a structural economic crisis, not a temporary one. The 'new normal' offers frightening prospects for most of us.

Punishing the poor for the actions of the richest isn't working. We must fight attacks on our living standards and services and fight for a change to a democratically planned socialist system.

Socialism Today

The Socialist Party's magazine February 2013 issue includes:

● **Capitalist wasteland**

Extracts from a Socialist Party National Committee document looking at the year ahead in Britain

● **Obama's second term**

Fiscal cliff still beckons

● **Northern Ireland**
Flag dispute exposes limits of the peace process

● **Doha climate talks**

UN talks yield no progress

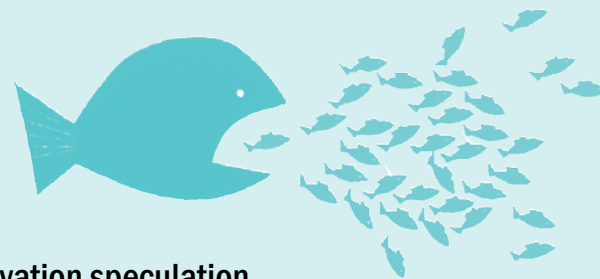
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Them...



Starvation speculation

Goldman Sachs (GS) made up to £250 million pounds from speculating on food prices including wheat, maize and soy. The bankers are accused of contributing to a growing global food crisis.

GS created the first commodity index funds which allow huge amounts of money to be gambled on prices. Anti-poverty campaign group the World Development Movement released the estimate following the publication of GS's 2012 results. The group is calling for tough rules to curb financial speculation on food, to prevent banks and hedge funds driving up prices.

The US has passed legislation to limit speculation, but the controls have not been implemented due to a legal challenge from Wall Street spearheaded by "The International Swaps and Derivatives Association", of which GS is a leading member!

Similar legislation is on the table in the EU, but the UK government has so far opposed effective controls. GS has lobbied against US and EU controls, and they carry a lot more clout than the starving millions.

Derek McMillan

Code of quality?

Former employees at Triage – a private business given part of the government's £5 billion Work Programme project – have alleged that the company used the 'LTB code' to refer to jobless and disabled clients. LTB stood for "lying thieving bastards".

But it seems that 'LTB' should refer to Triage itself. The Work Programme scheme gives firms money for taking on more disabled clients. The employees said that Triage took on clients and left them "parked", with very little time spent helping them find work – usually just a 'box ticking phone call'. What another marvellous example of private sector initiative!

Caring cuts?

So the government's sorting out the childcare crisis by, er, cutting the amount of childminders required. The change in nursery care ratios means that only two staff would be needed to

Profits a gas

And if you're not starving you can freeze instead.

The 'big six' energy companies are making £120 in profit per household, tripling profit margins after sticking fuel prices up 10.8%.

With the average dual fuel bill at £1,420 a year, six million people are now living in fuel poverty – meaning more than 10% of their income is spent on energy bills.

Charities have said that 20% of cancer patients cannot afford to heat their homes.

When gas and electricity was privatised in the 1980s, it was claimed that competition would push down prices! Utilities should be renationalised under democratic working class control and management.

Keep your friends close

Probably not starving are the Tory chancellor George Osborne and London mayor Boris Johnson. Their latest dinner party venue was an apartment in Mayfair. Rupert Murdoch's, in fact. So, post Murdochgate, post Leveson inquiry, post having to lose your spin doctor as he's a former News of the World editor with multiple phone hacking charges – it's okay to have a private dinner with the News International boss, along with several NI executives and editors?

126

Sure Start centres have closed in London alone

look after 12 two-year olds, instead of three under current rules.

What about increasing free childcare? Don't be silly.

The cuts in funding for Sure Start children's centres since 2010 have resulted in 400 centres closing. 126 have closed in London. In Westminster, the number of centres has been cut from 15 to three.

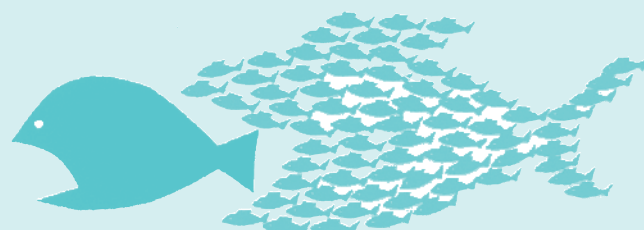
Half of the remaining London centres don't provide onsite childcare. A fifth now charge for services that were free. Prime Minister David Cameron pledged to ring-fence Sure Start for under-fives. The £420 million cuts in funding make this another broken election promise.

Back to Sachs

Goldman Sachs chief executive Lloyd Blankfein denounced Cameron's purely verbal attack on tax dodgers, saying that holding people up for criticism for their tax arrangements risked "criminalising every right-thinking person who organises his or her affairs in a sensible way".

They make money. People starve because they cannot afford food. But God forbid that anyone should suggest the super-rich pay tax!

...& Us



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

Taxing words from Cameron?

Tom Baldwin

South West Socialist Party

According to a report by the PCS civil service union, £120 billion of tax goes unpaid every year. This money, mostly avoided and evaded by the super-rich, could virtually wipe out the deficit.

Campaigners for tax justice rightly point out that the rich shouldn't be cheating the taxman while the rest of us suffer huge attacks on our living standards.

Now it seems they have found an unlikely ally in David Cameron. Speaking at the World Economic Forum in Davos he attacked tax-avoiding companies, telling them to "wake up and smell the coffee".

Does he now believe the rich should be paying for their own crisis? What's behind this miraculous

conversion? Or is he just upset that big business seems ungrateful for all the handouts?

Last year his government cut corporation tax by 3%, and the top rate of income tax by 5% in a budget described by Chancellor Osborne as "unashamedly pro-business".

Accountancy firm PwC reported that the corporation tax bill for Britain's biggest companies tumbled by 18% last year, despite a rise in profits.

Look both ways

Cameron went on to add "we will cut our tax rates and be competitive but in return we do ask that people pay their fair share."

The real test of Cameron's sincerity is whether his words are matched by actions.

Staff numbers at HMRC – the gov-

ernment's tax department – have been cut in half since 2005 with more cuts planned, while HMRC bosses have a cosy relationship with big business.

Why would the Tories challenge tax avoidance when it's been so good to them? Numerous Tory donors have 'questionable' tax arrangements. For example Lycamobile, their top corporate donor last year, hadn't paid a penny in corporation tax for three years.

Tory donor and 'non-dom' tax avoider Lord Ashcroft was even brought into the cabinet!

This government is hand in glove with billionaire tax cheats. Cameron's words are completely hollow. This is a government of the rich, for the rich – they give us job cuts and their mates tax cuts. Workers need their own party that will stand up to this abuse.



Join the fightback! Join the Socialists!

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Churchill cleaners: Striking back against poverty pay

Elaine Brunskill and Paul Philips

In the on-going battle against poverty pay, striking Churchill cleaners from the Tyne and Wear Metro lobbied the Labour-dominated ITA (Integrated Transport Authority) on 24 January.

