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CUTS CAN BE BEATEN!

Trade unions – call a 24-hour general strike



Come to the National Shop Stewards Network conference on 29 June: shopstewards.net

Judy Beishon
Socialist Party executive committee

The People's Assembly on 22 June has attracted considerable support, which shows the widespread anger against government cuts - and the will to defeat them. This assembly should express unequivocal support for a 24-hour general strike. If it doesn't it will undermine its ability to indicate the way forward for the success of the anti-cuts movement.

The National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) has consistently made such a call, recognising that the millions of organised workers in the trade union movement need to exert their industrial strength - united in action against austerity - to force the government to back down.

A nightmare scenario of cuts going on until 2020 and beyond was recently spelt out by the Institute for Fiscal Studies. "Spending reductions are set to be a long-term

feature of the UK finances", they declared, with an astronomical 1.25 million public sector job losses among other sweeping cuts.

Working people and those on out-of-work benefits are already on a survival treadmill, hit by pay and benefit caps or reductions, the slashing of services and all manner of stealth infringements on our living standards.

With this dire background, the bedroom tax came as a last straw for many. Those affected faced a sudden dramatic worsening in their weekly budget. Others were outraged by this brutal attack that is hitting some of the most vulnerable in society. People are being callously pushed out of social-sector homes they have lived in for decades, to properties mainly in the private sector where rents are much higher.

For example, Westminster council is reported to have spent more on forcing families into temporary and far-away housing than it has gained from the bedroom tax. Such reports make the nature of the millionaire Tory ministers' agenda

ever more clear. Their attacks are aimed at promoting privatisation and private profit in the interests of their families and big business friends.

They want to liquidate most of the civil service, privatise and atomise the NHS, privatise education, and continue to erode welfare and other public spending in every possible way.

A majority of people in society want these massive attacks to stop. Over half a million people marched against the cuts on 26 March 2011 in a great demonstration of opposition. Now, over two years later, there is an urgent need for more than just the staging of further demonstrations, rallies and assemblies that condemn the cuts.

Imagine the effect on the government if the seven million workers in the trade unions, across the public and private sectors, stop work for a day, bringing production, transport, financial institutions and much else to a complete halt. The government would be powerless on that day, and faced with such a show of working class strength - a

lesson in who really holds the power in society - can be forced to back down on its onslaught.

Everyone who wants to help build a movement of this strength - trade unionists, anti-cuts campaigners and others - should come to the NSSN conference.

Hundreds of workplace representatives will be present, participating in democratic debate around concrete demands and action that can deliver a fatal blow to the Con-Dems' cuts brutality.

For more on how the cuts can be defeated, see pages 6&7

See page 2 for details of the NSSN conference



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Why we're going to the NSSN conference: Coventry communications workers

Lenny Shail

Seven delegates will be heading down to the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) conference from the two CWU branches in Coventry. Workers in Royal Mail, the post office, BT and other companies in the communications industry are facing unprecedented battles: against privatisation, bullying, sell-offs, sackings, union busting and performance management.

At a Coventry CWU branch meeting of around 50 members there was unanimous anger at the union's telecommunications executive's recommendation of accepting BT's below-inflation pay offer and refusal to immediately take action against performance management.

At car park meetings at the local postal depots, postal workers are demanding industrial action now to defeat privatisation of Royal Mail.

Local NSSN supporters in these



The NSSN lobbying the TUC in 2011 photo Paul Mattsson

workplaces and branches have been key to organising such meetings, putting forward a correct pro-

gramme and strategy and linking the need for action with the need for a 24-hour general strike against

The 7th annual conference of the NSSN will take place on 29 June, 11am - 5pm in the Camden Centre, Judd Street, London WC1H 9JE

The NSSN was initiated by the RMT transport union in 2006. Seven national unions – RMT, PCS, CWU, NUM, POA, NUJ, and BFAWU – are either affiliated to the NSSN or officially support it as well as many union branches, shop stewards' committees and trades councils. The conference will include main sessions on resisting the cuts and fighting the bedroom tax but also workshops on defending the NHS,

organising in the workplace, housing, organising the unorganised, fighting blacklisting, Turkey, etc. It's open to everyone in the trade unions and community campaigners.

Speakers include union general secretaries: Mark Serwotka, PCS, Billy Hayes, CWU and Steve Gillan, POA and Tommy Sheridan, Scottish Anti-Bedroom Tax Federation chair

For more information contact: info@shopstewards.net or send your fee of £6 per person to: PO Box 54498, London E10 9DE. www.shopstewards.net

austerity. The continuing strikes in the Crown post offices has shown that action can force the employer to back down and that the public supports them. Workers in O2 were balloted for strike action to stop outsourcing to Capita, while

workers in Virgin Media, Sky, Vodafone and others continue to defy the union-busting tactics of management.

The NSSN, particularly its conference on the 29 June, is key to building support for these day-to-day battles.

Let's axe the bedroom tax

Campaign stops eviction in Manchester

As the first evictions related to bedroom tax arrears are heard in the courts, campaigners are organising to beat them. Eviction threats were defeated in Manchester and Bootle, Merseyside, on 12 June, breathing fresh confidence into the fight against the bedroom tax. Laurence Maples of South Manchester Against Cuts (SMAC) reports on one victory. See socialistparty.org.uk for further reports.

A young mother and her son recently faced eviction under court

proceedings by Southway Housing Association for rent arrears which arose due to failings in the benefit system and were compounded by the bedroom tax.

SMAC leafleted the estate where she lives, at a local school, in shops and at the library. A large group went with her to protest at the court. The housing charity Shelter provided a solicitor and the case was adjourned for three months and an agreement made for the arrears to be paid off at £5 a week. This partial victory was undoubtedly due to the strength of the campaign, launched only a few weeks ago.

SMAC has already leafleted the estate about the victory, generating a sense of solidarity in the community and inspiring tenants to fight

back. Southway has been forced to meet us.

Trade unionists, Socialist Party members and community campaigners set up SMAC to fight austerity, focussing initially on the bedroom tax. In just a few days we built for a public meeting which attracted 27 people. We have received tremendous support from local Unite and Unison branches.

SMAC now meets weekly, and is one of a number of anti-bedroom tax groups in Manchester, which will look to form a Greater Manchester Anti-Bedroom Tax Federation on 20 July. Many of those involved in SMAC want to work with the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition to stand 'no cuts' council candidates next year and at the next general election.

We are not powerless

Three months ago I was feeling very depressed about this government. I am a retired teacher and I subsist on a small occupational pension topped up with incapacity benefit. I live in a two-bedroomed council house but my daughter, who lived with me, is now away at university so I was deemed to be 'under-occupying' by North Tyneside council. As a result I have lost most of the housing benefit I was getting. I applied for one-bedroomed accommodation but I was told there wasn't any and I would have to go private. I also appealed against the bedroom tax in February but have had no reply. North Tyneside council's attitude is that they "don't accept the term bedroom tax" and "have no choice but to implement a government directive." It was my inability to do anything about this alone that initially led me to join the Socialist Party in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. I began by helping with anti-bedroom tax groups in Byker and Walker and realised I should be organising a similar group in North Tyneside. Joining the socialists has made me realise that we are not alone and powerless against the bedroom tax and this blatant attack on the poor and vulnerable. I am less depressed and more focussed on doing something positive with like-minded people. Joining the socialists was one of the best things I ever did.

Lynne Sample

Tell councils - you have a choice!

The Socialist Party calls for the bedroom tax to be scrapped. Councils can refuse to implement the cut, pledge not to evict people or to chase arrears that arise because of it, fill out their discretionary housing fund to cover people's losses and put their resources behind campaigns against the tax. Here are three examples of action being taken:

- Motion being put by councillor Pete Smith to Walsall council on 8 July: Given that this council at a recent council meeting on 8 April 2013, unanimously expressed its opposition to the so-called 'bedroom tax' and resolved to call on the

government to scrap the bedroom tax, this council now calls upon the Walsall Housing Group and other social landlords of properties in the Borough of Walsall to give assurances that they will take no eviction action against any of their tenants, solely as a result of arrears resulting from the imposition and impact of the bedroom tax.

- Response received (from Councillor Greg Marshall) by campaigners when they asked for clarity on the position of Broxtowe council in Nottinghamshire on evictions for bedroom tax related arrears: "The position of the council is unequivocal. At the full council meeting of 17 April 2013 there was a debate around the housing crisis and the bedroom tax. As part of his contribution Councillor Milan Radulovic (Leader) stated that "there will be no evictions from council run properties if individuals' circumstances alter due to welfare

changes as a result of the bedroom tax". For the avoidance of doubt and to reinforce the position I seconded that position and stated how it set ourselves aside as a progressive authority. The statement/contribution was accepted without dissent."

- East Lothian Housing Association in Scotland has set up a scheme to cover the bedroom tax for any of its tenants it decides are unfairly hit. This is particularly where the Housing Association's own policies prevent it from moving people to a smaller property where they would not be hit by the tax or where the bedroom tax reduces their income to less than £75 a week. For these people arrears are being written off. Martin Pollhammer, chief executive of the Housing Association said: "Trying to collect payments from people who patently have no means to pay them is a waste of our time, money and resources".

