



AXE THE BEDROOM TAX!



Budget Day strike

John McNally
Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) vice president

PCS members launched our union's national industrial action campaign with a one-day strike on Budget Day, 20 March and a half-day strike on 5 April, the end of the 2012/2013 tax year.

PCS members are aware of the enormous scale of the attacks – job cuts, pay freezes, attacks on terms and conditions and trade union facilities, all of this to prepare the way for the mass privatisation of the civil service. But it is also a strike against austerity and the failed programme of the government.

Our campaign will be effective and sustainable with the aim of causing maximum disruption to the employer to get them around the negotiating table. PCS particularly welcomes other unions' involvement.

Over the course of the past six months we've managed to win concessions in disputes within departmental groups. The slogan: "Campaigning works, action gets results" is true. We'll be making sure that we build the action until they're prepared to talk to us.

- Tax the corporate fat cats
- Mass house-building programme now

Mary Jackson
TUSC mayoral candidate, Doncaster

Around Britain, there have already been many protests against the so-called 'Bedroom Tax'. This is one of the coalition's most blatantly anti-poor policies and it will certainly be even more hated when it comes in on 1 April.

David Cameron and his multi-millionaire family have four homes, mansions in reality. Tory welfare minister David Freud, who is bringing in this law, owns an eight-bedroom mansion and a £1.9 million London home. These well-housed millionaires want council house and housing association tenants to lose 14% of their housing benefit if they're deemed to have one spare room, 25% if they have two.

We think that 4,822 households in Doncaster will be hit by this spiteful tax, over 3,000 of them with at least one disabled person. The bedroom tax will hit the poorest, low-paid workers, sick, disabled people, pensioners and the unemployed. The government says people should move in to smaller properties but they haven't done their sums.

In Doncaster, it would take an estimated 16 years to re-house those affected... but only if no other households move into that category, if no grown up children leave home, no one dies, no one joins the army. This can only lead to increasing poverty.

Many people just 'can't pay'. Doncaster, like many other areas, already has mass unemployment and deprivation. With 11,521 people on the waiting list for social housing there is a crying need for affordable housing. Rents must be capped, not



Labour government. And nationalising the banking system under democratic workers' control would free up more resources.

I am standing in an election to be Mayor of Doncaster. One of the first things I will do if elected is to look at a legal challenge to release this money to build the houses needed.

But what we need most of all is a campaigning policy of mass resistance. As with the battle that brought down the poll tax it will need organisation to ensure that no tenant is evicted just because she or he is poor and to convince councillors they should refuse to implement the tax, or replace them with those who will fight instead for a mass house-building policy to meet the needs of the people.

More reports on fighting the bedroom tax see page 5

benefits. We need a massive council house-building programme which will create much needed jobs and would actually cut the housing benefit bill.

There are things councils can do. There's a huge pot of money from the sale of council houses. Ring-fenced, because of legislation brought in by Margaret Thatcher and not repealed during three terms of a



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Trade unions must lead anti-cuts fightback

As this copy of the Socialist hits the streets, 250,000 PCS members in the civil service will be walking out on their Budget Day strike against job losses, attacks on their terms and conditions and the continuing pay freeze – amounting to an average real pay cut of 16% since 2008. In other words the Con-Dems have exacted a Cyprus-style levy by other means.

The Socialist Party has consistently called for the unions to organise and coordinate strike action, including a 24-hour general strike against austerity. This is urgent. Even more than the two million-strong N30 strike in November 2011, effectively a one-day public sector general strike, this type of action would get huge support across the public and private sectors.

The N30 strike rallies and demonstrations were massive but since then people's anger against Con-Dem cuts, including in the NHS and now the hated Bedroom Tax, has only increased. There is huge potential to build support for generalised strike action among the wider working class, large sections of the middle class and especially the youth.

Measures are needed to help precarious workers facing intimidation to unionise. Youth Fight for Jobs has begun this work with its Sick of Your Boss initiative showing the potential for trade unions to reach out to unorganised workers. A 24-hour general strike would be a mighty demonstration of the power of the trade unions and their appeal would grow enormously.

But since N30 there has been no follow-up national coordinated action by the unions although there were numerous local and sectional disputes, securing a number of victories such as that of the sparks against the construction companies' vicious attempt to slash a third of their pay. PCS members have organised group action in many government departments, often securing significant concessions or even outright victories, such as preventing compulsory redundancies in the DWP.

However, millions of other workers will be asking, 'What about me?' By April 2014, all public sector workers will be paying increased pension contributions, another pay cut on the back of a five-year pay freeze or below inflation pay rises. Tory minister Pickles has just imposed a 1% pay rise on millions of council workers – a 2% pay cut in real terms – with strings! Teachers are facing attacks on all fronts – on pay, through academisation and on workload.

In September 2012 the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) brought 1,000 union activists to Brighton to lobby TUC Congress in support of the POA motion that called for the "practicalities of a general strike" to be considered. The TUC General Council of union leaders is meeting on 24 April to discuss each union's submissions on this after it was passed.

The anti-trade union laws present a certain obstacle – as they have done in southern Europe. But as has been shown in Greece, Spain, Italy, etc, the ability of the government and employers to use the anti-union laws depends on the concrete balance of forces.

When prison officers, who have no legal right to strike, organised action on 10 May 2012, the government did not dare to use the law against the POA, as they knew it would escalate the struggle.

As the Socialist has said, if the TUC was to name the day for a general strike, and then make it clear to the government that if any unions or workers were threatened for participating in the strike the TUC would immediately call another 24-hour general strike, the anti-trade union laws could be pushed aside, losing their power to hobble the trade union movement.

The left unions won the vote at a recent TUC executive to get the left legal experts Keith Ewing and John Hendy to the April General Council to explain their opinion on how a general strike could be legal. We welcome this discussion – but there is already the potential to build mass joint action. This could

start in the public sector on pay, privatisation, redundancies, etc, and then the appeal could go out to workers in the private sector to ballot on the innumerable grievances that face them. For example, the CWU facing planned privatisation of the Royal Mail and the RMT and the other rail unions have the prospect of the devastating McNulty Report.

The NSSN is calling for a lobby of the 24 April TUC General Council meeting. It will demand that the trade union leaders do not just consider the general strike submissions but name the date. But the union leaders don't need to wait for that meeting; they should already be discussing coordinating ballots and action for late June.

Strike action

PCS is following up the 20 March strike with a half-day stoppage on 5 April – the final day of the tax year. As PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka outlined at a TUC pre-budget rally, this will herald a series of group and departmental actions of various durations, in the build-up to a likely one-day strike on 26 June, when Osborne sets out the next phase of the cuts in his Comprehensive Spending Review.

Since then the NUT and NASUWT teaching unions have announced regional strikes, starting with the North West on 27 June. This should be turned into a national strike, coordinated with the PCS, who have appealed to other unions to strike with them.

Activists will not be content to sit and wait while the TUC deliberates and living standards are eroded. It was pressure from below that forced the trade union leaders to vote for the POA motion and even greater pressure must be applied to force them into taking the much-needed action.

Branches and workplace meetings should pass resolutions urging their union leaderships to take up the call from the PCS for serious discussion among the left unions leaders. Those unions should go to the April General Council with the confidence and

knowledge that their members and the rank and file of other unions will not be satisfied with anything less than a strike date.

Some on the left, with the financial backing of Unite, are pushing the People's Assembly on 22 June as a vehicle to resist austerity, organised a week before the NSSN's 7th annual conference. The Socialist Party and the NSSN will use every opportunity and platform to put pressure on the union leaders to call decisive action. But there is a danger that this event, which will give an uncritical stage to Labour and Green politicians as well as the union leaders, could be a talking shop, helping to kick the idea of mass strike action even further into the long grass.

There is no alternative but mobilisation around a serious strategy to coordinate and escalate action by the most powerful organisation in British society, the labour movement. The trade union leaders should not hand leadership of the anti-cuts movement to an unaccountable, unrepresentative nebulous People's Assembly but organise action themselves.

A 24-hour general strike could transform the situation. The Con-Dems have had some success in their pernicious attempts at division: young against old, low-paid workers against unemployed, etc. Coordinated action by even a section of the 6.5 million workers in the unions would make the case for united struggle and undermine the Con-Dems' divide and rule tactics.

It would instil confidence in the anti-cuts campaigns and it would show this hated and despised government that they cannot get away with destroying our lives. This will be the key issue for discussion at the NSSN conference on 29 June because it is the key question facing the working class.

What is needed now is a real 'Workers Assembly' – a 24-hour general strike at the end of June, which can mobilise mass demonstrations in every town and city – a movement of millions to force this government back and open up the way to a victory against the cuts.

Cypriot workers resist bank-robbing Troika

After months of 'calm' the capitalist debt crisis has resurfaced over the banking meltdown in Cyprus, sending financial markets into a spin. EU ministers and the newly elected right-wing Greek Cypriot president have demanded that small savers, ie Cypriot workers, pay €billions for a banking bailout.

But angry workers in Cyprus are refusing to accept these capitalist dictats, with Cypriot CWI members helping to organise mass protests outside parliament. Already, the government is making concessions.

Athina Kariati of the Socialist Party's sister organisation in Cyprus spoke to the Socialist about what is required to solve the crisis in the interests of the working class.

Who is responsible for the current financial crisis?

The European financial crisis is now at its sharpest here in Cyprus. The capitalist class is responsible for this crisis.

The economy in Cyprus was in relatively good shape compared to other EU countries but over the last 18 months the crisis in the banking sector has meant that the country is now facing bankruptcy.

The main problem is that the Cypriot banks invested in Greek bonds in order to make quick profits but because of the 'haircut' which Greek bondholders had to take, this caused a massive problem of liquidity and the small economy of Cyprus has been unable to recapitalise the banks.