They demanded that the transport chiefs should force the private rubbish company to pay a living wage.

In freezing weather the strikers ran a soup kitchen outside Newcastle Civic Centre, where the ITA was meeting.

Churchill strikers feel betrayed by Nick Forbes, Labour leader of Newcastle City Council, who urges employers in the North East to introduce a living wage, yet refuses to exert pressure on Churchill to do this through the ITA that runs Nexus and the Metro.

Steve Hedley, RMT assistant general secretary, made an impassioned speech to the meeting of the ITA, demanding that Labour councillors ensure Churchill's cleaners are paid a living wage.



Protesting at the media blackout photo Elaine Brunskill

Then Churchill strikers began chanting "Low pay - No way!" at very uncomfortable looking councillors.

Afterwards Steve said: "We've set up a soup kitchen to show the ITA

that our workers are on the bread-line, working for £6.19 an hour. Even after working overtime many of them are claiming benefits to make ends meet.

"We believe Newcastle city council has a responsibility, not only to our members, but also to tax payers in Newcastle who are subsidising a bad employer who pay subsistence money and force their employees into having to claim benefits."

Even though it was Metro cleaners' 12th strike the local press did not approach the union.

After the protest at the ITA the union leaders and the cleaners walked down to protest outside the offices of the local Newcastle newspapers.

Commenting on the strike Micky Thompson, RMT regional organiser, said: "Given the intransigent position of Churchill, Nexus, DB Regio and the ITA we are more determined and resolute in our objective in achieving the living wage.

"If that means more industrial strike action and direct action by targeting those in authority then so be it."

DfE strike ballot

Robbie Faulds
PCS education group president, personal capacity

Members of the PCS union working in the Department for Education (DfE) are balloting for strike action, and action short of a strike, in opposition to plans to close six out of 12 offices and slash 1,000 jobs (25% of the workforce).

Education secretary Michael Gove is using the department as an ideological testbed for wider civil service cuts.

Workers are demanding the department enters meaningful negotiations over the cuts and future workloads, as well as the withdrawal of a hated performance management system, which 97% of members rejected in a ballot at the end of last year.

Union members are in no doubt that the cuts will lead to compulsory redundancies, with the department making the bulk of the cuts over the next few months and with few other civil service jobs to apply for. Those that remain in the department will face increased workloads, and will be left to explain to the public why many of the services they relied on are no longer provided.

There is already concern that the running of the DfE has become highly politicised, with Tory donors being brought in as non-executive directors and party hacks employed as special advisors.

PCS union members in other departments have expressed their support for any possible action in the DfE, fully aware that if the cuts are forced through then similar exercises are likely to follow in other areas.

PCS members are determined to fight back against the assault, and will seek to join up any action with other education unions if at all possible.

Time is short - teachers must act to stop Gove

Martin Powell-Davies
Member of the national executive of the National Union of Teachers (NUT)

On 24 January the NUT's national executive voted narrowly against a proposal to call a first day of national strike action to oppose education secretary Gove's plans to impose performance-related pay.

The 300 London teachers that packed into the vibrant meeting in the NUT headquarters just a few days before would have been taken aback by the pessimism permeating some of the speeches opposing the call for action this term. But the narrow margin of the vote - with 20 votes in favour and just 22 against - shows that the pressure from classroom teachers is having an effect. It's now time to apply even more pressure on executive members to vote for the campaign of strike action that we need.

Timing

The timing of action was at the centre of the debate. Those of us supporting a national strike on 13 March, which would have allowed the NUT to take action as part of the European TUC's day of international action against austerity, tried to explain why we had to start action this term.

Action at the end of the summer term alone will be too late to force Gove into retreating from his damaging threats, or, at the very least, into making some concessions to teaching unions. By then, the final legislation will have already been agreed by Parliament.

Another point of difference was around how much longer we could wait for the [other main teaching union] NASUWT to confirm that they would be prepared to take national strike action alongside us.

Max Hyde, proposing the unsuccessful objection, argued that we couldn't delay further when we still had no firm commitment from the NASUWT. After all, our membership surveys suggest that NUT members were - give or take a few percentage points - as ready to act alone as with the NASUWT. However, by that narrow majority, the Executive voted to wait to see what further discussions with the NASUWT could bring.

All of the six London executive members voted for the March strike. Others argued that there was little mood for action. The evidence from most members' meetings doesn't justify this pessimism.

Of course, the mood isn't even across all schools and all regions. But a serious leadership should be confident that, in six weeks, we could build a strong national strike



NUT members during the pensions battle photo Paul Mattsson

in March.

Time is now dangerously short, but pressure from below has been having an effect. Further pressure can make sure that the next NUT national executive meeting on 28 February finally calls national action.

That action could still start this term, perhaps even on the same day that the PCS are considering taking national action, around 20 March.

The close vote will hopefully also send a signal to the NASUWT that they can't continue to prevaricate and that, unless they want to haemorrhage support, they must also come out in support of national strike action.

• For the full version of this article and latest news, visit www.electmartin1.blogspot.com

In brief

Justice walkout

Members of the PCS civil service union working in the Ministry of Justice are walking out on 31 January. The staff who administer and collect court fines are protesting against plans to privatise their work. This would put a lot of the work into the hands of private bailiff companies who are already often the subject of claims about harassment received by agencies such as the Citizens Advice Bureau.

There was a 75% vote for action in the strike ballot.

Birmingham ballot

Lecturers' union UCU members at Birmingham university are balloting for strike action against cuts and redundancies. Almost 1,000 members are being balloted for strike action to start on 28 February with a series of half-day strikes followed by a two-day strike.

The university want to make 17 posts redundant in one department and seven in another. But UCU members suspect that this may be the thin end of the wedge. UCU branch president said: "This university has consistently made a large surplus for many years and we do not believe that the proposed job cuts are necessary. Making redundancies in this way is bad for staff and also bad for the quality of education that our university can deliver."

The ballot ends on 14 February.

Halesowen

On 26 January 300 trade unionists marched against the victimisation of lecturers' union UCU activists at Halesowen college, west midlands. Branch secretary Dave Muritu and three other maths lecturers were sacked in the run up to Christmas for supposedly failing to meet targets for student results - itself a result of cutbacks by college management.

Nick Hart

Howdens jobs battle

On 3 January DHL announced that the Widnes transport depot for the Howdens joinery contract would be closing and moved to Yorkshire. This puts over 50 jobs at risk and Unite are organising an industrial action ballot.

But because of the shortage of time the workers have been organising protests, notably outside Howdens' major shareholders in central London.

The workers believe this attack by DHL is to do with the company's tough reputation and the well-organised Widnes workplace.

Prospect Housing

The GMB union has launched a campaign against Prospect Housing and Support Services after more than half of all care staff received notice of dismissal because they would not agree to drastic cuts to their pay and conditions. On 4 January, the staff received letters stating that their employment would be terminated unless they accepted massive cuts of up to £16,000 a year to their salaries and further reductions to their terms and conditions. 268 staff are employed by Prospect across Surrey, of which more than half are GMB members.