New anti-bedroom tax campaign launched in Nottingham

On 4 June Nottingham defend council tax benefit campaign called the first meeting in the St Ann's estate against the bedroom tax. Around 20 local residents came to the meeting, either worried or angry about the attacks.

After each person explained what had made them want to get involved, an introduction was given on the council tax benefit cut and the bedroom tax by Gary Freeman, Socialist Party member involved in the campaign. We discussed the need to slow down the system, advising residents of the council procedures and giving some advice for challenging them. See details of this in the pull-out in the centre.

People picked up information

leaflets, discretionary housing payment forms and signed appeal letters and postcards to councillors (one of the local wards' councillors is involved in implementing the bedroom tax and another is the council leader). People took postcards for friends and neighbours to sign.

Sign-up sheets were also provided to make a list of residents who are being hit by the attacks, and another of those willing to form 'anti-bailiff squads'. A date for the next meeting was agreed, and some left intending to arrange day-time meetings, especially for those with childcare issues.

**Geraint Thomas
Nottingham Socialist Party**

Lowest living standards in a decade

Frankie Langland

It was no shock when it was reported recently that living standards had fallen to the lowest levels in a decade. As a young health worker I was even less shocked to discover that once again it is young people who are being hit the hardest, with the average income for a worker in their 20s remaining stagnant for the past six years.

In fact for the thousands of young people, like myself, who are employed by the public sector, a very noticeable cut has been made to our wages. Over the past 12 months I have seen a loss of £2,000 to my income, which as a band three Health Care Assistant brings me to just above minimum wage.

Struggle

Everyday life is becoming more and more of a struggle. In my community there is a noticeable increase in homelessness, alcoholism and drug use. Last Friday a 17 year old boy was stabbed to death; on the bus home the other day a man was smoking crack quite blatantly on the top deck; and when I go down to do my weekly shop the streets I walk smell of urine.

Many people will be able to relate to this day-to-day life. We budget until we're blue in the face but it's still not enough, stuck in overdrafts which bite away at our wages a bit more each month, living in mould ridden flats which we can barely afford the rent on. It's no surprise that there has been a steep rise in young people reporting mental health issues - one in ten young people now say they can't cope.

Anger is definitely the theme for this recession. Things that I used



photo Senan

to be able to accept and walk away from now make me shake with rage. I used to make jokes about the rubbish politicians said on the telly but now I want to throw things - they're not playing a game, they're playing with our lives!

All in it together?

This isn't about them trying to get us out of a recession, and we are definitely not all in this together! This is a politically motivated at-

tack on public services (which are needed more in times of hardship, not less!) and us, the working class. We all know the Tories are the party for the millionaires, they always have been.

Working class people are the ones feeling the brunt of these cuts. We are the majority and we have to fight to save our services and communities.

United strike action will link all of our power. They're hitting us where it hurts, let's hit them where it hurts them, and fight for our future!

Sir 'sell-out' Brendan

Alex Davidson

That former TUC general secretary Brendan Barber is now 'Sir' Brendan will come as no surprise to any union activist who saw the pensions dispute destroyed in 2011.

Following successful pressure by the Socialist Party, the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) and others, 30 November 2011 saw two million workers on strike over the Con-Dems' assault on public sector pensions. It showed just how much power the union movement could have.

The sell-out that followed was orchestrated by Barber and designed to destroy the growing momentum that had been built up. The knighthood given to him will be seen by all rank and file trade unionists as a reward for the deliberate destruction of a strike movement that could have defeated the government.

Barber has spent his entire life in the TUC bureaucracy. He has never been a shop steward, never held an elected position in any union. He and others like him see their role as managing the union movement and pre-



Brendan Barber

senting a 'responsible' face of trade unionism to the government. They think that the only role of trade unions is to mitigate the worst aspects of the employers' plans. When you

are faced with a government which is determined to destroy everything we have ever won, this approach is totally inadequate. With their six figure salaries and hefty expense accounts the TUC leaders have little in common with the rest of us.

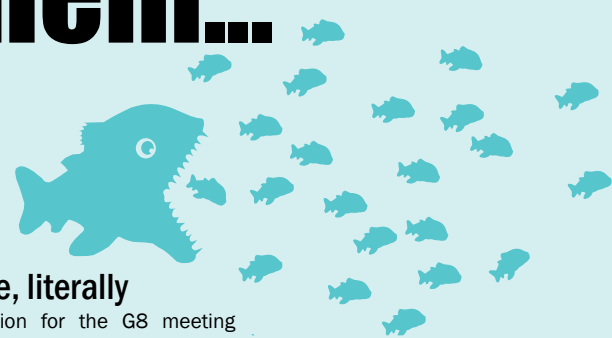
Rank and file

That is why we need to strengthen rank and file trade unionism to fight not only the employers but the traitors within the union leadership. The role of the NSSN is crucial in helping to develop a new generation of class fighters.

The Socialist Party stands for the full democratisation of the union movement. All key union officials should be elected and paid no more than the average wage of their members. We must end the rule of unaccountable bureaucrats such as Barber and build a fighting, democratic union movement.

These rotten traitors must be swept aside if we are to beat back the attacks of the Con-Dems and the employers. The NSSN conference on 29 June is the next stage in building such a movement.

Them...



A façade, literally

In preparation for the G8 meeting in Northern Ireland, £2 million was spent on tackling dereliction. Not by building or renovating new houses or services, but, in the main, by covering any undesirable looking buildings with painted boards to hide the effects of the recession away for the duration of the meeting. Stickers and paintings showing bustling and booming shops cover the empty ones that now litter most streets across Northern Ireland.

Elitism

We're constantly told that life is getting easier and easier for young people - these days everyone can go to university if they work hard enough, no matter what background they're from. But a new study shows that the top Russell Group universities are getting more rather than less elitist. They're letting in fewer state school students now than they were a decade ago. This is despite a separate piece of research recently showing that, on average, state school students do better at university than private school ones. The government's social mobility tsar Alan Milburn was quoted as saying that the increase in the cap in tuition fees to £9,000 a year might have something to do with it, but not necessarily. Hmmm.

Cave living

It has been widely reported that desperate eastern European migrants are living in sheds and even in old fridges across the country. Now it has been revealed that one group have taken up residence in a squalid network of caves near Stockport. The caves, used as shelter during air raids in World War

Two, are thought to 'house' possibly hundreds of people who came to Britain hoping for a better life than was on offer in their home countries.

Maternity shortages

Shortages of midwives and maternity beds lead to maternity wards closing 1,000 times each year. Thousands of women in labour have to travel miles to find an open ward. The Royal College of Midwives estimates that an extra 5,000 midwives are needed to cope with the rising birth rate - the "efficiency savings" being squeezed from the NHS won't allow for that.

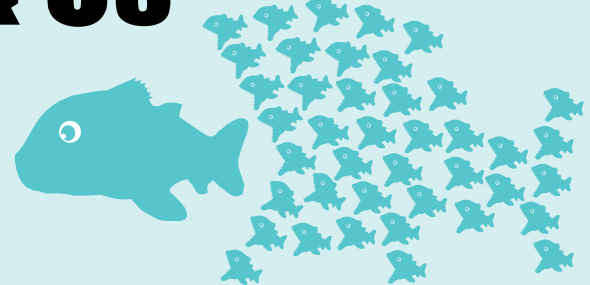
Racket

Tory MP Sir Gerald Howarth has recently taken up a part time (paid at least £15,000) consultancy job with QuickQuid - the payday loan racket infamous for charging up to 1,734% annual interest rates. The company was recently named by the Office of Fair Trading as being responsible for widespread irresponsible lending. Not to mention that most of the people forced to use payday lenders are there because of the cuts carried out by Howarth's party in government.

Deep freeze

The public sector pay freeze in place since 2010 has caused misery for millions. But it's just not enough for the government - pay needs to be more frozen, it seems. Some public sector workers have seen pay progression in that time as it was contractually obliged. In the upcoming spending review this will be ended, with an extra £1.5 billion cut from wages. And the government has told workers to expect more pay cuts from 2015 too.

...& Us



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Brighton: Bin the council cuts

Jack Poole

“We’re going to strike for seven days, and if that isn’t enough, then we’ll come out for more - we’re not going to take a 20% pay cut lying down,” said a defiant picket.

On Friday 14 June hundreds of people rallied in support of Brighton CityClean workers as they began a seven-day strike against planned pay cuts by the Green controlled council. Bin workers and street sweepers could lose up to £4,000 a year.

The picket line outside the bin depot began in the early hours of Friday morning and was soon spilling into the road, swelled by bin workers, their families, other union members, students and anti-bed-room tax campaigners.

The strike successfully closed the depot, with its gates shut and barred with placards telling the loathed Green council leader Jason Kitcat to “take a break from cutting our pay”.

The strike was 100% solid, and succeeded in drawing Polish workers into the dispute - there had been a worry that management would try to drive a wedge among the workforce but it has clearly been unsuccessful.

The only person who tried to cross the picket line was a former driver turned manager who set out on a one-man mission to drive a refuse truck around the city. He was quickly turned away!

Green cuts

The dispute has further exposed the Green councillors’ failure to stand up to central government cuts.

By voting through a cuts budget



Hundreds of people joined a march by striking council workers in Brighton. Residents stood on the route and applauded.