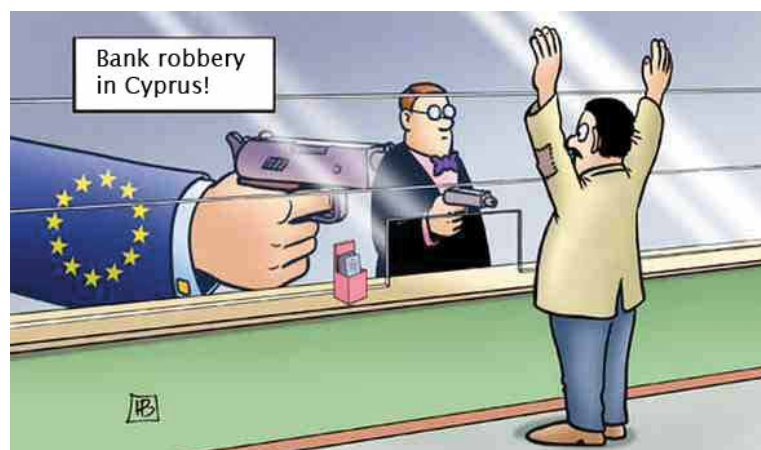
It is clear that the crisis is the fault of the banks not public sector work-

ers or the general population.

As part of the EU bailout the Cyprus government, headed by president Nicos Anastasiades, is attempting to make savers pay for the bank debt. What has been the response of people to this imposed levy?

The response has been immediate. In recent years there hasn't been many demonstrations, however, because the EU is demanding that small depositors pay for the bank bailouts, there were two demos yesterday (Monday 18th) with 1,000 people gathering outside parliament opposed to this EU 'haircut'.

People are very angry and frustrated. There have been incidents of farmers going into the banks with their tractors demanding their money! Long lines of people



queued outside the banks, which are closed and will not reopen until Thursday.

Today there will be another mass demo outside parliament with growing calls from people to end the government's link to the Troika [the European Central Bank, EU and International Monetary Fund] and refuse to follow its dictats. People rightly suspect that if they accept a haircut today then who is to say that the Troika won't demand a further haircut tomorrow?

Will the government be forced to back down? What do you think is likely to happen next?

That's a very big question! The government has already understood that the agreement they made with

the EU officials cannot be easily implemented.

For that reason it has delayed the convening of parliament to debate the crisis. They are trying to find a way to pass legislation but all the parties of the ruling class are divided. There is no guarantee that the legislation will be approved.

However, from the standpoint of the working class it is clear that the government will try to pass some amended legislation to make it seem less painful. But we cannot trust these capitalist politicians to protect the interests of small savers.

Moreover, even if some amended legislation is voted through parliament, in only three months' time we will be back to square one because that is when the EU will stop financ-

ing the banks. So every three months new cuts to our living standards will be demanded.

Also, there is the additional problem of Russian capital deposited in Cypriot banks. So even if the government and EU agree the terms of a bank bailout the banks will still face collapse because the Russian oligarchs will remove their capital funds from Cyprus.

What does the CWI in Cyprus propose to end this crisis?

We are completely opposed to the Troika's and government's demands to make working class people pay for this crisis.

Because the crisis is clearly centred on the banking sector we call for the nationalisation of the banking system under democratic workers' control. We say: refuse to pay the 'debt'. That means both the government's existing debt and the new €17 billion debt they are demanding the Cypriot people pay.

We also say nationalise those industries which are failing due to the economic crisis. Stop tax evasion so that we can find the money to finance government services.

To implement these measures will require building a strong socialist opposition and a new left government, one that (unlike the last left-leaning government) does not try and manage the crisis-ridden capitalist system.

Another Dooh Nibor budget - stealing from the poor to give to the rich

Sarah Sachs-Eldridge

'All right, everybody be cool, this is a robbery!' It's not Pulp Fiction - its Tory Chancellor George Osborne at the dispatch box and this will be the essence of his budget speech, at least for the vast majority of us.

As we go to press, the day before Osborne delivers his budget, the detail is largely yet unknown but the general picture is all too clear. The BBC reports that most government departments will face a cut of 2% of their spending over the next two years, amounting to about £2.5 billion. These cuts follow spending reductions of 3% for the next two years announced in last December's Autumn Statement.

Even by Osborne's own standards the cuts aren't working. Deficit reduction has been a key aim but borrowing is expected to go up this year. 56 months after the start of the first recession in 2008, the UK economy is now more than 3% smaller.

Grim outlook

Roger Bootle, head of research body Capital Economics, said: "In my 30-odd years of analysing budgets, I have never known a situation as grim as this." But it's not just grim in terms of economic outlook - the outlook for people's living standards is appalling and getting worse.

While hundreds of bankers are piling up million-pound bonuses new figures suggest the average worker will lose around £6,000 by 2014 as a result of wages failing to keep pace with rising prices.

The Lib Dems have argued that they are softening the blows by campaigning for rises in the personal tax allowance, while supporting austerity in the main. TUC research shows



Osborne's budget will continue the Con-Dems' austerity plans

that by 2015 low-paid workers will be losing up to four times more a year from the government's 2010 increase in VAT than they will gain from the raising of the personal tax allowance to £10,000.

At the same time a further cut to corporation tax is predicted. This

Most government departments will face a cut of 2%, amounting to about £2.5 billion

would follow a previous cut worth £3 billion a year by 2014. No wonder 'them and us' rage is boiling as low-paid and unemployed workers face the bedroom tax, council tax

hikes, pay freezes and a host of other methods of immiseration.

There have been attempts to sugar the pill, bringing the cap on social care costs down and introducing them earlier. But this is a pittance compared to what is being taken from us.

Childcare vouchers worth up to £1,200 sound tempting but only families where no parent earns less than £10,000 will be eligible for the new cash. So this represents a further blow to the low-paid and those who are unable to find work or full-time work.

Wednesday's jobs figures are predicted to show a slight improvement in the unemployment figures but this will not represent the end of the crisis of joblessness.

A number of Labour and other pro-big business economic commentators have called for 'measures for growth' but none call for an end to cuts.

But there is an alternative

The news of the Cyprus savings theft brought shock and horror to workers across Europe. Here was a

government planning to blatantly dip into workers' savings to bail out the banking system brought low by massive greed and profiteering.

Instead, the owners of the financial institutions and big business should pay for the crisis that is of their own making.

A socialist government could, for example, reverse the decades of corporation tax cuts and impose a 50% tax levy on big business's hoarded billions.

The banking system should be nationalised under democratic popular control. Only on this basis would it be

possible to get rid of the spivs and speculators, lined up behind the Chancellor, who are holding working class people to ransom.

A genuinely nationalised banking sector would be run for the benefit of the majority, rather than for the super-rich.

Those struggling to pay their mortgage could have it converted to an affordable rent; small businesses could get cheap loans, and public works such as a massive house-building programme could be cheaply financed.

The need to build a mass party of working people which stands for this demand as part of a broader socialist programme has never been clearer.



Building TUSC in the unions

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition is hosting a forum of leading trade unionists on 6 April. This initiative has come from the RMT transport workers' union with the aim of broadening trade union support for TUSC.

There will be three sessions at the forum, with an introductory speaker from the RMT executive. These will include a discussion on the struggle for trade union rights and how this can be made a feature of the 2015 general election; standing

in local council elections and discussing what support trade unions can give to councillors, particularly those in Labour-run authorities, who are prepared to vote against cuts in the council chamber; and a discussion on the options available to utilise union political funds to stand trade union anti-austerity candidates in elections, recognising the different situations that exist in different unions.

The trade union forum will be a 'working meeting' of trade union-

ists at an NEC or section, regional or group executive level rather than a larger 'rally'-type event, which will allow questions about TUSC to be properly addressed and a greater cross-flow between participants. It could be another important step in the growing debate in the labour movement on what needs to be done to build a political alternative to fight back in the age of austerity.

For further information contact RMT executive member Daren Ireland at D.Ireland@rmt.org.uk

Them...



Leveson confusion

First disagreements over press regulation were going to tear the government apart, then we were supposed to breathe a sigh of relief that they'd come to an agreement... while remaining strangely quiet about what exactly that involved.

And beneath the talk of royal charters, recognition bodies and two-thirds majorities, lies the fact that the deal was struck by a tiny group of MPs and celebrities with none of the usual pre-legislative scrutiny and potentially lays the basis for further attacks on democratic rights.

Foundation says the biggest factors behind the problem are the small number of women studying sciences and limits on immigration. The group also points out that this presents a bit of a problem for the government's grand plan of a manufacturing-based recovery.

How can we find and train 40,000 extra science graduates a year? Well, a start would be to lift the cap on student numbers, scrap tuition fees and offer guaranteed decent jobs in a relevant industry.

Workfare law

£130 million is owed by the government to about a quarter of a million unemployed people. That was the ruling of the judge in the case brought by Cait Reilly who had been forced to take part in one of the government's workfare schemes. Specifically, participants were not given enough information about the scheme or their rights. But apparently the government doesn't think it has to listen to what a judge says - so an emergency law is being rushed through parliament to overturn the decision, disgracefully with nothing more than an abstention from Labour.

Alarm and distress

Wouldn't we all want to make a fuss if David Cameron was invited to turn on the Christmas lights in our home town? For Bethan Tichborne, that has led to a criminal record and fines of nearly £800. Cameron was turning on the lights in his constituency of Witney when Bethan, a teaching assistant who works with disabled children, attempted to climb over the barriers and shouted 'blood on your hands' in a protest against cuts to disability benefits and support.

She was found guilty of using threatening words or behaviour to cause harassment, alarm or distress... We're sure Cameron's words and behaviour towards disabled people and their services have caused plenty of alarm and distress.

MPs' expenses 2012

Cameron: £119,149 (up 12%)
Osborne: £111,735 (up 20%)
Clegg: £148,583 (up 34%)
Alexander: £149,176 (up 16%)

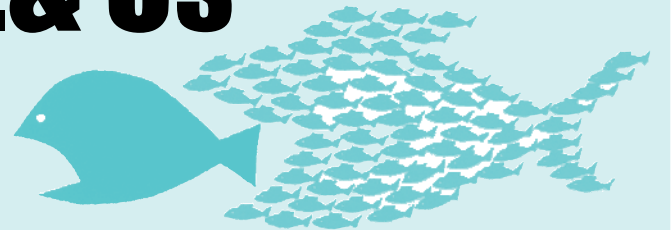
The over-£1m club

It's almost stopped being shocking - Santander is the latest bank to reveal the number of bankers paid more than £1 million in 2012. This time a 'modest' 19 reached these dizzying heights of the pay scale. Chief executive Ana Botin was paid £4 million!