Website

For more workplace reports see: www.socialistparty.org.uk

Jumping through hoops for a job

The latest unemployment figures showed a small decrease in the number of people officially unemployed. But it's a drop in the ocean when compared to the scale of the problem. Below Jack from Brighton explains his experience of looking for work.

Jack isn't alone, around a million young people are

unemployed, while only 489,000 vacancies exist according to the latest official figures. And, as Jack describes, those who are 'lucky' enough to have a job are generally facing appalling conditions – poverty pay, insecure contracts and bullying bosses. Youth Fight for Jobs is launching a new initiative aimed at these young people – the

underemployed. We will be organising campaign stalls, press stunts and public meetings asking, are you sick of your boss?

If the answer is yes, get in touch to get involved or to tell YFJ about your experience of work, unemployment or looking for a job: www.youthfightforjobs.com
youthfightforjobs@gmail.com

Since graduating from university last year I, like many other young people, have discovered the harsh reality of trying to find work in Con-Demed Britain.

The only work I've managed to find was a two month temporary job on the minimum wage. Apart from that I've been surviving on housing benefit and Jobseeker's Allowance, both of which are threatened with withdrawal or cuts.

Recently I applied to a call centre through a recruitment agency, hoping to earn a bit of money and be able to stay in my current house. Call centres, particularly where I live, are often the only source of employment available to young people. In recent years there has been an increase in students working in them attempting to make ends meet.

Rotten conditions

Pay slightly above minimum wage is attractive, however this is offset by rotten working conditions and an incredibly insecure position - you can be removed for any reason, at any time. The TUC has recently described call centre work as being dangerously similar to the conditions factory workers faced in the 19th century, with long, heavily monitored hours, few breaks and cramped working areas.

When I arrived for my interview I was placed in a large waiting room with around 20 other people and was told to fill out an application form.

Along with the usual questions, there were tick-boxes asking what work you would be happy to take part in for the job. One asked if you would be happy to "fund-raise for political parties and their campaigns". Unwilling to work on behalf of the very people who were cutting my benefits, throwing hundreds of thousands on the dole, and claim-

We were told this brutal process was necessary because they were interviewing 50 people that day

ing thousands of pounds in expenses, I did not tick this box!

The second part of the interview involved groups of four in a mock telephone fund-raising scenario. This was used to cut down the groups, so only half the people who arrived for the interview got past this stage. We were told this brutal process was necessary because of the "extremely high level of applicants" - they were 'interviewing' around 50 people that day.

Cross section

The people in my group were a first year uni student who had to work to stay at university, a recently retired man who was being forced back to work as he couldn't afford his living costs, and a middle aged man who had recently been made redundant by another call centre - a cross sec-

tion of the people on the receiving end of the government's austerity programme.

Anyone who 'passed' the mock telephone step spoke to an interviewer for five minutes. We had waited for well over an hour.

I heard from the recruitment agency later that day, informing me I had not got the job. They gave no

There is plenty of work that needs doing that could create millions of well-paid, secure jobs

reason, but I suspect my refusal to take part in campaigns for political parties had something to do with it!

My 'choice' was to live on benefits, which are under constant attack or campaign for the axemen in government who are cutting jobs left, right, and centre - resulting in the huge levels of applicants for places like call centres.

This is no choice for young people, or any person in society. What is needed is a huge job-creation programme. There is plenty of work that needs doing that could create millions of well-paid, secure jobs. But as long as the wealth remains in the hands of the 1%, the banks and their politician friends, this will not happen.

Fightback

Young people need to fight back against these conditions and for a society that offers real opportunity, not a life on benefits or low pay.

At the same time we need campaigns and trade unions that organise call centre workers and others in insecure jobs. We deserve a decent level of security and pay in work - something that an effective trade union campaign could fight for.

Youth Fight for Jobs campaigns on all these issues and offers a chance for young people to not only get angry, but to get organised. This is how we can resist austerity and begin fighting back to improve our lives.

Socialist Party national youth meeting

9-10 February London
 Email clairelaker@socialistparty.org.uk

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The TUC has compared conditions in call centres with those in 19th century factories

Sick of your boss?

Youth Fight for Jobs demands:

- **Decent tea and lunch breaks** and no being 'clocked off' when we take one. It's not possible to work long shifts without some time to breathe. We shouldn't be penalised for it
- **Give us proper contracts** guaranteed hours and full employment rights. No to zero hour contracts and insecure employment. No more uncertainty and insecurity dressed up as 'flexibility'!
- **Pay us enough to live** - Companies which make the bosses millions are paying us (who make them all that money) pennies. For a living wage which is enough to afford the basics in life. Right now, many of us have to top up our wages with tax credits and benefits. We shouldn't have to. A living wage of £10 an hour is not too much to ask.
- **Stop the bosses 'fire at will' attitude**, backed up by the government. Making it easier to sack us will increase youth unemployment – not reduce it!
- **We won't be used as cheap or free labour** on apprenticeships, internships and work-for-benefits schemes. A day's work is a day's work and it deserves a decent day's pay.
- **We have the right to get organised at work** - Trade unions are there to help give workers protection and fight to improve our conditions. In this country there is a legal right to join a trade union. Despite this, workers who try to get organised are sometimes penalised by their bosses. We say the right to organise is fundamental – full trade union rights now!
- **Scrap the anti-trade union laws** - We have a right to try to improve our conditions and stop the bosses that 'make us sick'! It's up to us to democratically decide how we do this. If we want to go on strike or take action to try and do so then that's up to us, the courts should not stop us.
- **Build democratic campaigning trade unions** - We want trade unions that will fight our corner. That means representing us in the workplace, defending us if we're under attack and, crucially, helping us use our collective strength as workers to fight back. All workers, young and old, deserve democratic trade unions with fighting leaders!
- **No to benefit cuts** – Attacks like this affect all of us, not just the unemployed. For a start thousands of low paid workers rely on benefits. Plus if unemployment benefits are lower it means the bosses have even less incentive to pay a decent wage. Don't let their lies divide us!



Privatisation: Bleeding the NHS dry



www.hackettillustration.com

Jon Dale

Private health company Harmoni regularly ran out-of-hours clinics in London without doctors or nurses last year. Their clinics at the Whittington Hospital were sometimes closed completely for hours at a time.

Families were told to drive miles across the city in the night to get their child seen. A GP who worked shifts for the company wrote to a director in 2010, saying he feared the service had become unsafe because of an aggressive cost-cutting agenda. The tragic death of a seven week-old child has been linked to one such incident, after a four-hour wait to see a doctor.

As well as out-of-hours clinics, Harmoni runs a quarter of the new 111 telephone lines, prisoner healthcare and IT services, supposedly providing services to over eight million people in the UK.

Harmoni was originally set up as a GP co-operative in North West London in 1996. This was the sort of organisation the Tories, Lib Dems and Labour all claim to support.

Former Tory Health Secretary, Andrew Lansley said in 2011: "...we're giving staff greater control of their organisations. By handing responsibility and power to the front line, a variety of services will develop, which in turn will give patients a real choice about the kind of care they want to receive."