The mood was determined and workers pledged to keep fighting until these proposals were taken off the table. In a reference to council chief executive Penny Thompson, the strikers chanted that their pay will be cut “by not one penny”.

At a rally outside the main council building, national GMB union secretary Brian Strutton pledged £100,000 from national funds to support the strike.

Socialist Party member Phil Clarke, standing as a TUSC candidate in Hanover ward byelection in Brighton, outlined the political alternative to cuts and austerity of the main parties and said the election campaign would also be a platform for supporting the strike.

STOP PRESS: Bin lorry drivers on strike from Monday (June 24) for a further five days after talks deadlock.

photo Serena Cheung

and ruling out the possibility of a needs-based budget, they have now begun attacking the pay of some of the council’s lowest paid workers.

As the Socialist Party has consistently pointed out, a refusal to implement cuts by the council could have been the basis for a mass campaign demanding that funding is returned to the city.

Instead the Greens have tried their own strategy of imposing “fair” cuts, leading inevitably to attacks on council workers.

This has caused frictions within the local Green Party with the local branch urging the councillors to stop their cuts plans.

Caroline Lucas, former Green Party leader and local MP who has come out in support of the bin workers, visited the picket line in the morning with some of the Green councillors who are opposed to the plans.

One of those councillors, who held the position of deputy leader of the council has since had it revoked, showing the determination of the councillors grouped around leader Jason Kitcat to push through these pay cuts, even if it threatens to tear apart their party locally.

The Green Party, Labour as well as the Tories and Liberals are now all tainted by cuts and privatisation.

The Socialist Party and supporters of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) have been giving solid support to the bin workers.

As rubbish piles up around the streets of Brighton, the council is going to come under increasing pressure to shelve its plans.

And while the council will undoubtedly try to use the disruption caused by the strike to turn public opinion against the workers, when the issue is explained clearly, very few people agree with the council. A recent poll in a local paper showed that 70% of people blamed the council and not the workers for the strike.

Support workers say ‘enough is enough’

Paul Kershaw
Chair, Unite LE 1111
Housing Workers branch

Housing support workers in Unite have voted to take three days’ strike action this week against pay cuts by One Housing Group (OHG). After a pay freeze staff will see their pay cut by an average of £2,000 a year and as much as £8,000 a year in some cases.

One support worker told the Islington Tribune: “I’m on a salary of £27,000 and will be losing £4,000. I have a family to support and a mortgage to pay”.

Bizarrely OHG have repeatedly denied Unite’s claim that OHG’s Chief Executive has taken a £31,000 pay increase lifting his pay, before pension contributions, to £176,000. These figures are taken from the group’s annual financial statement.

However, OHG has reported different figures to Inside Housing’s survey of bosses’ pay. Inside Housing now say they are refusing to comment on this.

Tenants and other stakeholders will ask what credibility OHG’s management has left? Already, Islington council has condemned OHG’s pay cuts.

A worker told the Socialist: “Many of those affected have been transferred from local authorities. My message to people still working for local authorities is; if we don’t win this, it’s your future (threatened).”

There have been a number of

strikes by support workers around the country recently. The message is ‘enough is enough’. Some employers say they have no choice but to cut wages in order to compete with each other. OHG have boasted that they can undercut directly provided NHS services by 80%.

Unite says this is deeply irresponsible, threatening to push workers into desperate poverty and undermine services.

In Scotland, housing employers take wages out of competition by negotiating a national agreement with proper rates of pay. England and Wales employers should come to a national agreement with the union.

The Unite housing branch has been transformed recently with new activists coming forward and a determination that we won’t see our services and our livelihoods destroyed. We also need a wider fightback and coordinated action but members cannot wait for that to continue their action.

There are hardship funds for both OHG and Equinox (see right) strikes.

Make donations to the hardship fund (marked Equinox or OHG) to Unite branch 1/1111.

Account no: 20040639; Sort code 08-60-01 or by cheque made payable to unite branch 1/1111 and send c/o Nicky Marcus, Housing Workers Regional Officer, Unite the Union, 128 Theobalds Rd, London WC1X 8TN

Equinox workers continue pay fight

Workers at Equinox Care solidly supported the second day of strike action on 12 June in our battle against pay cuts. We have had a three-year pay freeze and our hours were increased last year from 35 to 37.5; in effect staff have been taking a pay cut for the last four years. Frontline staff were dismayed to be told they had to take further cuts and Unite members voted 98% for strike action.

Chief executive Bill Puddicombe has claimed in the press that the union has chosen to take on Equinox politically but it was his staff who voted to strike. He also says that it’s “a lie” to say he will not speak to the union, but then goes on to say that there was “no chance” that the charity would rethink its proposals.

Puddicombe refuses to go to ACAS arbitration although the union remains open to this route. We have asked for talks but tumbleweed grows while we wait for a response

from the chief executive.

Support for the strike continues to come in from unions and the community. One former service user who supported the picket lines said: “These guys saved my life when I was homeless and in despair. I was given hope by Equinox and I’m forever grateful for the marvellous help, support and understanding that these workers give to people suffering from the illness of addiction.”

“Now that I’ve got my life back on track I’m giving back and showing my gratitude by volunteering at Equinox. I’ve been working for the last 18 months and I think it’s disgusting that these workers are not being properly rewarded for the vital and very difficult work they do - they deserve a decent fair wage, not pay cuts.”

A Unite LE 1111 member working for Equinox Care



Unite housing workers are fighting savage pay cuts photo S Wrack

In brief

Croydon/Bromley bins

An industrial action ballot of Unite members employed as refuse workers in Bromley and Croydon has returned a majority in favour of strike action in both boroughs.

Veolia, which runs the services on behalf of the two local authorities has offered only a 2% pay rise. The union is demanding a pay rise that meets the real cost of living and has pointed out that previous pay awards have not kept up with inflation.

Veolia workers in Camden are also being consulted on the same offer with all the indications that these workers too will reject the offer.

Unite Regional Officer Onay Kasab said: “My members are not being greedy. Fair pay for refuse workers need not cost council tax payers a single extra penny. Veolia UK Plc made £121 million in profits. Nobody needs a business degree to work out that the money exists.”

Veolia have engaged in a disgusting red baiting campaign against the union. Management has focussed on Onay Kasab being a member of the Socialist Party and has tried to claim that he is not acting in the workers’ interests. The fact is that Socialist Party members in leadership positions within the trade unions give members every opportunity to fight for their rights.

PCS walkout

More than 16,500 of the union’s members in courts, tribunals, the Crown Prosecution Service and other justice agencies staged half-day walkouts on 17 June as part of a three-month civil service-wide campaign against government imposed cuts to pay, pensions, jobs and working conditions.

In Manchester strikers were joined for a protest by lawyers campaigning against legal aid cuts.

The union’s 13,000 members in the Ministry of Defence and hundreds of staff in the Forestry Commission also struck as part of the campaign.

Crown Post Offices

CWU members working in Crown Post Offices will be striking on 20 June and 29 June in an ongoing dispute over closures, job security and pay. These strikes will be the 6th and 7th day of industrial action in the dispute.

Workers at the 373 Crown Post Offices have not had a pay rise since April 2011 while all other staff represented by CWU in the Post Office have had two pay rises totalling 6.75% in this period.

The Post Office wants to close and/or franchise 76 Crown Offices, 20% of the network, and cut up to 1,500 jobs. These main offices comprise 3% of total post offices but handle 20% of all customers and 40% of all financial services sales.

The CWU says talks have made no progress despite the Post Office preparing to announce a £94 million profit, smashing its target by £10 million. The union expects that these profits will mean large bonuses for senior PO executives.

Website

For more workplace and trade union news see the Socialist Party’s website:
www.socialistparty.org.uk

Home care Cuts and outsourcing equal abuse

Two Socialist Party members - a disabled activist and a support worker - explain the effects of cuts, outsourcing and 'personalisation' of care budgets.

In response to new CCTV film footage of an older disabled person being neglected, given to the BBC by her family, Lib Dem care minister Norman Lamb, said: "It's just shocking and depressing because this is neglect in your own home."

Any right-thinking person would share this sentiment and support his observation: "In a way you're almost at your most vulnerable when it's behind a closed door, it's you and a care worker and potentially poor things, dreadful things can happen in those circumstances."

Part of the CCTV footage shows Muriel Price, 83, from Blackpool, stuck in bed trying to contact her domiciliary care agency, family and neighbours after a care worker failed to turn up for an 8am visit.

For many years I was in a similar situation to Muriel where I did not have the funding for overnight support. The most difficult part was managing retention of urine. I was not incontinent so had to adopt strategies such as limiting fluid intake two hours before bed.

Muriel, who now lives in residential care, should have had someone with her day and night.

While disabled people have an individual right to an assessment of need and services to meet that need, legal judgements from the 90s known as 'Barry' and 'Kirklees' allow councils to consider their financial resources when meeting need.

Under funding

Under the 1997-2010 New Labour governments existing rights withered, and under-funded councils were receptive to some very negative policy developments, even before the Con-Dems' cuts.

The real downside is how these policies manifest themselves in people's lives, even more so with the latest cuts and privatisation.

Muriel was expected to go to bed at 8pm for twelve hours with a number of visits by care workers during the morning, afternoon and evening.