Manufacturing miracle?

There is an annual shortfall of 40,000 science, technology, engineering and maths graduates. The Social Market

...& Us



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

@tweets this week

Helen Ridett
Agenda 4 change is being attacked 2 'save money'...NHS staff are already on a pay freeze and our pensions are being eroded #saveourNHS #unison

Martin Powell-Davies
Average weekly wage the same as 2002 - 11 year freeze, industrial production at level of over 20 years ago! #SERTUC #austerity conference

Grumpyhatlady
I'm not a Labour member and no longer a Labour voter but abstaining on #workfare will ensure *I NEVER VOTE LABOUR EVER AGAIN*

Tony Saunois
250k extra school places needed next year. 33% of them in London. So #Con-Libjunta cuts and privatises education.

GlosSocialists
The biggest Food Bank supplier, the Trussel Trust is set to launch an appeal for £1m to prepare for increased demand caused by welfare changes.

Join the fightback! Join the Socialists!

• www.socialistparty.org.uk • Phone 020 8988 8777
• Text 07761 818206

PCS starts strike programme

John McNally
Public and Commercial Services
union (PCS) vice president

The government is wrong if it thinks it can attack us without facing determined resistance. As well as the one-day strike on 20 March there will be a half-day strike on 5 April.

This walkout will begin a week of tax justice campaigning, highlighting the £120 billion tax gap. Added im-

petus for the dispute will come from the announcement that all 281 tax enquiry offices in the country could close, including 13 to be closed this year in the North of England. Also, from 1 April, PCS members will have extra pension contributions imposed on them, while from the same date millionaires are being given a tax cut.

PCS particularly welcomes other unions' involvement. For example we welcome the strike of Unite and PCS members in the Homes and Communities Agency who have coordinated

their strike for budget day.

As our general secretary Mark Serwotka told the pre-budget TUC rally: "We hope our strike action is successful but we're quite clear, our union is right to take action but we all know if more of us take action together we have a better chance of winning... On 26 June George Osborne will do another significant thing. He will announce his comprehensive spending review which will confirm the butchery of public spending for the next three years.

What a brilliant day that would be - that while he announces cuts in parliament to see as many people as we can taking industrial action together, demonstrating together and protesting together. If we build that movement then we can turn our aspirations into reality."

Starting off as a one-day strike on budget day and an overtime ban from 21 March, the union's national disputes committee will meet weekly. We will be calling further action at short notice.

Blacklisted electrician wins his case



Steve studying his papers before the ET photo Andy Ford

Andy Ford

Steve Acheson has won his Employment Tribunal (ET) for 'Unlawful Refusal of Employment' three and a half years ago. On 11 March he finally got awarded damages of £11,000.

Although it is a victory and vindication for Steve, the chairman cut Steve's damages by 75%, leaving him massively out of pocket. Steve has been victim of a conspiracy to deprive him of work over a period of years. Now he has been let down by the Tribunal system.

Steve told the Socialist: "I'm massively disappointed at the remedy hearing, my losses of earnings were £28,000. Obviously the backdating and the injury to feelings stuff is a bonus, but that can't compensate for the hearing knocking 75% off. It means I've got £20,000 less than I should have got and the only words I can use for that are 'massively disappointed'."

Steve was dismissed on 19 December 2008 from an engineering project at Fiddler's Ferry power station in Warrington. His actual ET case was won in October 2009 for Unlawful Refusal of Employment - blacklisting in plain speech.

The chairman at that time said it was one of the world's most unfair

dismissals, but not illegal.

The NW regional committee of Unite is pursuing an inquiry into the reality of the claim by the employer that they had an 'otherwise agreement' with the union on site, made at the Project Joint Council, which allowed Steve's dismissal.

That left the Unlawful Refusal case. The first Remedy Hearing in December 2009 was postponed due to a claimed car crash by the HR manager from the firm which dismissed Steve. Case adjourned - for over three years!

Now at last Steve has won his case, but the amount is less than Steve's excellent barrister, Nick Toms, put in for. The amount was reduced because of an argument from the employers that Steve would have been made redundant anyway after a few more months. It was reduced by 75% because the chairman estimated Steve's chances of being made a charge hand and so avoiding early redundancy, at 75%. Steve fights on.

Benefit do for Steve Acheson, with Ken Loach speaking. Friday 22 March, 7pm, Saffron Restaurant, 107 Cheetham Hill Road, Cheetham Hill, Manchester, M8 8PY.

Tickets £20 waged/£12 unwaged, all proceeds to Steve Acheson.

Revenue and customs cuts

Revenue and customs (HMRC) plans to run a pilot in the North East of England to remove face-to-face tax services through its enquiry centre network.

Over 350,000 people use this service annually. If the pilot is 'successful', taxpayers will no longer be able to walk into an enquiry centre to receive assistance on their tax issues. They will be told to phone a contact centre.

The pilot will also include the shifting of responsibility to the third sector as taxpayers will be referred to organisations such as Tax Aid,

Age Concern and Citizens Advice.

It will run from 3 June to 30 September 2013. HMRC envisages that the pilot is likely to result in the closure of all 281 enquiry centres across the UK in March 2014, affecting 1,319 staff.

The PCS HMRC group executive is mounting a campaign of opposition. It will be linking up with pensioners' groups and anti-cuts campaigners. Messages of support can be sent to r&ccampaigns@pcs.org.uk For updates visit www.pcs.org.uk/hmrc

A PCS member

Another victory in the battle against Unison witch-hunt

Unison's leadership was defeated in the courts over illegally banning four Socialist Party members from holding office.

Recently the union was forced to call an AGM and elections in the Bromley local government branch where Glenn Kelly was removed as branch secretary.

This was the first time in four years that the members of the branch had the chance to decide who they wanted as their branch secretary, as opposed to an unelected full-time official running the branch.

Most of the branch's stewards have defected from the union in disgust at the ban and imposition of regional administration, along with hundreds of union members. So the union bureaucracy obviously thought now was a safe time to hold elections and keep Glenn Kelly out of office.

However on 13 March it was announced that in the only contested election in the branch Glenn has been re-elected as branch secretary. It was reported to the AGM that the branch is to be lifted out of regional administration on 2 April.

The union bureaucracy was clearly hoping that, having tried to isolate Glenn in the last few years, denying him a right to play any union role and even threatening him when he carried out his role as staff side secretary in representing workers, that this was their moment to get rid of him.

But it shows that at the first opportunity to show who they support - Glenn or the witch-hunt - workers have voted for a fighting democratic leadership that they know will stand up for them, not only against their employer but also against the union bureaucracy.

Marching against fire service cuts



At a previous lobby of the GLA photo Paul Mattsson

Residents and campaigners marched on 16 March to resist the closure of Clapham Fire Station, one of 12 London stations to fall victim of London Tory Mayor Boris Johnson's slash and burn budget.

The cut of £50 million to the London Fire Authority would result in the loss of 520 firefighter posts and the scrapping of 18 engines.

While the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) has vowed to fight the attack, with strike action if necessary, the Authority itself has outrageously buckled and agreed to consultation on the cuts after twice voting against them.

Among those marching with the FBU were Lambeth Save Our Services, members of the Women's

Institute, trade unionists, socialists and students.

While the local Labour Party made an appearance on the march, the party is scandalously passing on the cuts elsewhere in London, raising the need for independent anti-cuts candidates to raise the alternative to austerity.

If this attack succeeds, City Hall will be gambling with the lives of five million Londoners in the 20 affected boroughs.

As part of the same fight to defend our NHS and our vital public services, we must organise an all-London demonstration against fire service cuts and call on the TUC to name the date for a 24-hour general strike.

In brief

HCA strike

Unite Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) members (Housing Workers Branch) will be on strike on 20 March against a pay offer that has resulted in unprecedented anger and disgust among members.

The Agency's handling of the pay offer effectively blocked any meaningful negotiation, and was an insult to our members. The offer itself was considered deeply divisive and inequitable in its distribution of pay uplifts and bonuses. Some members will receive nothing at all despite a 13% average rise in cost of living since 2008, and two years of pay freezes.

Unite will have picket lines at the Maple House office on Tottenham Court Road (London) and Piccadilly Gardens (Manchester). The pay strike is being co-ordinated with the PCS.

Suzanne Muna

BT pay battle

After four pay meetings the nearest that BT have got to making an offer to the Communication Workers Union (CWU) is to say that while inflation is 'interesting' it is 'not relevant' to pay.

This contemptuous approach is the product of years of 'partnership' between the CWU and BT. But the union leaders need to prepare for the possibility of industrial action if BT doesn't make a serious offer.

The current leadership of the CWU Telecoms section have put up little resistance to the erosion of terms and conditions and place almost blind faith in the integrity of the company on issues like performance management.

Linked to industrial action over pay is the need to elect a new union leadership in elections due in the summer.

Clive Walder, Birmingham, Black Country and Worcester CWU, personal capacity

Justice for Remply workers

On 20 March Remply workers who have lost their jobs because of the government cuts and closures will be protesting outside the DWP buildings in Tothill Street, London at 9.30am. This is timed to link up with the PCS strike protests.

"Let this brutal Tory Lib Dem mob know we have not gone away."

Visteon

Former workers at the Visteon car parts factories marched to Westminster on 13 March, the fourth anniversary of the company going into administration.

Their former Ford pensions were transferred to Visteon but the workers lost out when Visteon collapsed. They want the plant's former owner Ford to cover their losses. Ford has been trying to argue that Visteon was an independent business. Unite began legal action against Ford in the High Court in January 2011.

Website

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

Fight the bedroom tax - the battle begins

From April the 'bedroom tax' will mean that social housing tenants with spare rooms will have their benefits cut.

This will hit 660,000 households including many disabled people and low-paid workers. Tenants are faced with an impossible choice of moving from their family homes or being

left with a much smaller income.

This situation will only get worse in October when benefit caps are introduced under 'universal credit'.