Nick Clegg said in 2010 that Lib Dems would "give frontline staff control over their ward or unit budgets, and would allow them to: 'establish not-for-profit social enterprises or John Lewis-style employee trusts to run services of all kinds within the NHS'."

In 2009 Labour had also proposed health workers form 'mutual' companies to take over the running of the services they provided.

Harmoni shows how these co-ops and social enterprises get swallowed up by much bigger fish. It merged with a con-

sultancy company, WCI Ltd in 2005. WCI was itself owned by ECI – a private equity company. (Private equity companies, or venture capitalists, buy companies with the aim of boosting their profits and then selling them on, at a handsome profit to themselves.) They say they have: "made a number of very successful healthcare investments during the past decade."

In 2007 another of ECI's businesses – a care home operation for sexually abused and autistic children – went bust. It had returned £20 million to investors, leaving vulnerable children needing rehousing.

Care UK

ECI sold Harmoni for £48 million in November 2012. The buyer was Care UK, one of the largest private health companies in Britain. It is paid £190 million a year to treat NHS patients and will soon get a lot more – from 35 new NHS contracts to provide diagnostic services, elective surgery and diagnosis and treatment of musculoskeletal conditions.

Care UK's profits rose 7% in 2010 to £38 million. In the same year average staff pay fell 1% to under £16,000. Whether the average included the Chief Executive is unclear, but he got a 60% rise to £800,000!

Care UK's owner is Bridgepoint, another private equity company. Like other profiteers, they have seen the opportunity to make money from healthcare. "European countries spend on average 9% of their GDP on healthcare provision," they say. "We believe that there will be excellent growth prospects and consolidation opportunities for private sector players."

It certainly seems less risky to these 'venture' capitalists than investing in manufacturing industry or construction. £41 million is now taken out of Care UK every year – as profits, tax avoidance and interest charges (at 10% a year!) on the debt Bridgepoint deliberately loaded onto the company. Some of Care UK's tax liabilities are registered in the Channel Islands.

If its care homes and NHS services were publicly owned, this £41 million

would be re-invested into improving the service. Instead it goes straight to Bridgepoint's investors and financiers.

On 20 January Care UK fixed a deal to take over another healthcare company, UK Specialist Hospitals, for £55-£70 million. UKSH operates five Independent Sector Treatment Centres (ISTCs). These privately run hospitals are paid to treat NHS patients.

"...there will be excellent growth prospects and consolidation opportunities for private sector players"

They were first set up in 2002 by the Labour government. The health secretary at the time was ex-MP Alan Milburn.

After leaving government, Alan Milburn joined Bridgepoint as part-time adviser on £35,000 a year. So Milburn brought in ISTCs and is now paid by a company that owns them! He is now chairman of Bridgepoint's European Advisory Board (which also includes Lord Patten, chair of the BBC Trust) and a director of another of its companies, Diaverum, the second largest private kidney machine clinic operator in Europe.

He is not the only person to travel in this direction. Care UK recently appointed Jim Easton, former 'director of improvement and efficiency' at the Department of Health, as managing director. His contacts at the Department of Health will be more recent than Milburn's.

All the money that taxpayers put in to the NHS should be spent on patient care provided by properly paid staff – not handed to greedy profiteers. After all, it's the NHS that trains most of the nurses, physiotherapists, radiographers, laboratory scientists, doctors and other health professionals these private companies employ.

Some shocking facts

The total value of European healthcare buyouts rose to \$6.5 billion between the first quarter and the third quarter of 2012, 170% up on the same period last year.

The Practice plc, a company with contracts for over 50 GP surgeries and health centres, has been accused of walking away from contracts in deprived areas. It seems it can't make enough money there.

Serco replaced skilled clinical staff with call-handlers without medical training, and then apparently instructed them to manipulate records to make sure performance targets were not missed. There was a fourfold increase in ambulance call-outs. (Guardian 24.1.13)

Specsavers (who sell hearing aids too) has won 33 adult hearing contracts with the NHS.

Private companies treated 345,200 non-emergency NHS patients in 2011-12, an increase of more than 10% on the previous 12 months.

The Whipps Cross hospital strikes 1997-2006

A Whipps Cross hospital worker recalls how workers fought privatisation.

In April 1997, following 'market testing' of portering services at Whipps Cross hospital, east London, the service, along with the switchboard, was to be privatised. Unison Waltham Forest Health Branch launched a campaign publicising the threat that this takeover by contractor Tarmac Servicemaster posed to both service users and workers. The porters voted to take strike action. And the magnificent two-day strike was overwhelmingly supported and saw major involvement in a lively picket. There was solidarity from health workers, patients and local trade unionists.

A 400-strong local demo was led by the porters. Their strike later concluded with them marching proudly from the picket line back to work, having put down a marker that they would not meekly roll over if Tarmac Servicemaster attacked their jobs, pay and conditions.

Over the period that followed the union saw new-start porters being employed on inferior pay and conditions compared to their ex-NHS employed counterparts.

The company's name changed six months later following the departure of Servicemaster (the partnership fell apart) until finally Tarmac plc was dismissed from the hospital by the Trust for failing to meet required service standards.

The union's arguments against privatisation had been fully vindicated. However, the Trust then awarded the contract to Danish multinational ISS Mediclean in February 1999.

Joint campaign

In 2002 a joint-up campaign with Unison branches at Newham, Homerton and Mile End hospitals and supported by the Telco (London Citizens) organisation, embarked on plans to secure harmonisation of pay, terms and conditions with NHS contract workers doing the same jobs.

Mass recruitment to the union was the key task. At Whipps Cross this experience was characterised in the words of Unison branch secretary and porter Len Hockey as: "Having a million conversations" with the overwhelmingly female domestic workforce from countries including Ghana and Nigeria.

With little understanding of what trade union organisation was or why they should part with their meagre earnings to be in one, these workers remained to be convinced that the campaign could really make a difference.

The core of the campaign to win these workers to the union was built around the industrial action experience of the longer established porters. These workers, employed on superior pay and conditions and tempered by their experience in struggle, helped show the domestic workers the way.

An important breakthrough for the organising campaign came when Kola Shokunbi was recruited as a shop steward for domestic workers. From one-to-one discussions in changing rooms, at bus stops, in corridors and the union office, the fight was on. Soon two female domestics joined Kola as activist shop stewards in the campaign.



The porters on strike in solidarity with the domestic workers photo Alison Hill

A common pay and conditions claim had been submitted to the companies and Trusts. The union made representations to the Whipps Cross Trust bosses about the appalling and discriminatory conditions that the contractor operated. They argued that the Trust indirectly bore responsibility, but this fell on deaf ears.

But in 2002 union membership at Whipps among these workers reached 250 and mass meetings were taking place. In a ballot for strike action, with confidence riding high, a vote of over 97% in favour was returned.

In the summer of 2003 the strike took place. In brilliant sunshine and in intermittent action over a period of several weeks, porters and domestics participated in what was an inspirational movement. 111 workers joined the picket line on the first day.