Because of her incontinence she had to use 'incontinence pads'. Manufacturers advise they should



Home care cuts are another way both New Labour and the Con-Dems have hit the most vulnerable photo S Civi

be changed when somebody soils themselves, not many hours later. If urine and faeces are contained against the skin they quickly raise its alkalinity, sometimes giving rise to what is termed Incontinence Associated Dermatitis.

The practice of keeping people immobile in bed for half the day is also callous because it significantly raises the risk of a person getting a pressure sore, and once present this is very hard to get rid of and life-changing in a very negative way.

Muriel was able to reflect on her experience because she now lives in a residential care home.

For many thousands of disabled people who have lived independently for years this scenario would be the ultimate neglect and mistreatment, but this will be the reality for a growing number if the Independent Living Fund closes and the tens of billions of pounds needed to properly fund care in the community and personal assistance are not secured.

For this to happen, the 'age of austerity' must be stopped.

Little charity shown towards tertiary-sector care users and workers

Up until a few weeks ago I worked as a support worker with disability charity Scope, founded in 1951 with the aim of improving the lives of people with Cerebral Palsy. Since then the charity has developed to support people with different disabilities and complex needs.

Like many charities and not for profit organisations, Scope has been awarded contracts by local authorities to provide care and support in the community and some residential and education settings.

I applied to work there as Scope had a good reputation. But the interview informed me I'd have a zero-hour contract (sadly, not at all uncommon within social care), but I was reassured that there were plenty of hours to pick up. The hourly rate was low, £6.40 an hour, but I needed to work and I was just starting out in care so I took the job.

On my first day I had an induction. I assumed this would take all day and I would receive some introductory training. But the induction was moved from the morning to the afternoon. When I arrived, I was given forms to fill out with my bank details and a copy was taken of my P45. I then had my photograph taken for my ID badge, and that was it!

On my first three visits, I shadowed more experienced members of staff. But after this very short introduction I was left alone with some clients, with no manual handling, CPR or any other training. It was a full four months before I received such training. Yet, just two months into the role, new recruits were shadowing me!

I wasn't even being paid for every hour that I was in work as I could only claim back up to £4.50 a day to cover transport costs when

more than one visit to clients took place. So I could work for eleven hours but only be paid for nine. The only breaks I got within my working day were the travel time. This time was tight, I would not even have time to pop to the toilet, let alone rest or have food.

Hours cut

To begin with, my weekly hours were fairly decent - 30 on average. But due to changes in the needs of clients and some moving to personal budgets, my hours were reduced drastically. The local authority seemed to look for any excuse to reduce the money provided to pay for the clients' care.

The clients' were given a number of hours support a month, the local authority then decided that a month should be 28 days. Most months have 30-31 days; any visits to clients' that were scheduled to be in day 29-31 of a month were then cancelled. This not only impacted the vulnerable clients, but I would lose up to three days' pay a month.

Whenever I booked annual leave, I was asked to arrange with the client to give the owed hours at a later date, usually on one of my rest days. Often there was no one available to cover for me, as we were always short staffed. When cover was arranged, it would often fall through at the last minute.

Scope's current tag line is 'Scope to...' In my experience it has been 'Scope to pay poor wages', 'Scope to give inadequate training' and 'Scope to not give employees a rest break'.

Scope is charged with caring for some of the most vulnerable people in society, yet they cannot even treat their employees fairly.

Unison Local Government conference: Leadership faces delegates' anger

A Unison delegate

The local government Unison conference met on 16-17 June. Although the agenda was largely uncontroversial, it couldn't stop the concern and anger of delegates surfacing.

Most noticeably this came during the debate on pay. In a consultation ballot of members Unison's England and Wales leadership said the derisory 1% 'offer' was the best that could be achieved by negotiation.

In Scotland, where there were parallel but separate negotiations, the Scottish local government union leadership was pressured into recommending that members reject the offer, and indeed it was rejected. They are now preparing for a strike ballot.

Consequently, we have the crazy situation where a pay offer has been accepted in England and Wales but is being contested - with the strong possibility of strike action - in Scotland.

Delegate Amanda Lane from Bristol received a standing ovation when she demanded action and articulated delegates' frustration, given that Unison general secretary Dave Prentis had last year promised to 'smash the pay freeze'.

Delegates rejected attempts to curtail the debate. The example of the north west region was given which campaigned against the offer and, most significantly, took a position against the national leadership. There, the ballot result was 71% in favour of rejecting the offer and balloting for sustained industrial action.

Fighting leads get results

Where there has been a clear and fighting lead, members had responded positively. Had a national lead of that nature been provided then it would be very likely to have resulted in a national dispute and a fight to get a decent pay award.

The union leadership was extremely uncomfortable during the debate as delegates attacked them over their handling of the situation. Socialist Party members played a prominent role in the debate.

On the second day conference debated 'motion 47' on affiliation to the councillors against cuts organisation. The leadership was 'supporting' it but had put in a 'wrecking amendment' that referred to advice previously given to branches which reflected Unison's national opposition to councils setting no-cuts 'needs budgets'.

So, the union leadership were effectively saying 'affiliate to councillors against cuts but on the basis of not supporting action along the lines of socialist-led Liverpool council in the mid-1980s (see page 10)'.

After a debate, in which Socialist Party members argued effectively, the position of the leadership was defeated.

Against the background of that debate, there was standing room only at the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) lunchtime fringe meeting, with former Liverpool Labour councillor and Socialist Party member Tony Mulhearn speaking. Over 80 people attended to hear an alternative anti-cuts fighting council strategy.

The Socialist Party calls for:

- No cuts in benefits, jobs, pay and public services
- Decent levels of care staffing with full training - falling short of this counts as abuse
- No 'zero hour' contracts - a genuinely living wage, guaranteed hours and employment rights for all care workers
- No privatisation or outsourcing of services. Take back in-house all privatised and 'tertiary sector' services
- A living wage and provision of respite for all family carers
- Provide free health and social care services to all who need them
- Stop using children and family members as a substitute for professional services
- A united anti-cuts movement involving disabled people and carers' organisations, trade unions and the anti-cuts movement
- For a 24-hour general strike as the next step in the campaign to defeat all the cuts
- For a socialist society that puts the needs of the millions before the profits of the millionaires

HOW CAN WE END CUTS NIGHTMARE?

Here Judy Beishon from the Socialist Party's executive committee looks at how the government's cuts warfare can be stopped in a feature that continues on from the front page.

The huge cuts that are rapidly eating into the services and benefits of working class and middle class people across the country are combining in a devastatingly toxic cocktail with living standards being reduced in other ways. Job losses, low pay, pay and pension cuts - all enormously increase people's vulnerability to the government's cuts onslaught.

A study by Absolute Strategy Research at the end of May found that 68% of people regard Britain as being in depression or recession, regardless of the pitiful 0.7% estimated GDP growth this year. 86% were worried about their financial situation, the highest number in the five-year period since the deep crisis broke.

For young people, a massive fight-back to halt the government's agenda is essential if they are to have a decent future. The lack of real jobs that pay a living wage is leading to a terrible loss of talent and self-esteem for an entire generation. A small minority, in desperation have at times turned to rioting, gang battles or the racist far right. These divisive blind alleys will be regularly re-fuelled if the trade union and anti-cuts movements don't provide a pole of attraction for a united, mass struggle against austerity.

Cuts worsening austerity

Will cuts reduce the public debt and restore growth? The opposite is happening. Economic growth is near zero and could easily be wiped out altogether by a worsening of the eurozone crisis or contagion from instability elsewhere in the world. Even the IMF, a bastion of global capitalist advice, has warned that sustained austerity can damage the economy - slashing people's ability to spend - fuelling a downward economic spiral.

As for the public debt, this is growing every year, reaching a phenomenal £1.3 trillion at the end of 2012, up 7% on 2011. Presently around £45 billion a year of interest on the debt is paid to finance institutions.

The government has reduced the rate at which the debt is increasing by forcing working class and middle class people to pay the price, rather than tapping the vast accumulated wealth of the rich and big business and their on-going profits. But showing the weakness of British capitalism, Britain still has one of the largest annual public sector deficits in the 27-country European Union, expected to be £120 billion this year. Last year, as a percentage of GDP it was

only better than crisis-mired Greece, Portugal, Spain and Ireland.

Since 2008, an enormous £1,162 billion has been offered in bailouts and guarantees to the banks, added to recently by a further £10 billion to RBS bank's Ulster subsidiary. The Bank of England has spent £375 billion on Quantitative Easing and the government has spent £37 billion on the war in Afghanistan.

