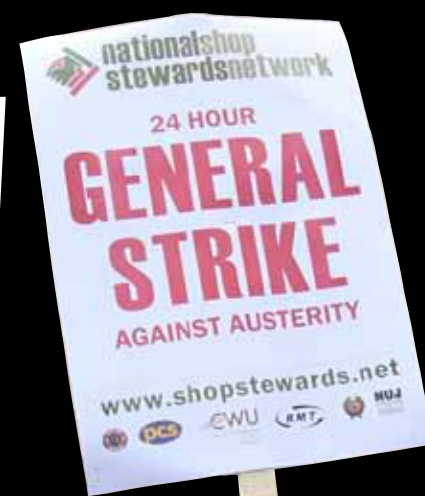




# AUSTERITY...

# ANGER...

# ACTION!



## TUC must set date for 24-hour general strike

**Asked what he wanted to achieve in 2013, Tory Chancellor George Osborne is reputed to have declared: "My main aim this year is to avoid f-ing up the budget."**

But no matter what rabbits he pulls out of his Bullingdon boy top hat, this next budget is guaranteed to be another 'f-up'. Last year's budget included the cut in the top rate of income tax. That killed any lingering perceptions that we are 'all in this together' and impressed upon the majority that this is a government for the rich, determined to drive the rest of us into the dirt.

Economic commentators debate the likelihood of a triple-dip recession but the reality is that there has been no real return to growth. Prolonged stagnation - 'bumping along the bottom' - is the best scenario on offer.

Moody's long-anticipated downgrading of the British government's credit rating will form the backdrop to this year's budget. It is a graphic illustration that - as the Socialist warned - Con-Dem austerity has made the economic crisis worse. Not that we have

faith in Moody's or the other capitalist ratings agencies - these are the same companies that happily gave the sub-prime mortgage companies an AAA rating!

But the Con-Dems worship at the altar of the finance markets. From day one this government has justified austerity by the necessity of keeping the Credit Ratings Agencies happy. The rest of us can go to hell in a handcart.

Before the 2010 general election Osborne made maintaining Britain's AAA credit rating one of eight benchmarks by which to judge whether a Conservative government is delivering.

The wheels are coming off the Con-Dem coalition - it could fall at any time, particularly if faced with a mass movement of the working class. Osborne will continue to attempt to blame the previous government and the economic disaster in the eurozone but in reality he and his cuts-coalition have no solutions - other than making us suffer.

It is not the loss of Britain's AAA rating which is making this government ever-more unpopular, but the austerity policies that were meant to prevent it taking place: the 15% fall in real wage levels since the economic crisis began, the brutal cuts in ben-

efits, the deepening housing crisis and the axe which is being taken to the NHS and other public services.

All of this is creating burning anger among the working class - but also wide sections of the middle class - as our living standards plummet. As the Bank of England's chief economist, Spencer Dale, noted: "The harsh but inescapable reality is that households and families are worse off - much worse off"

But while most of us tighten our belts a few households and families are gorging on a feast of riches. The Sunday Times rich list reached record highs in 2012. The combined wealth of Britain's richest 1,000 people swelled by almost 5% to £414 billion, reaching the highest amount ever recorded by the 24-year old survey.

The TUC is currently considering submissions from the unions on the question of a general strike. The latest episode in the crisis makes it clearer than ever - the TUC must urgently set the date for a 24-hour general strike against austerity. This would be the most effective way of channelling the burning anger into a movement capable of kicking out this hated government.

**Continued on page 2**



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# No to austerity, or austerity-lite – fight for a socialist solution

Continued from page 1

While a tiny minority increase their wealth at the expense of the majority, for the rest of us there is no end in sight to the economic crisis. Britain only maintained its AAA rating for as long as it did because, to the world's financial markets, sterling appeared a safer bet than the eurozone.

But sterling has been falling since the start of 2013. In other words in the last months the financiers have felt that Britain was a riskier prospect than the euro, despite there being more than 50% youth unemployment and profound political instability in a whole swathe of the eurozone.

There are no safe havens for world capitalism. British capitalism, and therefore the working class, faces a bleak future. Five years into the economic crisis, UK gross domestic product (GDP) is still 12-15% below the pre-crisis trend. It's been estimated that one in six high street shops is lying empty, with 20 stores closing every day. Such is the lack of jobs that 1,700 people applied for eight 'Barista' jobs at one Costa Coffee branch.

Osborne is under pressure from sections of the capitalist class to increase state investment in infrastructure, and he may make some proposals in the budget. Even if this is the case, Osborne has made it clear that this will be combined with continued austerity for the majority.

New Labour is deriding Osborne for the economic crisis and calling for a change of direction, a 'Plan B', but has no real alternative. Writing in the Independent (25 February 2013), Owen Jones hopefully declared that: "Labour

do have the outlines of an alternative". Jones quotes Ed Balls when he stood for the Labour leadership and asked Labour Party members to imagine if the 1945 Labour government had "decided that the first priority was to reduce the debts built up in the war, there would be no NHS, no rebuilt railways and housing, no welfare state." Jones, however, is forced to mournfully comment: "if only he [Ed Balls] had stuck unrelentingly to this script."

## Labour - no alternative

The 1945 Labour government, under mass pressure from below, did carry out 'a quarter of a revolution', creating the foundations of the public services which are now being destroyed. Today, Labour, however, is a willing prisoner of the straitjacket of capitalism. Never mind promising to strengthen public services or increase workers' living standards, it refuses to even promise to reverse the cuts being carried out by the Con-Dems.

The labour movement needs its own mass party – which the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC, see page 8) is working to lay the foundations for – campaigning for a 'Plan S' for socialism. What would such a programme include? Take one issue – the growing housing crisis. Homelessness has increased by 26% over the last two years and is set to increase further. While housing benefit is cut, the cost of housing is rocketing.

House prices have gone up 40 times since 1971 whereas prices in general have gone up tenfold. One in 12 families is now on waiting lists for social housing, the complete absence of which, combined with deregulation, is allow-

ing private sector landlords to increase rents.

The private rented sector has increased by 86% in three years. Rents have risen by an average of 37% since 2007. Younger people are faced with a future of shared accommodation, living with their parents, or sofa-surfing, with some ending up sleeping on the streets.

Even the right-wing IEA think-tank drew the conclusion that a mass house-building programme could almost halve the £21 billion that is spent on housing benefits and mortgage relief. However, their means to achieve this end was to get rid of even the current minimal planning regulation in order to allow the construction companies to chuck up jerry-built sub-standard housing.

A socialist solution would be to implement a mass council house-building programme – creating high-quality, affordable, secure, environmentally-friendly housing – for all those who need it. This would solve the housing crisis and provide secure, well-paid work for the many tens of thousands of unemployed construction workers. Such a policy would not only stop at housing but also be used to build the schools, hospitals, libraries, care homes and other necessary facilities and utilities to service the population.

How can such a policy be paid for? We favour massively increasing taxes on the super-rich. However, this can lead to the capitalists taking production abroad, as the hysterical reaction of a section of the French capitalists to François Hollande's puny taxation proposals indicates. Attempts to secure even minimal reforms, never mind a substantial reformist programme to change the lives of working people, come up against the inherent limits of capitalism, the



photo Paul Mattsson

system based upon production for profit and not social need.

Does this mean we should retreat? No! But it poses the need to go further with the demand for nationalisation, under democratic workers' control and management, of the banks and the summits of the financial system together with the big monopolies that dominate the great majority of the economy. Compensation could be paid to those capable of proving their need for it.

Among other measures a socialist programme would also require control of all foreign trade, through democratic nationalisation of all incomings and outgoings, in order to prevent sabotage as big business will attempt to move its resources abroad.

In short, in place of Osborne's 'plan A' we do not need a minimalist 'plan B', but a bold 'plan S' for socialism.

## Resist all attacks on trade union facility time

Dave Warren  
PCS rep DVLA

I work at the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) in Swansea where I am one of the officers of the PCS branch, one of the largest in the union. I am on 100% facility time, which means I spend all my time at work representing union members individually and collectively.

The total time allocated to all the reps in the branch, including safety reps and union learning reps, is around six full-time equivalents. This sounds a lot but with over 3,600 members it amounts to the equivalent of one full-time rep for every 600 members. Some of the reps like myself also have duties outside the branch at higher levels of the union.

The government's austerity programme means attacks on pensions, pay, jobs and terms and conditions. At DVLA we face the total closure of the Agency's local office network and also the privatisation of part of the organisation.

As part of our campaign to defend jobs and services we were on strike six times in 2012, either one-day strikes or two or three-hour walk-outs.



See page 4 for details of PCS's national strike ballot photo Paul Mattsson

Increasing pressure at work results in many members seeking individual help. At any given time I am dealing with 15-20 personal cases. I also get around 50 emails a day and countless phone calls in addition to the many meetings with managers, union members or colleagues. All in all, this is a very busy and demanding job.

## Reps under pressure

It is no accident that at a time when the government is attacking civil servants it is also trying to restrict the effectiveness of the civil service trade unions by cutting back on facility time for reps. If the government gets its way, no union rep in the civil service will be allowed to spend more than 50% of their time on union work in future.

At DVLA we've been given notice that this will apply from 30 April. There will also be an overall cut in facility time so it will not be possible to allocate the time lost to other reps.

DVLA is now taking steps to place me in an official DVLA post. This will be a full-time post with up to a maximum of 50% time off for union work. In effect, I and others will be expected to do two full-time jobs in the time it should take to do one.

There is a clear intention here to control and put pressure on reps. Under-performance in the official job will affect performance related pay and could even lead to proceedings for inefficiency, so there will be pressure to focus on the official role at the expense of the union work. Managers will also be under pressure to put 'business needs' first and have first call on the union rep's time.

It isn't easy being a union rep these days, but the attacks will have an unexpected consequence because in a hostile environment the most determined individuals tend to step forward to take up union roles.