What we need are not benefit caps but rent caps and a massive programme of affordable house building.



Socialist Party members at a protest rally in Bristol photo Matt Carey

Scotland is getting organised

On 13 March over 100 people packed into a Glasgow public meeting to build for the 30 March demonstration against the hated bedroom tax. The meeting, bringing together people from across the West of Scotland, agreed to launch a West Scotland Federation of Anti-Bedroom Tax campaigns.

Well-known socialist campaigner Tommy Sheridan gave a rousing account of his experience of how millions of working class people "melt-

ed the iron lady", Margaret Thatcher, by defeating the poll tax through mass non-payment. The lessons of that struggle, Tommy said, can play a vital role in mobilising resistance, and winning the struggle against the bedroom tax today.

Socialist Party member and Unison activist Nicola Crawford outlined her experience of building a campaign in Shawlands and Pollokshaws in Glasgow. After a successful public meeting, street

meetings of tenants increased the spread of the campaign and gave confidence to more benefit claimants to get involved.

Nicola called for a national campaign to build mass resistance to evictions and raised the demand for a council house-building programme. The meeting agreed a resolution calling for the scrapping of the bedroom tax and for a massive programme of council house-building to provide affordable homes for all.

The campaign's demands include:

- Scrap the bedroom tax
- Support those who cannot and will not pay this austerity tax
- No evictions for rent arrears. Build an army of anti-eviction campaigners to stop evictions
- Councils should rule out eviction for bedroom tax and fight the cuts
- Write off all debt due to the bedroom tax. Demand compensation to councils and housing associations as part of a mass campaign to win back the money stolen from public services by the Con-Dems
- For a major programme of council house-building to provide affordable homes for all

Dundee - stop this theft from the poor

The impact made by the campaign in Dundee was shown when the council's ruling SNP group passed a motion committing it not to use eviction to recover rent arrears for a "transitional period of one year."

However, this was under the condition that tenants "do all they reasonably can to avoid falling into rent arrears." What this means is unclear. Almost all tenants facing the imposi-

sition of the bedroom tax will be unable to pay from day one. There is no "doing all they reasonably can" under this tax. Other measures of debt recovery will be used by the council, including court actions.

The Con-Dems have told 3,300 households in Dundee living in council and Housing Association accommodation, all of them already receiving housing benefit, that they

have too many bedrooms. So from 1 April these tenants will lose 14% of their housing benefit for being deemed to have one extra room and 25% for those with two or more.

That's £2 million stolen from the city's poorest families - who are told to make that up from already meagre benefits. That's £2 million stolen from the poor to give to the rich. This cannot be allowed to pass.

'Barbaric, immoral, discriminatory' - Alan speaking at the Runcorn protest (see above)

"This tax is barbaric, immoral and discriminatory. Lord Freud and Iain Duncan Smith who are forcing this through, have blood on their hands. Look at the Atos assessments, the suicides after benefits have been stopped and being told you're fit for work.

Where is this supposed work and where are the supposed properties to downsize into, who is going to pay for us all to move as the Social Fund has been abolished? The NHS is being privatised, and all the money is going straight into the pockets of government ministers who

have links with the private medical insurance companies we will have to go to. We are being f...ed over every way you look at it, the last three governments Thatcher, Labour and now Con-Dem have systematically dismantled what made this country great."

Protests around the country

Bristol

The 200 people at Bristol's initial bedroom tax protest on 16 March heard defiant speeches from threatened tenants who resurrected the 'Can't Pay - Won't Pay' tradition from the days of the Poll Tax in the early 1990s.

NUT member Sheila Caffrey and Bristol Anti-Cuts Alliance spokesman and former Bristol Anti-Poll Tax leader Robin Clapp mapped out an immediate strategy for the fightback.

This meant no evictions, councillors to refuse to implement the tax, expose and picket compliant Housing Associations who try to enforce it, prepare to swamp the courts if eviction procedures are begun, chase the bailiffs back to their ratholes if they try to carry through evictions and build an army of workers, trade unionists and community activists to ensure the tax is stillborn. Loud cheering accompanied these fighting words from most of the crowd, especially when we underlined that we oppose all cuts, whichever party is making them.

Runcorn

Saturday's protest in Runcorn against the bedroom tax drew 150-200 people, mainly organised through social media. Activists from Halton Trades Council had initiated the protest but it had also been taken up enthusiastically by new, younger people via Facebook.

Michelle, one of the main speakers, said she'd never spoken into a microphone before "except when I was drunk singing I Will Survive!" It didn't matter, she spoke excellently as did Alan from St Helens who denounced the injustice of the bedroom tax in no uncertain terms.

It was the first political event many people had been to, but the

Socialist got a very friendly reception and I sold all the papers I had with me. It reminded me of the early days of the poll tax, with working class people coming together, determined to be no longer bullied, walked over and taken for granted.

Andrew Ford

Birmingham

An anti-bedroom tax rally/demonstration in Birmingham attracted around 200 people. We handed out literature, explained the Con-Dem government policy and the Socialist Party's views on it. Full credit to the organisers for what could be the first of many protests against this vicious policy.

Mark Andrews

Carlisle

Our call for house-building and rent caps, not benefit caps was preaching to the converted in the 100-strong march in Carlisle as we tried to keep up with the queue of people wanting to sign our petition. One woman, a widow, told us that when rent and other costs were subtracted she had little over £3 for groceries.

The mood is there for a serious anti-cuts movement, starting from below but linking up to challenge the government on a clear programme of opposition to every cut.

Daniel Thorburn

Stoke-on-Trent

Organised entirely on social networks, around 50 people turned up in Hanley to demonstrate against the bedroom tax. Over 240 people signed our petition calling on the government to axe the bedroom tax and to build affordable social housing.



The protest in Hull photo Lash

Iraq: Ten years after 'shock and awe' Imperialism's bloody legacy

Niall Mulholland

Ten years ago, under the banner, 'Operation Iraqi Freedom', the US-led 'coalition of the willing' attacked Iraq. Despite huge public opposition, including tens of millions-strong global anti-war demonstrations on 15-16 February 2003, the "shock and awe" bombing campaign began on 20 March, followed by a land invasion a few hours later.

The enormous military force descended on a people who had suffered 35 years of Saddam Hussein's dictatorship, the 1991 Gulf War and 13 years of cruel United Nations (UN) sanctions, which destroyed the Iraqi economy, reduced millions to poverty and cost between half a million to one million Iraqi lives.

WMD fiction

The 2003 war was 'justified' by a torrent of propaganda and lies emanating from Washington and Downing Street, which was repeated by a compliant, right-wing media.

President Bush accused the Iraqi dictator, Saddam Hussein, of attempting to enrich uranium to develop "weapons of mass destruction" (WMD). US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, told the UN on 6 February 2003 that Iraq was acquiring biological weapons capability. Tony Blair, the Labour prime minister, claimed that Iraqi WMD could be ready for use "within 45 minutes". Saddam was also accused of aiding al-Qaeda.

These were all lies. Soon after the invasion no evidence of Saddam's WMD could be found by the occupying forces or links between the former Saddam regime and 'terrorism'. In fact, it was the occupation that caused such resentment that it brought al-Qaeda's sectarian terror to Iraq.

Yet on the eve of the war's tenth anniversary, the former prime min-

ister told the BBC: "So when you say 'do you think of the loss of life since 2003?' of course I do. You would have to be inhumane not to, but think of what would have happened if he had been left there."

Blair's trite comments do not even begin to address the enormous human cost of the war. From 2003 to 2011, 150,000 to 400,000 Iraqis are believed to have died violently, according to several studies. The respected medical journal, *The*

The 2003 invasion greatly increased Arabs' sense of humiliation and injustice at the hands of imperialism.

Lancet, estimated a much higher figure of over 600,000 people dying violently between 2003 and 2006, alone. Added to this are countless thousands of Iraqis still missing and thousands of US, British and other coalition military personnel deaths and serious injuries.

The harvest of death in Iraq left two million widows as primary family breadwinners and 4.5 million orphans (600,000 of who live in the streets). The war created four million refugees. One million fled to Syria. A further 1.3 million are internally displaced persons in Iraq. Only one in eight of these have returned home since 2008.

The Bush/Blair Iraq adventure also came at considerable economic cost to the US economy. According to Joseph Stiglitz, the former World Bank chief economist, it took \$3 trillion from the US economy. While the

funds are always there to fight foreign wars on behalf of big business profits and interests, American and British workers find their living standards falling dramatically.

Interviews with Blair fail to put to him the real reasons for the invasion. Instead the war of imperialist aggression is dressed up as 'humanitarian interventionism' and attempts by Blair and Bush to export Western-style liberal democracy to the Middle East.

The ruling classes internationally were divided over Iraq. World and regional powers were fearful of the consequence of invasion and the USA gaining at their expense. The Bush neo-cons, however, pushed for war.

American and British imperialism, which previously backed Saddam, did not go to war to stop oppression or to introduce democratic rights and improve living standards.

For decades, Saddam's sadistic regime murdered and terrorised Iraqis while enjoying Western backing. After the overthrow of another Western favoured regional despot, the Shah of Iran, Saddam was encouraged by the West to invade its neighbour. Millions perished or suffered terrible injuries in the resulting eight-year war.

Saddam fell foul of Western imperialism's interests when he invaded neighbouring Kuwait in 1991. The potential for Saddam to control vital oil supplies terrified western powers and they quickly assembled a massive military force.

The first Gulf War saw a US-led coalition quickly retake the oil-rich statelet but stop short at Iraqi borders. Little concern was shown for the opposition to Saddam in 1991 when the Western military force stood back as an uprising by Shi'ites and Kurds was brutally put down by the dictator.

Cynically exploiting the heinous '9/11' al-Qaeda terror attacks, the White House and Downing Street eagerly seized the opportunity to directly intervene militarily to overthrow Saddam and to impose a pro-Western, pliant regime.

Seizing control of Iraq's abundant oil reserves, estimated to be 9% of the world total, was a key objective for US imperialism, as well as its vital geo-strategic interests in the Middle East.