The money is there

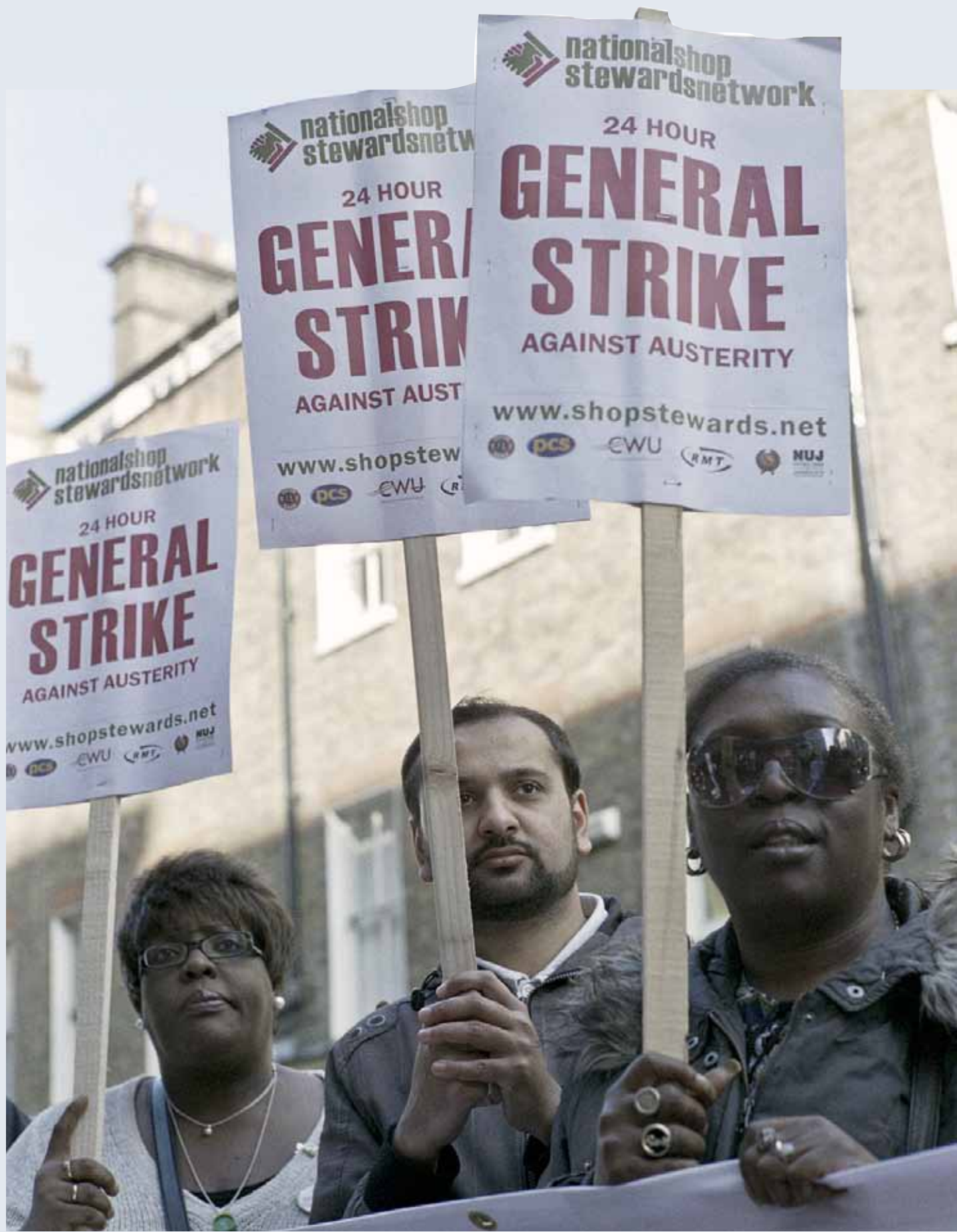
Compare these huge sums to the national welfare and pensions budget, presently £362 billion for a year, and it is easy to see that it's one rule for the capitalist class and another for the overwhelming majority. Then go on to take into account that £850 billion is being hoarded by the top companies - idle money - and that corporation and higher level income tax rates have been reduced over recent years and it's even more obvious that the wealth exists in society to fund decent services, pensions and benefits. Furthermore, the PCS union estimates that £120 billion a year is lost to the public finances by tax evasion, mainly by the multinationals and rich.

Therefore we can and must oppose ALL cuts. We demand measures such as the reversal of the tax cuts made over decades for the rich, stringent measures against tax avoidance, a 50% tax levy on the hoarded billions, and immediate withdrawal from Afghanistan - not just for financial reasons.

We also need to demand more than stopping the cuts. For most people the struggle to 'get by' dates from long before the economic crisis. Even pre-2008 when the economy was consistently growing it was big business that was primarily benefiting, while working class people had relatively flat or falling living standards.

So in addition to the above, we call for more far-reaching measures, including nationalisation under workers' control and management of the energy firms, banks, transport companies, construction giants and other key industries and services, plus capital controls against wealth leaving the country.

This would lay the basis for a democratically run, socialist planned economy that could end unemployment and give a massive boost to production, while at the same time protecting the environment. Goods and services could be provided with the aim of increasing the living standards and wellbeing of the overwhelming majority of people in society, incomparable to the impoverishment under capitalism.



Agency workers in the RMT transport union campaign for a general strike to assist their fight against unfair sackings photo Paul Mattsson

Rejection of the main parties

The Tories at the helm of the cuts onslaught didn't have an election majority when they formed their weak coalition government with the Lib Dems, and most people in society reject their cuts agenda. Their party is riven with division: over Europe and on many other issues, including their compromises with the Lib Dems.

Also they are mired in corruption, with the latest exposed money-grabber being energy committee chair Tim Yeo. This certainly isn't unique to the Tories; politicians from all three main parties have recently been caught out for sleaze and greed. As on top of this, all three parties also advocate cuts misery, it's not surprising that polls are showing an unprecedented level of rejection of them all.

In May's local elections, for the first time none of them received more than 30% of the votes. Ukup is benefiting from this backlash, gaining 139 seats in the local elections by falsely claiming that it sticks up for ordinary workers and by receiving protest votes against the main parties.

But in reality Ukup's policies are very divisive and firmly pro-austerity, offering absolutely no alternative to the cuts.

Despite all this, Labour has maintained its lead in the polls, but its leaders are strenuously jeopardising this by aping Tory speak and deeds. Ed Miliband and Ed Balls disgracefully promised to bring "iron discipline" to controls on spending by sticking with Tory spending plans at the start of a Labour government, capping spending on the sick and disabled and not restoring universal child benefit, among many other attacks.

Meanwhile, Labour-led councils pass on Tory cuts, refusing to defy them by using reserve funds or borrowing powers to allow time for a mass campaign against the cuts to be built. And the Labour leaders nationally won't pledge that a Labour government will reimburse councils for debts incurred if they reject making cuts, an offer that's within their power and would be enormously popular.

So the building of an anti-cuts political alternative to



www.tusc.org.uk

Labour is urgent and the existence of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is invaluable in this respect. Anyone who is firmly opposed to cuts and privatisation can volunteer to stand under its banner, helping to create an electoral challenge across the country against the cuts of the main parties, and also those of the smaller parties - including Ukup and the Greens. See page 8 for TUSC info.

In the meantime we can't wait for the next elections. Lives are being destroyed and made intolerable by the cuts now, so trade unionists and anti-cuts activists need to build action that can force a cuts U-turn by the coalition government and also lead it to resign.

Trade union and anti-cuts action

shopstewards.net

National Shop
Stewards Network
Conference
29 June 11am-5pm

ceived considerable funding from major trade unions, including Unite, and has attracted an audience to its regional launch meetings. The Socialist Party welcomes any forum of workers and anti-cuts activists that gives an opportunity for debate on how to take the struggle forward, so we participate in the PAs.

However, they will only play a useful role if they allow democratic debate, and crucially, add their voice to those who want the trade unions to lead a serious struggle against austerity. Otherwise the PA rallies will be used as a fig-leaf by some trade union leaders to avoid their responsibility to name the day for a 24-hour general strike against the cuts. The NSSN has asked if it can have a speaker at the 22 June PA in London - to raise the campaign for a 24-hour general strike - and has offered the PA a speaker at the NSSN 29 June conference, but has not yet had a response.

Nor should the genuine desire for unity among anti-cuts activists be used as an excuse to uncritically welcome people who vote for cuts onto PA platforms. Unfortunately, it's not unusual at these events for councillors who have imposed cuts at local level to be given an uncritical platform. For example a platform

speaker, Jack Scott, who was welcomed to a People's Assembly in Sheffield by its organisers last month, was the Labour council cabinet member responsible for waste management who oversaw cuts and even a strike-breaking operation against the city's recycling workers last year.

Around 30 GMB members took 30 days of strike action against council cuts and a privatised waste management service that was drastically reducing their working hours and therefore their pay.

Labour, Green and other councillors who pass on the Con-Dem cuts argue that it's not 'realistic' to refuse to implement every cut. Not only is it realistic - the money exists in society and more can be raised - but it's very divisive to accept some cuts, however reluctantly, and not others.

Among those who put this position are defenders of the idea that after the next general election a Labour government can be pushed by its trade union affiliates to use a lighter hand with the cuts axe. Yet not only should no cuts be made, but the Labour leaders have asserted that they will uphold and continue with the present torrent of them. Those who fail to warn that Labour will be little different to the Tories are dangerously playing into the hands of Ukup. Instead of lessening Labour's cuts, right-wing union leaders of Labour affiliates such as Paul Kenny of the GMB and Dave Prentis of Unison are complicit in Labour's attacks on the working class.