As John Wayne once said: "When the going gets tough, the tough gets going."

## Italian election Results resolve nothing

The Italian election on 24 and 25 February was long-expected to end in a stalemate, but the closeness of the votes and the possibility of a temporary coalition and another election soon have caused big falls on stock markets around the world.

Fears for the ability of the eurozone's third largest economy to get out of economic stagnation and growing budget deficits and to repay its €2 trillion debts have fuelled speculation that the euro is once again in jeopardy.

A movement that was unknown three years ago – the Five Star Movement – has gone from 15% (in the polls) to 25% in the last two weeks! Its leader, the comedian Beppe Grillo, had taken an anti-euro and anti-establishment stance, and drawn hundreds of thousands to his 77 city square meetings across the country.

Grillo calls for nationalisation of the banks and a reduction in working hours to create jobs. He also criticises cuts to education and health services.

The so-called centre right coalition, headed by Silvio Berlusconi, also rose rapidly on the basis of populist promises such as ending the highly unpopular homes tax (and even repaying the €4 billion already levied!). It finished with 29.1% of the vote for the lower house – the Chamber of Deputies – to the 29.5% for the 'Centre-Left' coalition under Democratic Party leader, Pier Luigi Bersani who offered nothing and threw away an 11% lead.

For workers in Italy there was no mass party championing their interests in a clear fight against the austerity measures imposed under the former technocratic prime minister, Mario Monti on the orders of the 'Troika' (Monti's own list struggled to get just over 10% of the vote)

The coalition called 'Civil Revolution' led by ex-magistrate Ingroia, in which the once combative Rifondazione stood, received just 2.25% of the vote and will have no deputies in the parliament.

**A fuller analysis by Controcorrente (the Socialist Party's sister organisation in Italy), will be carried on the website of the Committee for a Workers' International: socialistworld.net**



# The Work Programme isn't working

Michael Johnson

20 out of 9,500. That's how many former incapacity benefit claimants were placed in jobs lasting longer than three months through the Tories' much-lauded (by them) and controversial (for nearly everyone else) Work Programme.

A recent report by the Public Accounts Committee into how successful the scheme was, found that, at best, the private companies receiving money to take part in the scheme were only able to move 5% of the people using the scheme off benefits and into work, and at worst a pitiful 2%.

## Throwing money away

This meant that not one of the 18 companies that signed up to the scheme were able to meet the target (which, at less than 12%, seems to show a lack of confidence in the scheme from the start). This is despite these private companies including notorious names such as A4e, G4S and Seetec, getting extra money for being able to keep people in work for three to six months.

But even though these results have been called 'abysmally low', that the programme has 'spectacularly underachieved' and is 'worse than doing nothing,' ministers involved seem to have decided the best course of action is to get firmly behind this apparently essential programme.

The government claims reported figures give a skewed picture and that the programme is doing really well. It's just that it's doing great outside of the dates that these figures



photo Senan

are drawn from. Or that its performance will start getting better any time soon. Promise.

Despite these desperate attempts to save face it's crushingly obvious that the Work Programme isn't working.

Companies using the scheme see it as a way of getting money for free labour and are deliberately pushing aside anyone that might need more time and training, and for people on

incapacity benefit this means they might as well give up on the scheme now.

This useless scheme should be scrapped and instead the money spent on it (up to £5 billion in the first five years) should be used to create real jobs with a living wage that can offer people the training and support they need, rather than see a whole section of society tossed on the scrap heap.

# East Midlands Ambulance Service Why 'Being the Best' puts lives at risk

A consultation report on plans for the East Midlands Ambulance Service (EMAS) was published on 7 January 2013.

EMAS based its so-called 'Being the Best' plan on a report commissioned from private company Process Evolution (PE).

The report advised that EMAS should close its 66 stations and implement a new model consisting of 33 hubs and standby points. However, EMAS decided 33 was too many and culled 20 more stations leaving it with a proposed 13 hub model.

## Opposition

The report has been slated as a 'sham' which did not listen to the concerns of staff and the public. Over 55,000 people signed Unison's petitions, hundreds marched and many attended public meetings.

Unison has pointed out that the plan would mean more travelling

for staff to work and more travelling for ambulances to respond to emergency calls.

For example, without a station in the High Peak of Derbyshire, the nearest hub would be over an hour's drive away! This would result in more volunteer community responders, with only a few hours of training, holding the fort while waiting for a paramedic to arrive.

## Politicians' 'support'

Labour, Tory and Lib Dem councillors and MPs have used the opportunity to build their standing in their local community by voicing opposition to the plans.

None, however, are willing to link the station closures with cuts or privatisation in the NHS (in 2012 EMAS lost its Patient Transport Service contracts to Arriva and NSL).

On 25 March 2013, EMAS will present four options to the Board of Executives: 1) do nothing, 2) adopt the

13 hub proposal, 3) adopt a 27 hub model and 4) recruit more staff and have more vehicles.

On Wednesday 20 March at 7pm, EMAS is to present its proposal to Amber Valley councillors at a scrutiny meeting. Unison is preparing for a further demonstration outside the town hall to make it clear that closing ambulance stations in Amber Valley will cost lives.

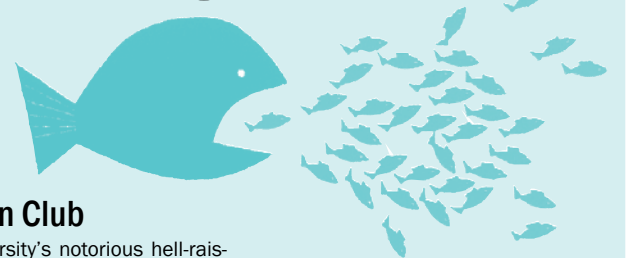
The battle to save our ambulance stations has a long way to go. Throughout the country ambulance trusts are drawing up plans to cull our ambulance stations.

Campaigners must fight for ambulance services to be fully funded by the NHS, the reversal of all privatisation and investment to ensure good staffing levels and quality care for all patients.

We need a national trade union-led demonstration as a first step in a mass campaign to fight for these things and to save our NHS.

**An ambulance worker**

# Them...



## Bully-don Club

Oxford University's notorious hell-raising Bullingdon Club - whose alumni include David Cameron and Boris Johnson - retains its vile upper class prejudices. According to the Oxford Student newspaper a prospective member of the Club was accepted after an initiation ceremony which included burning a £50 note in front of a homeless person.

ferent areas of the country. In London the child poverty figure for Bethnal Green and Bow is 42% but only 6% in Wimbledon.

There are 69 council wards around the country where more than half of children live in poverty and the national average is 20.2%.

## Tough out there

A Costa coffee shop in Nottingham advertised in February for three full-time and five part-time jobs with wages between £5.40 and £10 an hour. 1,700 people applied.

The manager of the branch summed up the lack of a future for young people in Britain, even the most highly educated: "Applications included graduates, people with PhDs, people with firsts. In the last six months, I've recruited four first class graduates. I feel for them: they might have been out of work for 12, even 24 months." He went on to say: "It's a barometer of the jobs market. It's really tough out there."

## Money laundering

Financial Fraud Action (FFA) has said that hundreds of thousands of students and unemployed people are at risk of being tricked into becoming money launderers. Criminals are targeting people with mass emails or by looking through CV sites and advertising jobs as things like 'money transfer agents' which pay hundreds of pounds a week. It is thought that 19% of students who had been approached accepted the offer.

FFA gave lots of warnings of the consequences for money launderers. But a better way to tackle the problem would be to fully fund education, provide grants to cover living costs and invest in creating decent, well-paid jobs.

## Child poverty

The End Child Poverty campaign has found big inequality for children in dif-

## Too Big Four

The Competition Commission has criticised Britain's 'Big Four' accountancy firms (PWC, Ernst & Young, Deloitte and KPMG) for being too dominant.

The Big Four act as auditors for 90% of stock market companies. The Competition Commission says auditors end up acting to please company management rather than seriously analysing the books. 61% of FTSE 100 firms have had the same auditor for more than ten years.

Surprise, surprise, the Commission's solution is... more competition! We say the big four should be, along with the banks, nationalised under democratic workers' control, with compensation only on the basis of proven need, and run in the interests of the millions instead of the millionaires.

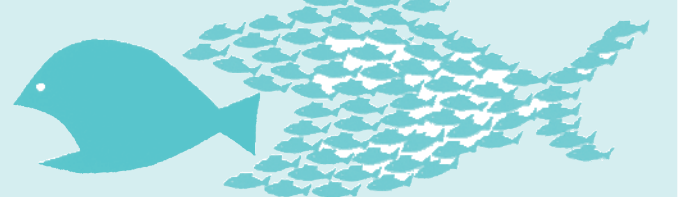
## Invisible ink

Printer ink is more expensive, measure-for-measure, than vintage champagne. And not only are prices going up but what you get for your money is going down.

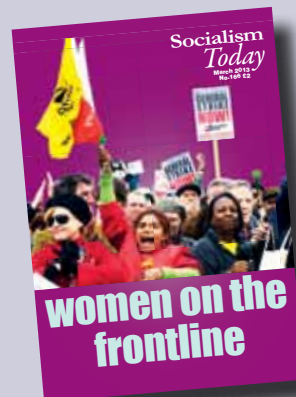
For example a decade ago, the best-selling HP cartridge had 42ml of ink and sold for about £20. Today, the standard printer cartridges made by HP may contain as little as 5ml of ink but sell for about £13. In fact most of the cartridges we buy these days are just empty space!

People's frustration with how quickly ink runs out has led the big companies to introducing 'XL' sized cartridges - but at pretty much the same size for twice the cost, they're even more of a rip-off!

# ...& Us



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



## Socialism Today

The Socialist Party's magazine  
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# Housing support - workers and service users under attack

**Paul Kershaw**  
Chair, Unite branch LE1111

Support workers at One Housing Group in London are to ballot for industrial action against pay cuts of up to £8,000 a year for 250 workers. This forms part of a trend with employers squeezing pay. But workers are increasingly fighting back.