The most striking feature above all was the porters' participation. These members, largely already on the superior pay and conditions, in response to the lead from their union and without a penny to gain from a successful outcome, stood shoulder-to-shoulder in struggle with their sisters and brothers.

Management resorted to intimidation. It was suggested workers might find their documents 'not in order'. The implication was that the workers could lose their jobs if they continued to support the union's campaign.

The Trust moved from a position of watchful neutrality at the beginning of the dispute, to being silent attendees at the negotiations and then very vocal and active participants (on the side of ISS Mediclean) in the often acrimonious talks between company and union.

This was exemplified in one incident. Following the end of one round of talks and as the union reps were returning to the hospital, the local police rang to say the union was required to attend the police station. This was because of a complaint from the Trust that the next day's strike action was an unauthorised demo and illegal.

During the successful discussions with the police that afternoon and while we were off site, the Trust and ISS Mediclean

The effect of the action completely transformed the Whipps Cross strikers. They made their own history

distributed letters of misinformation suggesting that the union leadership was misrepresenting members' interests.

But on returning to the hospital from the police station we were greeted by the sight of female domestic members dancing and jumping up and down on these now torn up letters. The strike went ahead the next day and was overwhelmingly supported.

The victorious outcome of the strike coincided with the ending of the contract with ISS Mediclean. Initial Facilities, part of the Rentokil group, secured the new contract.

Very soon a confrontational management style emerged. This resulted in a provocation between a supervisor with one of the strike leaders, Kola. Kola was sacked and a union campaign for his reinstatement followed.

After a successful Employment Tribunal, Kola was reinstated and returned to

work. There was a jubilant reception from union members as he was carried aloft by them into the staff restaurant.

The company's attempt to intimidate the workforce and break the union early on in the new contract had failed.

However, they continued to prevaricate and drag their feet over the implementation of the agreement, leading to a ballot and further successful strike action in 2006. The contractor conceded that they had to honour the agreement.

The effect of the action completely transformed the Whipps Cross strikers. They made their own history and had it reflected in the messages of solidarity and money that came in from all around the country. Strikers attended Unison conference where over 2,000 delegates and visitors rose to their feet to applaud their struggle. The union branch won first prize nationally for recruitment and organisation.

Unity

The experience of the unity of black and white workers in action was a living and concrete example of how to defeat the bosses' divide and rule tactics. The attempts of the employers to intimidate these workers was faced down. This was because of the resolute and principled stand from the local strike leadership, in particular porter and branch secretary Len Hockey.

As a Socialist Party member Len had the support of many other workers and trade unionists and was able to draw upon that collective strength and experience to help to guide the dispute.

But probably the most outstanding feature of this historic east London struggle was the example given by the longer established porters. These workers struck for the status and future of their own jobs and of the service.

Today the effects of the Con-Dem coalition's policies are felt throughout the Whipps Cross workforce with domestic and portering staff facing reduced earnings opportunities with flat-time earnings for overtime working. But the experience of struggle cannot be expunged.



Len Hockey speaking at a picket line meeting photo Alison Hill

The Socialist Party says:

If the NHS is to survive, all the money-grabbing private corporations swarming around its sickly body must be taken into public ownership, with no compensation unless there is proven need

Unless Labour disowns and expels the likes of Alan Milburn, there's no chance of a future Labour government doing this. A new workers' party is needed that will fight to rebuild a publicly owned service run for the benefit of all – except the profiteers

No cuts, closures or job losses in the NHS

End privatisation. Scrap PFI and refuse to pay back the 'debt'

Nationalise the pharmaceutical companies under democratic control and integrate them into the NHS

For mass action to defend the NHS, including a 24-hour general strike

[illegible]

Cameron takes a gamble by threatening EU referendum

Workers in Europe must unite against capitalist neoliberalism

Judy Beishon

With the economy again sinking and likewise the Tories' hopes of returning to power in 2015, Prime Minister David Cameron has turned to the issue of Europe to try to take votes from the eurosceptic Ukip and improve Tory fortunes.

His government had already guaranteed a referendum if the transfer of significant new powers to Brussels is proposed. But he went further in his 23 January speech, promising more 'repatriation' of powers and a referendum on the UK's European Union membership in 2017.

However, much can happen between now and 2017; huge events could take place that would throw the EU into great turmoil, such as major debt defaults in Greece and other southern European countries, and even the breakup of the eurozone. Also, if the Labour Party wins the next general election, it may decide not to hold a referendum at all.

For socialists, the bosses' EU must be firmly opposed, whether in a referendum or otherwise, as despite a few morsels of workers' rights, it is fundamentally an institution that acts in the interests of the capitalist classes.

The EU capitalist project was an attempt to overcome the limits of developing the productive forces within Europe's nation states and to enable Europe to compete better with other global capitalist powers and blocs. But as the Socialist Party always predicted, it has failed to overcome the barriers between the states and the antagonisms between the competing ruling classes.

Attacks on workers

Cameron repeated a warning originally made by German chancellor Angela Merkel that Europe faces difficulties in continuing to deliver the present 'way of life' because it 'accounts for just over 7% of the world's population, produces around 25% of global GDP and has to finance 50% of global social spending'.

This is a thinly veiled rationale for more attacks on the working class: further austerity measures and a rejection of EU regulations that prevent British bosses from undermining workers' terms and conditions.

TUC leader Frances O'Grady was right to warn about this, but not to feed illusions in the EU as a protector of workers' rights. The EU is basically a club of the capitalist classes, promoting their interests.

Although some EU laws are more progressive than British laws regarding workers' rights, the EU treaties enshrine major attacks on working people by demanding privatisation of public services and many other policies in the interests of big business.

Governments across Europe, acting for their own ruling classes, all want workers to pay the price of the capitalist economic crisis. This includes the French government that has imposed a large austerity package on French workers and the German government that has led the way in insisting on nightmare austerity in southern Europe.

It suits them all domestically to try to blame each other for the austerity; Cameron, while inflicting



No to the bosses' EU photo Paul Mattsson

savage cuts in Britain, argued in his speech that European people are 'frustrated' because 'their living standards are slashed through enforced austerity' as a result of 'decisions taken further and further away from them'. His posing as a great democrat who trusts the electorate is clearly a sham when we are offered a vote on EU membership, but not on the brutal cuts he is spearheading.

While the eurozone struggles for survival with its leaders in a desperate conflict over further integration, Cameron rejects Britain being part of any moves towards closer ties across the EU, wanting instead a looser 'network', development of the 'single market' and use of 'collective power to open markets' outside Europe.

He infuriates other EU governments by demanding access for British big business to the EU market but with reduced regulations, combined with safeguards for the City of London and British 'rights' in the EU against whatever survives of the eurozone club.

Cherry picking

Unsurprisingly Cameron is accused of blackmail - cherry picking what he wants out of the EU with the threat of leaving it if he doesn't get his way - and setting the scene for others to jump on the bandwagon. Already a Dutch minister has suggested his government should draw up its own shopping list.