Demonstrations and rallies

The big turnouts at some of the PA and other anti-cuts rallies and demonstrations reflect a growing desire of many

people to hear an alternative to austerity and to combat it, as markedly did the massive - over half a million - 26 March 2011 TUC demonstration against spending cuts. Large events can give participants a boost by their size, but this will be combined with disappointment if the proposals from the platforms fall short of what's needed to mobilise a mass anti-austerity 'army' with a programme and strength that can decisively defeat the government's attacks.

The actions being put to the 22 June assembly are: A day of civil disobedience and direct action, a day of coordinated local demonstrations, and an autumn union-backed national demonstration. These can be useful steps in contributing to the building of the anti-cuts movement but are not enough in themselves to turn the government back.

Strike against cuts!

The 2002-3 anti-war movement organised local actions, big rallies and a two million-strong demonstration, but those events were not enough to stop the war on Iraq, as the Socialist Party warned at the time. We argued that only through the millions in the trade unions threatening and seriously preparing for industrial action, could Blair's war plan be stopped.

Many speakers at the PAs express support for strikes that have taken place and for the idea of more, which is welcome, but unfortunately it is usually without emphasising the immediate necessity of rapid preparation for national coordinated action across the public and private sector. This isn't surprising when, for example, among the leading supporters of the PA is the same right-wing Unison leadership that poured cold water on the idea of Unison members striking against a derisory 1% pay increase.

The issue of democracy is crucial in the anti-cuts movement if it is to be able to challenge and overcome obstacles and arrive at unity in its direction and action. Yet in advance of the 22 June PA there is no invitation for anyone to stand for election to its leadership and the proposals being put forward can't be amended until next year. At a number of the regional PAs, supporters of the Socialist Party's ideas have been undemocratically denied a chance to speak.

During PA and other anti-cuts events the Socialist Party will continue to support the right of all organisations to express their views and distribute their material. But we also call for the maximum possible unity around a clear programme of refusing to accept any cuts, of councillors refusing to implement them, and of building the momentum for determined industrial action, as the central planks of defeating austerity.

We urge all those who want to build unity on this basis to attend the NSSN conference taking place at the Camden Centre in London on 29 June



[illegible]

Turkey: Eyewitness to Erdogan's state terror

Martin Powell-Davies of the NUT teachers' union executive and Socialist Party member, was part of an international trade union solidarity delegation visiting Taksim Square, Istanbul, Turkey, on 15-16 June, when a peaceful concert for anti-government protesters was brutally assaulted by riot police using tear gas and water cannon spraying toxic chemicals. Along with his eyewitness account of this shocking event, Martin also reports on the struggle against the authoritarian Erdogan regime, particularly the role of the workers' movement.

On Saturday, as originally planned, we were able to attend a meeting convened at our hotel to discuss with the general secretaries of both of the two main left trade union federations, KESK (Confederation of Public Workers' Unions) and DISK (Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions). A further meeting was arranged to hear from elected MPs of the HDK coalition of left parties, including those from both Turkish and Kurdish roots.

I also had the opportunity to leave my NUT flag with Turkish Airlines pickets, on strike for over a month to defend trade union rights and to demand the reinstatement of sacked colleagues from their union Hava-Is.

Anti-authoritarianism

However, it was Erdogan's decision to move in police to crush the Gezi Park occupation that made sure that our visit will not be forgotten by any of the delegations.

Our hotel, on a side street just a few yards from Taksim Square, turned out to be just on the perimeter of a wall of police, tear gas and water cannon thrown around the square.

Arriving in the early hours of Saturday morning, we had gone straight to Gezi Park, situated just to one side of Taksim Square, to look around. This small wooded park was filled with tents, stalls and sleeping occupiers. It had become a forum for debate and discussion between people from a range of backgrounds and traditions.

Chatting to a young woman, a member of Day-Mer, the Turkish/Kurdish community group in London that had invited me to take part in the delegation, it was clear that the occupiers' grievances were about a lot more than protecting Gezi Park's trees from destruction.

She saw Erdogan threatening culture, personal freedom and her rights as a woman in particular. Theatres, cinemas and any media outlet critical of the AKP (the ruling Justice and Development party) faced harassment and threats of closure. Rights to abortion were being abolished, with Erdogan insisting that women should expect to bear at

least three children.

Both the leaders of DISK and KESK explained how Erdogan's authoritarian style of government was alienating increasing sections of the population, with the Gezi Park struggle acting as a catalyst to bring together different groups with a range of grievances and demands.

Education was being threatened by having Islamic theology imposed on the curriculum, health services were facing privatisation. Trade unions are fighting for improved wages and working conditions and for the right to freely organise.

The DISK general secretary explained how they had been represented alongside other groups on the Taksim Resistance committee for over a year now. DISK was trying

The waiters rushed to close the doors before choking chemicals could drift in. The police attack was underway

to integrate the demands of the Gezi protesters with the wider demands of the trade union movement.

In answer to my question, he made clear that if the police were to move on the park then the federation would respond by calling a national strike. I am glad to report that KESK has kept that promise and will also be joined by DISK in that action.

Police attack

On a sunny Saturday evening, with the park packed with thousands of trade unionists, local residents and families, it was hard to imagine that any prime minister could order police to attack in the way that Erdogan seems to have done.

Nevertheless, it was clear that, with Erdogan planning to hold a mass rally of his supporters on the outskirts of Istanbul on Sunday, the stage was set for a possible confron-



Martin Powell-Davies photo Senan

tation. Few in the park seemed to be aware of the specific threat to the occupiers that had been made by Erdogan at his rally in Ankara that afternoon.

A concert by well-known singer Zulfu Livaneli followed speeches from DISK speakers with both old and young singing along to the music. Soon, these crowds would face a terrifying assault.

To the later relief of our partners and friends, our delegation decided to take a break from touring around the different trade union and party stalls in the park and grab a bite to eat in a nearby restaurant, and to discuss further with a DISK organiser about how a strike movement could be extended to workers beyond the two left-wing federations.

Soon after our food arrived, people fled past our windows away from Taksim Square. The waiters rushed to close the doors before choking chemicals could drift in. The police attack was underway.

As we later found out from other delegations who had remained in the square, police first fired tear gas bombs into the air right across the park, then attacked to drive people out into the surrounding streets on the opposite side of Taksim from where we had gone. Police reportedly even chased protesters into the Divan Hotel, firing choking water cannon spray through its doors.

We headed out into Istiklal Street, the main pedestrianised road leading up to Taksim Square. It was already thronged by thousands, soon to become perhaps tens of thousands of people, demonstrating their anger and defiance. Between us and the square stood lines of riot police and a threatening white 'TOMA' vehicle armed with a powerful water cannon.

It took all of us time to realise that the choking fumes and burning skin were coming from the water from the TOMA. A soaking from this chemical spray left protesters clutching for air and ready to vomit. Crowds parted every now and again to allow the injured to be rushed away.

The RMT (UK transport workers' union) flag was unfurled amid the chanting crowds while I managed to give some interviews over the noise in response to calls that I was receiving from Britain, including the Observer.

Aftermath

By Sunday morning, Taksim was quiet, surrounded by a line of police that was turning everyone away.

With the RMT delegation having returned to London to join a protest rally in Trafalgar Square, I joined the other international delegations in a taxi ride to the studio of the Hayat TV channel, one of the few who had been prepared to broadcast the protest movement (most of the big channels pretended it wasn't happening and had broadcast shows on cooking, penguins and soap operas!).

Hayat TV had just fought off an attempt to revoke its broadcasting licence, an attack which had been seen as an act of political victimisation by Erdogan's regime.

Two RMT union members who also witnessed the attack by state forces in Taksim Square, spoke to the Socialist at a solidarity rally in Trafalgar Square, London, on Sunday 16 June.

"We witnessed an unprovoked attack by riot police on a concert that was being attended by young people, families and children. Completely unprovoked, they were attacked by water cannon that contained acid. Four of us actually got temporarily blinded by this for about ten minutes. Then we were treated by protesters. It's an obligation for us all to get behind the people who are struggling for democracy in Turkey and to bring down the Erdogan regime. The trade unions can do this by lobbying and calling days of action and hopefully by calling solidarity action with our sister unions in Turkey."

Steve Hedley, assistant general secretary, RMT transport union

"Along with two of my RMT colleagues, a PCS colleague and an NUT colleague we went over to Taksim Square to show solidarity but also in an international observer capacity.

We got hit (by water cannon) and my skin's still burning over 24 hours later. While we were on the way back to the hotel to take several showers to wash the stuff off we came under attack with plastic bullets - you could hear them fizzing over your head, and then the gas canisters."

Sean McGowan, RMT national executive



The dreaded riot police and their water canon photo M Powell-Davies

We then held our own press conference back at our hotel. I was able to explain my view that, under the guise of defending 'religion' and 'traditional values', the AKP were, in reality, seeking to attack every worker through cuts, privatisation and attacks on personal freedoms and freedom of the press. The movement now needed to organise, extending and coordinating committees across the country.

I walked with a colleague from Day-Mer to attend one last meeting, a press conference where the Taksim Resistance committee was going to call for further mobilisations around Taksim that afternoon. However, perhaps to disrupt that meeting, the police started to attack protesters in broad daylight.

