



WE CAN BEAT BEDROOM TAX



Marchers on the anti-bedroom tax demonstration in Glasgow, 30 March photo Jim Halfpenny

Ronnie Job
Swansea

Bart Simpson's catchphrase is "I didn't do it!" It seems that David Phillips, Labour leader of Swansea City Council, has a similar one, which goes something like 'we didn't do it; it was the Con-Dems'.

Fifty anti-cuts campaigners and bedroom tax victims lobbied to demand the council re-classify homes as having fewer bedrooms and commits to no evictions for rent arrears as a result of the bedroom tax.

Councillor Phillips seemed annoyed that we had organised the lobby and said we should be taking our complaints to the Con-Dem government because the Labour councillors have no choice but to implement it. To show us where we're

going wrong the Labour councillors organised their own demonstration against the bedroom tax in the centre of Swansea!

We have come across some shocking stories. These include the father who shares custody of his young daughter and therefore needs a 'spare' room for her visits. To downgrade to a smaller property would mean giving up these visits.

We told Councillor Phillips we know the Con-Dems are to blame. But there are people in Swansea now, two weeks after its introduction, who are already struggling. They can't wait two years until the possible election of a Labour government in 2015, particularly as the Labour front bench has not committed to scrapping the bedroom tax.

The council did resolve to "take all legal and financially viable measures" to protect the people of Swan-

sea from the worst of the impact of the Conservative/Liberal Democrat benefit cuts." But what measures is the council going to take and when are they going to take them?

If anything, it seems that the councillors have accepted that they will 'reluctantly' implement this Con-Dem attack on the poor - an attack they themselves describe as "repugnant". For those of us with long memories, that's reminiscent of the poll tax struggle when Labour councils came out against Thatcher's poll tax and then 'reluctantly' - or not so reluctantly in many cases - pursued non-payers through the courts.

But a mass organised campaign defeated the poll tax and a similar campaign today could see the bedroom tax condemned to the dustbin too.

More on the bedroom tax, pages 4 and 5

- No evictions of tenants who fall into rent arrears as a result of austerity cuts. Organise local campaigns to oppose the tax and defend our homes
- Stand candidates against councillors who try to evict us. Build a new mass workers' party that draws together workers, young people and activists from workplaces and anti-cuts campaigns, to provide a fighting, political alternative to the pro-cuts parties
- Cap rents and build homes. Invest in a major programme of council house building and refurbishment to provide affordable homes for all and decent jobs
- End low pay! If workers are paid a genuinely living wage they would not need to claim housing benefit
- Fight all the cuts. Trade unions must build for a 24-hour general strike as the next major step in the campaign against austerity
- For a socialist alternative to cuts and capitalism with a democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people - not the 1%

the Socialist

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Doncaster: fighting for a working class mayor on a workers' wage

TUSC AGAINST CUTS

A campaigner's diary: Week three in Mary Jackson's campaign as Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition candidate for Doncaster mayor by Alistair Tice

Monday 8 April: "The day Thatcher died!" Doncaster has 225,000 voters concentrated in the town and several outlying ex-mining villages. We're in Thorne – everybody knows Mary, lived here for 40 years. The campaign stall is a poster and leaflet distribution centre! Message from supporter Shaun: "Done six hours leafleting in Moorends, need more leaflets". A box of 4,000 dropped off with young Rob, working nights, for a couple of hours flying each morning after work.

Later, having a celebratory drink. Jim Board, Doncaster Unison branch secretary (personal capacity), says he wants 3,000 leaflets to distribute, via left-wing stewards, to council workers. Problem: we're running out of our 15,000 leaflets. Good problem!

Tuesday: Mexborough, ex-pit village – lots of Thatcher reaction, people happy, have a spring in their step. Jackie, Paddy and Nigel, all met on stall last week, come to collect anti-bedroom tax (BRT) meeting and Mary4Mayor leaflets.

Wednesday: Conisbrough – where Steve lives. BRT meeting arranged. Loran from 'Eagle and Child' pub wants leaflets when done. Another woman has appealed the decision. Has applied for Discretionary Housing Payment, but still isn't paying: "we need another poll tax campaign". Mary at Chamber of Commerce evening debate, meets the other candidates: two businessmen, a business consultant Labour candidate Ross "did I mention I'm a chartered accountant" Jones (only 100 times!) and a National Front fascist: "Why do we want an airport, we don't want anyone to come in to Doncaster?" and "Why have we got so many vulnerable adults, we didn't used to have

so many? I'll tell you why, it's because they are inoculating our babies with monkey genes"! So scary, you couldn't make it up.

Thursday: Bentley. John and Alan already visited supporters with posters, stall well worthwhile. Walking back to car, see poster up in house window, always good to see. Drive past Ed Miliband's office – closed as usual. Mary drops 20 posters off for Armthorpe. Receive 'text to join' from Bentley post code but mobile number not recognised, so check register to get address, John will visit.

Friday: Donny town centre – chance encounter with a French TV crew who interview Mary about Thatcher's legacy. After stall, joined by anti-cuts campaigners Louise and Lois, for an al fresco planning meeting. They want to leaflet Hyde Park estate.

Saturday: We join the "no state funeral for Thatcher" protest. A couple tell me they have a Thatcher picture under their doormat so they trample on her everyday.

Sunday: teams out in Mexborough and Bentley (still can't track that 'text to join' contact down!) Mary texts: "Woman from Bentley phoned, her neighbour had brought her our leaflets. She said if I could talk to everyone individually I would definitely get in." Been a buzz about this week...

Pre-election rally: Monday 29 April, 7.30pm
Doncaster Trades and Labour Club, Frenchgate Centre, DN1 1LL
Speakers will include Mary Jackson and former MP Dave Nellist



photo Doncaster TUSC

"I

wish I could

remember a time when I was politically represented but I don't think it exists. It saddens me that this country seems to have accepted its fate, voting Conservative or Labour because they are sick of the lies of the other, refusing to accept what we already know: they are one and the same. There seems to be a lack of hope that anything can change, that we can make a difference. When I first began to look into the Socialist Party's ideals I think the most prominent feeling was relief at the fact that there is a real choice. For the first time here's a party I can vote for rather than voting against another. I am glad that there is a party that seems to be founded on the basic idea of human decency and that I would be proud to be a part of."

Jasmine Bennett

Campaigning in Bentley

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is standing 121 candidates, in 20 of the 35 councils with elections this year. TUSC candidates oppose all cuts and privatisation. TUSC involves the RMT transport workers' union, leading members of other trade unions including the PCS, NUT and POA, and socialist groups including the Socialist Party.

See www.tusc.org.uk for the full list of candidates

Maltby pit closure: TUSC councillor speaks out

On 6 April, hundreds of miners marched in Maltby, South Yorkshire to mark the closure of the town's colliery.

The mine's owner, Hargreaves Services, recorded profits of £43.1 million in 2012. 40% of Britain's energy still comes from coal, most of it is imported.

Joe Robinson, a 21-year-old Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition Maltby town councillor, spoke to the Socialist.

"It's a terrible loss of identity for the town. Hargreaves have made significant profits while closing this pit at the expense of Maltby residents.

There are no job opportunities for young people in Maltby at the moment. Our unemployment is twice the average for the Rotherham borough, which in turn is twice the national average.

Of the 550 miners, 250 have been redeployed, 200 have been made redundant, and older miners have taken retirement.

We should be renationalising our large industries and running them for the benefit of all people. In times of mass unemployment, things like mining and house-building programmes could be just the sort of things to get us out of this mess,

especially in the north of England where we don't have a large service sector.

Wind turbines are planned at the side of Maltby in Doncaster, but I'd encourage a lot of investment into tidal energy because the amount of energy that can be produced is phenomenal.

The focus of Maltby town council in these austere times ought to be picking up the services that are being hacked off by the borough council for the benefit of our community. Local level government should be about helping local communities.

There was no statement released by Maltby town council over the closure. No action has been considered for it. I did raise that at a meeting but nothing was resolved."

Thatcher's legacy

"One of the last few pits closing is terrible news for Maltby and the whole of Yorkshire. During the mayoral election campaign in Doncaster we have been to many of the former pit villages.

It would have been depressing to see the poverty and closed shops if it wasn't for the unbeatable working class spirit and the support for our ideas and the chance of a socialist mayor to bring the changes needed to regenerate Doncaster. Thatcher is dead but Thatcherism lives on. The TUC needs to stop pontificating and organise the first of a series of one-day general strikes to stop the onslaught of cuts to our jobs and living conditions.

As for the taxpayer paying for Thatcher's funeral! How dare they even suggest it? If they want it then let them pay for it!"

Mary Jackson
Doncaster TUSC mayoral candidate

Ineffectual Ed visits South West

Chris Moore

Gloucestershire Socialist Party

Waiting for Labour leader Ed Miliband to arrive in Stroud as part of his whistle stop election tour of the South West, one person asked which direction he was coming. "Probably from the right," was one crowd member's reply. Miliband's High Street performance to a crowd of 100 was a classic example of appearance over substance.

Gloucester resident Sharon Hendry asked: "When are you going to do something for the poor and what about the bedroom tax?" Miliband ignored the first question, but said he would repeal the tax. He rightly said it was "unfair and unjustifiable" but recently Labour MP Helen Goodman made it clear that Labour are not against the bedroom tax in principle. Others from the crowd wanted to know if he would commit Labour councils to no evictions for rent arrears due to the tax, again silence.

Pensioner and TUSC candidate Claude Mickleson asked: "When are

you going to ditch New Labour?"

"We're moving on," was the mysterious response.

Despite former prime minister Tony Blair's concerns that Labour is going too far to the left, Miliband supports Labour's conversion to a pro-big business party. He's made clear the savage Con-Dem cuts will not be reversed by a Labour government.

Miliband again spoke of his 'one nation' vision of Britain. It makes you feel he's on a different planet, when the UK's richest 1% are worth more than the bottom 50%.

One crowd member had a placard that read: 'I left the Labour Party over Workfare.' This referred to Labour MPs abstaining on the Con-Dems' 'emergency' legislation to stop compensation to 231,000 people who had their benefits illegally sanctioned.