The growth of membership in branches like the Unite Housing Workers Branch (which organises One Housing Group) suggests that the mood is changing: people have had enough and are ready to act.

Some other support providers are lining up to cut pay. The national charity, Turning Point plans to sack 2,600 staff and re-employ them on lower pay. This would leave some workers £10,000 out of pocket. Turning Point's publicity states "We turn lives around"; if you work for them,

it is in the wrong direction!

Unite is launching a campaign against the 'race to the bottom' in supported housing and social care. An online petition quickly collected over 45,000 names with many moving comments. Workers fear hardship and even homelessness as a result of cuts.

## Pay cuts hit quality

A recent report by Homeless Link, an independent agency, highlights the way pay cuts hit service quality. It shows how local authorities and charities are losing experienced staff. This is putting 'crucial relationships' at risk and leading to poor-quality homelessness services.

These pay cuts are driven by anticipated government cuts which must be opposed. It is a scandal that Labour-controlled Derby is leading the way, threatening to cut its 'sup-

porting people' funding for housing related support by over 80%. This is by far the biggest cut in the country and threatens to set an example for Tory 'easy councils' next year.

These cuts target the most vulnerable. The normally grey pages of Inside Housing magazine highlighted the impact on one service user observing: "For the likes of Mr Lee - who fears death or jail as a result of reduced support - the price is dear. But, like many councils across the country, Derby's councillors are calculating that it is one that may have to be paid."

Unite national officer, Sally Kosky commented: "Unite is bitterly disappointed by Derby council's decision. We argue that rather than going along with an approach which means destroying high quality services and undermining the salary and working conditions of employees, employers should join with us

and responsible funders in agreeing basic standards."

One Housing's pay cuts are driven by their plans to grow by undercutting other providers.

Unite has negotiated an offer of a £800,000 pay rise for the workforce at another supported housing provider, St Mungo's. But One Housing Group has offered a £400,000 cut.

The One Housing department whose staff salaries are being cut actually made a £1.2 million surplus on its contracts in 2012. The chief executive's pay was increased by £13,000 last year to £176,000 a year.

One Housing has boasted that it can undercut NHS-provided mental health services by as much as 80%. Unite members, fearing they will not be able to pay their own rent or mortgages, believe they are making up the shortfall.

## London workers lobby GLA about cuts and conditions



A firefighter on the protest photo Paul Mattsson

Members and supporters of London's firefighters (FBU) and transport workers (RMT) gathered outside city hall in central London on 25 February to protest against attacks on their services and conditions.

Firefighters are angry that Tory mayor Boris Johnson is determined to press ahead with his plans to decimate London's fire service despite the fire authority twice rejecting his plans.

These plans involve shutting 12 fire stations and sacking hundreds of firefighters. Firefighters from one of the threatened stations, Clapham, were on the protest and will be holding a demo on 16

March.

RMT members employed by STM Security Group UK Ltd who work on the London Overground were protesting against their working conditions.

In a situation familiar to many workers, they have only had an 80p an hour wage increase in the last four years. They are employed on zero-hours contracts meaning that they don't know from one day to the next what their hours will be.

One of their main demands is that they be employed directly by Transport for London which could give them more job security.

**Chris Newby**

## Victories for the left

Socialist Party member Peter Glover from Liverpool NUT has been elected to the national executive (NEC) of the teachers' union NUT.

This is a clear victory for the left in the NUT and for all those who have been calling for urgent action to defeat education secretary Gove's attacks.

As Peter says: "this election was like a mini-referendum on the strategy to defeat Gove. [Right] candidate] Beth Purnell's campaign issued glossy leaflets to every school selling her as the 'moderate sensible candidate'.

"Yet, without the same resources, I won with one of the largest ever left votes in the district. As one col-

league who had decided to back me explained, 'you were the candidate offering a strategy to win.'

"Perhaps now, those on the executive who have been wavering in their support for action will recognise the real mood of anger in our schools and back the programme of national strike action we need".

Peter will be serving alongside Martin Powell-Davies when the NEC meets this week, again to discuss whether to call national action.

After elections to the Northern Ireland public sector union Nipsa, the left now has 20 of the 25 executive seats - up from seven last year. Of these, nine are members of the Socialist Party in Northern Ireland.

## Stick to the agreements!

**Hugh Caffrey and Rob Williams**

Over 100 construction workers from across Cheshire and Merseyside protested at the Capenhurst site near Ellesmere Port on 20 February. This was against the employers' threat to national agreements.

This needs to be the start of a major campaign if the employers don't immediately back down.

Delegations of construction workers from sites in Cheshire, and a coachload from Liverpool, made for a vocal protest with all three construction unions (Unite, GMB and Ucat) represented.

The site is owned by Urenco, and main contractor Jacobs Engineering are building a storage facility for nuclear waste.

"Besna for the Blue Book industry" is how many are describing the attempt by Jacobs and other construction employers to get out of the national agreements.

Construction electricians in the JIB contracting section of the electrical industry won a famous victory after months of fighting against their employers' attempts through the 'Besna' to rip up the previous national agreement, de-skill the job, and cut pay by up to 35%.

Now it seems employers on the 'Blue Book' projects covered by the National Agreement for Engineering Construction (NAECI), which covers sites such as power stations and oil refineries, are looking to do the same thing.

Any weakening of conditions now, by sidestepping or watering down the national agreement even just on a few sites to start with, will be a quick step towards Besna-style hammering of pay and conditions.

Strong unions on site are absolutely crucial at a time when the blacklist has been exposed in the construction industry, through which the big companies victimised workers who wanted union organisation on the sites or even just proper health and safety protection. 49 building workers were killed on the job in the 12 months up to March 2012 and many more injured.

Construction workers can win, if they are prepared to take action. The possibility of a dispute with an employer should be investigated, which construction workers nationally can group around. This has to be based on building the union organisation on all sites, with democratic elections of stewards.

● Over 30 construction workers supported by Cardiff trades union council demonstrated at the Cardiff incinerator site on the same day as the Capenhurst protest. This was against the company CNIM going outside the NAECI national agreement.

As a result of pressure from construction workers the Welsh government may refuse to give contracts to companies that are using a blacklist.

This must be widened to include companies that go outside of national agreements and also be applied to Welsh councils.

**Dave Reid**

## In brief

### PCS ballot

Members of the civil service union PCS are being encouraged to ensure a big 'yes' vote for action by asking them to bring their ballot paper to work on 27 February, some are exchanging them for badges saying "I've voted 'yes'". The national ballot for a campaign of industrial action against attacks on pay, pensions and terms and conditions, closes on 4 March. The vote 'yes' campaign is being backed up by workplace meetings.

### Attack on union rights

Right-wing Tory ministers are campaigning for prime minister Cameron to put a clause in his manifesto for the next general election which would make a strike illegal unless at least 50% of union members take part in the strike ballot. An interesting proposal since only 15% turned out to vote in the Police and Crime Commissioners' elections last year. Were the PCC elections illegal then? Other ideas for attacks on trade union rights include allowing agency workers to be brought in as scabs during strikes and to increase the amount of notice which has to be given to bosses before strikes are called. There are also considerable attacks on facility time allowed for trade union reps in the civil service.

### Drivers strike

Tanker drivers working for BP at Grangemouth in the east of Scotland are due to start a four-day strike on 28 February. The Unite members are threatened with a pay cut of £1,400 a year and a cut in pensions after an aviation contract was switched from BP to DHL.

They walked out in protest on 22 February. None of the workers were expecting the bosses to come back to the negotiating table any time soon and so they are resolute in their determination to take the further four-day strike action.

### Construction blacklist

Two important tribunals are being held this week, concerning blacklisted construction workers. On 26 February engineer Dave Smith is going to the Employment Appeal tribunal. At Dave's test case Employment Tribunal in January 2012, companies in the Carillion group admitted in court to blacklisting him because he was a trade union health and safety rep. But he lost the case on a legal technicality because he was not directly employed by the companies but via an employment agency.

He is now taking the case to appeal, arguing that to uphold his human rights, the tribunal should extend legal protection to all workers and not just direct employees.

Carillion are also facing claims of bullying, corruption and racism by nearly 100 GMB members who work at Swindon hospital. On 27 February Unite union rep Frank Morris is going to an Employment Tribunal against construction firms on the Crossrail project in London. Frank claims he was sacked for raising safety concerns by Crossrail and the BFK consortium.

### Website

For more workplace reports see [www.socialistparty.org.uk](http://www.socialistparty.org.uk)

# Will the Tories play the benefits card?

**Mary Jackson**  
TUSC Mayoral candidate, Doncaster

Another bright idea that the Conservatives came up with recently is to pay people's benefits on a card that restricts what it can be spent on. This idea shows the contempt Tories have for the working class and their misunderstanding of 21st century life.

The idea was floated, in a parliamentary bill from Tory MP Alec

Shelbrooke, to replace benefits payments with a welfare card. It was discarded before Christmas.

Work and Pensions Secretary Iain Duncan Smith distanced himself from the scheme (though he said he might consider it for registered addicts). But, two months later, thanks to the self-styled 'left of centre' think-tank Demos, it's again a possibility.

Demos says that the imminent arrival of universal credit is likely to accelerate the need for digital

payment. It urges caution against routinely restricting use of benefits, but calls for a full public debate as to how any such restrictions should be drawn.

The original proposals would have restricted the use of benefits payments to prevent purchase of 'luxuries' such as alcohol, tobacco or TV subscriptions. Demos brought this back to the drawing board. But if they had any idea of the reality for benefit claimants they would be arguing for wages and benefits to be increased.

I work in an advice agency and help people manage their finances, often by drawing up a financial statement showing income and expenditure. People trapped into the cycle of unemployment and low pay, (topped up with tax credits), do not spend their money on alcohol and tobacco or subscription TV.