Early on a Sunday afternoon, with locals and tourists running for cover, the riot police were again firing tear gas and the TOMA letting out their torrents of chemical spray. If the British and American governments are really concerned about the use

of chemical weaponry, perhaps they could start by pressurising their ally Erdogan to stop using acidic sprays on its people.

After coming face-to-face with the riot police, we managed to find our way out to a passing taxi and get away to the airport for the flight back to London.

On the way we passed an AKP bus headed for Erdogan's rally on the road out to the airport. It was a concrete display of the polarisation in Turkey between the two sections massed in different parts of the city.

The trade union movement has to organise to undercut Erdogan's support by explaining that his government represents the interests of a wealthy few, while it is the trade unions and Left parties, acting to defend ordinary people's rights and livelihoods, that can help build a movement, and a society, that acts in the interests of the millions, not the millionaires.

Martin's report can be read in full on <http://electmartin1.blogspot.co.uk/>



At the concert before the police attack photo M Powell-Davies

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

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Big question unanswered

I was recently asked to represent the Youth Fight for Jobs campaign on the BBC 'ethical debate' programme, The Big Question, on the topic: 'Are the young expected to pay too much for our ageing population?'. The day before it was to be recorded, the BBC contacted me saying they'd asked 'too many people' so I shouldn't bother showing up. Having watched the show, aired on 16 June, I concluded that by 'asking too many people' the BBC actually meant 'asked too many middle aged, middle class people'. Despite the question being about young people, the Youth Fight for Jobs campaign was to give way to older, middle class people. Nobody there made the argument that the youth were angrier about paying for the banks' mistakes and bosses' bonuses than about 'paying for the elderly'. Nobody argued that the government weren't doing enough to create the jobs needed for the youth. Nobody said the problems are not a result of the 'baby boomers', but the result of neoliberal, capitalist exploitation. The BBC failed to accurately represent the left or young people.

Sean Marsh, St Helens Socialist Party

Bishop attacks pensioners

The Bishop of London has launched an unprovoked attack on pensioners as greedy, over-privileged and a burden on the state. We are not like Lady Thatcher, whom he eulogised so much that sales of sick bags zoomed up. The Bishop pontificates that government spending on 'baby boomers' – those born in the 20 years after World War Two – 'raises questions of inter-generational equity'. In fact pensioners are at the sharp end of cuts in benefits and public spending and many look to the church for some kind of support. I'm beginning to sound like Victor Meldrew but "I don't believe it!" When bishops and politicians start talking about pensioners as a burden on the state how far away are we from some kind of "final solution" for the lot of us? No more pensions for you but here's a bottle of cyanide?

Derek McMillan

Rail race to bottom

The race to the bottom in pay and terms and conditions is underway in the rail freight industry. It seems one company avoids having depots where train drivers book on so they save money that



photo B Severn

way. Then if a train is running late and the driver says they're nearing the end of their day and will need to finish, they will be pressured, first by the company control centre, to continue working. They will be told they should carry on, otherwise the firm will lose work putting their workmates' jobs in danger. If this does not work a more senior manager will make the same call. Then a director of the company, even the managing director, will have a go to keep the train moving and not incur extra cost. This is designed to put this firm in place to undercut others when contracts are offered or renewed. It shows the threat that exists to terms and conditions of work and even to the safe operation of the industry.

An Aslef member

Modern day slogans

Following Bill Buchanan's suggestion a few weeks ago of a name for a mass workers' party, might I add another few suggestions, namely the "workers" or "workers and socialist" with alliance/"movement"/"unity". If readers try the combinations in their heads to see which one sounds better we could get a debate going.

I'd also like to suggest a slogan we could use more generally, basing it on the Bolsheviks' "Bread, Peace and Land," I'd like to suggest "Jobs, Homes and Food" as a relevant slogan for the modern working class, given unemployment, rents and the bedroom tax, and the mass dependency on food banks.

Geraint Thomas, Nottingham Socialist Party

Wales campaigners fight for NHS

Mariam Kamish

Campaigners from Ystrad Fawr Hospital and from other areas have come together to call for support for 'Option 5' in the current NHS Wales consultation. We're being offered four options, but each would mean the loss of services – and none of them would give us our Accident and Emergency (A&E) service back.

We say: write 'Option 5, No A&E down-gradings and return a 24-hour doctor-led A&E both to Ystrad Fawr and Llwynypia Hospital' in the response form. If all areas stand together, we can win.

£660 million has been cut from the NHS in Wales over the last three years according to the Wales TUC. We demand that money be invested back into the NHS.

NHS representatives say that the downgrading of A&E services is dictated by a shortage of A&E doctors. Campaigners argue that this problem can be overcome. At the moment our A&Es are stressful places to work, because they're very understaffed. Consultants are expected to be on call one night in three, instead of one night in six or eight, as in England. The answer is not to spread the consultants we have over fewer A&Es. We need to bring in more consultants and that calls for imaginative thinking.

NHS Wales should put crèches and child minding services for



Return the A&E! photo Becky Davis

consultants into A&Es to win back consultants who are raising young families.

They should scrap student fees and bring in bursaries for trainee doctors – with a year for year match agreement under which for every year a trainee doctor trains, he or

she agrees to work for a year in Wales.

As Aneurin Bevan said: 'We will have an NHS in this country as long as people are prepared to fight for it.' **For more info, ring Mariam, campaign secretary, on 07772 520 192**

Books that inspired me Budding trade unionists and passionate Chartists

Scott Jones

The Rape of the Fair Country by Alexander Cordell is a novel set in the turbulent times of the industrial revolution in 19th century Wales. Set during the rise of the Chartists and the formation of trade unions in Wales, it details the trials and tribulations of the early working class whose lives resembled little more than slavery.

Impoverished men, women and children as young as three years of age, toiled through their short lives in appalling conditions in the iron ore mines and furnaces. Beaten and starved into submission, they were held to ransom for a crust of bread and owned body and soul by the wealthy iron masters.

I first came across the book while working in the tourism department of the local authority where much of Cordell's work is set.

It immediately aided me on my

journey to becoming a revolutionary socialist. It helped wake me up to the need to establish working class control of the means of production.

Stage adaption

Recently I saw a fantastic stage adaptation of Rape of the Fair Country but was disappointed to see the class struggle turned into one of nationalism with the red flag replaced by the Welsh one and the capitalist iron masters being referred to as the English masters.

Admittedly, the book's writer Alexander Cordell was not a radical but this work most definitely is and shouldn't be robbed of its meaning.

It is an inspirational work as the reader becomes deeply involved in the working class struggle of the likeable and inspiring characters. Unlike some novels of this ilk, the reader isn't moved to pity the characters and their predicament.

Instead you find yourself willing on the budding trade unionists and passionate Chartists in their campaign against the vile capitalists and their dreaded company shops.

This book is massively relevant to today's struggles as the union rights won by our forebears depicted in the book are now being eroded by 21st century capitalists. Also relevant is the struggle of the Chartists.

Most of Chartism's demands have now been won. But having fought for pay for MPs so that not only the wealthy could afford to go to parliament, now most working class MPs have been so absorbed by the capitalist system they are barely recognisable as workers' representatives. The struggle for workers' representatives goes on!

In my opinion this book should be required reading in schools, especially in South Wales. Every reader can't help but be inspired to go and change society for the benefit of the working class.

BBC 'unbalanced' on Liverpool 47

Dave Walsh, organiser of the 'Liverpool 47' events celebrating the 30th anniversary of Liverpool's socialist Labour council from 1983 to 1987, wrote to BBC Northwest recently about their coverage of the events. Below are extracts from Dave's letter.

Your programme gave prominence to five enemies of the 47 fighting councillors namely: Peter Kilfoyle, Jane Kennedy, Michael Crick, Lord Patrick Jenkin and Lord Neil Kinnock who led Labour to two of the worst defeats since 1931.

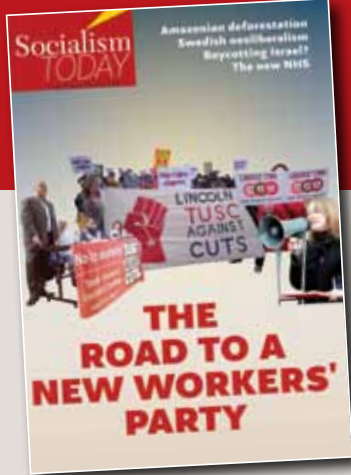
By contrast only very brief clips by Tony Mulhearn of the Liverpool 47 were broadcast while you allowed his opponents to put forward their arguments about the 'undemocratic nature of Militant activists'. Your programme did not air Tony

Mulhearn's points that the 47 built 5,000 high-quality council houses, improved services and built sports centres and nursery schools.

During the dispute between Liverpool council and Thatcher's government an excellent piece of journalism was done by World in Action which was balanced and gave both sides to the argument plenty of opportunity to make their point. Your whole team should watch it to find out how serious journalists manage to produce work of integrity.

We now see a resurgent labour movement. As resistance to the three main political parties' policy of savage austerity builds, we will see a real challenge to these parties develop.

The BBC, as a national institution funded by the taxpayer, should produce a fair and balanced portrayal of future events. Perhaps a revisit to the Liverpool Socialist Council events, with an opportunity for Tony Mulhearn to set the record straight, would be a good start.