Many workers are also concluding that Labour is just like the other parties. TUSC is standing five candidates in Gloucestershire as we strive to build an alternative to the cuts and privatisation policies of all the main parties.

Warrington council rebel builds fight against cuts

Following on from the 4 April demonstration outside the disciplinary hearing of rebel Labour councillor Kevin Bennett, a joint meeting of Warrington Trades Council and the newly formed Warrington Against the Cuts was held on 10 April.

Kevin told the meeting that, for taking a stand and voting against the £14 million cuts to be made in 2013, he had been suspended indefinitely from the ruling Labour group.

Both the trades council and WATC pledged their support for Kevin and any other councillor will-

ing to stand up against austerity.

Local activists and residents talked of the problems facing the town due to austerity, from the lack of council housing and child services, to the proposed test of universal credit in the area.

A campaign to support Kevin in

his ward and another anti-bedroom tax public meeting were planned. A campaign stall will take place on Saturday 20 April at 10.30am, Golden Gates Shopping Centre. Check www.facebook.com/WarringtonAgainstTheCuts for more info.

Adam Hemsley

Thatcher's funeral costs Insulting the lives she ruined

The announcement that Margaret Thatcher would receive a ceremonial funeral paid for by the taxpayer is outrageous. The honours accorded to the hated Tory ex-prime minister include Big Ben being silenced, the use of 700 military personnel and a service in St Paul's Cathedral attended by dignitaries from around the world.

Sickeningly most of these plans were made by the Labour governments of Blair and Brown. As with many cuts and privatisation, Labour has allowed the Tories' response to be a simple 'well, you started it'.

Why should we pay?

Peter Taaffe, Socialist Party general secretary, said: "It was Thatcher who deregulated the City, destroyed manufacturing and bound up trade unions in red tape. Furthermore, this was a woman who kept her entire fortune in offshore bank accounts in order to avoid paying taxes.

"Now working class people are going to see their taxes pay for politicians and big business luminaries eulogise for her. We support people like the secretary of the Durham Miners Association who wants to see protests take place on the day of her funeral. Some trade unionists have suggested people wear red on the day to express opposition to her policies and her legacy.

"This reflects how people really feel about her. It's outrageous to spend money on her funeral at a



Photo Paul Mattsson

time when the government is cutting services to the bone and we are being told we must tighten our belts. Why doesn't the government practice what it preaches and privatise her funeral. They could ask her son Mark Thatcher to donate the £10 million her funeral will cost out of his £80 million fortune.

Out of touch

"Or they could go to the City for the money. The bankers and big business made huge profits out of her policies which are being continued today by the Con-Dems and New Labour. Surely, since she did so

much for them, they would be more than happy to contribute to the cost of the funeral.

"This is yet another demonstration of just how out of touch the politicians of big business really are. We call on all working class people to accord her memory the respect it deserves; by building a mass movement against the policies of austerity that are her true legacy.

"We call on the TUC to call a 24-hour general strike to mark her passing and to begin building an alternative to her "mini-me's" in the Con-Dem coalition and New Labour."

New phase of campaign against Dewsbury NHS cuts

Saturday 20 April will see the march against NHS cuts in Dewsbury (previously postponed because of snow) take place at 12pm outside the Town Hall.

The Mid Yorkshire Trust has now embarked on a so-called consultation on plans to slash services at Dewsbury Hospital which will see the disappearance of critical children's, adult and maternity services reducing the hospital to a virtual drop-in centre.

The inadequacy of the consultation has enraged the local community. Public meetings happened before the adverts went out; meetings have failed to address any of the serious questions brought up by concerned members of the public; there has been no detailed evidence to support the Trust's obvious plans. Not a single member of the public at consultation forums has supported the plans but there is a widespread view that the Trust has already made up its mind and that the consultation is a rubber stamp. This has just made campaigners more angry

and determined.

Over the past few weeks, different campaigns set up in opposition to the Trust have come together. Local Labour councillors have started attending our committee meetings and the local Labour MP, Mike Wood is now working alongside our campaign group. The admin workers' dispute at the hospital has also now reached a critical stage with another strike ballot of the entire workforce about to commence.

Support is growing in all sections of the community. For example all the mosques are now promoting the campaign.

Our demo will mark the next stage in the campaign. Counter proposals to the Trust's plans have been prepared by both clinicians and academics who will publicly unveil their proposals at a public meeting on 29 April. A legal case is also being planned to challenge the disgraceful consultation through a judicial review.

The long cold winter which has been spent organising and mobilis-

ing opposition to the Trust is about to turn into a very hot spring!

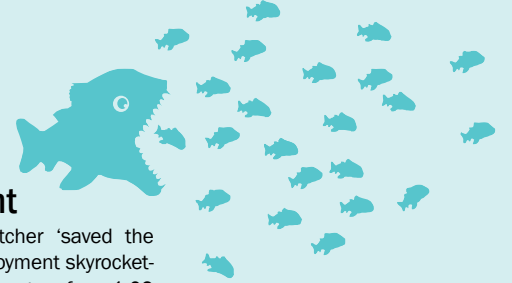
Mike Forster, Chair, Save our Local Hospital Services



STOP PRESS: widespread caste discrimination is ignored in the UK. Thousands of protesters from south Asian backgrounds raised their anger over this issue outside parliament on 16 April. Anger was directed at the Con-Dems who want to ignore the suffering of thousands while pursuing business with upper caste-dominated elites in India and elsewhere. Caste discrimination is largely hidden, exacerbating the suffering of those affected. The Socialist stands in solidarity with those building this resistance.



Thatcher...



Unemployment

We're told that Thatcher 'saved the country'. But unemployment skyrocketed under her governments - from 1.09 million in May 1979 to 3.13 million in July 1986. And these figures were probably an underestimate as Thatcher's ministers tried everything to improve the figures (other than protecting and creating jobs of course) - during the 1980s there were 28 revisions in how the figures were calculated.

Join a union

One of the things Thatcher is most hated for is her attacks on trade union rights, including limiting the grounds for a dispute and restricting the numbers allowed to picket.

The RMT transport union is backing an initiative asking people to "bury Thatcherism - join a union". General secretary Bob Crowe said: "Margaret Thatcher, and the class interests she represented, hated trade unions for one very good reason - the organised working class, against a backdrop of a Labour Party bought and sold by Thatcherism, is the only effective point of resistance to greed, exploitation and corruption. That's why she sought to destroy us and that's why her legacy has to be a resurgent trade union movement prepared to pick up the cudgels and turn back the tide."

Living standards

Thatcher's policies did improve things for some people. Corporation tax was cut from 52% to 35% and the top rate of inheritance tax was reduced from 75% to 40%. And it was cuts all round as public spending was reduced to its lowest level for 20 years by the end of the 1980s. The Family Expenditures Survey showed that real incomes of the bottom 10% fell by 9.7% between 1979 and 1985.

Election results

The right-wing media and politicians alike keep pointing out what a popular leader Thatcher was. Her election results tell a different story. The Tory vote in 1979 was 43.9%, the highest under Thatcher's leadership. In fact the only significant increase in Tory vote (but not percentage) came once John Major took over! Now her descendants in the Con-Dem government want to impose rules on union ballots meaning that 50% support would be needed.

Celebration

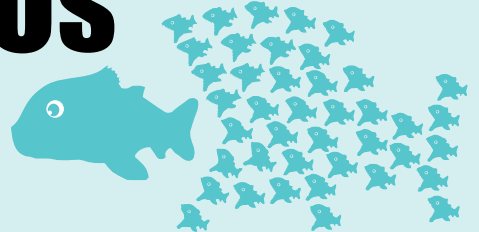
One bloke in Trafalgar Square the Saturday after Thatcher's death used to live in Scotland, which he now described as an industrial desert with shipbuilding gone, steel mills shut and pits closed during Thatcher's reign in the 1980s. He'd been forced to live in London and now worked as a van driver. When he heard the news on 8 April, he nearly punched the windscreen out. Another guy said he just wished she had died 40 years earlier as he had served in the army and 200 of his comrades had died in the Falklands war. Thatcher effigy, complete with handbag, swirled through the throng of thousands, some with party hats and witch hats, and the occasional popping bottle of champagne. Even the continuous rain could not dampen the spirits of the thousands there to celebrate Thatcher's demise. It was definitely not a night to be missed. Complete strangers would just start talking to you about why they were there and how glad they were that she had gone. Four Socialist Party members from Hackney sold 26 copies of the Socialist reflecting the mood.

Brian Debus

Friends and family

A lot can be determined about Thatcher by the company she kept - both friends and family. Chilean dictator Pinochet, whose regime murdered thousands, went to the Thatchers' for tea several times. She lent heavily on US president of the time Ronald Reagan, who mirrored her attacks on welfare, jobs and the trade unions on the other side of the Atlantic. Her son, Mark, was infamously arrested by South African police in 2004 for financing a coup in Equatorial Guinea. Her daughter, Carol, was sacked from The One Show for racism in 2009.

...& Us



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The Con-Dems' bedroom tax, introduced on 1 April, means people who claim housing benefit and live in social housing will lose money if they are considered to have 'spare' bedrooms. As these reports show, huge anger is building against this attack and the parties who are implementing it and campaigns are being formed around the country.

Resistance builds across Scotland

Matt Dobson
Socialist Party Scotland

The big and angry housing scheme meetings against the bedroom tax reflect an electrifying release from the powerlessness felt against what seemed like endless austerity. It says everything about the major movement and politicisation that could develop that most of those participating are not affected by the bedroom tax but are acting in solidarity.

At meetings you hear accounts of the horror that is being inflicted and the sacrifices that are being made as people try to put money aside to offset the cut. You also hear determination - one woman at a meeting in Dundee told councillors "you will have to drag me out of my home in chains".

Rage against the rich

This cruel cut is widely seen as 'the straw that broke the camel's back'. Over 100 attended the launch of the West of Scotland Anti-Bedroom Tax Federation (WSF). A woman in the audience responded to well-known Scottish socialist Tommy Sheridan's call for a mass campaign of resistance to evictions by saying to those present: "I'll stand with you if you stand with me". This phrase has caught on as the campaign has spread.