Perhaps it was to stop naked imperialist ambitions of these kind becoming public knowledge that led the Cabinet Office to insist the much-delayed Chilcot inquiry report will be published without crucial evidence that would reveal what Blair and Bush discussed in the run-up to the invasion?

Backing dictators

Blair and Bush have not faced trial for their Iraqi war crimes. The International Criminal Court (ICC), like the UN, is dominated by the interests of the powerful nation states. Only former despots and warlords from the Balkans and Africa, who have conflicted with imperialism, have been



Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis have been killed in addition to the hundreds of thousands of injured and made refugees

brought before the ICC at the Hague.

With all other justifications for his war shredded, Blair asks: "If we hadn't removed Saddam from power just think, for example, what would be happening if these Arab revolutions were continuing now and Saddam, who's probably 20 times as bad as Assad in Syria, was trying to suppress an uprising in Iraq?"

There is no doubt that Saddam was a brutal tyrant, whose regime murdered many people, including communists and trade unionists. But the former prime minister has no problem with dictators, per se. 'Tony Blair Associates' advise the Kazakhstan despot, Nazarbayev, the butcher of striking oil workers. And Blair's 'liberalised' Iraq is today run by Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, who even the right-wing Economist accuses of "dictatorial tendencies".

The 2003 invasion greatly increased Arabs' sense of humiliation and injustice at the hands of imperialism. This was an important factor fuelling the 2011 revolutions against Western-backed dictators in the Middle East and North Africa, as well as widespread anger at the lack of democratic rights, mass joblessness and poverty in these societies.

The 'Arab Spring' does not at all justify Blair's neocolonial adventure but actually validates the position of the Socialist in the run-up to the Iraq war; that removing the tyrant Saddam was the task of the Iraqi working people by a united mass struggle.

The toppling of close Western allies, Ben Ali and Mosni Mubarak, who were supposedly 'impregnable' dictators like Saddam, in late 2010 and

early 2011, showed this was also a possible course of action for the Iraqi masses.

John Prescott, Labour Deputy Prime Minister in 2003, now Lord Prescott, recently admitted to the BBC that the invasion of Iraq in 2003 "cannot be justified". He said he had backed the invasion because he believed George Bush had a plan to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Bush and Blair did claim the defeat of Saddam would act as an impetus for a new 'road map' for peace in Israel and Palestine. But as the Socialist warned in 2003, the oppression of Palestinians would continue unabated after the Iraq invasion. For its own imperialist geo-strategic interests, the US continues to support Israel, its closest ally in the region, while genuine Palestinian self-determination and statehood is further away than ever.

In an interview with BBC's *Newsnight*, Blair agreed that 'daily life in Iraq today is not what he hoped it would be' when he opted to invade ten years ago. Blair claimed there have been "significant improvements" but that "it is not nearly what it should be".

This is an understatement, to say the least! The Socialist resolutely opposed imperialist intervention in 2003, and correctly predicted it would bring oppression and chaos - opening up the gates to sectarian conflagration - and that imperialism would be bogged down in a long conflict.

The occupiers' policy of 'de-Ba'athification' of Saddam's largely Sunni-based regime, and the disbandment of the Iraqi army, resulted in sectarian purges of Sunnis. This

ignited fierce Sunni-based resistance.

Brutal colonial occupation, including the systematic torture and abuse of civilians in notorious jails like Abu Ghraib, the siege of Fallujah city and the massacre of resistance fighters and many civilians at cities like Haditha and Balad, ensured growing mass opposition to the US-led occupation, which was not just confined to Sunnis. Anti-war sentiment grew in the US, Britain and internationally.

Despite their awesome military machine and war chest, the Coalition was unable to crush the resistance and resorted to divide and rule tactics. They backed Shia against Sunni, causing an orgy of bloodletting.

Consequences

According to investigations by the Guardian and the BBC's Arabic language service, in 2004 the Bush administration turned to the "Salvador option" - named after the US's role in running right-wing death squads in El Salvador in the 1980s. Shia militias were armed and financed by the US. Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis died and millions were displaced as a result. The Sunnis were the main losers in the sectarian civil war.

A US-imposed 'constitution' institutionalised sectarian and ethnic divisions. Elections in 2005 led to Shia-based parties winning a majority in parliament and the prime minister's office.

A corrupt ruling class, and reactionary, sectarian-based political parties struggle over Iraq's natural resources while the mass of people live in poverty. Although Iraq has \$100 billion

(£66 billion) a year in oil revenues little of this trickles down to the people. It is the eighth most corrupt country in the world, according to Transparency International.

The capital, Baghdad, which is home to a fifth of the country's 33 million population, is still a city at war, divided up by oppressive military checkpoints and barriers, and vulnerable to indiscriminate, sectarian outrages. Baghdad and central Iraq suffer daily bombings, assassinations and kidnappings.

Bush and Blair's legacy includes a fivefold increase in birth defects and fourfold increase in cancer rates in and around Fallujah, as a consequence of the Coalition forces' use of radioactive depleted uranium munitions.

Western politicians like to contrast Baghdad to the relative peace in the oil-rich Kurdish region and majority-Shia provinces. But this is illusory.

The Shia in the south are relatively safer because one community dominates overwhelmingly. Unemployment is high, however, and most Shias still live in dreadful poverty.

Tensions between Kurds, Arabs and other minorities simmer in the semi-independent Kurdish Regional Government (KRG). Much to the chagrin of the central Baghdad government, the Kurdish regime has made 50 oil and gas deals with foreign companies and exports oil directly to Turkey.

After decades of brutal oppression, many Kurds hope they can move towards real self-determination. But the KRG is surrounded by states that have a long history of oppressing Kurds. The reactionary Kurdish leaders are

● Before the first Gulf War and years of sanctions, the literacy rate in Iraq was more than 90%, 92% of Iraqis had safe water and 93% enjoyed free health care.

● In 2011 after years of imperialist occupation, 78% adults are literate and 50% of Iraqis lived in slum conditions (17% in 2000).

● Over 1 million Iraqis are 'internally displaced'. Nearly half of the capital's 400,000 'internal refugees' (displaced victims of sectarian terror) live in squalor in squatter settlements.

● A quarter of Iraqi families live below the poverty line, according to the World Bank. Less than 40% of adults have jobs. Millions lack electricity, clean water and other essential services.

in 'alliances' with the US and Turkey, one of the worst perpetrators of Kurdish oppression.

An indication of the growing conflict over oil and territory between KRG and the central Iraqi regime is seen by clashes between Kurdish peshmerga fighters and Iraqi troops.

The removal of Saddam has not made the world a "safer place", as Bush/Blair promised. In fact, the world became much more violent and volatile. Saddam did not have "weapons of mass destruction" but after the 2003 invasion "rogue state" regimes, such as North Korea, concluded that only way to stop a US-led attack against them was to acquire them.

Despite imperialism's setbacks in Iraq, the US and Britain continue to wage conflicts around the world to further their vital interests. Trying to create distance from Blair's war, Ed Miliband said the Iraq war was a mistake but he continues to support British troops in Afghanistan and does not call for an end to US drone strikes.

The 2003 war and occupation have had long-term consequences for the region. Putting Western forces in Iraq was meant to further isolate and encircle Iran. However, Tehran found it had influence over the Shia-dominated Iraq government and the regional 'Shia War' was strengthened.

Partly to counter Iran, reactionary Gulf states and Western imperialism

are meddling in Syria, exploiting the Sunni-based opposition to Assad. The Syrian conflict is spreading to Lebanon and Iraq, where a 'Sunni Spring' has seen mass opposition demonstrations in Sunni areas.

Revolution

The majority of Iraqis do not want to be dragged back to the horrors of civil war. But to stop more conflicts, to end imperialist interference and to kick out the corrupt, reactionary ruling elites, working people need an alternative.

Iraq had a powerful Left until it was crushed by a CIA-backed coup in the 1960s and, later, by the Saddam regime.

The most important lesson from that tragedy and from the horrors of the last decade is the need for working people to have an independent, class-based party to fight for their interests. Such a party would demand the nationalisation of the oil riches, under democratic public ownership, to benefit the masses.

As the 2011 revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia showed, mass struggles will develop against tyrants, and despite the movements' limitations, can throw them from power. But to succeed in making fundamental system change, working people need a socialist programme, in each country, regionally and internationally.

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Brothers in war - crimes



Socialist Party members on a London anti-Iraq war demo

Socialist Party subs appeal Help increase our fighting strength!

Naomi Byron
Socialist Party finance department

The Socialist Party is asking every member if they can increase the regular donation (membership subs) they make to fund our work. We aim to raise another £3,000 a month, and every member who makes an increase will help get us closer to what we need.

Karen Seymour, from Mansfield and North Derbyshire branch, has pledged an extra £1 a month: "I was only able to raise my membership subs by a small amount this time, but I did it because I know the Socialist Party values my contribution just as much as a larger donation. I'd say to members who are a bit hesitant about asking others for increased subs - do it anyway! Everyone in this party wants a socialist world, but it is impossible to work



photo Steve White

for this without money!"

For members on a low income, each extra 50p or £1 a month will help increase the Socialist Party's fighting strength. We need every

penny to fight against austerity, and all the money that funds the party comes from our members and supporters.

Battle of our lives

We are facing the fight of our lives. As the Con-Dems begin their tax giveaway to the super rich, estimated to hand out £3 billion, they are rushing through emergency legislation to stop payouts of £130 million to jobseekers who were illegally forced to work for free for companies like Poundland, under threat of losing their benefits.

Even more shamefully, Labour is supporting the emergency legislation, and promises not to reverse most of the cuts the Con-Dems have made.

From the bedroom tax to the government's attempts to destroy the NHS by opening it up to the private

profiteers, the Socialist Party fights for the 99%. We are proud to be funded by ordinary working class people - not by big business like the main three parties and right-wing groups like Ukip.

Already just over 50 members have pledged £700, many by small amounts. Membership subs are our bread-and-butter income and we need to increase our overstretched resources to fight for the socialist alternative.

No limit

If you can make a more substantial increase, please do. For instance, one member who joined last year and is living on a pension has agreed to double their subs from £5 to £10 a month, while another new member has pledged an increase from £30 to £100 a month.

