



SCRAP THE BEDROOM TAX

CAP RENTS NOT BENEFITS

Roger Shriver

On 1 April David Cameron's government of the rich will unveil their vicious 'bedroom tax'. Council house and housing association (HA) tenants over 21 and under pension age who are judged to be 'under-occupying' their premises will lose much of their housing benefit (HB). They will lose 14% for one 'spare bedroom' and 25% for two or more.

There are already press stories about the effects on disabled people and families with disabled children, the sick, unemployed people, etc. Many people on housing benefit today are in work but on low pay and they too will suffer.

This is a blatant class attack! Will bailiffs be sent into the stately homes of the super-rich to evict surplus millionaires? No. On the same day as the bedroom tax arrives the Con-Dems are cutting millionaires' taxes yet again, saving them over £100,000 a year!

There are nowhere near enough one-bedroom homes to offer decent accommodation to the hundreds of thousands who the Con-Dems reckon are under-occupying their homes. House-building figures have crashed - fewer than 100,000 new homes were started in 2012 - the second lowest figure since 1946!

Cash-hungry councils have practically stopped building new properties. The private rented sector has now reached 8.5 million, one in six households, who are paying more and more rent, often to a small number of giant greedy landlords.

Cameron's regime hopes to force more tenants to follow suit by making social housing (ie council and HA) unaffordable - evictions and



Why tax mansions when you can tax the working class instead?

homelessness will follow.

We cannot let this government force people out of their homes! Around the country, rage at this cruel new tax is exploding. In Scotland, where the heroic, organised and successful opposition to Thatcher's poll tax started over 20 years ago, Socialist Party Scotland members have started setting up anti-bedroom tax campaigns.

- Scrap the bedroom tax
- Build support for anyone who cannot or will not pay this unfair, unjust tax
- Councils and Housing Associations must refuse to evict any tenants who fall into rent arrears as a result of the tax
- Stop the attacks on benefits and wages. Make the rich and big business pay for the economic mess - not ordinary people
- For a major programme of council house-building to provide affordable homes for all. Nationalise the house-building companies and banks
- Build a 24-hour general strike to bring down the Con-Dem government that is slashing jobs and services

Hugo Chavez dies but the struggle continues

Tony Saunois
CWI secretary

Millions of Venezuelan workers, the poor and youth will mourn the death of Venezuelan president, Hugo Chavez on Tuesday 5 March. Thousands reportedly took to the streets in Caracas chanting "Todos somos Chavez", 'we are all Chavez'.

In an era when the gap between establishment politicians, who defend big business and the super-rich, and the masses seems to widen inexorably Chavez stood out. In fact in the age of austerity the measures he took to alleviate poverty stood out like a beacon.

The workers and youth in Venezuela will be joined by many around the globe who have been inspired to support Hugo Chavez's regime as offering an alternative to imperialism, neoliberalism and capitalism.

Meanwhile the most pernicious right-wing capitalist commentators have wasted neither time nor ink in their outpourings of hatred of his regime.

The mourning of his passing and anger at these attacks must be channelled into a new stage of working class struggle for socialism in Venezuela and internationally.

Continued on page 2

After death of Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez Redouble efforts to fight for socialism - revolutionary and democratic

Continued from page 1

Since his death numerous articles have denounced Chavez, and his regime, as an "autocrat", a "dictator", a "caudillo". Some have tried to depict his death as the end of another failed socialist regime. The torrent of bile from these commentators was first readied in the hope he'd be defeated in the Venezuelan presidential elections in October 2012, but had to be shelved at the time.

Against the expectations of the international capitalist media and its politicians Chavez romped home for a third term with 55% of the vote, on a turnout of 80%, a result any incumbent capitalist politician in Europe can only dream of.

These self-same commentators deafened us with their silence during the attempted coup in 2002 - backed by US imperialism. When these alleged champions of democracy attack Chavez they brush to one side the fact that Chavez faced 17 elections and referendums since 1998 and won 16 of them.

They, and the capitalist politicians behind them, cannot abide the fact that a leader who spoke of "socialism" and the "socialist revolution" and who came into conflict with US imperialism and the capitalist class could win such popular support.

They also fear the potential revolutionary movement of the masses upon which Chavez rested.

Chavez himself did not emerge as a political leader with a rounded out ideology or programme. He has empirically embraced different ideas - swept along by events as they have unfolded.

Brought to power

Chavez was brought to power in 1998 with overwhelming support. Initially he only spoke of a "Bolivarian revolution" and reform of the old corrupt system. Chavez, like thousands in Venezuela, including junior army officers of which he was one, was radicalised by the "Caracazo" which rocked Venezuela in 1989.

Carlos Perez had won an election opposing the neoliberalism of the IMF. However, he undertook a sharp U-turn and introduced a "shock therapy" of neoliberalism. It triggered a mass uprising of the urban poor.

The army was deployed and an estimated 3,000 were slaughtered. Chavez's right-wing opponents have little to say on these events. He was however radicalised and affected by these horrors.

He led a left populist military revolt in 1992 against the murderous Perez government. As the coup was defeated he proclaimed the "revolution is ended. For now". "Por ahora" was to become ingrained in the minds of the masses.

Released from prison two years later, he built support and stormed to power in the 1998 election as the mass of the population demanded an end to neoliberalism and demanded change.

The limited but popular reforms his government introduced, paid for with the country's oil wealth, were enough to enrage the ruling elite which attempted a coup in 2002 fol-



When Chavez visited London in 2006 photo Paul Mattsson

lowed by a lockout. After 48 hours the coup collapsed and Chavez was brought back to Caracas and to power. During the coup the masses poured onto the streets to oppose the new right-wing regime and a revolt by the ranks of the army and its junior officers took place.

At this moment the situation erupted as the right-wing coup led by Pedro Carmona collapsed, marking a decisive blow against the ruling class and capitalism. The working class and poor had the opportunity to take over the running of society.

Unfortunately, at this moment Chavez opted to call for "national unity" and an agreement with sections of the capitalist class. The lockout was broken after a 12-month struggle. On each occasion Chavez was saved by the mass movement from below.

These events enormously radicalised Chavez who by 2005 had begun to speak about the "socialist revolution". It was in this period that he also made reference to the ideas of one of the leaders of the Russian Revolution, Leon Trotsky, as well as to Karl Marx and called for the formation of a Fifth International.

Nationalisations

This enraged both the Venezuelan ruling class and US imperialism. Nationalisations and partial nationalisations of significant companies were carried through.

The introduction of a basic but free health service and widespread education and literacy programmes enormously enhanced the popularity of the government. Significantly, in the 2006 election - following this turn to the left - Chavez won his largest electoral victory, taking over 62% of the vote!

This development has had an enormously positive effect in putting the issue of socialism back

onto the agenda in Venezuela and to an extent in Latin America and internationally.

The idea of the "revolution" and even "socialism" and radical reform is overwhelmingly dominant in the consciousness of a majority of Venezuelans. This is Chavez's positive legacy. There is a clear rejection of any idea of returning to the 'ancien régime'.

Economic crisis

However, despite the radical phraseology, in response to the global economic crisis which began in 2007, Chavez, and the Bolivarian government, rather than drive forward with a programme to break with capitalism, moved in the opposite direction.

Blows were struck but, without defeating it, the capitalist class remained in control. From within the Bolivarian government a new force has also emerged - the 'boli-bourgeoisie', a powerful layer in society which has grown rich on the backs of the Chavez movement.

This, combined with the emergence of a powerful bureaucracy, and deteriorating economic situation, has meant that despite the popular reforms, which the CWI supports, massive social problems of poverty, unemployment, corruption, violence and crime remain. These continue and arise from the failure to abolish capitalism.

Combined with a top down administrative approach from the bureaucracy and the lack of democratic workers' control and management in the revolutionary process, while Chavez has enjoyed massive support, it has also resulted in widespread discontent and frustration.

Recent strikes by teachers and metal workers have been repressed by the state, measures which have given a weapon to the right to beat

the regime.

If right-wing candidate Henrique Capriles and the right in Venezuela hope that Chavez's death will mean an easy ride back to power then they are mistaken.

Despite the discontent the idea of supporting the revolutionary process, of the idea of socialism and defence of the reforms is deeply ingrained in Venezuelan society.

In the short term it is most likely to mean a victory for Nicolas Maduro, the vice-president, named by Chavez as his successor, in the elections. A rallying of Chavez's supporters and the mass of the poor to defeat the right is already developing. Capriles and the right are, like Maduro, appealing for calm, peace and unity. The right feel their weakness and are being careful not to

The idea of the "revolution" and even "socialism" and radical reform is overwhelmingly dominant in the consciousness of a majority of Venezuelans

provoke a backlash from the masses.

While the pernicious right-wing commentators have used Chavez's death to beat their hypocritical anti-socialist drum, other sections of capitalism and imperialism have been more cautious.

US President Barack Obama's cautious statement, along with Foreign Secretary William Hague, is aimed at opening a new era of co-operation with a future Maduro-led government. They have concluded the right wing are unlikely electoral victors and therefore have left the door open for attempts to collaborate with a new "Chavista" government.

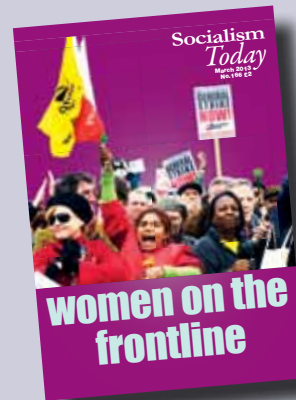
Maduro and the leadership will not have the same authority as Chavez and a new era will open following the elections.

Divisions between the different currents within Chavismo may open following the elections. Sections of the ruling class are looking for this as a means of ultimately defeating the Chavista movement.

Such prospects underline the urgent necessity of the working class and the poor to rally to defeat the right but then to take the revolutionary process into its own hands with its own independent organisation and programme to transform the "socialist aspirations" raised by Chavez into a reality.

The death of Chavez marks not the end of the struggle. A new chapter will now begin.