The rage against the rich and their political representatives is palpable - the sheer injustice of bankers' bailouts and their bonuses, MPs' expenses, pay-day loan sharks, foodbanks, food prices, unemployment. There is also an understanding that those in power will not cease their attacks on the working class and gains of the past such as social housing unless they are forced to.

Where councillors and other political representatives from the Scottish National Party and Labour have been present, unless they

have been clear about opposing all cuts and personally committing to defending people from evictions, they get savaged.

The bedroom tax isn't the only issue discussed. These meetings have given a voice and a platform to working class people who have been marginalised and alienated from 'politics'.

Fight all cuts

Socialist Party Scotland has raised the need to fight all austerity cuts, for a general strike and a new mass workers' party. Our speakers have been met by cheers, foot stamping and pint glasses banged on tables.

Thatcher's death has stirred up emotions and memories of generations involved in major class battles such as the miners' strike and the poll tax. This campaign has also connected with a politicised young generation.

In ex-mining areas such as Cumnock in East Ayrshire, hundreds have attended anti-bedroom tax meetings. These communities suffered the impact of Thatcher's policies and now face an anti-eviction battle defending their neighbours against her Con-Dem offspring.

The local National Union of Mine-workers branch has affiliated to the

One woman told councillors: "you will have to drag me out of my home in chains"

WSF and, coming under pressure, Labour MP Sandra Osborne committed to personally standing in the way of sheriff's officers.

On 10 April WSF called a national day of action targeting housing associations with tenants mobilised to



Socialist Party Scotland on 30 March demo photo Jim Halfpenny

lobby against evictions. The lobbies got major press coverage. Before the lobbies federation activists contacted the Unison and Unite branches who organise workers in Glasgow Housing Association. This meant staff received the lobbies warmly and the unions are discussing sending delegates to the Anti-Bedroom Tax All-Scottish conference.

Pressure building

The meetings are spreading across working class areas and getting bigger. Socialist Party Scotland has raised the need for local campaigns to have steering committees to organise and coordinate action and committees have met and are planning campaigning in Dundee and

the south and east of Glasgow.

These feed into the federations in the West of Scotland and Dundee which, after the conference on 27 April, will aim to organise on a national basis. The conference will be delegate-based. A key task from this conference will be building for a national demonstration.

The pressure building on social landlords to not evict is huge with still months of arrears from the bedroom tax to be built up before they could even think about taking such measures.

The Socialist Party Scotland demands the writing off of all debt from bedroom tax rent arrears. Holyrood should bail out social landlords and councils who refuse to implement the bedroom tax.

The Socialist Party says:



- No to all cuts and privatisation
- Cap rents and build homes. Invest in a major programme of council house building and refurbishment to provide affordable homes for all and decent jobs
- End low pay! If workers are paid a genuinely living wage they would not need to claim housing benefit
- Fight all the cuts. Trade unions must build for a 24-hour general strike as the next major step in the campaign against all the cuts
- Boardroom tax not bedroom tax. Make the rich pay for their crisis including nationalisation of the banking system, major corporations and utilities under democratic control with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need
- For a socialist alternative

Can't pay, won't move

The Waltham Forest Anti-Cuts Union (WFACTU) held a meeting on the bedroom tax on Sunday 14 April. We outlined the importance of people affected coming together to fight the tax and make it unworkable by clogging up the system.

Tenants can appeal against cuts in their housing benefit. They can apply to the 'discretionary housing payment' fund and they can refuse to move into private rented accommodation - which is very expensive. All of this will put enormous pressure on the implementation of the

bedroom tax and give us time to campaign against it.

The next day WFACTU campaigners joined one attendee, Alan Kennedy, outside his home to give him support as he prepared to meet a rep from his housing association about the tax. He faces costs of £40 a week to stay in the home he has lived in since 1965.

The local press interviewed Alan and WFACTU representatives. One local resident told campaigners that both he and his mother were threatened with the tax. Alan knows

other neighbours who will either be affected themselves or want to help him fight.

Following this action, WFACTU will be leafleting the local area and collecting signatures to a letter demanding that the council refuses to implement the tax by re-designating homes and/or refusing to evict tenants who fall into arrears.

We are calling an estate meeting in Alan's area for anyone who wants to campaign against the bedroom tax.

Suzanne Beishon



Waltham Forest campaigners photo Sarah Sachs-Eldridge

'Spare room' myth-busting!

Myth #1: people have 'spare' bedrooms

So-called 'spare' rooms aren't spare at all. The government's criteria mean children and young people are forced to share bedrooms with siblings – up to 16 if they're the same sex. They don't take into account people's disabilities which might mean they occasionally need someone to stay over to help them or to sleep separately from their partner. And if parents are separated, only one is entitled to have a room for their child.

Myth #2: the bedroom tax is going to 'encourage people into work'

It's hard to encourage people into jobs that don't exist. In some areas there are up to 20 jobseekers for every vacancy. And the government continues to cut more jobs than the public sector. Figures have shown all the schemes they've tried, including their heralded Work Programme, have failed to increase the numbers getting jobs. Besides, many of those affected by the bedroom tax are already in work – 90% of new housing benefit claimants from 2010-2012 have a job but are so poorly paid they are still entitled to support with housing costs – a bailout for stingy, low-paying bosses.

Myth #3: the bedroom tax will result in a reduced housing benefit bill

The housing benefit bill is so big because of high rents – mainly in the private sector but now social landlords can charge 80% of the market rate too. Private sector rents have increased by 86% in 40 years. The best way to reduce it is to introduce a cap on rents. People have been forced to move to urban areas to look for work, increasing the need for affordable housing. But the amount of social housing being built has fallen at the same time as the existing stock has been sold off. What the government really wants to do is attack the welfare state in every way possible and to force working and middle class people to pay for the bankers' crisis.

Myth #4: it's only fair to create parity with the private sector

The reduction in housing benefit for a spare room in the private sector hasn't always existed either. And the real problem is that there isn't enough decent housing, and virtually none that is really affordable. People being hit by the bedroom tax have nowhere to move to because of the massive shortage of social housing – mainly as a result of decades of successive governments continuing the sell-off of council housing.

Myth #5: the £500 benefit cap is only bringing benefits in line with average wages

This figure doesn't include benefits that people in work have to claim, including child benefit and working tax credits. That so many people earn less than £500 is a disgrace, best tackled by increasing the minimum wage, not bringing benefits even further into poverty levels.



Bedroom tax campaigns need a political voice

Cardiff

Welsh Labour has always argued that an ocean of "clear red water" lies between its policies and those of both the Tory-Liberal coalition and New Labour, run from Westminster.

Those claims were put to the test and found false on 28 March, when the ruling Labour group on Cardiff council voted down a motion put by Welsh Nationalists Plaid Cymru calling on the council to refuse to evict tenants who can't pay their rent because of the bedroom tax. Instead, Labour says it plans to "mitigate the effect of welfare reform" – by implementing it, it seems.

Plaid Cymru is attempting to capture the growing movement, but Cardiff residents are extremely sceptical of the party. Until last year Plaid ran Cardiff council, in a coalition with the Lib Dems, and carried out millions of pounds of cuts, including the cynical closure of the Disability Welfare Advice Service, meaning that many disabled people wouldn't find out what benefits they are entitled to.

4,000 of the poorest adults in Cardiff and a similar number of children have been hit by the bedroom tax and the arrears are starting to mount up.

A united fightback has already begun. In January, Cardiff Against The Cuts organised a protest of over 100 people against the demonisation of benefit claimants and on 30 March held, with other campaigners, a demonstration of several hundred through the streets of the city.

Those who are fighting this savage attack should stand in elections and join other anti-cuts campaigners in building a new mass party, based on ordinary working class people, to put an alternative to austerity on the agenda.

Ross Saunders



Ed Miliband dodges questions about the tax in Stroud photo Chris Moore

Bristol

People have queued at campaign stalls to sign the petition and express disgust at this attack on some of the poorest and most vulnerable people in society. Many have shared heart-rending stories of how this will affect them or people they know.

Socialist Party members and other supporters of Trade Unionists and Socialists Against Cuts have made opposing the bedroom tax an important part of our local election campaign. Around 30 attended a public meeting called in the Barton Hill area of Bristol to discuss how the

campaign could be taken forward.

Anti-cuts councillors would protect tenants affected by the bedroom tax by refusing to evict those who have built up arrears as a result. Many people have seen through the hypocrisy of Labour trying to make gains out of opposing the bedroom tax while supporting the principles behind it.

There has been a lot of support for our decision to stand candidates for a party that stands up for working class people and defends our public services, jobs, conditions and benefits.

Tom Baldwin

Reports: local campaigns get going

Leicestershire

It is fitting that on the day Thatcher died, the Leicestershire Anti-Bedroom Tax Federation was born. The campaign against the brutal bedroom tax has the potential to do for Cameron and Clegg what the poll tax did for Thatcher – bring them down. Anger at the injustice of the tax has led to protests around Leicestershire.

The meeting heard from various people affected by the bedroom tax – disabled people, separated parents, people being asked to move and people who could not afford to pay council tax on top of the bedroom tax.

A Unite Community member reported that they were organising a petition to Leicester council calling for no evictions. One or two councillors have said they will not support evictions. We need to keep up the pressure to help them carry out their promise.

We agreed to use whatever tactics we can – appealing against decisions, protests, petitions, public meetings, occupations to block evictions – to defeat this tax.

So let's drink to the death of Thatcher and the birth of a movement that will challenge her legacy.

Heather Rawling, Leicestershire Anti-Bedroom Tax Steering Committee

Coventry

On 11 April 50 people in Coventry voiced strong opinions on a protest against the bedroom tax outside Coventry City Council.

Many shared stories about themselves

or people they know who are being affected. One woman told me that she has to use money out of her food allowance to pay the rent, her daughter needs new shoes and they need money for the electric. She asked only one question: "what am I supposed to do?"