We are asking every member to

consider whether they can make an extra sacrifice. We know many people are struggling, and not every member will be able to increase by even 50p a month.

But even if you can't increase your own subs, you can still help to increase our income. Everyone can help attract new members to the party, raise fighting fund and be part of our campaign to increase the sales of the Socialist.

If you are not a member, but agree with what the Socialist Party is fighting for, join us today! Or if you're not ready yet to join us, you can still donate to support our work through our fighting fund by using the form below, phoning 020 8988 8777 or going online at www.socialistparty.org.uk/donate.

Socialist Party members can contact their local branch treasurer or phone 020 8988 8777 to discuss increasing their subs.

Fight grows against privatisation at Sussex Uni

Jack Poole
Sussex Socialist Students

As the occupation against the privatisation of services at Sussex University enters its fifth week, momentum continues to build behind the student campaign.

A demonstration has been called for Monday 25 March, with an appeal to anyone fighting privatisation around the country to head down to Sussex to show support.

It is expected to be the biggest demonstration yet - there has been a demonstration of 700 already - with coaches coming from universities, as well as local trade unionists and campaigners from across the Sussex area.

The campaign at Sussex has gained national attention, and is leading the fightback against the privatisation of higher education. Solidarity actions and messages have been flooding in from campaigns at other universities around the country, and one from students at Linnaeus University in Sweden! Monday's demonstration will



The Sussex Uni occupation has entered its fifth week

bring the opposition to these attacks down on Sussex campus with the united message: "Stop the sell off!"
Join the demo: 25 March, 1pm, University of Sussex, Brighton BN1 9RH
Please send solidarity messages to sussexagainstoprivatisation@gmail.com

Twitter: @occupy_sussex
Facebook: "Stop The Privatization Of Sussex University Services"
For more info on the campaign see the article in issue 756 of the Socialist and at www.socialistparty.org.uk. Look out for a report on the demonstration in the next issue of the Socialist.

Riots Reframed - starting the debate

Emma Smith

Around 1,000 young people patiently queued to watch a new documentary film, Riots Reframed, in Tower Hamlets, east London on Saturday 16 March.

Throughout the film, mainly interviews with commentators, campaigners and those imprisoned after the riots, spontaneous cheers showed that the anger, especially against police racism and media prejudice, still burns.

Research last year found black people are 30 times more likely than white people to be stopped and searched by police in England and Wales.

This film was made by Fahim Alam, who was imprisoned in August 2011 for taking part in the riots in Hackney. A jury took half an hour to overturn the case against him earlier this month. Imran Khan, known for acting for the family of murdered black teenager Stephen Lawrence, represented him in court.



photo Paul Mattsson

Following the film a question and answer session heard from many of those who appeared in the film but also gave members of the audience an opportunity to debate how to challenge a system based on inequality, racism, prejudice and unfairness.

Help build an alternative to the pro-cuts press with a May Day greeting

Bob Severn

As we got to press the details of the new press regulator are coming to light.

But the main freedoms of the capitalist press stay in place: the freedom to peddle pro-cuts lies, the freedom to attack workers who take strike action, the freedom to spread racist, homophobic and sexist lies.

This is as the main issue - who

owns and controls the press - has been left untouched. We need to build an alternative to the capitalist media, where it is not just a few billionaire media moguls who control what's printed.

The Socialist says make the bankers and fat cats pay for their crisis. It reports the struggles of working class and young people, both in Britain and worldwide. It shows why the cuts aren't necessary and what's needed to stop them.

And you can financially support that alternative with a May Day greeting.

Every year the Socialist carries May Day greetings from campaigning groups to mark International Workers' Day, which commemorates the first US general strike that took place on 1 May 1886.

Greeting messages can promote the work of socialists, trade unionists, students and other anti-cuts campaigners, while raising essential

money for the Socialist.

The pledge sheet can be used to collect donations towards a workplace or campaign greeting. Use the contact details below to order copies.

We can also send you model motions for getting a May Day greeting from your trade union branch, student society or campaign.

We need your greeting messages and images by 10 April - greetings paid for by then get a 25% discount.

Greetings prices include: £500 for a whole page (£375 before 10 April); £300 for a half-page (£225); £170 quarter-page (£127.50); £90 one-eighth (£67.50); £50 one-sixteenth (£37.50); £30 1/32 (£22.50); £20 small box (£15).

Other rates are available. For enquiries please phone 020 8988 8781 or email editors@socialistparty.org.uk. You can also give your greeting online at www.socialistparty.org.uk/mayday

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SOCIALIST PARTY FIGHTING FUND

| | £ target | £ received | January-March 2013 | Deadline 28 March 2013 |
|-----------------|---------------|---------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Wales | 2,300 | 2,751 | ██████████ | ██████████ |
| East Midlands | 1,550 | 1,815 | ██████████ | ██████████ |
| South East | 750 | 761 | ██████████ | ██████████ |
| Yorkshire | 2,900 | 2,771 | ██████████ | ██████████ |
| Eastern | 1,200 | 1,082 | ██████████ | ██████████ |
| Southern | 1,200 | 1,007 | ██████████ | ██████████ |
| London | 6,100 | 5,043 | ██████████ | ██████████ |
| North West | 1,200 | 869 | ██████████ | ██████████ |
| South West | 1,400 | 889 | ██████████ | ██████████ |
| West Midlands | 2,100 | 1,227 | ██████████ | ██████████ |
| Northern | 600 | 175 | ██████████ | ██████████ |
| England & Wales | 3,700 | 2,909 | ██████████ | ██████████ |
| TOTAL | 25,000 | 21,304 | ██████████ | ██████████ |

Prescription: Fight profiteering from health

GP and health activist
Yorkshire

In April the NHS will be moved another step closer to being fully privatised. 211 GP-led clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) will take over responsibility for the majority of the England NHS budget, replacing primary care trusts.

Private companies will get to bid for CCG contracts, while a massive cut in NHS funding will lead to further rationing of free healthcare. CCGs are likely to pick and choose which patients they want.

The government claimed its health 'reforms' will mean services will be decided by those 'closest to patients' who understand local needs best.

Yet a recent British Medical Association (BMA) survey found that just over a third of GPs involved in CCGs are also members of profit-making private health organisations.

These GPs could be commissioning services from the private health companies that they also benefit financially from.

GPs are meant to declare a conflict of interest and remove themselves from voting in this situation. But being on a CCG will give them inside information regarding what service areas are being looked at.

Inside trading

Potentially it puts their private organisations at an advantage, being able to position themselves better when bidding for contracts.

In one CCG, the majority of the executive board had an interest in an out-of-hours provider, meaning they would all have to sit out of voting over issues related to this

The majority of GPs, like the majority of the country, opposed the Health and Social Care Act

service. How can decisions about healthcare be made on that basis?

The majority of GPs in England do not have private health interests. The majority of GPs, like the majority of the country, also opposed the government's Health and Social Care Act which has introduced these changes.

Self-selecting

Because most GPs do not want to be embroiled in commissioning, CCGs have been made up of a self-selecting group. Worryingly, they obviously see no problem in the idea of the private sector profiting from healthcare and undermining the NHS as we know it.

How can the public have confidence that CCGs are making decisions in their interests rather than those of the private sector and potentially GPs' own financial gain?

Both the BMA and the Royal College of GPs have raised concerns and stated that GPs should either reconsider their position on the CCG or within the private organisation, but shouldn't continue to do both.

The Socialist Party calls for an end to privatisation in healthcare and for a publicly-funded, democratically run NHS. This is the only way healthcare can be accountable and genuinely meet people's needs.

- Stop all cuts, closures and privatisation
- All hospitals to be fully funded by the NHS
- Adequate staffing levels to provide good quality care for all patients
- 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



5,000 people joined the march to save north London's Whittington Hospital on Saturday 16 March. The trust plans to slash half the hospital's workforce with 570 job losses, cut half the beds and sell off nurses' accommodation. See www.socialistparty.org.uk for a full report photos Paul Mattsson



New faces - same Welsh Labour NHS cuts!

Ronnie Job
Socialist Party Wales

Welsh Labour has been playing musical chairs with the ministers' positions in the Welsh Government.

The most significant change is the replacement of Lesley Griffiths with Mark Drakeford as Minister of Health.

The press in Wales has speculated that this is an attempt to head off demonstrations over NHS cuts at the Welsh Labour Party Conference on 22-24 March.

The conference is being held in Llandudno, in North Wales.

One of the Welsh Government's headline casualties has been the closure of specialist neonatal care

units all across North Wales, meaning that the nearest provider of this essential service will not be in Wales at all but on the Wirral.

This has provoked a rash of demonstrations in Wrexham, Llandudno, Flint and Blaenau Ffestiniog among others.

Perhaps the fear of conference protests has led to the reshuffle and First Minister, Carwyn Jones, deciding to look again at the issue of neonatal care.

No confidence

Griffiths, the outgoing health minister, only just survived a vote of no-confidence over alleged collusion between the Welsh Government and Marcus Longley, the suppos-

edly independent consultant whose report is being used to justify cuts.

Her replacement, Drakeford, is a spokesman for the Welsh Labour Left.

But it's a token gesture. At his swearing in yesterday, Drakeford was quite clear that he will continue with Griffiths' cuts and "see the process through and bring it to a conclusion".

Drakeford warned that Wales's seven health boards will have to stay within their budgets. He said: "Health organisations have to work within their budget."

Health board funding has been cut by almost £300 million this year compared to last year - about 5% of their total budget.

This comes on top of £1 billion cut

from the Wales NHS budget since 2005!

Labour might publicly announce a reversal of the North Wales neonatal policy at their Welsh Conference. In the context of the same cuts to budgets, then it will mean harsher cuts elsewhere.

But such a U-turn will send a clear message that the Welsh Government can be forced to retreat by communities fighting back.

Health campaigners across North Wales would take heart as would those in South Wales fighting the plan to reduce the number of A&E units to four or five (serving two million people).

We now need to link up all our campaigns to fight every Welsh Labour NHS cut.