## Debt

They spend money on food, clothes, water, gas and electricity bills, TV licence, travel to work for the low paid, school trips for the kids (though often they cannot afford to let their children go on trips). Rarely are 'luxury' items listed, overwhelmingly it's 'essential' debt like fuel or water bills. The truth is benefits are not enough to live on.

There are others who do have a TV subscription (still within the contract period so payments need to be made even if the service is cancelled), credit card debt, payday loans. But these mainly belong to people who had decent paid jobs but are part of the hundreds of thousands thrown on the dole by public sector cuts or through the recession since 2008.

The Con-Dem government has already put through council tax benefit cuts, tax credit cuts, housing benefit caps, bedroom tax, disability benefit cuts and the end of the social fund. We live with a scandalous lack of full-time work, falling wages and rising rents, energy and food costs.

This cannot be tolerated. A mass campaign is needed against the 'bedroom' tax and cuts to council tax benefit. So is a one-day general strike as a first step in protecting our, often quite dismal, quality of life and to safeguard essential services. It's time to stop the rot!



The unemployed are deliberately demonised by millionaire Tory MPs



photo Paul Mattsson

# A busy day in the life of a 'shirker'

**Jennifer Birch**

I've considered myself as many things; a loud-mouthed leftie who tries to treat all equally, who laughs too loudly and tweets nonsensical, insider jokes with my friends. One thing I never thought myself to be was a 'shirker' or 'skiver'.

I have had a lifetime of education (after being force-fed a diet of New Labour's 'you must go to university, lest you perish and starve' initiatives), GCSEs, A-levels, a 2:1 BA (Hons) degree in Politics and an MA in Conflict Studies.

I also worked alongside my studies - with jobs ranging from barmaid, Human Resources advisor, retail assistant and radio presenter.

I did everything in the right order, worked hard to get good grades while notching up some work experience in the process, and volunteering with a youth support charity in my spare time. Millions of students do this on a daily basis. It is nothing new.

For my efforts, I was rewarded with the princely sum of £56 a week state benefit. I do not get the full amount as I am under 25. I turn 25 in August when, incomprehensibly, I will automatically need more money to live. At present all I need, according to CamClegg, is little more than £50 a week.

What irks me is the Con-Dem coalition's wonderful dichotomy of 'Strivers versus Shirkers'. Why am I a shirker? I worked hard at university. I had a full-time, if temporary, role at a local company dealing in mobile phones for the US market. As my temporary con-

tract ended, I found myself unemployed and overqualified.

I endlessly apply for jobs. I note these on a spreadsheet ready for my next Jobseeker's appointment with Tony, who seemed to take delight in telling me that he only had a 'handful of O-Levels and he is in full time work, while I have heaps of qualifications and am out of work'. Yes, how wonderfully ironic, sir.

I reformatted my CV twice, hoping this was the problem, perhaps it did not read well. I scoured CV websites, to ensure I was 'maximising my potential'. I am registered on three agencies' books, in different places in the Midlands.

I have signed up to job alert emails, I scour Monster, Reed and Total Jobs all day, every day, hoping that someone, somewhere will employ me. I recently went into Birmingham and Wolverhampton to hand out my CV around offices, pubs and shops.

But by the standards of Cameron and the Daily Mail, I am a shirker. I spend my dole on flat screen TVs, watch Jeremy Kyle, wear a tracksuit and terrorise old ladies in the street for sport. I am a generation that does not want to work. But this could not be further from the truth.

The economy is in trouble, the banks are out of control, there appears to be a fight for the scraps of work that are out there. But instead of addressing the problems, the Coalition demonises those who are out of work, making jobless people a scapegoat and masking the problems with vile stereotypes. Believe me, if I could afford a bike, I would get on it.

## Foodbank figures reveal reality of austerity

**Robert McArdle**  
Coventry East Socialist Party

In a survey of Coventry Foodbank service users by Warwick University, 62.7% said their weekly household income was less than £100 a week. 72.5% of the users said they had skipped eight meals in the last four weeks. 45.1% admitted that they had stolen to feed their family before getting help from the Foodbank.

The Coventry Telegraph (20 February) highlighted the survey as it reported: "A break-down of recipients' backgrounds also showed most, 84.3%, of the beneficiaries were born in the UK and of those, 53.5% were Coventry-born."

"Delays and changes to benefits were the single biggest factor Coventry Foodbank users cited



for using the service (44%)". This was closely followed, also on 44%, by people saying low income was the main factor driving them into poverty.

Austerity is condemning more people into the humiliating situa-

tion where they need to use food banks in order to survive.

Capitalism fails to find the solution because it is the cause - we need a socialist society run for the needs of the masses, based on democratic planned production.

## 'Sick of your boss!' initiative

● **Thursday 21 March** - Target tax-dodgers and 'sick' bosses Starbucks with protests and occupations

● **Sunday 24 March** - London public meeting. Phone for details

For more info contact Youth Fight for Jobs on [youthfightforjobs@gmail.com](mailto:youthfightforjobs@gmail.com) 02085587947, 07749379010 Twitter - @youthfight4jobs

Facebook - 'Youth Fight for Jobs'

Or check out [www.youthfightforjobs.com](http://www.youthfightforjobs.com)

# SOUTH AFRICA BIG RESPONSE FOR WORKERS' AND SOCIALIST PARTY

**Peter Taaffe**  
Socialist Party general secretary

“Look at my eleven month old son and I am fearful for his future if I am retrenched [dismissed],” commented one mineworker at the historic Democratic Socialist Movement of South Africa (DSM) conference. Another mineworker defiantly declared: “You cannot buy the bravery of the South African mineworkers: no surrender!”

The conference, attended by mine-workers from all of South Africa’s mining areas, as well as representatives of struggling communities and other workers, pledged to continue the fight against the brutal mining bosses and ruthless South African capitalists. Standing behind the bosses, defending them to the hilt, is the corrupt and increasingly discredited African National Congress (ANC) government of Jacob Zuma.

The task which this conference set itself was to assist in developing the colossal latent power of the mineworkers, in alliance with other workers, expressed through their rank-and-file strike committees. The DSM played a key role in these committees which succeeded in paralysing the bosses and their government in a month-long strike last year.

Events have found the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) firmly on the side of the bosses in opposing the legitimate demands of the working class. A further task set by the conference is a struggle to replace the bankrupt and corrupt ‘unions’ with new fighting and democratic forms of union organisation.

### Their own party

Above all, the mineworkers and the working class generally crave their own party, free from the shackles of the ANC and its pro-capitalist policies. Therefore, the new mass party of the working class – the Workers And Socialist Party (WASP), already launched – was enthusiastically endorsed. A timetable for collecting signatures to allow the party to register, together with many other practical tasks was agreed unanimously.

Forced to give concessions last year, the mining bosses may seek revenge through victimisations and sacking of militants, including the use of the capitalist courts and prison sentences for mineworkers.

At the conclusion of the DSM conference, I asked one mineworker from Rustenburg if he was returning to work the next day and he answered: “No – I’m going to court.” “What is the charge?” I asked, and his answer was chilling: “Attempted murder, aggravated assault, etc.” These charges were thrown out by the court and this worker was released!

Let it be thought that this mineworker may be guilty as charged, let us recall that the ANC government and its murderous police force accused the mineworkers – and actually charged some of them – of being responsible for the infamous Marikana massacre of 34 mineworkers on 16 August 2012!

By striking and demonstrating – by exercising their legitimate rights in ‘democratic’ South Africa – they seemingly ‘provoked’ the police into callously killing a total of 43 mineworkers at Marikana alone – many shot in the back.

Following this slaughter, the South African state has sought to impose apartheid-type measures – banning orders – against the workers. They seek to prohibit mineworkers from discussing with one another, forcing them to go straight from the mine shaft to their

homes without discussion and with the sanction of fines, dismissal from the job, etc, if they disobey the dictatorial edicts of the bosses and their hirelings.

The bosses have sought to ban mass meetings and, in one mine, tried to impose 18 new conditions. This just served to harden the resolve of the mineworkers. “What have we got to lose? You cannot hit me and then tell me how I should react,” said one mineworker defiantly at the DSM conference.

The brutal punishment meted out to the working class for carrying out the magnificent and successful strikes is the threat of widespread retrenchment. Already in Amplats, the platinum giant, 14,000 mineworkers have been threatened with this fate.

### Mining and farming

South Africa has about 80% of the world’s proven platinum reserves and platinum is a critical component of the country’s mining industry. It is the country’s biggest export earner, its largest employer – with almost 200,000 workers involved in its production.

However, the crisis in the world economy has cut the demand for platinum and the employers are using this to attack the workers. Gold mining is also traditionally a vital industry and still accounts for something like 150,000 employees.

In fact, the South African economy rests on the twin pillars of mining – and therefore of the arduous and dangerous work of the mineworkers themselves – and agriculture. The DSM conference illuminated how the mineworkers’ struggle sparked the uprising – because that is what it was – of the agricultural workers themselves, particularly in the Western Cape.

The farmers, described by unions representing the workers, as vengeful and arrogant, have benefited hugely in the post-apartheid era with a stellar tenfold growth in production and fabulous profits, while wages and conditions deteriorated. Striking workers have been dismissed in ‘truckloads’. Previously, more than one million farmworkers were evicted from their property: “They remain slaves in the land of their birth.” [The Guardian, 25 January 2013]

The bosses have traditionally used non-union labour to break strikes, but a new determination has been shown by the workers in the strike, which cost the big farmers an estimated R300 million in lost production. The unions have called for a worldwide boycott of South African wine.

Delegates from the Western Cape reported to the conference that when they visited the strike areas, they were greeted enthusiastically with the cry: “We were waiting for you!” They had seen the decisive role of the DSM in the successful mineworkers’ strikes. The trade union leadership was decidedly not as welcoming to the DSM!