Supposedly the idea of the bedroom tax is that people should downsize. But these smaller properties do not exist. In Coventry 3,180 families are being hit. Around 2,556 households are facing a one bedroom reduction; on top of that, 624 are at risk of paying for two bedrooms.

The protest was a great start for the campaign in Coventry. We were able to get into a lot of the local media. We also grabbed the attention of the councillors and the housing association and will be arranging to meet them to discuss our demand for a non-eviction policy. We will also be arranging public meetings.

Amelia Roberts

West London

West London Socialist Party members with others are campaigning against the bedroom tax. Socialist Party general secretary Peter Taaffe and other campaigners are speaking at a meeting on 18 April at the Trade Union Centre, Acton.

Hammersmith and Fulham council says that 1,600 households in the borough will be affected by the bedroom tax. Based on the Tory council's own statements they are already interfering in the lives of 50 households: "helping to downsize or swap with families who need bigger homes and advising others to take in a lodger to help meet shortfalls in rent".

They don't mention that the council has increased rent or that it has sold off over 200 properties over the past three years but has not used this income to build any new housing.

Keith Dickinson

Haringey

Over 500 people marched from Tottenham Town Hall to Bruce Grove Park on 13 April. On top of the bedroom tax and other welfare attacks, the cap on the total amount of benefits that can be claimed by each household is due to be implemented later this year. The cap is being piloted in four London boroughs, including Haringey where there is much poverty already.

Property developers want to regenerate the area to attract the better-off. Meanwhile many families are in debt with some having to leave their community because they can't afford to live in London.

Socialist Party members were on the march. Most of the people we spoke to were aware that it would affect them.

Jane James

East London

Socialist Party members campaigning recently against the bedroom tax outside Westfield shopping centre in Stratford, Newham, east London, were confronted by the borough's law enforcement 'militia' and by police.

Not only did they object to our campaign stall but also to the selling of the Socialist. We stood our ground, despite the



On 13 April 10,000 marched in Dublin against the introduction of the Property Tax. Here protesters 'show Labour the red card'. See more at socialistworld.net

threat of arrest, but were nonetheless given an on-the-spot £100 fine, which we refused to pay and will be contesting.

Newham council is 100% Labour controlled and run by the mayor Sir Robin Wales. They claim to be against the government's austerity attacks but are

happy to pass on the cuts, including the bedroom tax and reductions in council tax benefit.

Now it seems they also want to throttle any local opposition to these cuts. Unfortunately for them we won't be going away.

East London Socialist Party

No ifs, no buts... TIME TO NAME THE DAY FOR A 24-HOUR GENERAL STRIKE

Rob Williams
Socialist Party industrial organiser

The death of Thatcher has revealed the deep class polarisation that existed under her governments and still exists in British society. But crucially it has also brought memories of the resistance to the Tory onslaught, from the steelworkers, to the miners, to the organised opposition that defeated the poll tax and led to Thatcher's downfall.

Polls show a growing sense of fear of the effects of austerity. A YouGov survey revealed that 35% of those asked, equivalent to 8.6 million people, could not pay their rent or mortgage for more than a month should they lose their job. The key question is how can we force back the vicious Thatcherism of the Con-Dems?

The TUC General Council is meeting on 24 April, a week after Thatcher's funeral. But it is seven months after the TUC Conference voted overwhelmingly for the POA motion, 'Resisting Austerity Measures'.

That motion stated: "Congress accepts that the trade union movement must continue leading from the front against this uncaring government with a coalition of resistance taking coordinated action where possible with far reaching campaigns including the consideration and practicalities of a general strike."

Since then the Socialist Party and the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) have been to the fore in arguing that a 24-hour general strike is a key step in the battle against austerity. It could mobilise the biggest anti-cuts bodies there are – the six million-strong trade unions – and reveal the potential power of workers when they take strike action. That could terrify the government and imbue the anti-cuts movement with confidence.

Union attacks

The Con-Dems are specifically targeting the trade unions. They are attempting to curtail the unions by, for example, cutting facility time and making it harder to collect membership dues. This reveals their understanding of where the major threat to their cuts agenda comes from – organised labour. In fact, as we will show, they are more aware of workers' potential power than some of the trade union leaders.

The NSSN has fought tirelessly for the trade union leaders to set the date for a 24-hour general strike as the first clear step in a determined battle to stop this government. It led a lobby of the TUC General Council in December. That meeting agreed that each affiliated union could send in a submission outlining their attitude to a general strike. These will be presented at the 24 April meeting.

It was the pressure expressed in the NSSN lobby of the TUC that helped force it to vote for the POA prison officers' union motion. That pressure must now come to bear again. The NSSN has again called a

lobby of this meeting. Pressure can also be built in advance: workplace or trade union meetings can move emergency motions to let union leaders know that you believe a 24-hour general strike is necessary and that they should set the date so it can be prepared.

From the beginning the right-wing unions, in alliance with the TUC bureaucracy, have sought to hamper what was achieved at the TUC congress. This is consistent with their betrayal of the magnificent public sector strikes of 2011.

At the first TUC Executive this bloc moved a briefing paper that would have effectively dismissed the very notion of a general strike. But this was defeated by seven votes to six with Unite general secretary Len McCluskey and Bob Crow, of the RMT transport union, leading the opposition. This meant that the request for submissions to unions was far more neutral.

Three groups

The resulting submissions comprise roughly three groups – from the most militant, POA, civil service union PCS, RMT and Unite, actively advocating the TUC calls a political general strike or coordinates a mass strike; to right-wing shop workers' union Usdaw who totally oppose these moves. In the middle is Unison, in theory in support, but with qualifications.

The RMT has highlighted the study by the left-wing legal experts John Hendy QC and Keith Ewing, "Days of Action: The Legality of Protest Strikes Against Government Cuts". The authors argue that a general strike for political purposes could be allowed under European human rights legislation. They argue that strike ballots, introduced under Thatcher's anti-trade union laws, would not be needed.

The Socialist Party has said that there are dangers in allowing the right-wing union leaders to dismiss the idea of a general strike by diverting the debate down legal channels.

The anti-trade union laws present a certain obstacle – as they have done in other European countries. But, as has been shown in Greece and elsewhere, the ability of the government and employers to use the anti-union laws is not a given. If the TUC set the date for a general strike, and then make it clear to the government that any victimisation of workers or unions would result in another 24-hour general strike, the anti-trade union laws could be pushed aside.

Hendy and Ewing have been invited to the General Council meeting to give their opinion and, in all likelihood, be challenged by the right-wing. Correctly, the PCS submission argues that while this legal opinion should be explored, there is no need to limit the possibilities to this avenue. "If there is a majority for this position [the Hendy-Ewing recommendations], we believe the General Council should then pursue calling a general strike this year. We also believe that the General Council must also urgently discuss the unanimously

supported composites (1 and 12) which support coordinated action."

These motions came from PCS and Unite, but also Unison. They reveal the necessity but also the potential for mass coordinated strike action, whatever name is given to it. The issues are undoubtedly present – pay, pensions, jobs, and privatisation – to deliver the kind of joint action we saw on 30 November 2011 (N30).

PCS has already written to the other unions to ask them to join with them in the union's current action on these issues, plus attacks on terms and conditions. Members should demand their leaderships meet urgently to plan and discuss.

The government's austerity offensive is only increasing and deepening. This means that the idea of mass coordinated strike action can't be idly dismissed, even by the likes of Unison and the GMB's leaderships who were instrumental in stalling the public sector pension dispute after N30. During the TUC conference debate some among the Unison and GMB delegations were actually applauding those speakers opposing the POA motion, while ultimately voting for it! Unison's submission reflects this reluctant position.

"It is Unison's view that consideration of a general strike can only be the culmination rather than the beginning of a serious campaign across the whole union movement, involving both the public and private sectors, and wider community..."

Just as at the TUC congress, Unison can't openly oppose the call for a general strike. As the biggest public sector union, its members have been in the forefront of the attacks that have rained down. However, the approach of the Unison leadership has been to try to kick the idea of action into the long grass and dissipate the angry mood of members and the submission reflects this.

At last year's Unison conference, general secretary Dave Prentis attempted to divert criticism of his post N30 sell-out of the pensions strike by promising a fight over attacks on pay. He warned the Con-Dems that there would be a 'Unison Spring!' But a deafening silence followed the underwhelming pay 'offer' of 1% with strings, that means effectively a 2% pay cut. Worse – in last month's budget Osborne confirmed that this on-going pay freeze will continue past the next general election.

Manoeuvre

Unison's submission raises Hendy and Ewing's legal opinion and states that the union's constitution would need to be changed to allow a strike without a ballot. This obvious delaying manoeuvre raises the prospect of Unison being outside a general strike on these terms until their 2014 conference can debate a possible rule-change motion!

400,000 jobs in the public sector have



The TUC demo on 20 October 2012 photo Senan

gone, many of them Unison members, with the remainder having their living standards battered. This takes complacent routinism to absurd levels. It is a repetition of the type of arguments used by some union leaders during the miners' strike to justify their inaction that left the NUM isolated and defeated.

As the PCS argues, if a 'legal' general strike falls foul of Thatcher's anti-union laws, shamefully maintained under New Labour, absolutely nothing would prevent mass coordinated strike action. Anticipating this, Unison points to "real practical difficulties involved in balloting all our 1.3 million members and notifying around 23,000 employers."

Yet this proved entirely possible for the N30 strike, both in Unison and other public sector unions. As PCS states, this strike received overwhelming public support with strike rallies of huge numbers – 25,000 in Manchester, 20,000 in Bristol, 4,000 in Cardiff, 10,000 in Glasgow and so on in virtually every town and city in the country.

As the 25,000-strong NHS demonstration in Lewisham in January showed, as well as the mobilisation of 5,000 against bedroom tax in Glasgow at the end of March, given the impact of the cuts since N30, a one-day general strike would attract even more support than N30 from those suffering under the austerity onslaught.