However, Cameron's edict is a dilemma for the EU capitalist classes, as they would prefer to keep Britain inside the EU.

The smaller states want a counter balance to German and French power, while Merkel has to take into account that Britain is now Germany's biggest global trading partner and that Cameron is a 'free-trade' ally to counter the 'less neoliberal' southern states. Britain is also useful to them in other ways, including through its military apparatus (used in Libya and Mali) and international relationships.

So token concessions, at least, could be tossed to Cameron, as

Merkel indicated when she advocated a 'fair compromise' following his speech. But there are clearly limits to these concessions. Cameron painted a picture of an even less workable EU than at present, with every state choosing its relationship with it.

Achieving agreement for a deal in just two years after 2015, from all 27 EU states, with the background of economic crisis and the eurozone struggle for survival, stretches credibility to breaking point.

Tories' prospects

Cameron's speech was cheered in the Tory ranks. He was under the pressure of hostility towards the EU from a substantial number of Tory MPs and party members, backed up by much of the right-wing media, and increasing hostility in the population as a whole.

However, although he's managed to galvanise his party and a post-speech poll showed the Tories gaining some support at the expense of Ukip, the issue of Europe is not the decisive one for a majority of the electorate and Labour still leads in the polls.

Not only has Cameron failed to convincingly shift towards winning a 2015 general election, but in the event of a hung parliament his referendum commitment could make Tory power less likely, by helping to propel the pro-EU Lib Dems towards a coalition with Labour instead of the Tories (despite Nick Clegg denying this). And with Cameron himself arguing - subject to gaining concessions - for staying in the EU, Ukip will still take votes from the Tories by calling for withdrawal regardless of any concessions.

Cameron must also be hoping that the issue of Europe and the eurozone crisis - the effects of which he fears - will distract attention from the dire state of the British economy and its struggle to compete globally.

'A new global race of nations is underway today', he said, to get across the need for the EU to be economically strong. But his underlying agenda is to protect and promote the wealth and profits of British big

business, through demanding more opt-outs from EU regulations and stepping up the slashing of workers' living standards.

Referendum

Present polls show more people supporting an EU exit than staying in. But it's not yet possible to predict the fortunes of the pro- and anti-EU campaigns if a referendum is eventually held. Judging by present positions, Lib Dem and Labour leaders would campaign to stay in the EU and in all likelihood the Tory leadership too, but inevitably widespread anger against both the EU and the government would figure strongly. Many workers could vote No to the EU to express outrage at the government, austerity and the EU gravy train.

So while much could change during a referendum campaign, as was the case in the 1975 referendum, Cameron has entered dangerous territory for British capitalism - raising the possibility of an EU exit against the intent of the leaders of all three main capitalist parties.

How would the British economy be affected if Britain leaves the EU? Many Tory eurosceptics argue that Britain would be fine outside the EU.

However, half of British trade is with Europe and the British ruling class has benefited politically and economically in the world arena through being a leading EU player. So while British capitalism would stagger on, much of it could suffer significantly from an EU exit, including the car industry and finance sector.

Either way, new mass workers' parties need to be built so that the working classes across the continent have the political tools to reject this capitalist Europe of crisis. Socialists must warn of the dangers of nationalism and strongly promote solidarity between workers and the unemployed across Europe. No to the bosses' EU, and yes to an alliance of socialist states - a democratic socialist confederation - that would make the needs of the majority paramount.

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:



Italy: February election likely to end in stalemate

Plethora of parties and coalitions but none that represent workers' need to fight austerity.

Clare Doyle in conjunction with Marco Veruggio, Controcorrente (CWI, Italy)



Ireland: The ULA, the fight against austerity and building a new party of the working class

The Socialist Party has ended its membership of the United Left Alliance (ULA).

Statement by the Socialist Party, (CWI, Ireland)



Mali: Imperialist intervention offers no hope for the working masses

Further slide into chaos and anarchy.

Janet Arogundade, Lagos, Democratic Socialist Movement (DSM, CWI, Nigeria)

the Socialist postbag

Do you have something to say?

Send your news, views and criticism in not more than 150 words to Socialist Postbag, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD, or phone 020 8988 8771, email: editors@socialistparty.org.uk. We reserve the right to shorten letters. Don't forget to give your name, address and phone number. Confidentiality will be respected if requested.

Hit by bedroom tax

I belong to a Facebook group, of over 6,600 people, that is trying to find ways to fight the introduction of the 'bedroom tax' on 1 April. It is growing daily. People who simply cannot pay are terrified of being evicted and becoming homeless. The government's plan is to make people downsize but there aren't the smaller properties to move to. I am 56 and have lived in my three-bed Housing Association home for over 21 years and I spent a fortune on adapting it for my needs, and on my garden. I am 95% bed-bound. I have dogs and cats. As I have two 'spare rooms', I will have to pay 25% of my current housing benefit. There are no one-bed adapted bungalows available.

I am also bipolar and this is really affecting my mental health. As if life on benefits isn't hard enough! Who do we turn to for help?

Debbie Price,
East Sussex

Les Miserables

Like Derek McMillan, who reviewed Les Miserables (the Socialist 749), I enjoyed watching the film. Derek's review highlights one of the film's weaknesses, a lack of political/social context. The 1830 revolution had deposed the Bourbon dynasty, yet disappointed many republicans by installing Louis Philippe on the throne. This led to the June Rebellion in 1832 of mostly republican students. This took place around the funeral of General Lamarque where, for a night at least, the rebellion succeeded in con-

trolling the eastern part of Paris, with Victor Hugo (author of Les Miserables) witnessing fighting on the barricades. Also, if you work out the year in which Jean Vanjean was arrested for stealing bread, you find it is 1796, just two years after 1794, the year of Thermidorean reaction and the end of the Law of the Maximum (price controls on food) brought in by the pressure of the poor Parisian masses, the sans-culottes. The film focuses on the story's romantic side, but it shines some light onto the



aftermath of the great French Revolution of 1789-1815. Good places to start further study are Peter Taaffe's recently republished 'The Masses Arise' and Marx's writings including 'The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte' and 'The Civil War in France'.

Iain Dalton, Leeds

Film review

Fired up by Fire in the Blood

Paul Heron reviews the film 'Fire in the Blood', directed by Dylan Mohan Gray and released on 2 February



Only 1.3% of profits of the multinationals goes into new drug discovery research

This excellent documentary shows how the multinational pharmaceutical industry denied essential medication to tens of millions of people in the developing world affected by HIV and Aids.

Fire in the Blood is a story of unfathomable cruelty and neglect as Western neoliberal governments did the bidding of the powerful pharmaceutical industry. By effectively blockading low cost Aids drugs to the developing world it is estimated that ten million people died. In pursuit of profit, lives and communities were destroyed.

The film explores why the system governing the development and commercialisation of medicine is deeply flawed and discriminates against those who cannot afford to pay. It shows how very few patents are new, novel or improved and how patent monopolies have been established to maximise profiteering.