The reaction of other workers as well as the mineworkers gives the lie to the legend disseminated by the NUM leadership that there was a “third force” behind the strike, egging it on. “Somebody was behind the forest.” [NUM president Senzeni Zokwana, The Citizen, 8 February].

There was no “third force” – unless it was the intervention of strike breakers, shamefully with support from the NUM leadership themselves.

The DSM gave expression to the legitimate anger and the revolt of the mineworkers who were ‘waiting’ for a leadership able to articulate their de-

mands, both in the ferocious industrial battle that was under way as well as reflecting the widespread feeling among the mineworkers and other workers for a new mass party of the working class, revealed in WASP.

The mine bosses now wish to replace courageous class fighters with their own stooges. This has led to bitter clashes in recent days, with one mineworker killed and others injured at Amplats, where the NUM was found on the side of the bosses.

This only serves to further instil hatred for the NUM, which is utterly discredited as an organisation, as is Cosatu, the South African TUC, purporting to represent the mineworkers. The mineworkers have exploded in rage against their conditions as well as their own organisation’s complicity in this.

The current strike wave and social upheavals are the biggest since the collapse of the apartheid regime, with South Africa now registering the highest number and the most violent strikes in the world. Force and repression by the state – more visible in South Africa on the streets through the “armed bodies” of men and their material appendages” of repression, as explained by Friedrich Engels – will not alone hold the masses in check.

Eruptions – revolution to give it its right name – will inevitably follow the present upheavals. Moeletsi Mbeki, brother of former president Thabo Mbeki, and now a political economist, has predicted that South Africa will face a “Tunisia day” by the year 2020! His diagnosis is accurate; the date when a mass uprising will take place may be sooner than he thinks. All the ingredients are already present for South Africa to emulate the Middle East and North African revolutions.

### Exploitation

South African capitalism has historically risen to become the strongest economy in the whole of the African continent. Its very development has created a powerful industrial working class. And yet the fruits of this labour have never been passed to the working class. The day-to-day reality of South Africa is virtually a state of constant upheaval. The mineworkers’ strike is just the latest but most important and starkest expression of this process. Many other sections of the working

class, not just the mineworkers – car workers, nurses, teachers, have taken or threatened strike action.

Also, a virtual permanent state of semi-insurrection in the townships is indicated, ironically, by registered police reports. These show that an estimated three million people took part in protests against the lack of services that elicited a police response in 2008-09. This involved 5% of the total population – forced to physically confront the police in order to achieve basic services.

About 100 police die every year, usually as a result of crime but this ultimately has social roots; 57 were killed in 2012, up to the Marikana massacre. These figures do not take account of workers and civilians killed by the police themselves, symbolised by the Marikana killings.

And the anger since then has not abated but has grown. Indeed, the endemic violence which characterises South Africa is symbolised by the recent death of Reeva Steenkamp, the girlfriend of the well-known Paralympic competitor, Oscar Pistorius. Privileged whites, as well as, increasingly, the richest black elite, protect themselves from the anger which this engenders behind gated communities, which are armed to the teeth.

Virtually every house in a white neighbourhood, we observed, warns of “armed response” in the event of break-ins. This is an indirect expression of the catastrophic social situation: “South Africa is the most unequal society on the planet.” [UN report 2010]

Youth unemployment at over 50% is on the scale of Greece or Spain. The average worker supports up to eight people on the minimum wage. 50% of all workers earn less than R3,000 a month (\$350): “Many of these workers are the sole income earners in their households.” [Jay Naidoo, Financial Times, 27 August 2012]

Fifteen million South Africans are

only saved from starvation by the social grants they receive every month. The mineworkers do not inhabit leafy suburbs – where the black elite comfortably rubs shoulders with the white elite – but reside in townships in squalor camps, without basic resources, sometimes even without electricity living in miserable shacks which pass for homes.

### ANC

On the other hand, the ‘lords’ of the ANC inhabit a world far from that of the masses. President Zuma himself lives in a palace – a compound – which had an upgrade recently at the cost of £18 million, with rich South African businessmen reported to be secretly financing his lavish lifestyle.

So removed is Zuma from the mineworkers and the poor masses that when he visited the scene of the massacre in Marikana, he did not even visit the mines or the shacks of the mineworkers themselves. Unbelievably, he sought to excuse the massacre, on the grounds that, “How many other people would have died if, for example, police did not move to disarm these people?” “These people”, striking mineworkers, had been shot down like dogs by Zuma’s police.

Zuma’s answer was the setting up of a judicial review: “You would not have had that during apartheid days. That’s the beauty of democracy, because it doesn’t mean that when you have got democracy, there will be no such mishap”. [Guardian, 14 December 2012.] A “massacre” is just a “mishap”.

You cannot eat “democracy”; democratic rights – above all, the right to strike and vote – are for the working class weapons to fight for a better life. But under failing South African capitalism, when they exercise their rights, they are met with repression.

Marxism has long predicted such a development. We wrote in 1994 at the very beginning of ANC rule: “How long will it be before an ANC government sends in police and army units against striking workers or rebellious inhabitants of the African townships?... The ANC as a majority, will be subject to remorseless, contrary and counter-class pressures.” [“South Africa: From slavery to the smashing of apartheid: 1994] Sometimes it takes decades for Marxism

“You cannot buy the bravery of the South African mine workers: no surrender!”

perspectives to be borne out but borne out they have been! The gulf between the insurgent masses of South Africa and their rulers is of Grand Canyon proportions. It is impossible to reconcile the class forces that oppose each other in this explosive situation.

The ANC, the capitalist establishment that it now represents, which also includes the so-called ‘Communist’ party (SACP), and the corrupt trade union leadership have all been rejected by the South African masses. A new mass workers’ party – WASP – is not just an idea, but is becoming a reality in South Africa today.

The capitalists have long recognised that the ANC is discredited. Fearing that the ground is shifting decisively beneath their feet towards the left and that the political vacuum could be filled by a party like WASP, the Economist magazine recently urged the formation of a ‘liberal’ new party. This they believe could head off the development of a new fighting socialist party of the masses.

In answer to this call, a former anti-apartheid activist and ‘soul mate’ of Steve Biko, murdered by the apartheid regime, Dr Mamphele Ramphele, has launched a ‘platform’ around which such a party she and the capitalists hope could emerge. She is a former managing director of the World Bank and was, until recently, chairman of the mining company Goldfields. This party – ‘Agang’ (‘Build South Africa’ in the Sotho language) – has no clearly defined policies.

The Financial Times clearly sees this new party’s prime role as forcing the ANC into a coalition with this party and others after the 2014 elections: “The prize would be to force the ANC below the 50% threshold it needs to govern alone.”

### Working class

The working class needs a clear, independent political class alternative, not another pro-capitalist one. While it is not excluded that ‘Agang’ can become a temporary political home for refugees from the ANC, it will not find a big echo among the masses. The social situation and the newly-arisen workers’ movement do not provide fertile soil upon which such a party can grow and develop.

Nor will the ANC be able to burnish its image as a vehicle for the masses by the demise or removal of Zuma and his replacement by somebody like Cyril Ramaphosa – who bid £1.4 million to buy a prize buffalo – to save it. Its days are numbered. Despite the claims of Zuma that it will last for another 100 years, splits and divisions will occur in the ANC as well as in Cosatu. The best and most fighting elements of the South African working class will find the road towards WASP.

The idea of a new mass workers’ party has existed in South Africa almost from the first days of the ANC government. For instance, the metalworkers’ union (NUMSA) came out in favour of a mass workers’ party in 1993, before the ANC came to power! It remains pledged to this idea whose time has now come. The future belongs not to the discredited ANC and its allies, who are propping up the old order, but to a party which represents real socialist liberation, WASP.

So removed is Zuma from the mineworkers and the poor masses that when he visited the scene of the massacre in Marikana, he did not even visit the mines or the shacks of the mineworkers themselves. Unbelievably, he sought to excuse the massacre, on the grounds that, “How many other people would have died if, for example, police did not move to disarm these people?” “These people”, striking mineworkers, had been shot down like dogs by Zuma’s police.



Peter addresses a mass meeting of striking Tshwane municipal workers



Alec Thraves raises the CWI flag



DSM members toyi-toyi at the conference



The latest issue of the DSM paper

### Committee for a Workers’ International (CWI)

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



The CWI website contains news, reports and analysis from around the world. [www.socialistworld.net](http://www.socialistworld.net)



# Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition: building an anti-cuts electoral voice

## Eastleigh TUSC campaigners

The Eastleigh byelection circus has left many voters out in the cold as the real stories of foodbanks, unemployment, benefit cuts and the closure of the local Ford Transit factory are ignored.

The Tory and Lib Dem coalition partners are tearing into each other but with little to distinguish their brands of austerity. Labour's cuts-lite, policy-lite 'alternative' has fallen on deaf ears.

Right-wing Ukip, fanned by the media as one of the 'main' parties, is set to gain a considerable protest vote. It demonstrates once again the urgent need for the voice of working class people to be organised.

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), and its candidate Daz Procter, with barely any media coverage, has been out every day fighting the cuts and drawing together trade union activists with anti-cuts campaigners to guaran-

tee we will be here when the circus leaves town.

As we go to press the election rally, with an impressive line-up, is starting. Dave Nellist (former Labour MP) and Keith Morrell (Southampton Councillors Against Cuts) will speak in support of Daz.

For nine years Dave stood in parliament as a workers' MP on a worker's wage, refusing to leave behind the real day-to-day issues of those who elected him when he was surrounded by the privileges and perks of the Westminster elite. He was later expelled for fighting cuts - namely Thatcher's hated poll tax.

Keith Morrell and Don Thomas were expelled from Southampton Labour Party in 2012 for voting against cuts proposed by Southampton Labour council. Keith and Don have continued to fight against all cuts, in defence of jobs and services, and call on Labour councils to refuse to implement the Con-Dem cuts.

tee we will be here when the circus leaves town.