For more on Hugo Chavez and Venezuela, see the website of the Committee for a Workers' International:
<http://www.socialistworld.net/view/43>



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Forbes Rich List exposes obscene inequality

Matt Gordon

The annual list of billionaires produced by Forbes Magazine has again seen records smashed by the world's hyper-rich. There are now 1,426 billionaires in the world, 210 more than 2012, with a collective wealth of \$5.4 trillion, up nearly a trillion dollars from last year.

At a time of global recession and austerity, this bunch of high-flyers seem to be beating the odds. 80% of the list saw their wealth increase during the course of 2012.

Scandalous

Despite youth unemployment in Spain now reaching 55% with desperation leading increasing numbers to suicide, Spanish billionaire and owner of Zara clothes chain Amancio Ortega has seen the biggest increase of all – an extra \$19 billion on his fortune!

But some are still not happy – Saudi Arabian prince Alwaleed Bin Talal has lashed out at Forbes magazine which he says has robbed him of his rightful spot in the top ten. It placed him at an unimpressive 26th in the world with a wealth of 'only' \$20 billion.

In reality these figures are scandalous at a time when global poverty is on the rise and 80% of the world struggles on less than \$10 a day, a stark contrast to the lavish lifestyles of this tiny elite.

World capitalism has been in cri-



There are 210 more billionaires in this year's list than last

sis since 2008 and increasing concentrations of wealth at the top are not just an aberration but are one of the main problems the economy is faced with. Wealth doesn't 'trickle-down' as we are told, but is instead sucked up and locked away, leaving everyone else worse off.

Waste

The latest figures show that between \$21 trillion and \$32 trillion has been stashed in offshore tax havens around the world by the super-rich, none of it being put to productive

use. This is only a fraction of the cash hoard being held back by big business as a whole.

Instead of wasting it in the bank accounts of the super-rich, this money should be taxed, along with widespread nationalisation of the top multinationals, to release funds to create jobs, homes, infrastructure and prosperity for all – the 99% not the 1%.

Next time someone says that there is no money for schools, hospitals, public services or decent housing and that we all have to tighten our belts, direct them to a copy of Forbes Magazine.

Interview: John McNally PCS members to strike on 20 March

In the recent PCS civil servants' union ballot, there was a more than 60% vote for strike action and 80% for action short of strike. John McNally, vice-president of the PCS, spoke to the Socialist.

What are the issues you were balloting over?

Civil service pay has fallen, along with other public sector workers, by about 20% since the economic crisis began. What we're asking for is a minimum £1,200 a year or 5% pay rise, which won't make us any better off, all it'll do is claw back some of what we've lost over the past five years.

We're also demanding that the living wage is applied throughout the civil service and in this day and age it's ridiculous that we don't have equal pay across the civil service.

On the question of pensions, we're opposed to the contributions rise in April. The government is also launching an attack on terms and conditions. All the attacks are politically motivated but the real purpose of attacks on terms and conditions is setting the scene for mass privatisation in the civil service.

And on the question of jobs, we've lost 62,000 jobs since this government came to power. We're opposed to all job cuts, but we're especially



PCS block on 26 March 2011 TUC demonstration photo Senan

opposed to any compulsory redundancies.

What does the ballot result show about the mood of PCS members?

We thought the ballot result was very good. Our members have been under attack for a long time under the current and previous government. The fact that our members are determined to fight back shows their genuine anger.

They feel they're not valued by

the government in any way, shape or form.

What are the union's plans?

The union's executive decided today to start the campaign on budget day on 20 March with a one-day strike. That will be followed by disruptive action of shorter duration, hitting the employer on a regular basis.

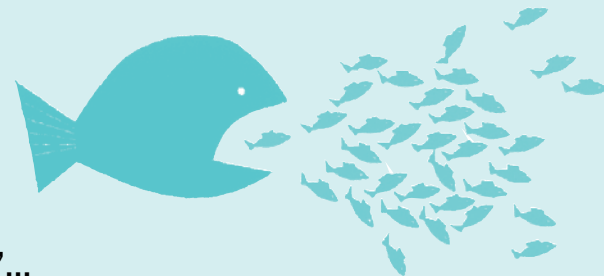
What we're planning to do over the course of three months is keep the pressure on, have shorter walk-outs which are very quickly organised, work-to-rules which vary according to what's appropriate to each department.

It is a scandal that the government is refusing to talk to us. We will apply pressure to get the employer around the negotiating table.

Over the past six months in particular we've had a whole series of group disputes in areas like DWP, HMRC, Department of Transport, where we've threatened or taken action and managed to get concessions from the employer. We don't think it's a strong government. We think it's being held together by no opposition in parliament.

We're doing our best to stand up for our members. We know our members will respond. We recently wrote to other unions and we're going to write to them again telling them that we're preparing for action and if other unions joined in, we'd be more than happy to coordinate.

Them...



Bankers'...

The idea of bankers' bonuses is supposedly that they encourage hard work, which can only be good for the economy. We have to reward them or we couldn't guarantee that they'll behave responsibly.

Why is it then, that the boss of Lloyds Banking Group, Antonio Horta-Osorio, is in line for a bonus of £2.5 million despite the bank (still supported by tax money) racking up losses of £570 million last year? And the Royal Bank of Scotland that lost an even bigger amount – £5.2 billion – is giving out bonuses of £607 million.

It seems like failure is rewarded the same as success. You could be forgiven for thinking it's just about making the super-rich bankers even richer.

...bonus...

I spent the weekend at an excellent Socialist Party Congress in Clacton, hearing members discuss the prospects for the struggle, and learning from each other about how we have campaigned.

Changing trains in London on the way home I picked up the Evening Standard with the headline "HSBC pays 78 UK bankers over £1 million each". Yes, that's what we're fighting. Back to work!

Paul Gerrard

Amazon sexism

Keep calm and rape a lot, keep calm and hit her, keep calm and knife her, keep calm and grope a lot. These were some of the slogans on t-shirts available through the Amazon website recently.

US company Solid Gold Bomb claimed that the products had been 'automatically generated' and slowly removed them. Amazon had refused to stop selling the company's products.

Payday loans

Some limits are being introduced on rip-off payday loan companies and how they advertise. Them and Us has previously reported the rocketing numbers relying on payday loans as a result of squeezed income and rising prices.

The interest rates of up to 4,000% or more are trapping thousands in a cycle of debt. The Office of Fair Trading recently found widespread irresponsible lending.

Limits on advertising are all very well but what we really need is an increase in the minimum wage, a cap on rents and an end to attacks on benefits so that nobody has to rely on payday loan sharks.

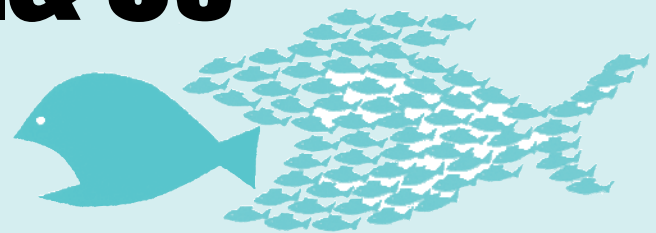
Gas profits

British Gas profits soared 11% in 2012, largely as a result of the cold winter forcing people to have their heating on for longer, despite continually rising costs.

At the same time, wholesale gas prices reached a five-year high on 4 March after a power cut at a North Sea gas plant left supply low.

We need nationalised utilities, not vulnerable to every tiny shock in the market and capable of offering capped prices and profits invested to improve production and service.

...& Us



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What we saw

From Directgov no-jobs website:

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TUC must name the day for 24-hour strike

Over a quarter of a million civil service union PCS members will walk out on 20 March, the day Chancellor George Osborne stands up to deliver yet another cuts budget.

This strike is the next step of PCS's battle to defend its hard-won terms and conditions from attack as well as to fight to break the five-year public sector pay freeze. It could and should also herald the next phase in the general struggle against the Con-Dems' austerity offensive. PCS has clearly called for coordinated action and it is urgent that the TUC sets the date for a 24-hour general strike.

The PCS has won its industrial action ballot – 61% for strike and 80% for action short of a strike on a 28% turnout. While the Tories and even pessimists within the union movement might try to denigrate the figures, it shows a clear majority for strike action. As Mark Serwotka, general secretary of the PCS, put it: "it is not voting in the ballot that matters, it is voting with your feet."

In local ballots and disputes across the country, votes for strike action show that where a strong lead is given, workers want the opportunity to fight.

PCS, with Socialist Party members playing leading roles, has been to the forefront in resisting Cameron and Clegg's cuts. The high point was undoubtedly the strikes in 2011. Later sold out by right-wing trade union leaders, they were nonetheless a defiant reaction to the first year's imposition of increased pension contributions – effectively a pay cut on the top of the pay freeze. Since then, PCS has taken action across many of the civil service departments, from the Home Office, DfT to DWP and HMRC, winning major concessions and even victories over the government.

The second dose of increased pension contributions will be applied after the budget and yet another next year, which will include millions of local government workers for the first time.

For many of these workers already suffering from the pay freeze and many in fact having lost thousands from changes to their contracts, the

'deal' done after N30 will be a distant memory. That two-year delay was the main thing that Unison general secretary Dave Prentis used to justify the pensions sell-out, yet the pay offer to council workers of 1% plus strings, in real terms a pay cut of up to 2%, shows that all public sector workers are fundamentally in the same position as PCS members.

Already it has been estimated that real earnings are on average 16% below pre-crisis levels, falling every month for the last three years. All this without the new raft of welfare cuts. 60% of welfare recipients are working, including 300,000 nurses, 150,000 teachers and 40,000 soldiers. A million workers now depend on housing benefit, a figure that has doubled in this period. On top of this, up to half a million public sector workers have lost their jobs through cuts.

Budget day walkout

The walkout on budget day will be happening just as the TUC considers the submissions of unions in response to the POA general strike motion which was passed at TUC Congress last September.