Stop Mid-Yorks NHS cuts

Paul Wheelhouse

Mid-Yorkshire NHS Trust is looking to cut back Dewsbury Hospital services. Little notice or information has been given for the consultation meetings, which have already started and will be over by 20 March.

But if the trust really wants to know what people think, they should pay attention to the 25,000 signatures already collected in opposition to the cuts.

Save Our Local Hospital Services (SOLHS) believes the trust want to implement 'Option Two' in their proposals, which will reduce Dewsbury Hospital to a cottage hospital. As if to reinforce their plans, the trust has already started transferring local services to Pinderfields and Pontefract, forcing patients to travel further.

The trust has already attacked workers at the hospital, with admin and clerical workers having taken strike action against pay cuts this year (see reports at www.socialistparty.org.uk).

SOLHS was formed in August 2012 to bring the community together to oppose the proposed cuts across Mid Yorkshire Trust.

The group, with the support of the Huddersfield Socialist Party, has worked tirelessly to do this, holding many public meetings around the local area, spreading the word of opposition to the cuts and giving an opportunity to everyone to get involved to stop the cuts to their services.

We have spoken to many local people. The vast majority do not want to lose any of their vital services from Dewsbury Hospital.

Rally against Dewsbury Hospital cuts
Saturday 23 March, 12pm
Dewsbury town hall

'Is green growth possible and do we really need it?'

A debate between Pete Dickenson and Derek Wall
Wednesday 27 March, 7pm
Housmans, Peace House,
5 Caledonian Road, Kings
Cross, London N1 9DX

Entry £3, redeemable against any purchase

A debate as to whether an eco-socialist programme would have to curtail growth or could it provide an environmentally sustainable version of growth?

Pete Dickenson is author of Planning For The Planet: How Socialism Could Save The Environment and a member of the Socialist Party.

Derek Wall is the Green Party International Coordinator and has written books including The Rise of the Green Left: Inside The Worldwide Ecosocialist Movement.

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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.

Our health ...

I saw a TV report saying bacteria were becoming resistant to antibiotics. This, it said, is a "ticking time bomb" and as big a threat as global warming. Who could be responsible for this? Apparently it's the general public, who frequently fail to complete courses of antibiotics. People stop taking them when they feel better, missing out the last few tablets, which allows bacteria to develop their resistance to these life-saving drugs. But the same report said that no new antibiotics have been introduced since 1987, as drugs companies do not consider developing new antibiotics to be sufficiently profitable. There's the real reason. There's no profit in saving lives. Market forces do not work in society's favour. That's why drugs companies need to be taken into public ownership and run as part of a democratically planned economy that meets the needs of the millions, not the millionaires.

**Steve Williams,
Doncaster and Barnsley
Socialist Party**

... or their profit

Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust has joined together with private healthcare firm Care UK to provide two new residential facilities for patients with severe mental health problems. Unison calls this 'the thin end of a privatisation wedge' and stresses that the new services could have been funded by local commissioners.

The new premises will be some distance from the organisation's main in-patient areas. There will be even greater loneliness and isolation for service users as their families and friends try to find the money and time to visit them.

The Trust denies that this is about 'sending Sussex patients out of county' claiming the arrangement will improve



photo Paul Mattsson

health outcomes. The previous owner of one of the units, Albion Ventures, has made £2 million from the sale, nearly one and a half times the cost of their original investment!

**Sharon Mitchell,
Brighton**

Blaming the sick

A report by the Demos think-tank calls for patients who exercise regularly and avoid fatty foods to be sent to the front of the health and welfare queue while welfare claimants are penalised for not "behaving responsibly." So anyone unwell is to blame for their condition and should be punished.

Demos also suggests supermarkets help spy on claimants "with the claim-

ant's consent". And if they withhold their consent? Back to the end of the queue! The "all sick people are scroungers" philosophy prevails. Westminster Tories suggested that people on benefits who they judged 'too fat' were not entitled to benefits. But Demos calls itself a "left



photo Paul Mattsson

of centre" think-tank. Perhaps Demos thinks "the centre" is somewhere to the right of the Daily Mail.

Demos and New Labour are 'tough on scroungers' - except MPs, corporation bosses voting themselves massive bonuses, and the filthy rich on unearned income.

Derek McMillan

Can't pay, won't pay!

The government is replacing Council Tax Benefit from this April with Council Tax Support to be run by local authorities and cutting the money available to cover the council tax of those without work by 10%. About half of Council Tax Support recipients will be pensioners, who are exempted from the cut, so the cash available to pay this to people on working age benefits is reduced by roughly 20%.

Those without jobs in New Labour-controlled Harlow will be obliged to pay 24% of our council tax bills. For a single person on Jobseeker's Allowance, this amounts to around 6% or 7% of his/her disposable income.

Harlow Council Tax Benefit Rebels are jobless people who will refuse to pay any council tax. We say: Can't Pay? Don't Pay! Harlow council expects 84% of those affected won't pay, and admits it is not worth councils taking court action to recover relatively small amounts. If enough people refuse to pay we can force a change in Harlow council policy. We intend to join with similar groups elsewhere to force central government to reverse this cut.

**Wat Tyler
www.benefitrebels.blogspot.
co.uk**

Look over your shoulder!

Cuts protesters gathered to speak to councillors who were meeting to cut Sunderland's much-needed services by £37 million for 2013-14. Council leader Paul Watson claimed the Tory cuts programme was being followed reluctantly as 'there is no other way'. If they don't, he said, Eric Pickles will send in a team to impose the Tory brand of budgeting, decimating Sunderland.

Protesters gave examples of some Labour councillors who had defied the Tory agenda rather than Labour abetting these Tory-led cuts. As protesters were

invited into the council chamber, the will to live drained away. These councillors must love their own voices as they pour out formulaic speeches. Are these councillors affected by the cuts themselves? Would they even need to use these services they are cutting?

They passed the cuts, but should look over their shoulders as an alternative such as the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is coming for them!

**Wilf Laws,
Sunderland**

NF: Numbers Failure?

The National Front (NF) mustered around 60 fascist sympathisers for their national "White Pride" event on 9 March; so it was more "notional" than "national". It seems unlikely that hundreds of NF supporters couldn't attend as they were buying last-minute Mother's Day gifts!

"Where's the Rest of Your Demo?" chanted the 300+ anti-fascists assembled to oppose the NF. Yet under capitalism, fascism's breeding grounds will still exist. When the poverty experienced by many is coupled with xenophobic rhetoric spouted by those in power and in the media, some may draw conclusions which are exploited by those with far-right leanings.

Fascism and racism seek to strangle the working class. A new mass party of the working class is needed; one of equality and economic fairness, a party built on the principles of socialism.

**David Hamblin,
Cardiff**

Choose well - no cuts!

Queues of ambulances built outside Welsh hospitals this week. Non-emergency operations were cancelled as staff were diverted elsewhere. But did the Welsh Government reconsider their plans to shut and downgrade Accident & Emergency services across Wales? No. They told us not to worry - they've got a free phone app for us to download! The Welsh Government's website says: "The free to download Choose Well application provides advice on which service to use when ill or injured and details of how to find them."

Great but if the Welsh Government's plans go through, finding the service you need will be difficult; they intend to close all specialist neonatal care in north Wales, to have only four or five at



photo Becky Davis

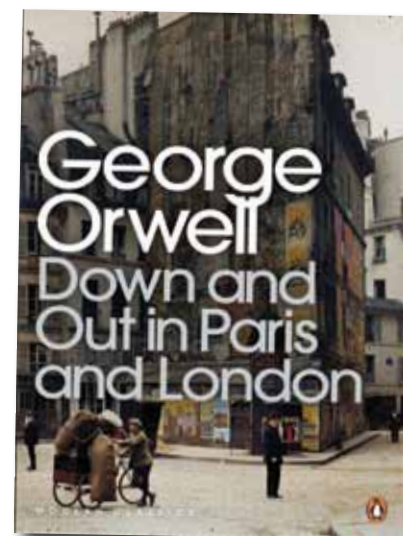
most A&E units for all south Wales. We need to 'choose' never to trust Labour again but unite our different campaigns and fight all NHS cuts in Wales.

Ronnie Job

Books that inspired me

Down and out in Paris and London

In the first of an occasional series on books that inspired socialists, Tracy Edwards looks at Down and Out in Paris and London by George Orwell



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"People are wrong when they think that an unemployed man only worries about losing his wages; on the contrary, an illiterate man, with the work habit in his bones, needs work more than he needs money."

This is typical George Orwell style. Orwell had a fairly privileged background, having been born in India to an 'upper lower middle class' family. But as a novelist his writings were based on his experience. He developed a socialist consciousness, which later enabled him to write some of the best literary works of the 20th century. His writings are vivid, entertaining, witty and enlightening.

In Down and Out in Paris and London, George Orwell leaves his privileged lifestyle behind to experience life day to day as part of the 'underclass.' Published in 1933, Orwell mingled with the victims of post-World War One society, producing a vivid account of life on the gutter.

This book laid the basis for later writings such as The Road to Wigan Pier - which describes the harsh realities of life in Britain's industrial coalmining communities and Homage to Catalonia following his return from fighting fascism during the Spanish civil war.

I'm sure when Orwell wrote Down and Out in Paris and London, he would not have expected the conditions he describes from the 1920s to be making such a comeback as they are today.

In the book's first half Orwell works in horrendous conditions as a 'plougeur', ie a general dog-sbody, in kitchens in hotels and bistros across Paris. The exploitation of these workers resulted in enduring days without food and moving from bed to bed.

Many workers lived in temporary, vermin infested accommodation. Like today, the service industry offered no job security or salary. Plougeurs could work up to 14 hours a day, surviving on a diet of

bread and cheese.

Orwell tells some funny and interesting stories about the characters he met along the way - he doesn't feel pity or become patronising towards the people he writes about. He understands they are part of a class and caste system - they are there as a result of their class and position in society.

When George Orwell returns to London, he decides to live as a tramp. He dresses like a tramp and goes through the same experiences - living in 'spikes' ie temporary dormitories for the homeless. Spikes were usually run by the clergy. People were expected to sit through a religious ceremony before being granted a bed for the night.