Those patents are used to focus on high-priced products for the richest in the west, but even people in the west, particularly in the USA, are being 'priced out' of the market.

The neoliberal agenda has now made Western governments the bag carriers to the pharma industry as

they pursue bigger profits for their shareholders. The film explains how treaties are used to prevent affordable generic drugs, particularly from India, reaching the developing world.

Indeed in the field of 'research and development', globally governments and other public sources fund this to the tune of 84%; only 12% of such research is funded by the pharmaceutical industry.

Betrayed

Only 1.3% of profits of the multinationals goes into new drug discovery research. As the former chief executive of Pfizer comments in the film, people pay for the drugs twice once through taxes, and then to the pharmaceutical industry.

The statistics are damning but Fire in the Blood is a human story. It shows the shocking impact of big pharma profiteering on lives, how millions died, and communities were devastated. It disproportionately affected working class communities and the poorest, particularly in Africa.

But it also tells you about the fight-back among the medical profession,

the lawyers, but above all the working class, and how mass campaigns, and indeed breaking the law, won a campaign for affordable generic 'first-line' antiretrovirals (ARV's)

However, the film also carries a warning. Millions of people with HIV/Aids in the developing world, whose lives were saved by these first-line ARVs, will at some point need to switch to the more complex second and third line ARVs.

Not surprisingly these are not available in generic form, and the multinationals recently took steps under new trade agreements – under the auspices of the World Trade Organisation – to ensure that the next battle will not be lost by them so easily to allow cheaper generic drugs.

This film shows the mass campaigns fought to break the cartel of greedy multinationals and exposes the effective genocide of ten million people.

It fills the viewer with a feeling of betrayal by governments in the pocket of big business and shows the desperate need for socialised medicine, with health systems nationalised under democratic workers' control.

The Masses Arise

The great French revolution 1789-1815

by Peter Taaffe

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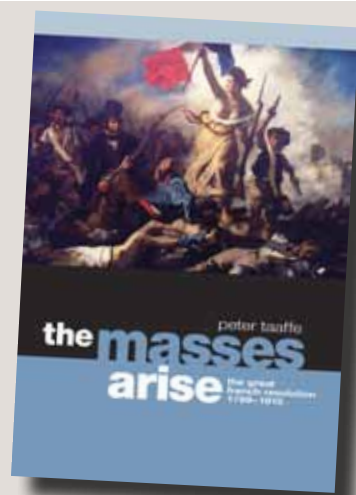


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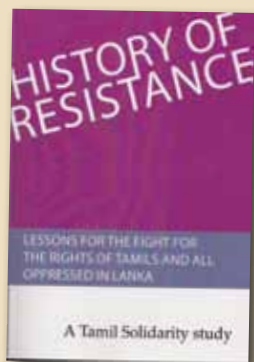
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Aaron Swartz: a fight to free information

Adam Hemsley

The suicide of Aaron Swartz, aged 26, exposes the hypocrisy of the US justice system and highlights attacks on freedom of information.

Swartz, co-founder of the social news website Reddit, was facing over 50 years imprisonment and fines up to \$1 million on 13 felony counts for downloading four million academic journals with the intention of opening them up to the public.

JSTOR, the digital library from which the journals were downloaded, didn't pursue charges.

But despite being allegedly guilty only of copyright infringement and breaking a terms of service agreement, the US government brought felony charges of wire and computer fraud against Swartz that could have seen a prison sentence

of over half a century.

Swartz was involved in groups such as Change Congress and Demand Progress which campaigned against the Stop Online Piracy Act (Sopa) and the Protect IP Act (Pipa), US government attempts to censor the internet under the guise of fighting online piracy.

A statement by the Swartz family said that the tragedy of his death was not just personal but the "product of a criminal justice system rife with intimidation and prosecutorial overreach." Swartz's belief that information should be free and open to all people contradicted the restrictive and secretive nature of capitalism.

After the banking crash of 2008, the bankers and speculators who committed history's largest act of fraud walked away without even a slap on the wrist.

But an activist who challenged

the system was hounded by an unjust legal system and took his own life.

Aaron Swartz's death raises the importance of the campaign to keep the internet and all forms of information free from censorship. SOPA in the US and the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Act (Acta) in Europe have been defeated but could return in different forms.

Socialists must raise awareness of control of the internet by big business and capitalist governments. To ensure that free information is provided on the internet, control over it should be taken from big corporations and run by elected representatives of the community.

We should fight to replace capitalism with socialism, a system that has nothing to hide from people because it is built around their direct running of it. Then, truly free access to information can be achieved.

Councillors have a choice: Don't vote for cuts!

Building support for a fightback in Southampton

Southampton Socialist Party

Facing the worst council cuts ever, with the loss of over 300 jobs and vital services, Southampton Socialist Party proposed a 'no cuts' budget during the council's consultation process.

This proposal was based on utilising council borrowing powers funded by cash in the council's reserves.

The council has now circulated a document written by chief financial officer (CFO) Andy Lowe, refuting this proposal.

Southampton Socialist Party does not accept the legal arguments of the CFO. They only represent one interpretation of the Local Government Act 2003.

The Act asserts: "A local authority may borrow money - (a) for any purpose relevant to its functions under any enactment, or (b) for the purposes of the prudent management of its financial affairs." Can there be any doubt given the cuts the city faces that our proposal meets this requirement?

The CFO actually accepts that councils can borrow, even without government permission. Out of Southampton's General Fund borrowing (for non-housing expenditure) of £79.9 million in 2011-12, £22.9 million was 'unsupported' by government grants.

He then says, however, that borrowing should only be for 'capital expenditure' as opposed to day-to-

day 'revenue' spending.

But the Audit Commission, the government's spending watchdog, admitted recently that 16% of unitary local authorities submitted 'capitalisation requests' in 2012 to allow them, "to treat revenue expenditure as capital expenditure and therefore either borrow or use capital receipts to finance" it. There are other routes as well.

Southampton Labour council and its two Labour MPs, Alan Whitehead and John Denham, could easily demand that Labour should promise, when next in government, to write off the debts of any councils that borrow in order to avoid cuts.

What is ultimately deemed to be an 'acceptable budget' will be decided not by the views of council officials and their legal advisors alone, or even Eric Pickles, the Conservative minister for local government, but the determination of those councillors committed to opposing the cuts, and the mass support they can build.

The stand of councillors Keith Morrell and Don Thomas - expelled from Labour for voting against cuts - has galvanised others to agree that such a campaign could be fought and won.

Keith and Don have received overwhelming support in their Cooftord ward and backing from Len McCluskey, Unite union general secretary, and also from the RMT union.



Council workers marching against the cuts photo Pete Mason

Alongside this they have received the support of Southampton council workers, their trade unions, and other union branches, activists and anti-cuts campaigners across the country.

Save Jobs and Services - Don't Vote for Cuts
Demonstrate Wednesday 13 February, 1pm
Civic Centre, Southampton
Video: Rebel councillors speak out :www.tusc.org.uk

Hull councillors ready to vote No

Phil Culshaw

Hull Unison steward, personal capacity

Three Hull city Labour councillors - Gary Waring, Gill Kennett and Dean Kirk - have told the local press they will vote against cuts in jobs and services at the council budget setting meeting on 28 February.