The Socialist Party, the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) and others in the unions have acted to popularise a 24-hour general strike against austerity. The NSSN lobbied TUC congress, along with up to 1,000 union and anti-cuts activists.

At a time of further devastating cuts to council services and jobs, the NHS and welfare, thousands of union reps and shop stewards will be asking: "General strike to fight austerity - what's there to think about?" They are speaking for millions of working class people who would give full backing to a 24-hour general strike.

The N30 strike was supported by a clear majority in Britain. This rose to over 80% approval among the young, who face a nightmare future of zero-hour contracts, unaffordable housing and sky-high tuition fees.

Even the police voted by an 81% majority for the right to strike. It may have been ruled out because 'only' 42% voted – far bigger than the

15% turnout in the Police Commissioners' election last year – but it will terrify this Tory-led government.

Militant unions like PCS, RMT and POA have called on the TUC to investigate whether a 24-hour general strike could be carried out legally. In addition, PCS has called on all unions to look to coordinate strike ballots and thereby disputes in the public and private sector in mass joint strike action.

This could be done throughout the public sector on pay alone which then could be spread to the private sector.

In the private sector there seems to be local strikes and protests almost weekly - even if they are ignored in the big business-owned media – and some have won victories. Just in the last few weeks, workers have won major gains if not outright victories in Grangemouth with the oil tanker drivers, in Greencore in Hull and construction workers forcing Urenco and Jacobs to adhere to national agreements in Capenhurst.

The NUT has a national dispute on pay, pensions and working conditions. Unfortunately the leadership has not yet set a date for strike action. Given the enormous attacks on teachers it is urgent that they do so.

An indication of the mood of teachers is shown by Lewisham NUT which recently unanimously passed amendments to NUT conference resolutions calling for national strike action on 1 May and 27 June as part of a rolling programme of action.

Those union leaderships in favour of determined coordinated action against the cuts should meet soon to discuss how they can drive this process forward.

By supplementing their walkout on 20 March with lunchtime protests, including outside Parliament at the same time as Osborne speaks, with an appeal to all other unions, trades councils and anti-cuts campaigns to join them, the sights of workers inside and outside the PCS could be raised about what is possible right now. It would also put huge pressure on the other trade union leaders. It is time to strike together. The TUC must name the day.

In brief

Capenhurst victory

Construction workers on the Capenhurst construction site near Chester have fought off attempts to abandon the NAECI national agreement on terms and conditions. The project, to build containment facilities for nuclear waste, is being run by Urenco and Jacobs, who were trying to cut bonus payments and introduce other measures which would have cut the workers' pay by around £100 a week.

After a number of protests, supported by workers from other major construction sites, the companies agreed to implement the national agreement in full.

Greencore victory



After succesful strike action, Greencore food workers in Hull have won their pay battle photo Mick Whale

Grangemouth victory

BP tanker drivers from the Grangemouth oil refinery in Scotland have won a victory over attempted cuts to their pay and pensions. Some workers were threatened with losses of up to £13,000 a year. But after a 72-hour strike and the scheduling of a four-day strike, the company made an agreement to prevent workers losing out as they transfer from BP to DHL.

The workers are aware of their powerful position in negotiations as ten million litres of fuel normally leave the refinery every day. With a work-to-rule and overtime ban being applied by the drivers as well as strike action, supplies to airports and garage forecourts were threatened.

The recent victory of Tesco truck drivers gave confidence to other drivers to defend their conditions.

Fire service cuts

On 5 March the public consultation exercise begins on proposals by the commissioner of the London Fire Brigade, supported by the mayor of London, Boris Johnson, to close 12 fire stations, remove 18 engines and slash 520 frontline firefighter posts.

The consultation runs for 12 weeks, concluding on 18 May. Firefighters' union FBU believes the cuts would be dangerous and wrong, and would compromise public safety. According to the commissioner's own predictions, the cuts would lead to 4.7 million Londoners across 20 boroughs waiting longer for a fire engine. They are urging other workers to use the consultation procedure and protest about the cuts: https://www.citizenspace.com/app/london-fire-brigade/lsp5/consult_view

Rail workers fight poor conditions



Part of the protest at the TfL HQ photo Paula Mitchell

Paula Mitchell

Travel Safe Officers, members of the RMT union, went on strike on 28 February. Socialist Party members and NSSN supporters joined them on their strike protest outside the headquarters of Transport for London.

Strikers explained: "We are all employees of STM Security Group UK Ltd, which is a contractor of London Overground.

Since February 2012 we have been in dispute with STM because we are being victimised and deprived of basic needs such as water, uniforms, mess rooms, toilets, pay rises, sick pay, sometimes holiday entitlements, etc.

For the last three and a half years

we have been working as Travel Safe Officers without having any contract and no guaranteed hours.

In July 2012, we gave the right to RMT to negotiate with STM and London Overground. Without going into the details of many unfruitful meetings with STM, we are still empty-handed.

The struggle is on. We won't surrender until we get something to secure our future. The slavery should go and rights should be given."

One of the chants on the picket was "bring us back in-house". These appalling conditions are the reality of privatisation, and a clear attempt by the employer to exploit mainly migrant workers. But they weren't reckoning on these workers joining a militant trade union and getting organised!



Come to the 7th annual national NSSN conference
Saturday 29 June, 11am-5pm
Camden Centre, Judd Street, London WC1H 9JE

Speakers include Mark Serwotka, PCS general secretary, Billy Hayes CWU general secretary and Steve Gillan, POA general secretary.

Send your name, union and contact details to: info@shopstewards.net.
Send your fee of £6 per person, payable to National Shop Stewards Network, to PO Box 54498, London E10 9DE



photo Paul Mattsson

Eastleigh: growing revulsion at main parties

But anti-cuts alternative still needs to be built

Nick Chaffey

Southampton Socialist Party

Underlining the deep economic crisis austerity has brought in cuts to jobs, benefits and living standards, the Eastleigh byelection has left Tory ringmaster Cameron with his big tent in tatters.

While the Lib Dems hung on, Labour were side-stepped into fourth with a huge protest vote emerging for the United Kingdom Independence Party (Ukip).

What does this byelection say about the state of British politics? Why did Ukip make gains?

While the Lib Dems comfort themselves for clinging on, ironically they survived only because they were seen as the best means of ensuring the Tory candidate didn't win. They and the Tories, partners in national government, here tore strips out of each other, mobilising massive resources to do so.

The Tories distributed eight leaflets in a three-week campaign. The Lib Dems made 130,000 phone calls, and brought in 700 canvassers from across the country for the last weekend. They shamelessly campaigned to prevent an "increased Tory presence in parliament", while propping up this rotten government of the super-rich.

Another planet

As this Westminster Circus descended on the streets of Eastleigh like aliens from another planet, the mood of many was 'a plague on all of you'. And that included Labour, testing its 'One Nation' appeal - not in a leafy suburb as some would like to describe Eastleigh, but in an area with a strong Labour history based on rail, cable, bakery, and aircraft industries as well as the Ford Transit plant.

Eastleigh has suffered from the flat-lining economy. It has a growing queue at the foodbank, not only of those on benefits but 200 over Xmas struggling to pay their mortgages and find money for food.

That Labour could not tap into the rebellious mood is a warning to the party and its right-wing trade union allies that a majority government is

not in the bag for 2015. Angry workers are looking for solutions and a fightback, not vacuous rhetoric.

Into this vacuum stepped Ukip, with a message of "saving manufacturing jobs in key industries" linked to the issue of immigration. With no challenge, especially from Labour, on the issue of jobs, Ukip was pushed to the fore, aided by the media who promoted them as the 'fourth' main party.

The result has furthered the question of a leadership challenge to Cameron, with the fading prospect of a Tory majority at the next general election.

Ukip support

It is mistaken however to believe that Ukip's showing represented a growth in settled support for racist anti-immigration views.

Exit survey analysis of Ukip voters showed that over 75% were casting protest votes, to send a message that they were "unhappy with all the main parties". Earlier research on Ukip's support showed that 30% came from previous Tory voters, 30% Lib Dems, 20% Labour and 15% from those who didn't usually vote.

This was confirmed by discussions TUSC campaigners had with people who left the shop rented by Ukip and passed our campaign stall further down the street.

We gained agreement from many that bankers and the super-rich were responsible for the crisis, and that the solution was going after big-business tax dodgers to pay the deficit, not scapegoating immigrants for the crisis. A mass workers' party would have been able to cut across this turn to Ukip.

Could the outcome have been different? The byelection came at a lull in the movement against cuts, a moment where the offensive of 2011, the mass TUC demonstration and national strikes in June and November, had been halted by right-wing TUC leaders.

As hundreds face redundancy with the local Transit factory closure, what impact could have been made, for example, if those workers were in occupation of their factory with the solidarity of Ford workers across Europe?

Such a battle would have raised



TUSC candidate Daz Procter speaking at the pre-election rally - see www.socialistparty.org.uk for report
photo J Gillman

the standing of the trade unions as defenders against austerity and opened the possibility of the protest vote going to an anti-cuts, workers' candidate.

Workers' candidate

In Daz Procter, the RMT Southampton Shipping branch secretary and RMT executive member, Eastleigh TUSC fielded an excellent candidate with support from the RMT and a significant number of local trade union activists.

But with the shortage of time and a deliberate media blackout, referred to by Ken Loach on the election night Question Time (after the polls had closed!), we were unable to make an electoral impact.

Despite high expectations the newly-formed National Health Action Party also failed to impact, although it was granted TV and press coverage, locally and nationally in the Guardian, the Independent, and the Daily Mirror.

Reflecting the role of our candidate as a local and national anti-cuts fighter, Daz led a demonstration of over 200 in Portsmouth on 23 February.

On election day, before heading to the Eastleigh count, Daz visited his home town of Bootle where he had organised a demonstration against the hated 'bedroom tax'.

Over 1,200 attended the demo. Many then stormed the Sefton council budget setting meeting. The campaign has now declared its support for standing TUSC candidates in the local elections.