Unite

Unite's submission is far more positive and in line with the POA, RMT and PCS. "For some colleagues, the legal position presents insurmountable obstacles to calling a 'general strike'. Unite does not share that view... Such an attitude leaves trade unionism incapable of effective action." Like PCS, Unite reminds the TUC that the threat of a general strike in 1972 forced the government to free the jailed Pentonville dockers.

But Unite's submission is somewhat hazy on timing, which could be used to endlessly delay calling mass action. It makes no concrete proposal for a general strike, instead concentrating on other issues. Of course, a 24-hour general strike would need time to be properly prepared – once a date is set. The N30 pensions strike – effectively a 24-hour public sector general strike – was announced at the 2011 TUC conference in September of that year. That gave time for strike ballots to be rolled out in each union and to build support.

The same process could happen now, with mass rallies and public meetings being organised by the unions throughout the country. Whether it was to build support for a 'political' general strike or mass coordinated N30 type strike action, it could reach out from the public to the private sector and even to unorganised workers to bring them within the realm of the trade unions.

But the task cannot be subcontracted out to amorphous groups like Coalition of Resistance and their 'People's Assembly' as some union leaders would like to do. Would that meeting have the authority to name the day for 24-hour strike action in the way the 2011 TUC congress set the date for N30? The NSSN will continue to insist that the trade union leaders must bear the responsibility to lead the resistance to these brutal cuts.

What an answer this would be to the pessimists in Usdaw's leadership who complain in their contribution that union membership in the private sector is insufficient for this type of action. Incredibly they claim: "Usdaw members are concerned about pay and job security and would be very unlikely to support a general strike." Not that the Usdaw leadership is likely to ask members' opinion. And remember this is in a context of mass job losses in retail!

Mass appeal

Actually Usdaw members don't live in a bubble but are the husbands, wives, children, friends and neighbours of public sector workers. We've already seen over the last year significant private sector disputes flare up all over the country which indicate that the sights and sounds

of public sector workers fighting back has again legitimised the idea that workers can challenge employers.

Who would doubt that mass strike action, properly built for, wouldn't appeal to low-paid and super-exploited workers in the retail industry? Already with 400,000 members, Usdaw could, under these conditions, be filled out and could realise its potential to play a pivotal role in the massive supermarkets.

The other 'usual suspects' of right-wing unions such as Prospect and ATL also oppose the general strike. Like TSSA, they argue that in some way, this mobilisation is a distraction! As if 'normal' campaigning would be enough to defeat the government that is absolutely determined to drive through their cuts programme. It seems that the ATL leaders, who were prominent on the 30 June 2011 pension strike, have retreated to their default passive tradition.

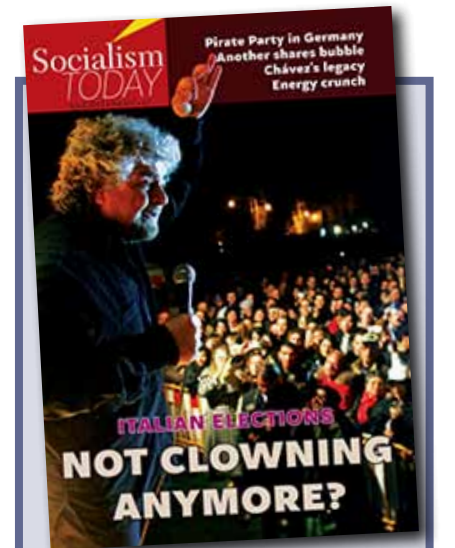
However, pride of place in this line of argument must go to the leaders of Community, the ex-ISTC predominately steel union. "We have not stopped campaigning to save the jobs and workplaces up and down the country. Those efforts and the work we have done with many of our members' employers will be undermined by any moves towards a general strike, even if it is just an examination of the practicalities. It is not a priority for our members."

They go further and plead for the failed alternative of 'partnership' with the employers to campaign for investment. Yet Tata last year announced up to 600 redundancies throughout the country. In some respects, the fact that this is the only open espousal for partnership, the official position of many of the unions over the last 25 years, is testament to the change of mood among union members that the leadership have been forced to reflect.

The fact that the TUC General Council is meeting to discuss a general strike is historic. It has already been reported in the media and will doubtless have raised hopes among some working class people that real mass resistance is possible.

The response to Thatcher's death has once again revealed the real mood in society – of incredible anger at this millionaire cabinet trying to make the poorest pay for the bankers' crisis.

At the TUC General Council, the unions should accept that a 24-hour general strike, in whatever form it is presented, is not only 'practicable' but absolutely necessary and would be exceptionally popular. It is time to name the date.



The Socialist Party's magazine April 2013 issue includes:

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Support the paper that beat Thatcher - twice!

Ken Douglas

Socialist Party national treasurer

Readers of the Socialist will have been sickened by the acres of newsprint and hours of television that have been devoted to worshipping Margaret Thatcher and her record.

Among the wider public it has now provoked a reaction. 'Ding dong the witch is dead' has reached number two in the charts.

Liverpool football club fans held out banners and chanted anti-Thatcher slogans in the game against Reading.

Over 5,000 protesters gathered in Trafalgar Square on 13 April and throughout Britain parties were held in celebration.

Everywhere that our members sold the Socialist, with its front page calling for the fight to continue against her legacy, we got a great response.

The predecessor of the Socialist Party, the Militant, led two successful campaigns against Thatcher - a mass campaign in Liverpool

against the cuts, which won £60 million extra from her government, and the battle against the poll tax which ultimately led to her resignation.

Battle continues

We are continuing that battle today against her heirs in both the Con Dem coalition and New Labour.

Through them her neoliberal policies live on - attempting to claw back all the economic and social gains made by the working class in the 20th century.

Thatcher's funeral is costing us £10 million - a grotesque amount at a time when the Con-Dems are hammering the working class with austerity and cuts.

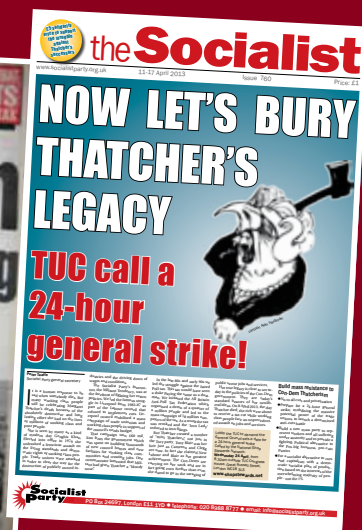
But you can make a stand by supporting the antidote to this love-in of the rich and their politicians! You can make a donation to the Socialist - a paper that since its inception has consistently put forward a programme to end the misery of capitalism. A paper that beat Thatcher, not once but twice!

Can you donate £10, £20, £50 or more? Every donation, no matter how big or how small, is very welcome and can help the Socialist Party produce and distribute the paper that fights all cuts.

Can you help increase sales of the paper by selling at your workplace, college, to fellow campaigners or in your neighbourhood? Contact us if you want more papers sent to you.

You can also help the paper by writing for it - like the comments sent in response to Thatcher's death. Send in your letters and reports to editors@socialistparty.org.uk

You can pay via the Socialist Party website www.socialistparty.org.uk/donate, telephone 020 8988 8762 or use the form below.



Meeting and exhibition marking 30 years since the election of Liverpool's socialist council

Saturday 27 April, 10.30am
Adelphi Hotel, Lime Street, Liverpool

Speakers include: Unite general secretary Len McCluskey, PCS president Janice Godrich, Socialist Party general secretary Peter Taaffe, Liverpool Labour Party president (1980-85) and 'Liverpool 47' surcharged councillor Tony Mulhearn, former Labour MP Tony Benn and 'Liverpool 47' surcharged councillor Felicity Dowling.

The exhibition can be viewed from 9.30am. The exhibition will move to Jack Jones House in Liverpool from 28 April until 14 May.

Liverpool: A City That Dared To Fight

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NUS conference votes against free education and EMA

Ronnie Smith

Sheffield Socialist Students

In 2012, the National Union of Students (NUS) conference mandated the union to call a national demo to launch the fightback against the government's attacks on education. In 2013, free education and demands for the reinstatement of EMA were voted down. What happened to provoke such a U-turn?

The NUS leadership failed to properly build support for the national demo in 2012. The 2013 NUS conference was then led by the right-wing New Labour leadership who, through buzzwords and empty rhetoric, whipped up a defeatist attitude and anti-left sentiment on conference floor.

The NUS leaders claimed that "free education will prop up privilege". Neil Moore, Belfast Met Students Union president and Socialist Students FE Block of 15 candidate, responded: "I dare you to come down to my college and say that, where free education isn't an 'insult', it's a necessity for the poorest students to access education."

Neil also exposed the leadership's promises to "investigate a better alternative to EMA" as lowly attempts to avoid action.

There was no commitment to action, the focus being on the 2015

general election and how "we" - or rather the New Labour Students faction - were going to win them. As if we'd forgotten that Labour introduced tuition fees! Socialist Students spoke about students demanding action now on the issues important to them: fees, cuts, privatisation, and EMA. We demanded that the real issues students have to deal with be discussed, and spoke out demanding a vote of no confidence against the blatantly biased chair (multiple times!), supported by many delegates who felt similar frustration towards the abhorrent lack of democracy.

Socialists defend students

Socialist Students intervened successfully to ensure the NUS's attempt to quietly drop its opposition to unpaid internships was defeated, mandating NUS to demand proper terms and conditions for interns and apprentices, and also ensured NUS continues to oppose all mid-course fee hikes for international students.

Socialist Students also played a critical role in fighting against privatisation and anti-immigrant motions.

Significantly, the conference did vote to campaign against privatisation. But the eight-week occupation at Sussex Uni opposing privatisation

of support services, which has mobilised thousands, was hardly mentioned - except by Socialist Students members.

We intervened to stop the right-wing attacking the NUS democratic structures as the leadership tried to steal the little control ordinary students still have over NUS.

Unsurprisingly, the sentiment on conference floor was reflected in the election results. Not a single left-wing candidate was elected for president or vice-president positions. But Socialist Students Block of 15 candidates Neil Moore and Edmund Schluessel got a good response, with the results due on 17 April.