Daz, a member of the RMT transport union's executive, said: "Irrespective of the result on 28 February, I believe I have done what I set out to do - raise awareness of what TUSC stands for.

"Many friends and colleagues, my fellow seafarers and the branch members of Southampton shipping branch are now aware of an alternative option for the working class.

"I hope to stand again and would recommend others do so to build TUSC through a grassroots movement."

Fellow RMT executive member Sean Hoyle said: "The RMT council of executives has given its full backing to Daz standing in the Eastleigh byelection. He has also received the support of RMT branches around the country.

"As the Con-Dem austerity agenda continues to bite and Labour councils do their dirty work, we want to get our message across: 'It doesn't have to be like this!'

"To those who agree we urge you to join us on the campaign trail and become a candidate for TUSC in the forthcoming May elections."

TUSC supporters were also building support in Portsmouth on 23 February, when they took part in the 200-strong Stand Up For the South Coast anti-cuts demo.



Over 60 people from the local community attended an inspiring TUSC meeting in Hackney, London, on 18 February, to hear rail union leader Bob Crow speak, among others.

Bob said that although there are some Labour MPs who support his union's policies, Labour as a whole is carrying out a Tory agenda. For the working class, Labour is now "as dead as Monty Python's parrot, and can't be resuscitated".

There were two platform speakers from the DayMer Turkish and Kurdish organisation. FBU north east London chair Gareth Beeton explained about fire service cuts.

TUSC London Assembly 2012 list candidate Nancy Taaffe urged activists involved in fighting cuts to step forward to be TUSC candidates in the 2014 elections.

## Challenging Labour's Camden cuts

TUSC supporters were out in force on 23 February in Gospel Oak, north London, where John Reid is standing in the Camden council ward byelection.

John is the RMT union's London Transport regional secretary. His pledge to use the council chamber as a platform to organise against the cuts went down well with people bitterly disappointed in a Labour council that passes on Con-

Dem government cuts.

The closure of Belsize Fire station and the council pushing out 761 low-income families due to housing benefit cuts were issues of concern.

Trade union activists pledged to participate in the campaign despite some union tops' support for Labour.

The election will take place on 14 March.

**STOP PRESS:** The London Fire Authority, after twice voting against Tory mayor Boris Johnson's plans to close 12 fire stations, is now allowing consultation on the cuts to go ahead. Johnson threatened a judicial review if the LFA did not bow down to him by 5pm on 26 February.

A massive campaign is now needed to save 12 stations, 18 engines and 520 fire jobs. The FBU union has called for fire station occupations. The Socialist Party supports this call and believes strike action to stop cuts would get massive community support.



Two more anti-cuts candidates have joined Staffordshire TUSC's group for the Staffs County Council elections in May.

Steve Wheeler, a Unite NHS rep, will be standing in Newcastle. Paul Arnold, who works in the food industry, will stand in Rugeley.

Checkout the latest TUSC broadsheet if you're interested in standing as an anti-cuts election candidate at: [www.tusc.org.uk/pdfs/2013/CandidatesAppeal2013.pdf](http://www.tusc.org.uk/pdfs/2013/CandidatesAppeal2013.pdf)

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, and socialist organisations including the Socialist Party.

Socialist Party members from across England and Wales will be attending the party's 2013 Congress on 2-4 March.

The next issue of the Socialist will be produced a day late to report from the congress and so the paper's editors can attend all three days.

Please help the Socialist Party build the fightback against cuts and for a socialist alternative by donating to the Congress finance appeal.

Speak to your Socialist Party branch secretary, fighting fund organiser or treasurer about your donation.

Alternatively, you can phone 020 8988 8777, use the form below or go to [www.socialistparty.org.uk/donate](http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/donate) (please label your donation 'congress appeal').

## Socialist Party Scotland conference

Matt Dobson and Wayne Scott

On 16-17 February, Socialist Party Scotland (SPS) held its largest conference since the relaunch of the Scottish section of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) in 2001.

Scotland, a low wage, service sector based economy, has been hit hard by public sector cuts and has been in recession for a year. Joblessness and poverty is rising.

But the conference showed that workers are prepared to fight back. Our members are campaigning for a 24-hour general strike, with support won from Scottish Unison.

Many workers and young people may see the 2014 independence ref-

erendum as an opportunity to break from unending cuts.

SPS are giving critical support to a Yes vote, but arguing for an independent socialist Scotland to form a voluntary socialist confederation with England, Wales and Ireland.

Sinead Daly highlighted women's key role in the battle against the cuts and the mass protests against rape and violence in India.

The youth discussion saw many young members speaking at a conference for the first time, showing confidence gained from the October 2012 Scottish March for Jobs.

The party will be mobilising for anti-Trident (nuclear arms) demonstrations in the spring.

In the trade union session, members outlined lessons from 2012

disputes such as the sparks' action to defend pay and conditions, and against blacklisting.

SPS will be supporting Jim McFarlane, as well as other left fighting candidates, in the Unison executive elections.

We will also continue to call for trade unions to break the link with Labour and build a mass party that fights for workers.

The conference voted on amendments on combating the far right, and on protecting the environment.

Conference elected a new national committee to coordinate the party's work.

Fundraising targets were agreed, with over £700 raised at the conference after an appeal from Diane Harvey.

Mark International Workers' Day this year with a May Day greeting in the Socialist and help fund the paper that fights all cuts. See [www.socialistparty.org.uk/mayday](http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/mayday) for more info



## Get involved

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## SOCIALIST PARTY FIGHTING FUND

|                 | £ target | £ received | January-March 2013 | Deadline 29 March 2013 |
|-----------------|----------|------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Wales           | 2,300    | 1,497      | ██████████         | ██████████             |
| East Midlands   | 1,550    | 681        | ██████████         | ██████████             |
| West Midlands   | 2,100    | 847        | ██████████         | ██████████             |
| South West      | 1,400    | 525        | ██████████         | ██████████             |
| Yorkshire       | 2,900    | 997        | ██████████         | ██████████             |
| North West      | 1,200    | 379        | ██████████         | ██████████             |
| Southern        | 1,200    | 368        | ██████████         | ██████████             |
| London          | 6,100    | 1,590      | ██████████         | ██████████             |
| Northern        | 600      | 140        | ██████████         | ██████████             |
| Eastern         | 1,200    | 190        | ██████████         | ██████████             |
| South East      | 750      | 102        | ██████████         | ██████████             |
| England & Wales | 3,700    | 273        | ██████████         | ██████████             |
| TOTAL           | 25,000   | 7,594      | ██████████         | ██████████             |

# 45 years since the Ford Dagenham strike: women workers still fighting for decent pay

**Linda Taaffe**  
National Shop Stewards Network

The marvellous victory of the women factory workers in the machine shop at Ford Dagenham rings as loudly today as it did 45 years ago.

In 1968 capitalism was still in the post-war upswing period. Cars rolled off the production line day and night like there was no tomorrow. Multinationals piled up gargantuan profits while still screwing down wages, never conceding a penny – unless they met a force that threatened to eat into their precious dividends.

Through the trade unions, workers everywhere forged ahead to gain better pay, pensions, holiday and sick pay. They used every conceivable argument and method to push up pay and win better conditions, like a 35-hour week, and unsociable hours' payments.

## Striking for equal pay

It was against this background that 187 machinists walked out claiming that their job, turning out 55 seat cushions an hour, labouring with heavy machinery and unwieldy materials, was just as skilled as that of male paint-sprayers. In a re-grading exercise they demanded the same semi-skilled rate for the job – equal pay.

Their National Union of Vehicle Builders (NUVB) argued the case for them, but to no avail. They then agreed the next step must be a strike. No legal ballot, no seven days notification and all that palaver. They set a date and bravely all walked out together.

Solidarity action by male car workers escalated the pressure. Then women at the Halewood plant in Merseyside joined in. Ford was losing £1.25 million a day rather than concede five pence (old money) an hour to a handful of women workers. But, as the action struck a chord with workers everywhere and was gaining greater momentum, including the support of Labour government minister Barbara Castle, in the end this mighty employer caved in.

The strike has been rightly heralded as a landmark in the struggle of women and a contributing factor to the Labour government's introduction of the Equal Pay Act in 1970.

Yet like all battles fought by the working class, each achievement

is not necessarily the same for everyone. Equal pay battles had to be waged again and again. According to a recent TUC study women in their 50s working full time still get

See [socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk) for details of International Women's Day meetings in your area

one fifth less than men - earning £12 an hour compared to £14.69 for men.

In Cameron's austerity Britain women workers may have equal pay with men (mostly), but the struggle now has to focus on defending those equal-pay rates.

At Whipps Cross hospital in East London 35 domestics on the lowest grades, and mostly African women, have launched a campaign through the local Unison branch to stop their private employers cutting a half-hour off their working day. This would mean suffering two and a half hour's pay deduction in their weekly wage packet - and with no reduction in workload!

While super-rich privatising bosses Rentokil wave off 30 minutes as trivial, one worker pointed out that over a year all those half hours add up to enough to pay their council tax bill! For part-timers this reduction is actually one sixth of their total wage!

The shining example of the Ford women could be usefully re-examined by all women workers and particularly those in struggle. International Women's Day presents us with this opportunity. Those east-end workers of yesteryear showed that trade union action, coupled with solidarity action, could break the most powerful bosses.

The Ford women took 29 days on strike to get a result. The Whipps Cross domestics can win today. The terrain may be harder. The anti-trade union laws stultify and restrict effectiveness.

But, the union branch is giving a fighting lead. The mostly male porters are with them. Public support is widespread. The slogans on their placards proclaim: "Not a minute off the day. Not a penny off the pay." There is no alternative but to fight. The domestics have decided to ballot for action. The struggle continues. The tradition of the Ford women lives on.