The electoral breakthrough for TUSC lies ahead in the stormy battles to come. Eastleigh shows again that many are in open revolt against the political establishment.

This time last year Respect was the vehicle for protest in Bradford West, where Ukip was heavily defeated. In Scotland it has been the SNP, in Brighton the Greens. But all these forces will be put to the test again and again by the relentless

TUSC's candidate led a demonstration of over 200 in Portsmouth on 23 February. On election day, he organised a Bootle demo of 1,200 against the hated 'bedroom tax'

economic crisis.

Eastleigh didn't provide the votes this time but now has a base for TUSC. Activists from the RMT, Unite, Unison, CWU and Prospect unions and Disabled People Against Cuts (DPAC) are meeting this week to discuss plans for the forthcoming May elections.

Three Hull councillors remain defiant against Labour budget

Phil Culshaw

Hull Unison steward (personal capacity)

Three Hull councillors, Gary Wareing, Dean Kirk and Gill Kennett, broke the Labour whip and voted against council budget cuts on Thursday 28 February.

They were supported by 400 people who lobbied the city council's budget-setting meeting.

Anger in the public gallery erupted with the announcement of the budget that includes 600 job cuts.

Craig Moody, a youth centre volunteer, said: "There's going to be a 10% cut to the youth service, how can they justify that when

Warrington rebel

A Warrington Labour councillor, Kevin Bennett, voted against his party's £14 million cuts on 5 March.

He told the council budget setting meeting: "Enough is enough, this administration is acting as agents of the coalition."

The rest of the Labour councillors voted the cuts through. Please send messages of support to kevinbennett396@btinternet.com

there is growing demand on the service due to unemployment and homelessness?"

Amaya Orton explained that: "It

affects my 98 year old mother who has dementia and will have to live without daycare services because they're not value for money. They shouldn't be making a profit out of the elderly and vulnerable."

The three rebel councillors received a standing ovation at the Unison Recreational Centre after the council meeting.

Rebel councillor Gary said: "What we saw were Labour councillors saying how sorry they were for making the cuts, but we set down a marker - there is an alternative."

"We need to fight the cuts as they take effect over the year, linking with the trade unions and community groups, we can make a real difference."

Respect and Greens fail to fight cuts

Bristol

The opposition to £35 million of cuts in Bristol took on a vocal and vibrant expression when 70 people turned out to lobby the council and George Ferguson, the city's 'independent' mayor.

Banners and flags from all of the local authority trade unions, the Bristol and District Anti-Cuts Alliance and the Disability Equality Forum represented the broad spectrum of opposition to these attacks.

Unfortunately the mood of protesters found no echo in the council chamber. The mayor and Tory, Lib Dem, Labour and Green councillors all said they hated cuts, but were voting for cuts.

Labour, the only party not to have joined the mayor's cabinet, abstained.

Mayor Ferguson said he'd lost sleep thinking about the impact of these cuts but as a millionaire business-

man he's unlikely to feel the impact. The 330 council workers due to lose their jobs will though, along with users of children's centres and countless others.

Tom Baldwin

Bradford

On Wednesday 27 February, Bradford council voted though £82 million of cuts and a 1.99% increase in council tax. The cuts were proposed by the Labour group of 44 councillors, but they were voted through with the help of the three Green councillors and half of the Lib Dems to gain a majority in the 90-seat council. Those expecting a valiant anti-cuts stance from the five Respect councillors were sorely disappointed. Only three turned up and, instead of voting against cuts and putting forward an alternative budget, abstained.

Matt Leek

International Women’s Day 2013

STOP VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Eleanor Donne
Socialist Women committee

The ‘Slutwalk’ protests have been an ‘in your face’ challenge to the reactionary idea that how women dress and behave can ‘invite’ rape. The idea that men rape because of uncontrolled sexual urges - that they ‘can’t stop themselves’, is still widely held. In fact three quarters of rapes are pre-planned not ‘spontaneous’. Safety campaigns urge women not to indulge in ‘risky behaviour’ like drinking and walking home in the dark. Yet nearly half of rape survivors are attacked in their own home, usually by their partner or ex-partner.

In 2005 an Amnesty International poll found that a third of people in Britain think women who behave ‘flirtatiously’ or are drunk are partly to blame if they are raped. A quarter felt the same if the woman is wearing ‘sexy’ or revealing clothes and 20% if she has had a lot of sexual partners.

These findings (which apparently showed that women and men held roughly equal views) revealed the extent of prejudice and double standards where men and women’s sexuality are concerned. However, the fact that large numbers of young women and men took to the streets to protest against ‘victim blaming’ on the Slutwalk demonstrations in the last two years reflects and reinforces a growing understanding of the need to challenge such prejudice.

Violence, including sexual violence, at the hands of a partner or ex-partner is not something that only happens in a few ‘dysfunctional’ couples or families. One in five women and one in 20 men will face sexual assault at some time in their life. At least one in four women experience intimate partner violence (IPV). Home Office statistics show that two women a week are killed by their partner.

IPV accounts for a quarter of all violent crime and (according to Amnesty International research) costs £5.8 billion a year to the criminal justice system, health and social services, local authority housing and loss to the economy through time off work.

Why does it happen?

There have been some headlines recently about a rise in IPV, linking this to the effects of economic recession. Any statistics on crime need to be treated with caution as sometimes cause and effect are not always clear.

Cuts in support services, benefits cuts and a housing shortage are likely to force more women to remain in violent relationships when they otherwise may leave. Money worries, the loss of a job and the status that goes with it can increase pressures in any relationship.

However, the idea that unemployment, poverty and bad housing in themselves cause domestic violence is not true. There is ample evidence to show that perpetrators and survivors come from many different economic backgrounds.

Perpetrators of domestic violence give lots of reasons for their abusive behaviour; financial difficulties, jealousy, alcohol, ‘nagging’, pressure of work. Any of these or something else could be a ‘trigger’ but fundamentally the purpose of the violence or threats is to

The legal right of husbands to beat their wives was removed 150 years ago, but domestic violence continued to be downplayed by the police as a private matter



photo Paul Mattsson

exert power over a partner and control what they do.

The feeling that such power is legitimate is rooted in ideas about men being at the head of the family, and reinforced by material inequality.

Most of us think of our family in terms of personal relationships, our loved ones. For the capitalist system, however, the family is first and foremost an economic unit. Big business shareholders and their apologists in government maximise profits by keeping wages low. But they also keep to a minimum the ‘social wage’ - the costs of feeding, clothing, housing and educating a new generation of workers, caring for those too young, old or sick to work, by offloading this from the state onto individual families.

The family is also used as a means of social control - reinforcing the hierarchy in society. This is much more blatant in societies with semi-feudal social relations such as Pakistan, India and some Middle Eastern and African countries where men’s authority often has the full weight of the law and religious authorities behind it. This helps to explain the horrifying levels of rape and violence against women in much of the ex-colonial world.

Tory and New Labour governments alike have upheld the traditional idea that a key role of the family is to teach discipline, blaming ‘family breakdown’ for social problems such as crime or rioting.

In Britain we are generally free to choose our partners and to end relationships. Women can no longer be imprisoned for adultery. However, it was only just over 20 years ago that law lords finally ruled that marital rape was illegal.

The idea of ‘conjugal rights’ can still give many men a sense of entitlement to sex - hence the level of rape by partners or ex-partners (around one third of attacks). So-called ‘date rape’ is still often posed as less serious than stranger rape - scandalously, even by former Tory justice secretary Ken Clarke.

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Slutwalk 2012 photo Paul Mattsson

The legal right of husbands to beat their wives was removed 150 years ago, but domestic violence continued to be downplayed by the police as a private matter.

Some organisations claiming to represent father’s rights have argued that IPV is no longer a gender-based crime and that men are now ‘equal victims’. This argument is based on some discredited statistics and is refuted by many others which show that women make up by far the majority of those suffering more serious assaults, choking, strangling, and repeated violence.

This is not to say that men do not get abused by their partners, male or female, and when this happens they should have access to appropriate support.

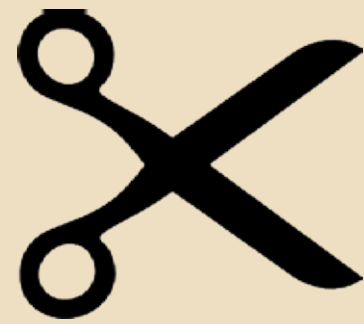
Human nature?

The fact that sexual coercion and violence against women is still so widespread in countries which outlaw such behaviour, has led to a pessimistic view that it must be ‘natural’ rather than socially constructed - a kind of ‘universal male behaviour’.

Violence and rape are the most extreme and deeply rooted expressions of women’s oppression, but there is nothing ‘natural’ about them, any more than there is about war and inequality.

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VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND THE CUTS



- 31% cut to funding for sexual and domestic violence services

- 230 women were turned away by Women’s Aid on the average day in 2011 because of lack of space in shelters

- The legal aid budget is being cut by £350 million a year – it is estimated 54% of women suffering from domestic violence would not qualify for legal aid

- The number of Independent Domestic Violence Advisors has been reduced: in 2011 among 8 major IDVA service providers, 2 faced funding cuts of 100%, 3 cuts of 50%, 3 of 40% and 2 of 25%

- 2 out of 6 specialist refuges for women from black, Asian and minority ethnic groups closed and 2 others suffered significant funding cuts

- Respect services, working to reform male perpetrators of domestic violence, suffered budget cuts leading to a 78% reduction in the number of clients they were able to assist

- Statutory provision, including those police and court services that involve specialised expertise, has also been reduced following funding cuts. This includes cuts in the operating levels of Domestic Abuse Officers, a unit on female genital mutilation and domestic violence courts

the case, why is it that anthropologists studying early human societies which existed for tens of thousands of years and surviving hunter gatherer societies, find very little, if any, evidence of aggression, still less sexual coercion?

In fact, it was much later ‘civilisation’ (class society) founded on exploitative relations outside and inside the home that, over time, imposed severe restrictions on women’s sexuality, and removed them from their previously vital public role in tribal societies.