26 people came to the Socialist Students 'Marx Was Right' fringe meeting.

NUS is currently an organisation run from the top by careerists, blocking the student movement rather than leading it. Socialist Students will continue to fight to change NUS, building a democratic fighting student movement.

But students won't wait forever for the NUS leaders to act - as Sussex Uni has shown.

Students need to build campaigns on every campus where cuts and privatisation dare to raise their ugly head. Socialist Students will look to bring these together nationally to build a mass movement to defend education.

Welsh NHS cuts - no change of heart from Labour

Ronnie Job

Ed Miliband said, at Labour Party Wales Conference, that he wants the shadow cabinet to come to Wales and learn from the good things that the Welsh Government is doing. Whatever he is referring to, it can't surely be their stewardship of the NHS in Wales?

With demos against NHS cuts across the country already this year, First Minister Carwyn Jones was forced to meet the North Wales Alliance.

But Jones insisted that the Welsh Government will not back down on their planned reforms - cuts to most of us.

The Alliance represents campaigns over local issues, like the threat to close a number of community hospitals or plans to scrap breast surgery at Llandudno, where

the conference was held.

There is also a proposal to end specialist neonatal care in the whole of North Wales. The Alliance is looking at raising funds to mount a legal challenge to the Welsh Government on this issue.

But it's not a matter of North versus South. Services are being cut everywhere; the South Wales Plan will mean four or five A&E units serving the whole of the Valleys and M4 corridor.

In May, the Wales TUC has an opportunity to put itself at the head of a campaign to defend the NHS in Wales in its entirety. To do that they will have to overcome the ties of its leadership to a Labour Party carrying through Tory cuts.

We need a national demonstration as a first step towards creating an all-Wales campaign on the NHS that demands an end to all of Labour's cuts.

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London	6,100	733	███	
East Midlands	1,550	181	██	
Wales	2,300	256	███	
Northern	600	66	██	
West Midlands	2,100	169	██	
Eastern	1,200	62	██	
Southern	1,200	38	██	
Yorkshire	2,900	58	██	
South West	1,400	0		
England & Wales	3,700	30		
TOTAL	25,000	2,005		

Brutal Saudi regime supported by UK government

On 13 March, seven young men were executed in Saudi Arabia by firing squad. They were reportedly arrested in January 2006 and charged with organising a criminal group, armed robbery and breaking into jewellery stores. They were sentenced to death by a court in Aseer province in August 2009.

Yahya Al-Faifi of the General Federation of Free Workers Trade Unions (GFFWTU), which campaigns for democratic and trade union rights in Saudi Arabia, spoke to the Socialist about these executions. Yahya explained how, in a society where huge wealth is concentrated in the hands of those at the top, young people are frequently forced to turn to crime to try to feed themselves and their families.

“These young people were from the south, the most deprived provinces in the entire country. This is where the ‘Saudi Spring’ is most likely to start from. The blood of these youths has been used to scare the people away from challenging the authority of the regime.

“Do you really think that the Saudi government has conducted any investigation into the origins and motivating factors behind these crimes, or looked at taking measures to alleviate youth unemployment? No, this is a police state that is only occupied by its own security and nothing else.”

Yahya also expressed concerns about corruption in the judicial processes.

“Under international safeguards adopted by the United Nations Economic and Social Council, capital punishment may be imposed only for ‘the most serious crimes’, such as murder, and only after the most rigorous judicial process. Neither of those fundamental criteria has been fulfilled in these cases.

Also, the death sentences were

imposed largely based on initial confessions which could have been extracted under torture, and the allegations of torture must be examined. The defendants had reportedly only made brief appearances before the court, and were not allowed to speak or given adequate opportunities to conduct their defence. They claimed they were not present at all during the appeal stages and had no defence counsel representing them.”

Yahya added that the Home Ministry frequently quotes verses from the Quran out of context, in order to try to give a religious justification to its crimes against the Saudi population, which are in fact motivated politically by the need to maintain the rule of the royal family and imperialism, especially in the context of the Arab Spring uprisings.

GFFWTU is calling for:

- An end to capital punishment in Saudi Arabia. Provide training and apprenticeships in the oil and engineering industries to young workers, and migrant workers, devoid of a future.
- No to the domination of western imperialism and the arms indus-



Prince Charles and Camilla visited Saudi Arabia for commercial reasons only days after the executions

try. Nationalise the oil industry under democratic workers’ control, and use the billions spent on arms to instead improve the living standards of the poor.

- Stop corruption and bribery. For the oil wealth of Saudi Arabia to

be used to benefit the majority of the population, not the royal family and their small elite clique.

- Down with the brutal Al-Saud dictatorship! For full democratic, social and trade union rights in the Arabian Peninsula.

Only days after the seven youths were executed, Prince Charles and Camilla visited the semi-feudal state to help cement trade and commercial links, including lucrative arms sales, between UK companies and the Saudi Kingdom.

According to Amnesty International:

- Saudi Arabia has one of the highest rates of execution in the world.
- At least 24 people have been executed in 2013 including Sri Lankan domestic worker Rizana Nafeek, who was accused of killing a baby in her care when she was just 17 but claimed to have confessed under duress.
- At least 82 people were executed in 2011, as were a similar number in 2012 - more than triple the figure of at least 27 in 2010.
- Saudi Arabia applies the death penalty for crimes, including drug offences, ‘apostasy, sorcery and witchcraft’.

Committee for a Workers’ International (CWI)

The Committee for a Workers’ International (CWI) is the socialist international organisation to which the Socialist Party is affiliated.

The CWI is organised in 45 countries and works to unite the working class and oppressed peoples against global capitalism and to fight for a socialist world. For more details including CWI publications write to: CWI, PO Box 3688, London E11 1YE. email cwi@worldsoc.co.uk

The CWI website contains news, reports and analysis from around the world.

www.socialistworld.net

Defend our health service

NHS cost-cutting is damaging patient care

Karen Seymour
Mansfield Socialist Party

Last autumn it emerged that 120 breast cancer test errors had happened between 2004 and 2010 at Kings Mill Hospital in Mansfield, Nottinghamshire. This caused great anxiety to the women affected and their families.

Now a new report concludes that “decision making was finance driven, with too little attention given to clinical considerations.” The Care Quality Commission lists factors leading to the Kings Mill test failures:

- “Short term decision-making by managers” meant the laboratory did not keep up to date with technological advances.
- “There is no air conditioning in the laboratory and therefore no adequate temperature control... This will introduce variations in... quality, particularly during the summer.”
- There was a “Trust culture of short-term cost-cutting without the necessary strategic planning to ensure continuity of service.” Examples include “considerable delays to procurement of the semi-automated [equipment] on

grounds of cost.” Four specialist laboratory scientists were made voluntarily redundant, only for their work to be covered by agency staff at increased costs. (This occurred more recently, showing “short-term cost-cutting culture” continues.)

- Staff were not released for courses or to visit centres of excellence by management “as routine work took precedence. [This is] short-sighted decision-making.”
- There was “a management decision to change one of the [test materials] to another ... which was found not to work. This decision was based on price alone, saving a paltry sum. The consultants were not informed of this substitution and only realised when the new [material] repeatedly failed to perform.”

The report concludes that “a patient-safety, risk-management approach to clinical services issues should replace the cost-based approach.”

But exactly the opposite

is happening across the NHS. The massive £20 billion ‘efficiency improvements’ - started under the last Labour government - is the background to the Kings Mill managers “cost-cutting culture”. This government is allocating 20% less funding for pathology services by 2015.

Big business

Hospital pathology services have seen big changes since Lord Carter’s 2006 report (under Labour). This private health company boss recommended moving from hospital-based to regional laboratories, which private companies could bid to run.

Tenders are now being examined for community pathology services right across the Midlands - a contract worth £300 million. These blood tests are mostly automated and profitable, so hospitals use them to subsidise complex tests, like cancer diagnosis. Without routine high volume work, hospital laboratories become ‘un-economic’ but big business just

wants to cream off easy profits.

Kings Mill was an early adopter of the Modernising Scientific Careers project, changing how medical laboratory scientists work. There is also enormous financial pressure from unsustainable PFI payments, such as Kings Mill’s.

Mansfield Socialist Party members call for an inquiry by health workers’ trade unions, patients and community representatives. The financial books should be opened so we can see where our money is spent and where private profit is putting more patient’s health at risk.

New, sweeping NHS changes will result in more tragic and avoidable cases where cuts, ‘business culture’ and privatisation cost lives.

New evidence has emerged using the Freedom of Information act which shows that the government’s drive to make all NHS hospitals achieve self-governing Foundation Trust (FT) status by 2014 will benefit private medical practice at the expense of NHS patients.

Under the Health and Social Care Act, which became law on 1 April, the 2% cap on doing private medicine in NHS hospitals has been raised to 49%. As FT hospitals have to compete with one another for income, a higher rate tariff on private patients could result in NHS patients going to the back of the queue.

So far 40 FT hospitals plan to open private patient units.

Initiated by the last Labour government, FTs - which aren’t accountable to the health secretary - represent another nail in the coffin of the National Health Service.

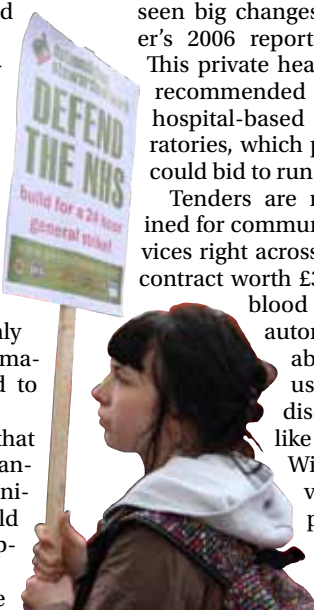


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We reserve the right to shorten letters. Don't forget to give your name, address and phone number.

Confidentiality will be respected if requested.

Measles – the preventable epidemic

Measles is now epidemic in South-West Wales, with nearly 700 cases reported this year. Vaccination rates across Britain and the US have tumbled in recent years largely due to the pseudo-scientific "antivax" movement, which encour-



ages parents not to vaccinate their children against measles, mumps and rubella (MMR).