The same treatment and view of homeless people is still prevalent today. Beggars were seen as society's drop-outs with nothing to contribute. Begging on the street could result in a jail sentence. Orwell skilfully dismantles the myth that beggars have somehow got an easier ride in life - that they don't

have to earn an 'honest' living like the rest of society.

The rhetoric promoted by people such as Work and Pensions Minister Iain Duncan Smith, who attempt to divide people along the lines of deserving and undeserving poor, would have found an echo in certain circles.

It's 80 years since Orwell wrote this book but it remains a useful insight into the lives of people on the bread line. The conditions the working class had to endure throughout the 1930s laid the basis for the mass pressure that emerged following World War Two which forced the Labour government at that time to develop the welfare state, create jobs and build homes.

This book should inspire us to keep building a trade union and socialist movement that will halt the dismantling of all those important gains and introduce a socialist society that could secure a productive future for everyone.

The same treatment and view of homeless people is still prevalent today

Alexis Tsipras in London

What way forward for Greece and the working class in Europe?

Amalia Loizidou

On Friday 15 March 500 people attended a public meeting organised by the London branch of Syriza, the left party in Greece. Alexis Tsipras, Syriza's leader, spoke at the meeting.

Tsipras attracted Greek people living in London and left activists, looking for debate on the way out of the crisis. However, Tsipras kept his radical rhetoric to explaining the effects of capitalism in Europe and vague proposals, not fully satisfying the audience.

He described the devastating consequences of austerity in Greece and explained why the government and its allies abroad are supporting and implementing such policies: "They seek the creation of an economic environment based on cheap labour, Special Economic Zones, deregulation of the labour market, tax exemptions for capital, and extensive privatisation of public goods and services."

He outlined his vision of the way out of the crisis - "the model of

the 1953 London Debt Agreement, which gave the post-war German economy a kick start" on the basis of huge investment through the Marshall Plan.

This is a way of avoiding the demand for debt cancellation. The situation in Greece in 2013 is not comparable with post-war Germany. There is no state in the position to implement a Marshall plan. Nor do world governments today have the same geo-strategic, ideological and political motivation to do so.

Banking system

"Our first priority is to freeze all measures reducing wages and pensions and to restore the minimum wage to pre-Memorandum levels" said Tsipras. It is welcomed that this point was emphasised as others in Syriza's leadership have recently stated that this restoration will be harder to achieve as the economy shrinks further.

However, is this demand possible while Greece is crushed by its debt? Tsipras outlined: "We will secure the viability of the banking system by introducing social and public control of banks... What we need is a banking



Tsipras

system devoted to the public interest - not one bowing to capitalist profit."

There was no mention of public ownership of the banking system or of the basic sectors of the economy. If left in private hands they will not be devoted to the public interest.

Syriza is the party working class people are looking to, but not necessarily joining, at the present time as the best alternative to the pro-Troika parties in Greece. There

are signs of the leadership of Syriza shifting to the right - desperate to avoid an open clash with Greek big business and the Troika.

Initiative of 1000

But there is also an attempt by sections of the left, grouped around the Initiative of 1000, calling for a united Left, to build a strong, socialist opposition, and to push

a future Syriza-led government to implement socialist politics.

Before the meeting took place, Tsipras met with Labour Party representatives and later said that Labour is "one of the few parties...with whom we share a lot of positions". Instead of looking towards pro-capitalist parties, the people at the Syriza London meeting showed that there is a search to unite the resistance all over Europe from below.

TUSC election campaign has an impact in Gospel Oak

Neil Cafferky

As expected, the Labour candidate in the recent byelection in Gospel Oak ward in Camden, London, romped home, taking just under 60% of the vote. The more remarkable story was the collapse in the Lib Dem vote and the very credible result of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), standing in its first election in the borough.

The Lib Dems were the largest party in Camden council as recently as 2010. Fast forward two years and their vote had melted to 6.2%, putting them behind the Tories and Greens in fourth place.

Hard on their heels was the first time campaign of John Reid from the Trade Union and Socialist Coalition. TUSC captured 109 votes, a 5.1% share of the vote.

Despite a short campaigning period and limited resources the TUSC campaign had an impact in the area. A protest at Camden town hall highlighting the impact the bedroom tax is having in pushing 761 families out of the borough made it into a local newspaper. A public meeting with RMT leader Bob Crow speaking attracted 35 people.

Only the beginning

Several people, some who had never heard of TUSC until the election, came out to campaign, including a former Camden Labour councillor. Many are committed to building TUSC after the election.

Most importantly TUSC provided a desperately needed alternative to the establishment parties. John was approached by two retired trade unionists who thanked him for standing as they had not been intending to vote until the TUSC leaflet pledging to vote against all cuts came



Prop for the housing protest photo Neil Cafferky

through their letterboxes.

The question of an alternative to cuts was particularly important as the far-right BNP was also standing, on a supposed 'anti-cuts' platform. Its leaflet attempted to whip up divisions in Camden by putting the blame for high unemployment on migrant workers. Thankfully its campaign received short shrift and the BNP received 52 votes, putting it last.

During the election John repeatedly emphasised that the campaign was only the beginning of building a real working class voice in the borough. With an impressive first time result to build on and a team of people in the area ready to begin developing TUSC, the raw material is there to build something very exciting in Camden.

See tusc.org.uk



On 21 March the new Workers and Socialist Party, established by the Socialist Party's sister organisation, Democratic Socialist Movement and striking miners, will be launched in South Africa. See workerssocialistparty.co.za and socialistworld.net for reports

Socialist Students win debate with Labour

Ian Pattison

Socialist Students national organiser Claire Laker-Mansfield and I recently represented Socialist Students at a debate with the Labour Party and the Marxist Society at Queen Mary University.

The Labour Party speakers seemed unsure whether they were against socialism or trying to prove that the Labour Party was the most socialist in the room.

We were told we should be grateful for the reforms handed down by the benevolent 1945 Labour government. In reality, the welfare state was won through mass movements of working class people, often led by socialists, pushing the leadership of the Labour Party to act.

We were particularly supposed to be thankful for free education, despite the fact that most people in the room were paying tuition fees introduced by Tony Blair's New Labour government.

They had really lost the plot when they compared support for workers from Britain going to join the International Brigades in the fight against fascism in Spain to support for the imperialist invasion of Iraq.

They closed the debate by claiming that the Labour Party is all we've got, so "get over it".

When it came to voting on who had won the debate, Socialist Students won by a landslide - even one of the Labour Party speakers admitted defeat and voted for us. The only person to vote for the Labour Party was a member of the Conservative Party!

North West TUC fails to debate councillors and cuts

Andy Ford

The North West TUC met on 9 March at a crucial time for the trade union movement. Motion after motion spelt out the miseries of poverty, austerity, cuts and privatisation. Of course the key question is - what are we going to do about it?

Thankfully, Motion 25, from the Merseyside Trades Councils, calling for a general strike, was passed unanimously, although unfortunately with any mention of the TUC 'naming the day' removed.

I had succeeded in raising a motion of support for rebel Warrington

Labour councillor Kevin Bennett. Kevin, himself a delegate, spoke at the conference. To be allowed onto the agenda, an emergency motion needs two thirds support.

When the vote was taken we had 62 to 34, but not the necessary margin, so the motion was not taken. It looked like Unison, CWU, NASUWT and Ucat voted against, with Unite, RMT, PCS plus most of the Trades Council delegates voted for the motion.

The result was that one of the key questions confronting the unions in local government - do they accept or oppose Labour councils voting to make their members redundant - was not even debated.

ARE YOU SICK OF YOUR BOSS?



#enoughisenough



See youthfightforjobs.com photo Leeds Socialist Party

Claire Laker-Mansfield

The government is on the side of the hard-working 'strivers,' Tory chancellor Osborne assures us. 'Alarm clock Britain,' can rest comfortably in bed, content in the knowledge that when the dreaded beeping starts and a hard day's graft begins, the Con-Dems are fighting our corner.

Ian Duncan Smith regularly reminds us his welfare reforms are all about making work 'pay'. Strange then, that people's pay packets are getting smaller, conditions tougher and job security is being undermined.

Race to the bottom

Young people are among the most frequently hit with the 'skivers' label. Berated for lacking the determination to seek employment, told we should be grateful for what we get, you wouldn't think it was young people who often work for the smallest financial rewards in the most unpleasant conditions.

Yet the government is determined that we should accept even less for our hard work. In fact we should be so grateful for the chance to prove ourselves we don't mind being paid next to nothing, working long shifts without a break or being bullied and pressurised to constantly up the pace.

The Tories lament the fact that hiring young people carries too much 'risk' for employers. Zero-hour contracts, whereby employers take people on without any obligation to give them even an hour's work, are the way forward in their view.

Bosses should be allowed to 'fire at will'. Workers should be acquiescent, unassuming and willing to do

whatever's asked of them. Bosses should see profits boosted year on year, month on month. Workers should be happy with the scraps from the table. Bosses should be able to take their families on luxury holidays. Workers shouldn't expect a paid break in a 12 hour shift.

When Starbucks got bad press last year for not paying tax, the company went straight for its workers' holiday and maternity rights to make up what they'd lose by paying up!

But enough is enough. Young workers shouldn't have to put up with being treated as disposable and denied basic dignity. It is a lie to say that driving down the conditions of workers will tackle youth unemployment. What we need are decent, secure jobs paid a living wage. Just forcing the super-rich to pay the tax they avoid and evade, which comes to a whopping £120 billion every year, would go a long way towards funding this.

That's why Youth Fight for Jobs is launching the 'Sick of your Boss?' initiative. We'll be naming and shaming some of the worst employers in the country and targeting them with protests. We'll be helping workers to get organised to fight to improve their conditions. The bosses get rich on the backs of our hard work. It's time to organise and demand paid breaks, secure contracts and a genuine living wage.

Starbucks Protest

Thursday 21 March, 1pm
Assemble outside Oxford Circus tube station (by Gap)

Meeting

Sunday 24 March, 1pm
Unite the Union Community Centre Basement, St George's Town Hall, Cable Street, E1 OBL (2 mins walk from Shadwell DLR station)

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!