Scope for change

As socialists we are optimistic about the potential for developing a society which does not rely on exploitation of one class by another and allows us the opportunity to develop personal relationships free from the pressures not just of poverty and overwork but of gender inequality.

What do socialists do?

Campaigning can make a difference

Claire Laker-Mansfield

Alongside the gloom of statistics and stories about rape and IPV, there has been another side to the past year. From Delhi, to Europe and America, huge anger at rape and sexual violence has spilled onto the streets in the form of protests. In India, rage against the enormous prevalence of rape and sexual violence resulted in a mass movement that shook the establishment.

While more modest in scale, protests such as Slutwalk, which have been organised closer to home, have challenged many of the myths surrounding rape, and a culture that blames victims.

So what do socialists say about challenging violence against women? Can campaigning make any difference? Or is the problem too ingrained for anything to be done?

Fight for change now

Socialists argue that the root cause of women’s oppression, and its often violent expressions, is the existence of a society based on class division, hierarchy and exploitation. Therefore an end to sexism would require some quite fundamental changes. In fact ultimately, it would require an end to capitalism, which profits from women’s secondary position in society, if we are to begin the work of making abuse a thing of the past.

Saying this, however, does not exclude winning improvements for women in the here and now. In fact, as with all issues, it is through working class people getting organised and fighting to make things better, that we can begin to build a movement that can win victories and develop the confidence to change things more fundamentally. That’s why socialists not only participate in protests and movements like those mentioned above, we actively set out to develop and lead campaigns on these issues.

In the 1990s, it was members of the Socialist Party’s forerunner, Militant, who initiated the Campaign Against Domestic Violence (CADV) with others. It was set up in response to a number of appalling stories of abuse, as well as of women being given life sentences for killing extremely violent partners in acts of huge desperation.

The campaign began with a series of aims, which included raising awareness of domestic violence, winning changes to the law to improve the position of abused women, fighting for decent provision of refuges and other women’s services and for the trade unions to take this up as a workplace issue.

The campaign was political - not aimed just at helping individuals



photo the Socialist



Rape Is No Joke comedy night in Nottingham photo Lewis Stainer

(important as that is), but at setting what is sometimes seen as a personal matter in the context of its causes and possible solutions within society. One of the campaign’s biggest successes was to help ensure that almost every trade union in the country had a clear policy on domestic violence, making it a workplace issue. CADV was able to win other important victories, including legal changes.

Rape Is No Joke

In 2013, socialists continue to fight on these issues. The recent launch of Rape is No Joke by Socialist Students is an example of how we are doing this. This campaign is particularly focussed on challenging some of the sexist attitudes and culture that help increase the acceptability, and indeed the prevalence, of rape and violence against women.

In particular it is targeting misogyny

in comedy and the rape jokes which are now prevalent in some parts of the scene. While these jokes are of course symptoms of wider trends in society, they also reinforce reactionary ideas which can impact on lives.

Around this year’s International Women’s Day, Rape is No Joke has organised a week of action. Rape joke-free comedy nights, stunts and meetings are all planned to coincide with this important date for the workers’ movement.

Socialists aim to unite working class people to fight sexism and oppression and for an end to the rotten capitalist system which creates them. The Socialist Party has a proud tradition of fighting violence against women, one which is being continued and developed in the present.

If you want to help fight sexism and argue for a socialist society - one free of the brutality of women’s oppression - then join the Socialist Party today.

From the Savile scandal, to gang rape in India, to allegations against a leading member of the Lib Dems, a common thread runs through many recent news stories: sexism, violence against girls and women, and abuse. To mark International Women’s Day, which takes place on 8 March, the Socialist outlines why violence against women exists and how it can be tackled.



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 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.

The Socialist Party’s demands:

- An end to victim blaming! Decent education in schools, workplaces and trade unions about the myths and facts of rape

- Decent support - including legal, emotional and where necessary practical - for survivors of sexual assault, rape and domestic violence

- No to closure of domestic violence support services! Increase and improve the services to help those women affected by domestic violence

- A mass building programme of decent, affordable social housing to make sure women have somewhere to go should they choose to leave a violent relationship

- No cuts to legal aid. Increase threshold for legal aid so that all women can access it for divorce cases. No to enforced mediation

- The right for all women to have full control over when and whether they have children. Protect and improve abortion services

- A united mass campaign against all the cuts, including a 24-hour general strike

- A socialist alternative to class and sex inequality. Join the Socialist Party!

Socialist Party Congress 2013

Just over 300 delegates and visitors took part in a very successful Socialist Party annual congress in Clacton-on-Sea from 2 to 4 March. The congress, the Socialist Party's main decision-making body, showed a party deeply involved in and often leading working class struggle in the areas, workplaces and unions where members are based. Congress provided the opportunity for delegates, elected by party members in branches throughout England and Wales, to discuss and vote on resolutions covering the main political issues in Britain today, and the work of the party. The enthusiasm to participate in this vital process was reflected in the numbers who wanted to contribute – with most sessions over-subscribed. Here we report on four of the sessions.

Resolutions and amendments had been submitted by the party's national committee and by many of the branches. The resolutions agreed will serve as guidelines for the party's work in the coming year. In keeping with our democratic traditions a national committee was elected to lead the work of the party in between this congress and the next. Steve Score, regional secretary for the East Midlands, made the appeal for fighting fund and congress raised a very impressive £10,843. Sacrifice and commitment to the struggle for socialism and internationalism was again in evidence when Clare Doyle from the Committee for a Workers' International, the CWI world socialist organisation to which the Socialist Party is affiliated, made an appeal for funds to support

our sister organisation in South Africa. This raised over £5,000. Over £300 a month of increased monthly donations (party members' subs) were also pledged. A moving memorial tribute to Robbie Segal and Roger Mackay who died last year was made by Bill Mullins, former industrial organiser. Visitors from sister sections of the CWI in Greece, Scotland, and Ireland contributed to the debates. The congress concluded with a very inspiring report of the work of other sections of the CWI. With CWI members in 49 countries – CWI general secretary Tony Saunois couldn't report on all of them – but his report touched on Europe, the US, Brazil, Pakistan and Tunisia, among many others. See the Socialist Party website for video reports of this inspiring event: www.socialistparty.org.uk

Capitalism 'has failed and has to be changed'

Sarah Sachs-Eldridge

“Portugal has entered a recessionary cycle that has no end in sight. [...] Worst of all, people have no reason to believe the future will be any better. The programme has failed and it has to be changed.”

Introducing the first session at the congress, Peter Taaffe, Socialist Party general secretary, quoted the Portuguese daily Público. But, as Peter and the discussion which followed showed, Portugal is far from alone in the recessionary cycle and it is capitalism that has failed and has to be changed.

Devastating facts and figures stand testimony to the parasitic nature of 21st century capitalism: Peter reported that by 2020 the world's financial assets will outbalance its gross domestic product by ten to one.

There will be \$900 trillion of financial assets, compared to \$90 trillion of GDP. According to the Economist the result will be a world economy “structurally awash with capital – and a corresponding shortage of places in which it can be invested”.

In this situation pro-big business governments across the world have legislated for mass privatisation of public services. Of course this leads inexorably to a social catastrophe but the capitalists demand a super-profitable outlet for their cash piles.

Robin Clapp, regional secretary for the South West, among others, pointed out how none of the problems which led to the financial crash of 2007-8 have been solved, far from it. Robin quoted IMF boss Christine

Lagarde when she expressed in passing the largely unspoken fear of the capitalist class: that they may have underestimated the cost of inequality.

Examples of the impact of prevalent gross inequality were mentioned by many speakers: homelessness in Athens, the capital city of Greece where the crisis in Europe is most developed, has skyrocketed to 40,000, up from 2-3,000 two years ago.

Katarina from Xekinima, the CWI in Greece, told a heart-breaking story of five university students who, among the thousands who can't afford to buy fuel, attempted to heat themselves with a homemade fire. Two died and three are in a coma with carbon monoxide poisoning.

Leadership

But the working class does not yet have mass parties with a leadership to draw the necessary conclusions from this – that there is no solution on the basis of capitalism and a struggle for power must be conducted to stop the ruthless destruction of living standards.

A member who has participated in events in Egypt spoke about how the working class did make a revolution in 2011, only to see it stolen from them by the Muslim Brotherhood. However, the recent movements in both Tunisia and Egypt show that the working class has not given up on the idea of struggle. He explained that socialists must do all they can to increase the confidence of the working class to act as an independent movement for itself.

The working class in Italy, a front-runner in the closely fought contest to

be the ‘sickman of Europe’, as Elaine Brunskill, Northern regional secretary, explained, has just registered its opposition to on-going austerity in the elections there. Clare Doyle, from the International Secretariat of the CWI, and Gianni, a new Italian member in Bristol, spoke about the Five-Star Movement of Beppe Grillo. Among its 25% vote are millions searching for a political voice for the working class.

Danny Byrne, who is working with Socialismo Revolucionario, the CWI in Spain, spoke about the intensification of struggle there against eye-watering cuts to living standards. Such is the level of resistance that it is necessary for the SR to demand that the IU united left party and the left nationalist parties build a united front on the slogan of power to the working class.

Moves towards building a new leadership for the working class are most advanced at this stage in South Africa. There the life or death struggle of the miners' mass strike movement indelibly etched the need for a new mass party of the working class in the minds of those involved.

The Socialist Party's sister party, the Democratic Socialist Movement, was involved in the struggle and able to make conscious this urge and help form the new Workers' and Socialist Party.

Alec Thraves introduced himself as the “revolutionary ambassador” from South Africa after his recent visit with Peter. He had the congress hanging on his every word. He reported his trepidations about visiting crocodile-infested Limpopo. On arrival the would-be predators were in the form of local discredited ANC councillors attempting to obstruct



Peter Taaffe introduced the first session at the congress photo Senan

a DSM meeting. Far from being intimidated the determined members used the opportunity of the meeting to pledge to build a hundreds-strong organisation – in that region alone.