The Ford Machinists on the picket line in 1968



Whipps Cross workers protest photo Suzanne Beishon

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socialist students

The Rape Is No Joke campaign is organising a week of action 4-10 March. Meetings, comedy nights and protests will be taking place around the country, including this event in London on International Women's Day. See [rapeisnojoke.com](http://rapeisnojoke.com) for details of what's happening near you, to get involved and to download the week of action campaign pack to help you make plans.

## Women: fighting austerity, fighting for equality

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## Marching against cuts in Coventry

### Coventry Socialist Party

Around 150 people marched in Coventry city centre on 23 February in protest at £61 million of cuts threatened by councillors. These cuts would have enormous impact on our city – around 800 council jobs are expected to go, on top of 800 already gone. Services will be decimated.

The march was organised by the three main council workers' unions—Unite, Unison, and GMB. Other unions showed their support including CWU, UCU, NUT and Coventry TUC and so did Rugby Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition.

There will be a lobby of the 26 February council meeting that will vote on the cuts. Unions will be discussing how to respond to them. Social-

ist Party members distributed their latest bulletin for council workers, in it we pointed out: "There is a danger that if the cuts go through (which they are likely to do) each section and department across the council could end up fighting on its own."

### Strike action

"We would be stronger if we responded... with the beginning of a council wide consultative ballot for industrial action. Our unions also need to be organising a national campaign, including nationally coordinated industrial action and a general strike. [We must] draw a line in the sand. No more job losses. No more cuts."

From the platform, Dan Crowter pledged the support of the Youth Fight for Jobs campaign for any industrial action that the unions take.

Workers from every sector should unite with all those under attack from the Tories, including students and the unemployed.

Heather Wakefield, Unison's head of local government, made good points about the bankers and their crisis, but put forward no strategy for a national campaign of industrial action. Her speech was heckled by a PCS union member about the sell-out of the pensions campaign after the successful action of 30 November 2011. It was a big set back for the anti-austerity movement. We need to reclaim and rebuild our unions.

Not one Labour MP or councillor showed their face to pledge support to the campaign or speak out against the devastating impact on our city. This sharply poses the question of building a political alternative to the three mainstream parties of austerity.



26 March 2011 TUC demo photo Paul Mattsson



# Campaigning against the cuts

## Leicester protesters say no cuts!

On 20 February, 200 homeless people, trade unionists and campaigners lobbied Leicester's Labour council as they voted for cuts. Many protesters occupied the lobby. The protest was called by Leicestershire Against the Cuts (LAC) and Streetlife Action Group (organised by homeless people), and later by Leicester city Unison.

The council's consultation document says they already plan to "reduce annual spending by £75 million, and estimate making further cuts of over £50 million per year by 2016." The immediate impact includes a one-third cut in the homelessness services budget and those of adult social care and youth services.

Labour councillors wailed about how the cuts hit the most vulnerable, then voted them through! Homeless group activists showed the impact these cuts would have on people. Tony Church from LAC explained why we call on the council to refuse to make cuts, and build a campaign to force the money we need from the government.

## Leicester campaign forces rethink

At an LAC meeting after the lobby, homeless people spoke graphically about their situations. One woman was a victim of domestic violence. A couple were being forced into shared accommodation as they can't afford the bedroom tax.

The meeting resolved to build the campaign against cuts in housing benefits and services on the estates, building on our experience of fighting the poll tax to resist the cuts. We are prepared to occupy people's homes to stop them being evicted if they cannot pay rent due to housing benefit cuts.

The meeting's mood was confident. Forced to rethink their plans, the council withdrew the part of their budget referring to the homeless service at the council meeting. But these plans to cut homeless beds have not gone away. The council merely delayed a decision. Cameron - we are all in it together, fighting your government's callous attacks on ordinary people and the most vulnerable in society.

**Heather Rawling**

## Stoke - perks and cuts

On 23 February over 1,000 people marched from Hanley to Stoke to protest at council plans to waste £59 million on an unnecessary new council HQ. Local Labour activist Tony Walley tried to rubbish the number marching, claimed that "640 people is not a mandate". The answer to that, Tony, is simple. Get your councillor mates in the Civic Centre Bunker to hold a democratic referendum to show who really has a mandate.

Socialist Party members were out in Hanley building support for the march, linking it to fighting Stoke Labour council's cuts, closures and privatisation. We collected 550 names on our "No to another new council HQ! - Save our



On the Leicester protest photo Leicester SP

jobs and services instead" petition, over 4,000 people have now signed it! One issue our leaflet raised was the need to stand anti-cuts candidates in local elections. A Unite NHS union rep told us he'd be standing as a Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) anti-cuts candidate at local elections in Newcastle-under-Lyme this May. We sold 100 copies of the Socialist.

**Andy Bentley**

## Peterborough - save Children's Centres

A boisterous demo, led by the union Unite, in Peterborough on 23 February attracted hundreds more signatures against Peterborough council's proposal to close seven Children's Centres, which have been vital in Early Intervention and Prevention. Unite estimate their members engaged over 1,200 times in providing support for parents. It seems the money saved by the closure, around 2% of the total Children's Services budget, could easily be found from the council's general reserves, given the political will. It would likely have been found, if elections had been due this year in Unitary Authorities. There will be a lobby of the council meeting on 6 March. Meanwhile send protests to Councillor Scott (cabinet leader) shelia.scott@peterborough.gov.uk with copies to local Unite members via savepeterboroughplay@gmail.com

**Steve Cawley**

## Hull - building resistance locally

Forty local residents attended Holderness Road's first anti-cuts meeting on 19 February. Councillors Gary Wareing

and Gill Kennett repeated their pledge to vote against cuts. Gary explained that austerity put pressure on the poorest sections of society but also puts pressure on Labour councillors to fight austerity.

Some moving contributions followed from the floor. A letter from one resident described the terrible conditions she was bringing up her young child in: "Damp runs down the walls, the floors are so wet that slugs are everywhere. My baby and me are always ill". The private landlord's advice to her in mid-winter was "Open the doors and windows and let some air in"! One person claimed that standing against Steve Brady (council leader) could let the Lib Dems back in. But people already blame Labour, whose failure to fight the cuts is opening the possibility of a return of the Liberals, who are opportunistically fronting the campaign to keep a local library open. Plans are in place to set up similar groups in other parts of Hull.

## Erdington walk-in centre

Over 30 people turned up to a public meeting on the future of Erdington NHS walk-in centre in Birmingham, which is threatened with closure, on 19 February. The meeting heard from members of the NHS top brass locally who spoke over those asking questions to say that while there "were no immediate plans for closure" they "couldn't guarantee the centre will be staying open"! The patients' group plans to follow up its recent protest with more local campaigning.

**Nuala Hussey**

## Newcastle - fight for a needs budget

A Youth Fight for Jobs (YFJ) public meeting in Newcastle on the cuts, addressed by Pete Redpath from the PCS Young Members Network and Nick Quirk, South West executive member for the RMT union agreed that Newcastle council's £100 million of cuts is a disgrace. We should learn lessons from the 1980s Liverpool city council and call for implementation of a needs budget. The next council election is next year but we have plenty of time to prepare. YFJ regionally is stepping up its campaign for a needs budget as well as launching a 'sick of your boss' initiative.

**Paul Phillips**

# Hull: build an unstoppable force

**Mike Whale**  
Hull Socialist Party

A walk down Holderness Road, east Hull, tells the story. Instead of traditional shops and businesses, there are charity shops, pay-day loan sharks, money lenders, pawn shops and betting shops. Even Hull City football team is now sponsored by "Cash Converters".

Poverty is everywhere in Hull, even before the bedroom tax comes in. Youth unemployment in East Hull is around 50%. Hull's workers need defiant action from the council to force money from this government to safeguard jobs and services.

The private sector has failed dismally; BAE keeps shedding jobs and Comet has closed. Those with a private sector job face attacks on their pay and terms and conditions. Skilled Greencore workers who were on strike recently are paid just 24p an hour above the minimum wage. Their bosses claim it makes them competitive. Yet Greencore made millions in profits.

Workers in Hull's private sector are just starting to fight back. A mass joint campaign involving public and private sector workers and the wider community would be an unstoppable force capable of driving out this government as a first step to resolving the problems we face. Socialist Party members and the Labour Representation Committee are trying to establish community-based anti-cuts committees to coordinate resistance to the cuts (see article left).

East Hull residents enthusiastically signed letters to the city's Labour group (and council) leader Steve Brady demanding that he make a stand. Brady correctly blames the cuts on the Con-Dem government but Labour must show it has an alternative. All we hear from Miliband and Balls is that if Labour were in office it would be more of the same but perhaps a bit slower. This is not

an alternative!

Many Labour activists in Hull don't support the position of Labour's leaders. Three Labour councillors, Gary Wareing, Gill Kennett and Dean Kirk publicly pledged not to vote for cuts and signed the founding statement of 'Councilors against the Cuts'. They have the support of council trade unions and some Labour Party activists who long for the pre-Blair days of 'Old Labour'.

But clearly fighting the cuts has no place in Miliband's Labour Party. Gary Wareing and Gill Kennett went before Labour Party discipli-

Labour will probably try to implement a cuts budget. But some Labour councillors are trying to balance loyalty to Labour with loyalty to Hull's working class

nary committees. Both were reprimanded: Gary's punishment was a "suspended suspension!" They face further sanctions if they vote against the cuts.

Labour will probably try to implement a cuts budget, leading to the loss of 600 jobs in the first instance. But some Labour councillors are genuinely weighing up the situation and trying to balance loyalty to Labour with loyalty to Hull's working class.

Maybe more than three councillors will vote against the cuts. The increasing pressure that the unions and local people put on councillors could be decisive.



Hull City FC are sponsored by Cash Converters, pawnbrokers and pay-day lenders



At the Holderness Road meeting in Hull photo Hull SP

# Should socialists support GM foods?

The first genetically modified (GM) plant was grown in 1983. Thirty years later, should socialists agree with Con-Dem environment minister Owen Paterson that GM foods could be beneficial for society?