It still gets widespread media attention, despite 2011 revelations that studies linking the MMR vaccine with autism were fraud. Antivax led to a 15-year neglect of MMR. Many of those unvaccinated are now themselves parents of small children, creating particular risk. Public Health Wales (PHW), the agency responsible for promoting vaccination, have a target of 95% of all children vaccinated against MMR, but Welsh government-imposed budget cuts slashed PHW's disease prevention and vaccination awareness programmes by 5% in 2012. PHW anticipate at least 20% cuts to all programmes over the next four years as Labour and Tories risk children's lives to pay for the austerity agenda.

Outbreaks of measles, mumps and rubella have become far more common as the children of antivax parents enter school. Failure to vaccinate puts at risk not only one's own children but also other children who may not have been vaccinated due to age or allergy or for whom the vaccine was ineffective.

Measles, which until MMR was introduced in the 1960s was epidemic worldwide, can cause life-long disabilities, such as deafness, or even kill. Cut-backs cost lives. A socialist government would give the NHS enough money and resources to properly meet the health needs of people in Britain, and would ensure doctors, nurses and public health workers had control over an evidence-based public health policy.

A world-wide, coordinated public health policy would guarantee measles, mumps and rubella would face the fate of smallpox: confinement to a laboratory as a scientific curiosity.

Edmund Schluessel

Poll tax protests 'turned' Thatcher

Margaret Thatcher's advisers in the late 80s tried to explain that every political and financial expert opposed her plans for the poll tax. It was unfair but she thought if she called it a 'community charge' not a 'poll tax' all would be well. The lady was not for turning.

You cannot tax people who have no money so she tried to imprison non-payers. At the height of the campaign against the poll tax there were 18 mil-

lion non-payers, people of principle who wouldn't pay and people in poverty who couldn't pay. The most arrogant megalomaniac would pause before imprisoning that many - the sheer logistics defeated her.

She was not for turning but her own party turned her out and the poll tax was a major factor in her ignominious defeat.

Derek McMillan

Standing for the many...

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) had a letter (below) published in the Hampshire Chronicle about May's county council elections.

"The nation needs a 'UKIP of the Left' was how Ken Loach described the situation in a recent televised debate. This is true and TUSC will be fielding a number of candidates in the upcoming county council elections.

"TUSC's aim is to [build] the mass workers' party, crucially representing the needs of the poorest sections of society, not the richest and select few the top three parties support. We promise all our candidates will oppose all the vicious cuts that are handed down from government. We will stand up for the many not the few.

We oppose the bedroom tax, and at-



tacks on pensions and wages and say no to bonuses to wealthy bankers and other sectors."

Adam Freeman, deputy Hampshire branch secretary, TUSC

... not the few

We no longer have a party that represents ordinary people in mainstream politics so I am with you as your organisation represents almost everything I believe in. I used to be old Labour.

Teresa Stuart, Plymouth

Apprenticeships not

There's much to admire about the football team I support, Swansea City. Flying high in the Premier League, having just won the League Cup, in a new stadium, built in partnership with the council, on a sound financial basis and 20% fan-owned, through the supporters' trust. However, according to the Guardian the club "recently advertised for a highly qualified, unpaid performance analyst to work for eleven months, shortly before announcing a £2 million dividend to its owners."

The Guardian concentrates on Swansea, Reading and Wigan but suggests the practice may be widespread in football. The internships are advertised on the website of a quango, UK Sport, that receives a lot of government money. There are worse jobs than watching and analysing Swansea but that's the point

– it's a job, one with hours of work, probably much unsocial time and requiring skills in data analysis, IT and knowledge of football.

Clubs are exploiting the love of football and the hint of future paid employment to get expertise for nothing. Working unpaid is slave labour whether it's for a supermarket or a football club.

Ronnie Job

.... internships

Thatcher's Tory government ripped apart Britain's industry and millions of apprenticeships were done away with. Today, capitalist firms use unpaid 'interns' as a substitute, including football clubs such as Wigan, Reading and Swansea City who all get a share of the £5.5 billion TV deal if they avoid relegation.

In the 1980s Militant, the Socialist party's predecessor launched campaigns against youth unemployment, including demands for real apprenticeships. And Liverpool city council used apprentices on union rates in their home-building plans. They gained £60 million from Thatcher's government by their campaigning work. We need similar action to fight today's Thatcherites!

Patrick Atkinson, Unite member

False perception

A problem that the campaign against bedroom tax faces is the perception that the people affected are 'scroungers'. Someone posted the following comment underneath an article about the anti-bedroom tax protest:

"What does this country owe you? Why should the people that actually work hard and make a genuine living continue to be penalised? It's disgusting... Maybe I should start protesting about having to pay for the bums of society all of my working life?" I was fuming, but how could I blame this person for thinking this? They are manipulated by the capitalist system to hate those on benefits. Making them believe that these people don't work,



photo Lash

don't want to work, live luxurious lives and are happy to stay that way. How do we change this perception?

A Roberts

Rewarding failure

Once again the government are managing to reward bosses' failures in the workplace, this time by extending the franchise contract of the London Midland train company. This is despite the fact that it had the worst performance of all with 100s (maybe 1,000s) of cancellations of trains over the last few months!

'Angry commuter', Worcester

New class survey: Can workers still change society?

Ken Douglas

"Emergent service workers of the world unite, you have nothing to lose but your chains, doesn't have the same ring to it".

Referring to a line from Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' Communist Manifesto this was one response to the recently published Great British Class Survey. The survey deduced that, contrary to Marx and Engels' conclusion, the traditional social divisions of upper, middle and working class are out of date in 21st century Britain.

Does this mean that the working class is no longer the force it was? Does it mean that "we're all middle class now" as former Labour deputy prime minister, John Prescott, tried to claim?

The survey purports to present an accurate picture of class divisions in 21st century Britain. As well as questions about income, housing and savings, the survey asks about lifestyle, places you like to go, which people you know and draws out seven 'classes'.

These range from the 'elite' at the top, to the 'precariat' at the bottom. The other categories are the 'established middle class' and 'technical middle class', which are then followed by 'new affluent workers', 'traditional working class' and 'emergent service workers'.

Preariat

In this month which has been dubbed 'Black April', when polls find a majority of us affected by economic problems, the Con-Dems slash benefits while making tax cuts for the rich. It definitely seems like the traditional class system is alive and well.

The top 1% of the UK population has a greater share of the national wealth than at any time since the 1930s. For the majority incomes have fallen. 23% of large workplaces (over 100 workers) now use zero hour contracts and although factories have been replaced by call centres, conditions in them have led to them being called the new 'dark satanic mills'.

For most ordinary people and many traditionally middle class people the on-going economic crisis and the Con-Dems' austerity attacks have made their lives feel more precarious.

In addition the opportunity to move up in society is very restricted - the link between individual earnings and parental earnings is stronger than in any other OECD country and Britain has one of the lowest levels of social mobility and the highest levels of inequality in the developed world.

Since this government was elected workers have attempted to unite and fight back. In 2011 events ranged from the 26 March biggest trade union demonstration in Britain since the Chartists, to the public sector strike against the attacks on pensions in November, where more workers were on strike than on a single day in the 1926 general strike.



That movement was only cut across by the right-wing trade union leaders making a deal with the government. With a fighting leadership, that movement could have beaten back the pension attacks and potentially brought down the government.

Is Marx and Engels' idea that workers have the power to change society and end exploitation now out of date? Marxism defines classes under capitalism in relation to production, to the nature of the economy.

The ruling class, the capitalist class, owns the means of production, distribution and exchange (the factories, transport system, banks etc) and uses their ownership of these and their control of the state to ruthlessly exploit the working class who work in banks, railways, call centres, etc, in the pursuit of profit.

The position of the working class at the point of production, distribution and exchange makes it, potentially, the most powerful class because workers can paralyse production in a strike.

In a general strike they can do that on a national scale and, as in the 1926 general strike, go on to control the distribution of goods and resources and so begin to run society.

Workers in jobs not directly related to production also have significant economic power - a national teachers' strike for instance would be massively disruptive as many workers would be unable to go to work as they would have to look after their children.

Workers in Britain today still have all their power to bring the economy to a halt.

The Socialist Party is calling for the trade unions and the TUC to organise a one-day general strike because such action, as the start of a determined campaign, has the power to stop this government's austerity drive in its tracks.

The Great British Class Survey attempts to introduce artificial divisions between workers. This government of and for the elite is ratcheting back public spending to pre-World War Two levels and transferring that wealth into the bulging pockets of the rich.

It is clearly a 'them and us' world. The other 'divisions' will fall away under the pressure of these attacks, not just in Britain but across Europe and throughout the world, as workers unite to fight back.

Unison health conference Time to fight back against attacks

A Unison member and health worker

As Unison's health conference begins on 22 April, health workers are facing wholesale privatisation, huge financial cuts and closure of wards, services and even entire hospitals. National pay bargaining is also under threat.

We are living in the most tumultuous period in the history of the NHS. The next two or three years will determine the future of not just the NHS but also the pay and conditions of Unison members.

This is a war between trade unions and communities on the one side, and the government and employers on the other.

The Health and Social Care Act is the culmination of a whole series of government reforms which have the aim of breaking up the NHS and replacing it with a market-based system. Under the Act, all services will be open to competition, with the inevitable result that whole swathes of the NHS will be handed over to ruthless private sector companies.

The government and employers want to make drastic cuts in labour costs as they prepare to compete with the private sector. We have had years of little or no pay increases, with no meaningful response from Unison nationally.

Alongside this we have seen the first concerted attempt to decisively



Unison members in healthcare urgently need a national campaign to defend jobs, pay and conditions and the NHS photo the Socialist

break with national terms and conditions with the establishment of a breakaway pay cartel in the South West. 19 NHS Trusts are threatening to abandon Agenda for Change and launch an unprecedented attack on terms and conditions.