Hull council faces losing a third of its funding over the next three years. Already, 55 people chase every job vacancy in the city.

The remaining Labour councillors are faced with a decision: do the Tories' dirty work or stand united with their workforce and the people of Hull to build a mass campaign to defend much-needed jobs and services.

But council leader Steve Brady has already distanced himself

from the rebel councillors, and the militant traditions of the labour movement.

The east London Poplar councillors' motto in the 1920s was: "Better to break the law, than to break the poor!" They were jailed during their successful struggle where obeying the law would have meant cutting services, making the rates (equivalent to council tax) unaffordable, or reducing poor relief to a level that would not stop the unemployed and their families from starving.

The 1983-87 Liverpool city council adopted the same motto as Poplar in their struggle for the return of funding that was cut by Thatcher's Tory government. Liverpool's militant stand won £60 million, resulted in the largest council home-building programme in the country at that time and created children's

nurseries and apprenticeships for unemployed youth.

The council was never voted out of office. Instead it was undemocratically dismissed by the courts with the backing of both the Tory government and the national Labour leader, Neil Kinnock.

In the early 1990s, Militant (now the Socialist Party) led a mass campaign of 18 million poll tax non-payers which forced the Tories to ditch their hated tax along with their leader Margaret Thatcher. If people had followed the advice of the Labour leadership then no doubt we would still have that unjust tax!

Hull trade unions are organising a series of public and consultation meetings to build a strong anti-cuts campaign that follows the traditions of Poplar, Liverpool and the anti-poll tax movement.

Brighton's Greens vote for cuts in workers' allowances

Jon Redford

Brighton and Hove Socialist Party

Brighton and Hove council's policies and resources committee, on 24 January, proposed a review of allowances received by staff. These allowances frequently make up large parts of workers' wages.

£4,000 of a refuse worker's £17,000 annual salary is made up of these payments, according to the GMB trade union.

After the public gallery was cleared of angry bin workers for the vote, the Greens and Tories accepted the proposals. Details will now be developed by a group of three council officers, while Green council leader Jason Kitkat made it clear

Why can't Green councillors stand up for the people who elected them?

they would impose the changes unilaterally if there was no agreement from the trade unions.

The next round of Brighton and Hove cuts is expected to reach £25 million.

A wave of anti-cuts feeling brought the Greens to power in Brighton and Hove in 2010. Why can't Green councillors stand up for the people who elected them?

Shrewsbury 24: What is the government hiding?

Bob Severn

On 23 January, a packed Westminster press conference heard the Shrewsbury 24 campaign's response to the government's refusal to publish documents relating to the Shrewsbury 24 case on the grounds of national security.

1972 saw the first building workers' national strike, over pay and health and safety. Five months after the successful strike ended, 24 trade union members were charged over

picketing in Shrewsbury. Two - Des Warren, who died in 2004, and Ricky Tomlinson - were imprisoned.

Ricky told the meeting that, after the papers have been kept secret for 40 years, the justice secretary decided last year that the embargo would continue for another ten years.

Eileen Turnbull appealed for signatures to the campaign's petition to Downing Street, which can be accessed via www.shrewsbury24campaign.org.uk.

The campaign also appeals for

supporters to write to their MP urging them to support the early day motion of Labour MP John McDonnell, who chaired the conference.

Phone hacking campaigner Tom Watson was among the Labour MPs who spoke. Trade union leaders Frances O'Grady from the TUC, Unite's Len McCluskey and Ucat's Steve Murphy also addressed the meeting.

Another speaker, film director Ken Loach, urged those trade union leaders to not just rely on parliament but to organise workers' action.



Appealing for support for the campaign photo Bob Severn

AS BUDGET TIME APPROACHES, TELL COUNCILLORS:

There is an alternative to cuts!

The Con-Dems have slashed local government spending by almost 30%, decimating the vital services millions of people rely on. Across the country Labour councillors have wrung their hands at the scale of the cuts – but have wielded the Tory axe obediently. The Labour leadership does not oppose cuts – instead promising to maintain the public sector pay freeze, for example.

In fact, when two councillors in Southampton voted against cuts, including the closure of a local swimming pool, they were promptly expelled from Labour (see page 11). However, the scale of the cuts, and the anger mounting against them, could force more councillors to take a principled stand.

Andy Bentley from Stoke-on-Trent Socialist Party reports on events there.

On 23 January, Stoke-on-Trent Labour councillor Andy Lilley resigned from the Labour Party saying: “I cannot, nor will not, support an administration that seeks to target the very people they claim to represent.”

The following day Stoke-on-Trent Unison local government trade union branch suspended funding of Labour locally as the party cuts workers’ jobs, terms and conditions. Unison branch secretary Clive Rushton said: “The Labour Party was born out of the trade union movement and is there to represent the working people. It is now attacking the working people.”

These developments reflect the seething resentment at the failure of Labour to fight for the interests of ordinary working class people.

The city council plans to borrow up to £59 million to build a new council HQ. Disgracefully this follows savage cuts of £56 million over the last two years, with a further £21 million planned this year. No wonder anger in Stoke has reached fever pitch.

What started as a ‘virtual march on Stoke’ on Facebook has now become a real march on 23 February.

Nearly 3,000 people have signed Stoke Socialist Party’s petition against the new HQ and calling on the city council to “save our jobs and services instead”.

Despite the denials of Labour council leader Mohammed Pervez, councils can legally borrow money and use reserves to stave off cuts. Nationally councils have £13 billion in reserves!

If the council refuses to imple-

ment cuts and set a ‘needs budget’ it would get massive support from across the city and beyond. If other local authorities did similar, anti-cuts councils could link up against the government.

If the council launched a campaign of real resistance to the Con-Dems, the Socialist Party would give our 100% backing and would help mobilise support across the city, in trade unions and in the communities, through demonstrations, rallies and protests.

But in 2006 Stoke’s Labour-controlled council, under a Labour government, launched cuts of £21 million. Labour leader Ed Miliband, in front of 150,000 trade unionists on the 20 October 2012 TUC demo, said that a future Labour government would not reverse one spending cut.



photo Paul Mattsson

Labour condemns strikes and refuses to repeal the anti-trade union laws. Quite clearly the Labour Party no longer represents working class people.

Trade union members should

follow the example set by the Unison branch in Stoke and demand that their political donations are no longer used to fund a party that continues to attack their jobs, pay and conditions.

TUSC AGAINST CUTS

TUSC stood six candidates at the last local elections in Stoke-on-Trent and in 2015 we aim to stand more. www.tusc.org.uk

Trade unions need a political voice – a new mass party that stands up for working people. The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition is an important step in this direction. TUSC is an electoral alliance standing candidates against cuts and privatisation.

It already involves leading members of the PCS, NUT, RMT and POA unions, community campaigners and socialist groups including the Socialist Party.

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 un-recycled 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!