Danny and others commented on the complications of the national question that are emerging – which in reality can be workers' expressing the need for fundamental change to the capitalist system.

In replying to the debate Lynn Walsh, editor of Socialism Today magazine, explained that the crisis in the EU showed how capitalism was incapable of overcoming the limitations of the nation state.

He also reiterated that the present crisis is a deep structural crisis and that capitalism cannot be reformed into a better fairer system. In the post-war period the existence of the planned economy in the USSR, ie an alternative model (in our view not



Katarina from Greece photo Senan

socialist due to the absence of workers' democracy), helped the workers' movement in the west to force concessions out of capitalism and there was a certain redistribution.

But since the collapse of Stalinism triumphalist capitalism has shown its true parasitism – even the capitalists have given up on the idea that they can overcome their system's problems.

'We won't be a lost generation'

Bob Severn

“The conditions faced by young people today are creating a powder keg that could explode at any time,” said Socialist Party national youth organiser Claire Laker-Mansfield, when introducing the discussion on youth and student campaigning.

There have already been explosions – student protests against £9,000 fees and EMA cuts in 2010, the riots in 2011, the Occupy! movement.

The lack of a strategy by the National Union of Students contributed to the 2010 movement dissipating, but anger is now swelling against the results of the Con-Dems' higher education policies.

Jack Poole reported on meetings,

protests and an occupation at Sussex Uni against privatisation and job cuts.

Kyle Williamson reported on the Socialist Students campaign against the University of East London's “three strikes and you're out” draconian attendance policy.

Edmund Schluessel from Swansea University spoke on why he and Neil Moore from Belfast Metropolitan are standing for the NUS executive elections. They are the only ones proposing that NUS organises a mass national student demo.

Many others reported on how Socialist Students' campaigning record and openly socialist programme were winning improved votes in local union elections and higher number of NUS conference delegates for

over a decade.

Mike from Leeds explained that the small drop in unemployment figures hid the rise of insecure and low-paid jobs. Ian Pattison, Socialist Party youth organiser, in his reply to the debate, reiterated how young people often expect such jobs to be stop-gaps but, with no decent jobs available, they become permanent fixtures.

This is why Youth Fight for Jobs is launching the ‘Sick of Your Boss?’ initiative to fight for basic rights – such as breaks, decent pay – and trade union rights.

Matt Whale from Hull said there was an “instinctive togetherness” among young people, with the potential to unionise workplaces and find new, combative, union branch

At least
40%
of young people are
either unemployed
or underemployed

1 in 28
workfare
programme
participants have
become employed
as a result

and workplace leaders. The highest support for the 30 November 2011 public sector pensions strike was among young people.

Jamie from Cardiff spoke about getting a fast food job and how, with support from Socialist Party members, unionisation could be possible.

Call-centres are today's equivalent of 19th century ‘dark satanic mills’. Tracy Edwards, a full-time organiser for the PCS civil service union, reported that there was now 95% union membership at HMRC call-centres. There, young workers are fighting to improve the “crap” conditions, with gains won on flexible working hours.

The young Socialist Party members who spoke in this session showed how fighting for a decent future means fighting for a socialist alternative to the profit driven capitalist system.

Socialist Party Congress 2013



Delegates at the venue in Clacton photo Senan

Britain: beware volcanoes of anger below the surface

Dave Carr

What are the key economic, political and social issues which will shape Britain in the coming months? In particular, what effect will the recessionary crisis, government austerity measures, and the trade union leadership have on workers' struggles and hence, the campaigning work of the Socialist Party?

Socialist Party deputy general secretary Hannah Sell introduced the session by making the point that although the scale of the capitalist crisis and class struggle in Britain is not on the level of southern Europe there is, nonetheless, a groundswell of anger beneath the surface which could explode at any time.

Delegate Jim Thomson, in the discussion, characterised 2012 as "the year of them and us".

Even if the road to widespread struggle, including general strikes, is blocked at this stage by the right in the trade union leadership, local struggles are still breaking out.

Hannah pointed to the recent large protests over the NHS and council cuts and anger over the 'bedroom tax'. These issues were added to in the discussion with contributions from Claire Job, Roger Keyse, Gavin Marsh, Phil Culshaw and others.



Hannah Sell photo Senan

Evidence of anger at the rotten political establishment and the widening inequality in society abounds. However, in the absence of a mass working class political alternative such anti-establishment sentiments can be hijacked by parties such as Ukip who promote divisive anti-migrant worker policies and right-wing nationalism.

At the same time they, and the capitalist-owned press, present themselves as a repository for protest against the hated main parties.

Despite the government's credit rating downgrading and the deepening unpopularity of the coalition, it's 'business as usual' for Chancellor Osborne as far as continuing

austerity is concerned. Big business also wants the government to persevere with this failed policy.

British capitalism is ailing and all the 'fixes' of quantitative easing, more bank loans, a devaluing currency, etc, are not reviving the economy, which continues to flat line.

But why then is UK unemployment not as high as elsewhere in Europe? This is partly due to government measures bolstering 'zombie' companies.

But it is also due to 'labour hoarding', in the false hope that this is a temporary crisis, while cutting workers' pay and conditions. There has been an increase in part-time casual work and people abandoning the jobs search and registering as self-employed.

Young workers

Helen from east London spoke about how young people, at the sharp end of this process, are being politicised by it. Having done what they were told, studied hard, they find themselves struggling in rotten jobs with no hope of anything better. This can lead to more young workers drawing the conclusion that they will have to organise and fight to improve their working conditions.

Politically, Cameron is also under conflicting pressure over Europe,

migration and 'modernising' the Tory party. Many of his backbenchers want out of the EU in a referendum and also oppose same sex marriage. Big business largely opposes leaving the EU.

The Tories' third place in Eastleigh will increase this pressure. And as the fault lines deepen between the Tories and Lib Dems in the Coalition, a government collapse still couldn't be ruled out. The independence referendum in Scotland can provide another complicating factor.

Although Labour retains its lead over the Tories in opinion polls there is little enthusiasm for Labour among working class people.

And, as Hannah remarked, the Labour leadership's continued commitment to cuts may mean they are not be able to marshal the anti-Coalition mood at the next general election, which could still take place before 2015, such is the instability in the situation.

Nick Chaffey pointed out in the discussion that Labour spectacularly failed to pick up the opposition protest vote in the Eastleigh byelection. Despite this many trade unions continue to financially back Labour as the 'only show in town'.

However, some militant sections of the organised working class understand the need to construct a

new mass left formation rooted in the trade unions.

In replying to the debate, Clive Heemskerck dealt with amendments to the national committee's document on Britain and resolutions, including on the 2014 European elections.

Clive pointed out that, at bottom, the EU exists to facilitate the multinationals at the expense of the working class. Indeed, neoliberalism is enshrined in its constitution. Ukip may well make gains in this election but it is not guaranteed that it will remain the receptacle for the growing protest vote.

Encouraging trade unionists and anti-cuts campaigners to stand for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition can help to make the case that workers should represent themselves.

Nancy Taaffe referred to the magnificent 30% vote for the Socialist Alternative candidate in Seattle last November. She reported that CWI supporters had initially underestimated the support, even within the Obama vote, for socialist policies until a stand was made.

The session made clear that, while we may be in a temporary and relative lull in the class struggle, we must be prepared to play an increasingly important role in a situation that can change rapidly.



Delegates and visitors spent over £1,000 on books photo Senan

Let's build on our successes

Sarah Wrack

An excellent Party Building session introduced by Judy Beishon and replied to by Jane James, both from the Socialist Party's executive committee, showed that in many areas of the country and in many types of work, the Socialist Party is going forward.

Judy pointed out that we have more Socialist Party branches meeting more regularly and with bigger meetings than at the same time last year.

She also suggested steps that could be taken by branches, as well as by the national centre to continue our growth such as assistance with Marxist education. All branches should have a strategy for developing in size and influence, setting targets as a guide.

The discussion made clear that the 'year of the branch' launched at last year's congress had a big effect in many areas. JP from Coventry informed congress of the

launch of the new Coventry North branch and Tom from Bristol outlined steps taken by the three Bristol branches, such as having a day time activity team and regularising the Bristol district committee meetings.

Socialist Party branches are thinking hard about which campaigns they focus on. Some suggestions were made. For example Chris from Stroud raised the idea of organising opposition rallies around the country when the Health and Social Care Act comes into force in April.

Several speakers spoke about work among specific groups. For example, Mary from Walthamstow talked about campaigning at colleges and suggested trying debates and outdoor meetings. Becci from Nottingham described how the Rape Is No Joke campaign and other initiatives Socialist Party members have taken part in can attract women.

Senan outlined the important work being carried out by Tamil

Solidarity, especially making an appeal for trade unionists to attend the 20 April conference (see www.tamilsolidarity.org).

The vital need for finance was also an aspect of the discussion. Dave, fighting fund organiser for Llanelli and West Wales branch, said that the key to their success has been taking the attitude that "nothing short of meeting the target is acceptable".

Two thirds of their fighting fund comes from supporters of the branch's campaign in opposition to NHS cuts. Producing and selling a pamphlet on historical struggles in the local area also helped.

Dave also suggested Socialist Party members keep their eye out for any money-raising opportunity - he rents his garage out for £20 a month for the fighting fund.

The session was supplemented the following day by a separate discussion on the role of the Socialist. Congress agreed that 2013 will be 'the year of the paper'. See future issues for details of this.

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.

Due to a recent history of political witch-hunting of socialists and activists in Unison, the following three letters appear anonymously.

Still a fighter

"The trouble is I know too much now. Two years ago I was happy with being a housewife, looking after my kids." In two years, Sharon has been through the mill as a care worker with cost-cutting Plymouth city council.

As a Unison activist, I was first aware of Sharon when she began attending union meetings during 2010.

The council's attack on terms and conditions had brought her to the fore as the shop steward for the council's domiciliary care workers. Despite her inexperience she fearlessly laid into senior managers in meetings and was responsible for recruiting most of her colleagues into the union.