This will include cuts in annual leave, increases in the working week, an end to unsocial hour pay, and a host of other measures which would result in the equivalent of a 15% cut in pay.

Unfortunately Unison's position has been to concede some of our

benefits in national negotiations in order to defend Agenda for Change. However the tactic of concession bargaining has already failed.

The Foundation Trust network is advocating local pay bargaining, and the South West pay cartel is saying they will adhere to national agreements if that means massive attacks on our members' living standards!

In order to defend and re-establish the NHS, Unison needs to launch a national campaign that links up all the local protests that

will develop as services are cut and privatised.

The first step should be a national demonstration, on a Saturday, which would not only increase the confidence of all our members but would give a warning to the government that they face a huge fight if they continue with their attacks.

The policy of cosy social partnerships with management is now dead. We need to mobilise the potential power that our membership possesses in a vigorous campaign.

This must include full support for all local strikes and the calling of national industrial action. We must also demand a 24-hour general strike that would not only reveal the power the trade union movement possesses but could also be the first step in the overthrow of the Con-Dem government.

Finally we need to break from the Labour Party, who when in power did so much to prepare the way for the Health and Social Care Act.

Socialist Party Unison health conference meeting:

7pm Tuesday 23 April at the "Piper in the Square", corner of Cochrane Street and George Street, Glasgow G1 1HL

Unison elections: Vote for Socialist Party and Reclaim the Union candidates

Elections for Unison's national executive (NEC) start on 22 April and run until 24 May.

Members of the Socialist Party are standing, alongside candidates organised in United Left, as part of the Reclaim the Union election slate, in the seats listed.

The Con-Dem government is determined to destroy the NHS and the welfare state.

This must be resisted by the full strength of Unison, other unions and local communities. We need an NEC leadership that is determined to win.

The NEC has a responsibility to organise and plan a coordinated fightback instead of leaving branches to fight alone.

The employers are saying take cuts in pay and conditions or face more job losses or we will pull out of the national pay agreements. However, the union is wrong to believe that the way to protect our national agreements is to give away some of our rights, as they have recently done in the health service.

The Socialist Party believes that:-

- Unison should organise a national demonstration to save our NHS with the support of other unions.
- Unison should stop funding Labour if it refuses to fight the cuts and to stop the destruction of our NHS.

The Reclaim the Union candidates are: (Socialist Party members are asterisked).

- National black members seats: Female: Monique Hirst*, April Ashley*, male: Hugo Pierre*
- National young members seats:

Greta Holmes

• Eastern region: Female: Claire Wormald

• East Midlands region: Female: Jean Thorpe*, male: Adrian Picton*

• Greater London region: Female: Helen Davies, Marshajane Thompson, male: Jon Rogers, reserved seat: Gundula Seidel

• North West region: General seat: Tony Wilson, female: Bernadette Gallagher, Karen Reissmann, male: Roger Bannister*

• Scotland region: General seat: Jim McFarlane*, male: Duncan Smith,

• South East region: Female: Jacqui Berry*, Diana Leach, male: Paul Couchman*

• South West region: Male: Bernie Parkes

• Cymru/Wales region: Male: Jamie Davis*

• West Midlands region: Male: Dave Auger*

• Yorkshire and Humberside region: Female: Helen Jenner, male: Mike Forster*, reserved: Vicky Perrin*

• Health Care service group: Female: Helen Ridett*, Suzy Franklin, male: Dave Ward, general: Gary Freeman*

• Higher Education service group: Female: Tomasa Bullen, general: Max Watson

• Local Government service group: Female: Phoebe Watkins, Sonya Howard, male: Glenn Kelly*, general: Paul Holmes

• Transport service group, water and environment: John Jones

• Community: Female: Janet Bryan

Thera workers on strike

Gary Freeman

Unison Rep, South Derbyshire Healthcare, personal capacity

After an 82% vote for strike action, Unison members in Thera East Midlands (TEM) will be on a 24-hour strike starting on 18 April. The ballot also gives leeway for further strikes if necessary.

We will be protesting outside Thera's head office, in Thatcher's hometown, Grantham, that day, by coincidence, the day after her funeral.

TEM is one of a number of regional companies led by a national charity, Thera Trust. The employees provide care and support for people with learning disabilities.

Even though TEM does not recognise Unison, and we want to change that, we have an active steward in the workplace.

This strike is a sign of how strong the mood is to fight the introduction of a new contract with its draconian attacks on terms and conditions. It would mean pay cuts for TUPed [transferred ex NHS] staff to the £7.59 an hour that Thera contracted support workers receive. Some of our members face losing over £300 a month. This raises the prospect of future pay cuts for support workers.

Thera wants a workforce at its beck and call, who can be sent to any site in the East Midlands in their own time and at their own expense.

The company's contract will inevitably lead to a loss of its skilled workforce. Members want to defend the quality of care and want proper consultation with the union.

Joe Warner, TEM managing director, resigned in October, further increasing workers' morale.

The company is trying to pressure managers to find out who is



Building support for Thera workers photo East Mids SP

in the union. It is trying to get employees not on the rota to work during the strike and we have heard a rumour that they are asking people from outside Derbyshire to come in.

We have organised well-attended members' meetings and kept in regular and frequent contact with members by newsletters, text, email and by letter. We have organised two protests in Derby and raised the issue in the local paper and on Radio Derby.

We are working with other Unison branches, officials and members in the East Midlands such as Nottinghamshire County Unison and with Unison members and officials in Thera North (where Unison is recognised) and Thera East Anglia.

A serious lead by Unison's national leadership, coordinating action around all the issues that are affecting our members and our health and other public services, would gain a great response in Unison.

In brief

Unite gen sec

Len McCluskey has been re-elected as general secretary of Unite, with 64% of the vote (144,570). Jerry Hicks received 79,819 votes (35%). The turnout was 15.2%. More in the next issue.

Home office

PCS members in the Home Office have started a week of strike action. Every day a different set of workers will be taking action. This is part of the national dispute across the civil service over attacks to jobs, pay and conditions. Strikes were held on 5 and 8 April but in the Home Office the employers decided to deduct a whole day's pay for the half-day strikes. PCS has therefore escalated the action in this department.

Blacklisting

Following a damning interim report from the Scottish Affairs Select Committee's investigation into blacklisting in employment, the fight to expose blacklisting by the big construction companies goes on. Unite have organised a campaign of high-profile protests. The select committee are very critical of some large contractors. Of Balfour Beatty, for example, they say: "It is hard to see how workers who have been systematically and illegally denied employment will understand that the perpetrators are still in their jobs. We do not accept the defence that people were only obeying orders." The protests will further embarrass those companies and help to take the battle against blacklisting forward.

Yorkshire ambulance

Ambulance workers in Yorkshire could take more strike action in a battle over downgrading and union derecognition. 450 Unite members were on strike on 2 April against the plans to send emergency care assistants to 999 calls instead of paramedics. Since the strike the trust has refused to negotiate with Unite which is holding workplace meetings to decide on further action. Caroline and Alan had come off night shift to picket from 6am at Doncaster station on 2 April. Caroline said that she felt: "De-banded, de-skilled and demoralised" by these cuts which Alan said would cost staff £2,000 to £4,000 a year in pay.

Trainpeople

The rail union RMT members who have been sacked from London Underground's Trainpeople contract protested outside the Transport for London HQ on 15 April. London Underground terminated the contract with Trainpeople, leaving those workers without a job, after they got organised and began a battle for equal rights with permanent staff. RMT are discussing how to continue the battle.

Crown Post Offices

Crown Post Office workers will be striking against closures, and to defend job security and pay on 19 April. Up to 4,000 workers are likely to be involved. 76 Crown offices are threatened with closure or franchising out and staff have not had a pay rise since April 2011.

WE SAY TO THE TUC:

TIME TO FIGHT BACK

TIME FOR A 24-HOUR GENERAL STRIKE

Linda Taaffe
National Shop Stewards Network
(NSSN) national secretary

The beginning of this month marked a step change in Con-Dem attacks on all workers. Class war has been ratcheted up, with the charge cynically led by Tory minister Iain Duncan Smith, on £134,000 a year and living in a rent-free mansion.

New coalition welfare rules mean the poorest face swingeing cuts; disabled people are penalised even more; and to top it all, cuts to housing benefit for the "crime" of having a so-called spare bedroom have kicked in.

Meetings and protests against the cuts and more particularly the 'bedroom tax' have been getting off the ground all over the country. It feels a bit like the early days of the anti-poll tax campaign.

Reminiscent also of the poll tax struggle, the biggest protest so far has taken place in Scotland, where on 30 March 5,000 marched in



Bring your union and anti-cuts banners to the lobby photo the Socialist

Glasgow, and a further 2,000 in Edinburgh demanding "bin the bedroom tax". The fighting spirit of all the angry demonstrators was not in any doubt.

But we have to ask - where is the

fighting spirit of the leaders of our most powerful defence organisations, the trade unions? What plans are they making? We have heard media reports of churches and voluntary bodies coming out against the changes,

pleading the case not to penalise the poor. We have heard Labour front benchers criticise the changes, but at the same time remain wedded to free market policies, steadfastly refusing to commit to reversing Tory cuts if they come to power.

In a meeting at the end of the Glasgow demo Rob Williams, NSSN chair, got a huge cheer when he demanded that the trade union leaders start organising now for a 24-hour general strike where everyone, both in the public and private sector can join together with community campaigners, the unemployed, students, disabled and pensioners in a day of mass action to demand these changes are immediately withdrawn.

The government has done so many U-turns on various issues we have almost stopped counting! They could be beaten on this. The anti-poll tax struggle played a significant role in melting the iron lady Margaret Thatcher. The TUC and millions of workers could crumple these paper tigers Cameron and Clegg.

More on pages 6&7



**Come to the NSSN
lobby of the TUC
general council on
Wednesday 24 April
From 8.30am onwards, outside
Congress House, Great Russell
Street, London WC1B 3LS.**

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

Speakers confirmed: union general secretaries: Mark Serwotka PCS, Billy Hayes CWU and Steve Gillan POA.
**For more details see
www.shopstewards.net**

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!