## Yes – but demand science for social need, not profit

**Ben Norman**

Debate over the genetic modification of crops raises questions for socialists and environmentalists as to the role of GM, as well as the wider issue of science under capitalism.

Last year, protesters threatened to destroy GM crops at Rothamsted Research in Hertfordshire. In response, scientists launched a YouTube appeal in defence of their research, which seeks to modify wheat crops by making them resistant to aphids.

Socialists should not oppose GM research in principle. As with all sci-

entific advancements, the question for socialists is never simply 'right or wrong?' Rather we ask which class controls it and in whose interest will it be used?

Often the debate centres on moralistic ideas of 'playing god', or as one of the protest banners put it, 'nature does it best'.

Yet, from eradicating deadly diseases to establishing agriculture and developing flight, human history has relied on consistently challenging nature and natural laws.

To declare everything which occurs naturally to be unalterable is to turn our backs on thousands of years of progress.

However, scientific research exists within the constraints of capitalism. From applying for research grants to publishing findings, big business plays a crucial role in deciding which research exists, the direction it takes and who reads it.

### Education budgets

As education budgets are cut and universities are turned into free market competitors, scientists are not able to carry out research simply for the sake of science. They have to find a funder and increasingly this is the private sector.

This is just as true for research

into renewable energy being controlled by oil giants such as BP, as it is in the field of medicine, where the pharmaceutical giants' competition for profit comes before sharing vital scientific breakthroughs.

For GM crops, the Rothamsted research was carried out on spring type wheat, which is more commonly used in the US than Europe. The US presents a more profitable market for selling the research. This shows that while GM could be a weapon in the fight against the global food crisis, the primary aim of such research under capitalism is the profits of US agriculture.

The crisis in global food produc-

tion is itself a savage indictment of the failings of capitalism. The only long-term solution remains a democratically planned economic system, which can only be brought to existence through socialism.

As unavoidable as this truth is, GM research still represents a potential transitional solution to alleviating global hunger. The research should focus on crops which could be used in sub-Saharan Africa and similar crisis areas. The research should be publicly funded and democratically accountable, with findings published openly so the results can be read and shared for global benefit.

## No – potential damage from GM is enormous

**Jenny Brooks**

Ben rightly points out that agribusiness capitalists control the type and direction of agricultural research and that they do so in their own interests. Much of the research done - with the profit as the main aim - is of questionable social and human benefit, while some is undeniably worthwhile.

But genetic modification research and use in agriculture is in a category of its own, because whatever the potential benefits are, the possible damage to the environment and our health could be enormous.

We certainly should not "declare everything which occurs naturally

to be unalterable," but this doesn't mean that all alterations are desirable and progressive. The accumulation of greenhouse gases causing climate change is one example of potentially disastrous consequences of 'alteration'.

Genetic modification is not simply an extension of the relatively harmless plant and animal breeding that has long been practised. That type of change didn't involve the imprecise transfer of genes between very diverse species as is taking place in genetic engineering today.

It is impossible to confine the modified genes in a crop - test sample or otherwise - to a patch of land and stop them from affecting the environment further afield. There

hasn't been anywhere near enough research done on the potential effects of such spread, but some of the studies carried out indicate unpredictable and harmful consequences, including more weed and insect tolerance to herbicides and insecticides and a decline in biodiversity.

### Unknown consequences

Despite the unknown consequences, 160 million hectares of land globally were planted with producing GM crops by 2011. Some studies have indicated possible alarming effects on the health of the millions of people eating foods containing genetic modification; more research on this is urgently needed.

The European Union is presently discussing whether to allow GM crops (beyond trials) to be grown in Europe, many of them modified to give resistance to certain herbicides. Growing them is predicted to lead to a large increase in herbicide usage (due to an increase in herbicide resistant weeds), polluting the environment unnecessarily and probably leaving greater toxic residues in the food we eat.

The global 'food crisis' doesn't need GM foods to solve it. Enough non-GM food can be produced to feed everyone on the planet simply by planting non-GM seed instead of GM; it is poverty that is mainly responsible for starvation. In fact GM foods are tending to worsen poverty

and hunger, as farmers are forced into dependency on the expensive GM seed and herbicides of the agribusiness multinationals.

In a socialist society, it may be feasible to genetically modify crops in a safe and beneficial way, as it will be possible to carry out the necessary safety precautions and investigations and thoroughly assess - by democratic discussion and decisions - what is done.

Today however, in capitalist society, socialists should say a firm no to GM use in agriculture. There is little evidence of its benefit - except to the mega profits of multinationals like Monsanto, Syngenta and Bayer - while at the same time evidence of the risks has been growing.

### 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.

#### Closing doors on our future

I'm a cut, come 14 March. Open Door Leicester, a free counselling service for children and young people, has folded. Redeployment within the city council is looking slim

Open Door supported young people experiencing abuse, depression, isolation, low self-esteem, self-harming, body image issues etc, as well as other specialist services.

Open Doors was the only service of its kind. On 31 March it will no longer exist.

**A Leicester youth worker**

#### Fight for LGBT liberation

Equal marriage rights are on the horizon following the passing of a bill in parliament. This is an important democratic right. Not everyone is interested in marriage and for many Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans (LGBT) people the bill was more significant in representing a

symbolic defeat of the homophobic arguments shown in the televised debate. However, legal equality is not nearly enough to eliminate oppression.

Laws against discrimination have not ended homophobic, transphobic, sexist or racist ideas. When David Cameron talks about marriage as the foundation of a stable society he is talking about family members stepping in to compensate for inadequate public services, for example by becoming unpaid carers. This is a pressure that has massively increased due to the cuts his party is making.

Genuine LGBTQ liberation requires fighting for a socialist world where people can define their own relationships, free from economic pressures or social prejudices. Swansea Socialist Students have marked LGBT History Month by celebrating the militant traditions born out of the Stonewall Riots.

**Ben Golightly  
Swansea Socialist Students**

#### Bedroom tax

The bedroom tax is an outrage. If the Tories say you're under-occupying social housing, then it's £12 extra for one room, £22 for two rooms. If you can't afford to pay, then you're out.

Many years ago I asked Bristol city council for a managed transfer, their own policy. This meant that I would exchange my two-bed maisonette for a one-bed flat. BCC said no to this. Now they are taxing people for extra bedrooms without any offer of transfer.

I've joined a Facebook group against the bedroom tax and after just 30 minutes online, it's clear that local authorities in different parts of the country appear to have different rules for implementing it. This is not on. We are all equal in the UK and should be treated the same. A council flat or house is the same in London, Liverpool or Glasgow.

**Rob Menzies  
Bristol council tenant**

#### A half-baked system?

In Volume One of Capital (1867), Karl Marx points out that two types of bakers were baking bread in London.

The first, which Marx labelled 'full priced', produced quality bread; the second, which Marx called 'under sellers', sold bread at below its value.

The buyer of each type of bread was a class distinction, dictated by the money available to the buyers, and the under sellers' bread was adulterated with, among other things, alum, soap, pearl ashes, chalk, and stone dust.

Of course, that was 1867 - long, long ago.

Now, we are in the 21st century; capitalism has progressed so far from the grim days of the 19th century, so everyone can be thankful that everything going into our food is nutritious and we know what all those ingredients are!

**A food lover  
Kent, the garden of England...**

# No cuts! Save jobs!

## Councillors must fight attacks on council services

In Southampton youth workers and young people are campaigning to stop the decimation of youth services. Campaigners are fighting back against vicious cuts in other council services. They have the support of two councillors, Keith Morrell and Don Thomas, who have put up a real battle against the Labour-led council's cuts agenda. But they were expelled from the Labour Party as a result of voting against cuts.

Since then Keith and Don have won widespread support from campaigners and trade unionists, including the RMT and Unite leaderships. For Keith and Don the bottom line is 'no cuts'; why should ordinary people pay for the bankers' crisis? To that end they proposed an alternative budget which could have given campaigners time to build a mass fightback against the cuts. Southampton council would not even allow it to be debated. But, as Keith explains here, the fight is far from over and a new battle is unfolding.

"In Southampton, because the previous Conservative administration had spent up to the hilt, we couldn't propose using reserves to see us through the coming 12 months. But we worked out another way of maintaining services and protecting jobs.

We proposed using the prudential borrowing powers that are available to the city council and capitalisation, which involves identifying revenue spending that can be transferred to capital. We were able to put forward a balanced budget which would see us through the next 12 months.

It wasn't a silver bullet, it wouldn't have resolved the financial black hole that the government has created for us, but it would have bought us the time to work with other local authorities and with the trade un-

ions in particular to mount a robust campaign to force the government to give us back the money it has taken from the city.

But despite very loud protests from the public gallery, the mayor ruled that our budget should not even be discussed in full council.

The Labour administration raised the white flag before a shot had been fired. So they are having to make swingeing cuts in services and sack several hundred council workers. That's the cost of their refusal to put up a fight.

But now there are groups all around the city that are coming together because they realise that their local services, their libraries, their Sure Start centres, their play centres, their youth clubs are under threat. We will work with them to build a resistance.

We're confident that, as people begin to realise what is happening, they will start to organise. We want to help them coordinate so that we can present a united front to the city councillors and demand that they don't take the easy (for them) route and put their hands up to more cuts.

This government is weak and it hangs onto power simply because there doesn't appear to be any political alternative. If the Labour group on Southampton city council had been prepared to make a stand it would have been an example to other councillors.

But I'm confident that others will realise they have to make a stand like us.

As one of the youth workers shouted out as he left the council chamber: 'It's not over, the fight goes on!'"



The rebel councillors' alternative budget and their letter to the Labour councillors can be read at [www.tusc.org.uk/press180213.php](http://www.tusc.org.uk/press180213.php)

photo TU Senan

### 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!