But others had seen her potential. Sharon and another woman activist were promoted into more-or-less full-time positions, just as Unison full-timers moved in to formally take the branch over.

But two years later she's seen Unison's inner workings and has been repelled by it. When she refused to toe the line, the full-timers unceremoniously took her facility time away. At the same time, Sharon was able to see the complete absence of any fight in the face of unrelenting attacks by management.

When I caught up with her, she was still fighting on behalf of her members, having left Unison in disgust and joined Unite – taking most of the dom care workers with her.

At the last city council elections she was an enthusiastic Labour voter. But as part of an £18 million cuts budget, Labour proposes selling Sharon and her

Therefore it's rather strange to see Unison using an employment agency to find temporary 'recruiters'! The agency mainly finds staff for charities - the so-called chuggers who accost you in your local town centre trying to make you feel guilty for the ills of capitalism.

The chosen candidates will no doubt be stuck in a room for a concerted session on what a trade union is, handed piles of recruitment leaflets, a clipboard and a target to reach.

How they're going to deal with ques-



photo Paul Mattsson

tions from potential members about job security, cuts and pay is going to be interesting!

Cutting slowly

In a Unison press release dated 18 February 2013, Unison stated 'a survey of more than 14,000 local government workers... reveals that a staggering 87% are struggling to cope with increased stress and pressure at work... The union is urging the government to slow down the multi-billion pound cuts currently hitting councils. The toll of job losses has already hit 250,000, making it difficult to provide services which are in high demand as communities struggle to cope with the recession.'

While I am sure the government is terrified at the prospect of Unison 'urging them to slow down' the cuts, this press release should be a rallying cry to all Unison members to elect fighting activists in the forthcoming NEC elections as part of the process to kick out the weak right-wing union leadership and stop all the cuts!

Eat horse and do your sums!

Michael Wilshaw, Ofsted head and serial school bully, has turned his unwanted attentions to governors.

He said many had their priorities wrong and ignored fundamental aspects of education such as teaching standards, student behaviour and school culture. Instead, they spent time worrying about "marginal" issues such as school lunches.

The idea that food is unimportant is ludicrous and he has carefully chosen to make this stricture in the middle of a scandal about food standards.

However the more sinister side of his rant is the clear intention to replace governors who represent the concerns of parents and the community, with GOVENors who represent the government's priorities and are of course 'business friendly'.

An example, a scandalous example, was St Bede's School in Cambridge where a long-standing governor and trade unionist was removed for failing to support academy status.

Curiously another person specification

for governors was "to be able to think critically." So it seems that on planet Gove you can only think critically if you agree with the academy programme.

Derek McMillan

Bankrupt capitalism

So Chancellor George Osborne has no 'reverse gear' in the wake of the UK's loss of its AAA rating, a vote of no confidence in the economic prospects for British capitalism and its ability to pay its debts.

This draining away in the capitalists' confidence was further underlined in MoneyWeek magazine. It states that in recorded history every single country with debts as big as Britain's has suffered a devastating economic collapse and that there are "no exceptions". It continued: in the Great Depression the USA debt hit 252% of GDP. That the Japanese economic collapse triggered two decades of deflation and a 75% drop in the stockmarket with Japanese debt hitting 498% of GDP.

The same article then listed the doomed German Weimar Republic of the inter-war years where total debt reached 913% of GDP, before adding that Britain's total debt today equals 900% of GDP! Now what was that quote from Trotsky about tobogganing towards disaster?

Len Hockey
Waltham Forest

Universal disaster

In October Universal Credit will be upon us. This means fresh claims will have to be made online. This will necessitate greater public access to computers. Not every recipient of this sweeping new singular approach will have computer access, never mind familiarity with the kinds of question asked and the level of information needed.

There are many security issues that are bound to arise, not least of all those provided by library access.

I think it's fair to say that most library computer users are either internet nov-



ices or people that can't afford systems of their own. Such people will have even more of a struggle making an online claim - will there be support from library staff in doing so? Library workers are neither benefit claims processors nor frontline Jobcentre Plus staff.

However, there are other concerns: public access terminals are not secure. What happens to libraries that start charging for internet access, as some currently do?

It is abundantly clear that, again, the government, in its rush to 'reform', has given next to no thought to the detail involved.

Martin Arnold

TV review

Britain on Benefits



Ian Pattison

I assumed the Channel 4 documentary - Britain on Benefits - would be peddling the same old government lies to mask its failures on unemployment. Instead, wheelchair basketballer and former Paralympian Ade Adepitan gave a refreshing challenge to the government's cuts to welfare and disabled people.

Ade used the hugely popular and successful Paralympics to defend the right to disability benefit. He and the other athletes featured in the documentary, alongside the vast majority of Paralympians, have spent the majority of their lives on Disability Living Allowance (DLA). Without DLA they wouldn't be able to compete in the Olympics, or even continue their daily lives.

Callously, to cut £2 billion, the government wants to kick over 500,000 people off DLA. From April, the Con-Dems will replace DLA with PIP (Personal Independence Payment). DLA isn't perfect but it takes into account mobility and care, whereas PIP only assesses mobility and daily living.

71% of people claiming DLA are on it for life, because there is no possibility that their disability will improve. Recognising this ends with the introduction of PIP.

Ade criticised private vultures Atos which has a £390 million contract to administer the PIP.

Aaron Moon, a former soldier, who lost his leg in Afghanistan, was assessed by Atos when he applied

for DLA. An Atos nurse read out Aaron's injuries to him, including his amputation. The nurse then asked Aaron to point his toes and feet down on his amputated leg. Aaron retorted: "I've not got a leg, I can't do that." When he took off his prosthetic leg, the nurse was surprised!

After all this, Aaron was denied DLA, and was only granted DLA in an appeal. 40% of people found fit for work by Atos via the hated Work Capability Assessment have appealed the decision, and around 40% of them have won on appeal. Atos claims that only 0.3% of appeals were due to an inaccuracy in their reports. But appeals over mistakes by Atos cost over £50 million a year. And disabled people have died while waiting for their appeals.

Everyone interviewed by Ade said they were worried about the introduction of PIP, and couldn't be Paralympic athletes and wouldn't be able to work, volunteer, or even survive without DLA. If Atos had assessed the Paralympic athletes, they probably would have found them fit to work, and ineligible for the Paralympics!

While Britain on Benefits effectively exposed attacks on disabled people, disappointingly Ade and the other people he interviewed continually agreed on the need for cuts, giving ground to the Tories' arguments.

Britain on Benefits is available until 26 March on 4od - <http://www.channel4.com/programmes/dispatches/4od#3487846>

Anti-cuts protester arrested after exercising his right to free speech

Rory Jobe

Saturday 16 February saw a massive demonstration against cuts in Newcastle with protesters turning out in their thousands.

However, one unlikely face to walk past the demonstration was Nick Forbes, Labour leader of Newcastle council.

Local youth worker and anti-cuts activist Michael Macdonald saw the opportunity to peacefully oppose the brutality of the cuts Forbes was attempting to implement against the people of Newcastle.

Michael ran over with two placards from the demonstration and stood in front of the councillor asking: "Have you seen this?"

Michael did not attempt to intimidate or threaten but Forbes' acquaintance asked: "Should I ring the police?" Michael stood his ground and told Forbes: "You have been made out to be a saviour in the press today when you've actually left us out to dry" (referring to the minimal concessions Forbes had made to his £90 million budget reduction on the eve of the protests).

Feeling that his point had been made, Michael left the councillor to return to the demonstration. As he left, Forbes' acquaintance shouted "who's the big man now?" and Forbes commented, "don't worry I know who he is".

At 10.15pm that night as Michael was at home with his six-year old son he received a knock at the door from police informing him that he was being arrested under section four of the public order act.

After four hours of questioning in the police station his charge was lowered to a breach of section five of the public order act (causing alarm, harassment and distress). He was issued a fixed penalty notice which he has returned to the court and will be fighting.

This sort of political policing is usually associated with authoritarian states.

Backing Michael's campaign for justice is also a fight for a society where we are free to disagree with authority and participate in the democratic process.

See www.defencecampaign.wordpress.com



photo Paul Mattsson

120 colleagues to a privateer. Sharon said: "I'm finished with Labour." She is still fighting though and told me she is looking for the right organisation for her. She said she's even thought of voting Ukip but someone told her they may be a bit racist. We spoke about this and she said she'll come to the next Socialist Party public meeting. Whether Sharon ends up joining our ranks or not, I'm confident she will remain a fighter.

Chugging along

Unison is launching a major recruitment drive this month as the loss of members through redundancies is causing major financial worries.

The recent strike action in Mid-Yorkshire hospitals showed that workers who could see at first hand a union prepared to fight would sign up in their droves. Similarly Unison recruitment rocketed in the run-up to the 30 November 2011 pensions action.

Italy: Voters reject austerity

Political instability and crisis but also new opportunities ahead

Chris Thomas

Controcorrente (CWI, Italy)

The “Tsunami tour” was the name comedian Beppe Grillo gave to his election meetings which filled piazzas throughout Italy with tens of thousands of ‘spectators’.

Now an electoral tsunami has well and truly rocked the Italian political system with Grillo’s Five Star Movement, which did not exist at the last election, becoming the biggest single party in the lower house with more than 25% of the vote. Another 25% of the electorate stayed at home, the highest ever post-war abstention rate.

The outcome of the 24-25 February election is political gridlock, with no party or list having an overall majority and the possibility of fresh elections quite soon. The opinion polls had predicted a victory for the Democratic Party (PD) in the lower house and most commentators expected an alliance of the PD in the senate with the electoral coalition of the outgoing (unelected) prime minister, Mario Monti.

However, the polls vastly underestimated support for the Five Star Movement and also for ex-prime minister Silvio Berlusconi’s PDL, which, on the basis of populist programmes, tapped into deep and widespread anti-austerity and anti-political establishment feelings.

Just 120,000 votes separated the PD camp from that of the PDL in the lower house (Camera). The centre-left got 29.5% to the centre-right’s 29.2% but the PD lost nearly four million votes compared with the last election and the PDL six million!

Even though the PD, as the ‘winning’ party, will receive bonus seats to give it a majority in the Camera, it cannot reach a majority in both houses of parliament, even in alliance with Monti.

Grillo has ruled out any alliances. A ‘grand coalition’ - embracing Bersani (PD leader) and Berlusconi - although not impossible, could be politically suicidal for the PD.

The ‘technocratic government’ card has already been played with the Monti government, so the most likely perspective now seems to be a period of political crisis leading eventually to another election, possibly after a change in the electoral law, in which the support for the ‘Grillinis’ could grow even further.

The “worst result possible” was how the Wall Street Journal described the election outcome. The repercussions will reverberate far beyond Italy.

The day after the election, falls on the Milan stock exchange were so great that trading was temporarily suspended. At the same time the spread (difference between interest rates on Italian and German bonds) began to increase, raising once



Beppe Grillo’s anti-establishment Five Star Movement was the real winner in the elections

again the prospect of market turmoil in Europe. The fate of the euro could eventually be decided not in Greece but in Italy.

No to austerity

The election results were an overwhelming rejection of Monti’s austerity policies of public spending cuts, tax increases and attacks on workers’ rights. Monti had been dubbed the ‘saviour of Italy’ when he replaced Berlusconi in November 2011 and the markets began to stabilise after months of instability and crisis.

In these elections he was the candidate of Brussels, of Merkel (German chancellor) and of a section of the Italian capitalist class. However, Monti’s alliance received only 10.5% in the Camera.

Grillo and the Five Star Movement were the real winners. His slogan “tutti a casa” (send them all packing) summed up the absolute disgust and contempt which ordinary Italians have for politicians, establishment parties and an entire rotten political system mired in corruption, scandals and self-enrichment while working people are called on to make more and more sacrifices.

Scandals

Reports of the huge cover up and fraud at Italy’s third biggest bank, Monti dei Paschi, exploded during the election campaign, tainting the PD, who have been historically closely linked with the management of the bank.

It reinforced the deep-rooted feeling that the whole system stinks. Every day pages of the press were devoted to stories of politicians receiving kickbacks for economic favours, of public funds being

creamed off to fund lavish lifestyles and of company directors (including the director of one of Italy’s biggest and most prestigious companies, Finmeccanica) being arrested for fraud and corruption.

The Grillo votes came from across the political spectrum. In the piazzas, Grillo shouted populist slogans and sound-bites about curbing the power and privileges of the political ‘caste’, about a ‘citizen’s income’, a referendum on the euro, a shorter working week, nationalising the banks, and about improving the environment, all of which struck

Working class
anger has exploded
in the ballot box...
but continuing
crisis will see the
development of
new mass struggles

a chord with those who have had enough of cuts and corruption.

There are enormous illusions in the ability of the Grillinis to shake the system up. In reality, the Movement (Grillo refuses to call it a party) has no worked-out programme capable of solving the day-to-day problems of unemployment, low wages, and declining public services which most ordinary Italians are concerned with.

It has no real roots in the workplaces or communities, organising principally via the internet and social media. Grillo himself decides policies and tactics in an ad hoc, off-the-cuff way with no explanation or understanding of how those policies could actually be implemented in practice. His ‘rants’ are confused and inconsistent.

Grillo has an ambiguous position with regards to the far right and immigration. During the campaign he spoke of “eliminating” trade unions although he has also made a distinction between CGIL, CISL and UIL (trade union centres) on the one hand and the more combative FIOM and ‘unions of the base’.

At a certain stage the limitations and contradictions of the Movement will become clear, ripping it apart. It is likely to disappear as quickly as it has arisen; but for the moment, in the absence of a left-wing, anti-capitalist alternative, it has become

the main vehicle for expressing the anger, frustration and disaffection of millions of Italians and its support could grow even more.

Economic crisis

These elections took place against the background of the longest recession in Italy in the post-war period. GDP (economic output) has declined 7% since the economic crisis began. Unemployment has doubled and more than 37% of young people are now without work. Devastated by rising taxes and declining wages, the average family’s real income is at the same level as it was 27 years ago.

Yet with working and middle class people desperate for an end to austerity, the PD was offering a continuation of the Monti agenda with just a few ‘modifications’.

They pledged to respect the fiscal compact and balance the budget even though this would entail cuts of €45 billion every year. This is behind the massive fall of 11% in their ratings towards the end of the campaign.

Berlusconi, on the other hand, was astute enough to understand how supporting Monti’s tax increases and cuts agenda was undermining his electoral base and so he pulled the plug on the Monti government, waging a populist anti-austerity, anti-Europe, pro-tax-cutting election campaign.

This included sending a mock-up tax demand to every home pledging to reimburse every penny that people had paid out when Monti reintroduced the IMU household tax.

On the basis of this campaign the ‘mummy’, as one French newspaper dubbed Berlusconi, rose like

The election results were an overwhelming rejection of Monti’s austerity policies of public spending cuts, tax increases and attacks on workers’ rights.

Lazarus from the dead; his PDL alliance clawed back 15 points in support and ended up neck and neck with the PD.

What little remains of the left was electorally crushed. Nichi Vendola’s SEL (Left Ecology Freedom) party, allied with the PD, got just 3.2%. Had the party stood alone it would have failed to cross the 4% threshold and would have had no seats in parliament. This was ultimately the fate of Rivoluzione Civile, the heterogeneous electoral list headed by the former magistrate, Antonio Ingroia.

New force needed

Instead of standing on a clear anti-capitalist/workers’ list, Rifondazione Comunista (PRC), once a semi-mass workers’ party, dissolved itself into Rivoluzione Civile on a vague reformist/liberal platform.

This was an opportunist move, undemocratically imposed from above in a desperate attempt to get back into parliament. The PRC lost all of their MPs five years ago after entering into a coalition government with the pro-capitalist PD.

After every electoral defeat, the PRC leadership, rather than looking to increase its support by involving itself in struggles in the workplaces and in local communities, has sought a new unprincipled electoral alliance, and every time its vote has plummeted. Rivoluzione Civile won just 2.2% of the vote meaning no seats at all.

The unprecedented support for Beppe Grillo can only be understood in the tragic context of the collapse of the Italian left. But now an entirely new political landscape is emerging.

The anger of working class people has exploded in the ballot box rather than on the streets and in the workplaces, but continuing crisis and instability will see the development of new mass struggles.

At a certain stage the inadequacy of the Five Star Movement will be exposed leaving millions looking for another alternative. This will open up huge possibilities for the building of a new mass political force based, not on confused populism, but on the movements of workers and young people.

It could offer a real solution to the problems of working people by challenging not only the politicians but the economic roots of the whole rotten capitalist system.



PD leader Pier Luigi Bersani rues his party’s failure

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.

STOP CUTS AND PRIVATISATION TO SAVE OUR NHS!

Josie Shelley
Stafford Socialist Party

I read with anger, on Thursday 28 February, that another nail is being driven into Stafford Hospital's coffin with administrators being brought in to oversee its day-to-day running.

This decision has been taken by Monitor - the 'independent' watchdog for Foundation Trust hospitals.

The disaster at Mid-Staffordshire NHS is due to both Labour and Con-Dem governments' underfunding.

Already understaffed, the trust achieved foundation status by making 'savings' of around £10 million in 2006-7.

Many, if not most, of the 492 deaths at the trust between 2005 and 2008 were avoidable.

Chronic staff shortages left unattended patients in dire conditions, lying in soiled sheets, uncleaned faeces and vomit. Workers tried to speak out but were stopped by bullying management.

Today, as well as scrapping the night time A&E service for the last

- All hospitals to be fully funded by the NHS
- Adequate staffing levels to provide good quality care for all patients and the return of a 24-hour A&E department
- An end to bullying management in the NHS
- All NHS PFI deals and debt to be scrapped, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need
- Kick big business vultures out of the NHS
- Axe the Health and Social Care Act
- For a mass national trade union-led weekend demonstration to save the NHS

15 months, the hospital has been labelled as 'unsustainable' in its present form. I dread to think what 'special administrative measures' would make it 'sustainable'!

According to local press reports, administrators will be looking at the financial viability of various services. There is a possibility that the Foundation Trust will be axed or privatised.

There are promises of public consultations before any final decisions are taken - but I for one don't hold out much hope of our voices being listened to at the consultations when it comes to 'sustainability'.

Jeremy Lefroy, MP for Stafford, has been quoted in the Stafford Newsletter as being "very disap-



If we are going to save the NHS, action by health unions needs to be the tune of the future photo Paul Mattsson

pointed" at the decision!

I think I can safely say that the people of Stafford, Cannock, Rugeley and across Staffordshire are not disappointed, they are absolutely livid!

'Ironed out?'

When the overnight A&E closed we were told that it would only be temporary while they 'ironed out' some problems. But so far it has not reopened.

No wonder people are very anxious about what other services will be lost and the distances they will have to travel to access healthcare or visit loved ones.

The need to fight for our NHS has

New Labour's foundations for failure

Mid-Staffordshire NHS is the first Foundation Trust to go into administration. Foundation Trusts were a flagship policy of health secretary Alan Milburn in Tony Blair's New Labour government. They are a halfway-house between public and private sector hospitals - one of Labour's 'reforms' that opened the way up for the Con-

Dems' Health and Social Care Act which, if not stopped, will do away with the NHS as we know it. Foundation Trusts have borrowing powers and other financial powers unavailable to other NHS hospitals. They undergo fewer inspections. These were supposed to be benefits. Instead, becoming a Foundation Trust in 2007 worsened the medical and financial problems at Mid-Staffs.

never been more urgent. Stafford Socialist Party is campaigning to defend Stafford Hospital, linked to defending the NHS nationally.

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) will be standing candidates to defend Stafford Hospital in May's local elections.

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!