The Socialist Party's magazine
June 2013 issue includes:

The road to a new mass workers' party
Clive Heemskerk looks at the development of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition

Israel
Are boycotts an effective protest?
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Student loans threat: Action needed on student debt mountain

Claire Laker-Mansfield

'Keep calm about university fees' was the slogan of a government funded advertising campaign aimed at mitigating the effects of fee hikes on application numbers in 2011.

The message: student debt is different to a loan you'd get from a bank - repayments are easier, interest rates are capped and you don't begin paying it back until you're earning a reasonable salary. Stop listening to those cynical lefties, their campaign beseeched, that £50,000 we're asking for - you'll hardly notice it.

This government propaganda was, of course, ludicrous. As anyone with a brain could have predicted, application numbers declined following the fee hike. After all, even if student loans were interest-free, £50,000 is still a mountain of debt to start adult life with.

Now, this week's news shows a fresh aspect of the government's rank hypocrisy on student debt. Not content with having tripled fees, the Con-Dens have been conducting shady talks about selling off what remains of the state-owned student loan book.

The potential plans include a massive hike in interest rates and a retrospective change in the terms of loans given to those who gradu-

ated years ago. All this is with the aim of making the loan book more of a 'catch' for potential private buyers. Their profits will come at our expense.

One argument used to justify this outrageous attack is that it would mainly affect those who graduated while tuition fees were 'just' £3,000 a year or less.

Things are much worse for those entering university now - for them the basic price of a degree is three times higher and their loans are far more punishing. So, claim the government, there's no ground for the 'three granders' to complain.

Fightback

But if this sell-off goes ahead it will surely be the thin end of the wedge. The completion of the privatisation of student loans will open the doors for ever-increasing interest rates and the tearing up of previously agreed terms. It opens the floodgates for the banksters to make a killing from our education. Everyone who needs or has needed a loan to study will be affected.

This vicious government attack underlines the urgent need for action against student debt, fees, cuts and privatisation.

The NUS should be leading this fight, starting with a fully mobilised national demonstration in the au-



Socialist Students campaigning for free education to end crippling student debt photo Paul Mattsson

turn, something which Socialist Students will put pressure on them to do.

But even if the NUS won't engage in the fightback, students need to take matters into their own hands,

organising local anti-cuts and fees campaigns on every campus and linking them together nationally.

We need to build a mass movement, united with the working class and trade unions, to defend educa-

tion and make it accessible to the millions.

If you want to be involved in building the fightback on our campuses - join Socialist Students! www.socialiststudents.org.uk

Wales Shop Stewards Network Defend past gains - fight for the future

At the Wales Shop Stewards' Network (WSSN) conference on 8 June, some of the trade union movement's most determined leaders discussed the austerity onslaught facing us - and what we're going to do about it. Unlike the recent Wales TUC, the WSSN was clearly preparing to defend the gains working class people won through decades of struggle.

Cerith Griffiths, Wales chair of the Fire Brigades Union, said: "We've got to build for a one-day general strike and for action after that." Essential public services that form society's safety net are being ripped to shreds.

"Equipment is being downgraded: vans are being brought in that are cheaper but too heavy to carry as much water we could before. They also have fewer firefighters. These cuts undermine our ability to respond to emergencies - we are 20% slower getting to incidents now as a result."

Mark Evans, Unison local government executive member for Wales, in a personal capacity, pointed out that: "Wales now spends less per head on education than they do in England. The Welsh Local Government Association says 52% of non-statutory services will be wiped out in coming years."

"Labour councils and the Assembly should refuse to implement cuts. If just five or six did, or if the Welsh Assembly coordinated a campaign, that would send ripples throughout Britain, and we could defeat this government. But

the leaders of Labour-affiliated unions act like a shield for Welsh Labour, protecting them from the anger of union members."

Speakers explained the damage privatisation will do to their industry. AJ Singh, South-East Wales CWU postal branch secretary, said: "The CWU demands that Labour pledges to reverse the privatisation of Royal Mail planned by the Coalition. If we can't get that pledge we'll be looking at our affiliation."

RMT national executive member Steve Skelly said: "Privatisation is a farce: private investment accounts for just 1% of the investment going into the railways. Meanwhile workers and safety are being hammered. The McNulty report will mean 20,000 jobs lost on the railways. The employers are pushing for agency workers to replace directly-employed staff. No sick pay, no pension, and bumper profits."

"We need a general strike. We'd have one if the TUC got its act together. If you don't agree with what your union leadership is saying, stand up and say so."

Delegates left the conference determined to do just that. WSSN plans a day of action to build support for a one-day general strike and transmit the militancy of the conference into society at large.

Ross Saunders



Campaign reports

Fire cuts - public will support strike action

Pete Dickenson

Response times for fire engines in Bow East and Bow West wards in Tower Hamlets, east London, will nearly double if Bow Fire Station is closed. A civil servant, the Deputy Fire Commissioner, admitted this at a meeting on the closure packed with 130 local residents. She was sent to take the flak by Tory London Mayor Boris Johnson, responsible for the fire service.

These times will exceed the guidelines laid down by the Fire Service. Johnson's cuts would cost lives.

A local resident, Frank, said: "They could find money for the Olympics but they say there's no money for this... You said this meeting was the heart of Bow. Well, if the firefighters have to go on strike the heart of Bow will support them."

A representative of London FBU told the meeting that his union is actively fighting closure and the loss of a fire engine at Whitechapel fire



London FBU members protest against fire service cuts photo Paul Mattsson

station. Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) supporters and Socialist Party members pledged full backing to the campaign. They said that if local residents organised an occupation of the Bow Station, they would get massive support from the community.

And if Tower Hamlets councillors and its mayor, Lutfur Rahman, did not fight these and other cuts,

including the bedroom tax, TUSC will stand candidates against them in next year's election. These comments got a good response from the audience.

The meeting unanimously opposed the Bow closure. Two days later the FBU organised a march from Tower Hamlets to City Hall, where Johnson hangs out, to ram home the message.

Racist BNP meeting stopped in Salford

Twice in three weeks, socialists and trade unionists have managed, by mobilising opposition, to stop the far-right racist British National Party (BNP) from holding meetings in Salford.

Three weeks ago, we heard that the BNP intended to hold a 'public meeting' at Salford's Town Hall. On behalf of my Unison branch I contacted the Returning Officer who said the council had a duty to facilitate the meeting because the BNP were standing a candidate in

the Weaste and Seedley byelection (where anti-bedroom tax campaigner Terry Simmons is standing for TUSC).

We told the council we would obstruct the meeting and within a day they cancelled it saying the BNP did not want elected councillors from other parties to attend so it wasn't a public meeting. This reason wasn't found until we pressured the council.

The BNP then tried to hold a fully-open public meeting. News of our

opposition obviously got to the BNP as two hours before the meeting they changed the venue to a new secret location somewhere in the city.

The actions of socialist, anti-racists and trade unionists forced the BNP to pull their meeting. The challenge now is to beat their ideas and the system that allows their ideas to gain credence. That is why I support TUSC - we need a new mass workers' party that will genuinely stand up for working class people.

Steven North

FIGHT THE TORIES FOR RIGHT TO A DECENT EDUCATION SYSTEM

Fewer holidays for students, worse pay for teachers, Ofsted tyranny, forced academisation, Free School privatisation – it appears that Tory minister Michael Gove comes up with a new way of whacking the right to a decent education and a decent job every day. And the so-called opposition in Labour seem to be largely in agreement. Here Martin Powell-Davies, member of the national executive of the NUT teachers' union, looks at the motivation behind one of the latest attacks – on GCSEs.

Just when tens of thousands of 16 year olds sit their GCSE exams, Tory education wrecker Gove announced a further shake-up to the examination system. He was shamefully sending a signal that these students' achievements will be, in his mind, 'second-rate'. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Gove and the Con-Dem government can't accept that, through the hard work of students, teachers and schools, and under enormous pressure to achieve imposed targets, GCSE results have improved year-on-year. In the past, improved examination results would have been celebrated but widespread achievement no longer matches the needs and wishes of the government and big business.

Big business no longer requires a widely educated workforce. Now it's time for Gove and Co to draw up the ladder so that only a select few young people are able to succeed.

It would be wrong to idealise the GCSE system. Any exam regime is there, in the final analysis, to decide who is given the opportunity for certain careers and higher education, and who isn't. However, the introduction of GCSEs marked an acceptance that all students should have the chance to achieve a qualification of equal worth to their peers.

Gove has had to abandon his attempts to ditch GCSEs altogether but is insisting that exam boards re-

vert to exams at the end of Year 11. The various changes to assessment methods, while significant, aren't the fundamental point. No, the key to Gove's agenda is to be found in his recent phrase: "the pass mark is to be pushed higher". Whatever happens, Gove wants to make sure that far fewer students succeed.

Coursework

Coursework will be ditched under Gove's proposals even though it has allowed students to show skills that can't be so easily assessed in a brief final examination.

However, it also has to be said that, as schools came under increasing pressure to improve results, teachers have been expected to go

to increasing lengths to coach and support students to complete the work required. Now the pressure will be on to cram students for the terminal exam.

Of course, if teachers, schools and students were consulted properly, it may well be that changes and improvements to the current system could be agreed upon. But as the economy crumbles, the post-war consensus in favour of high quality public services and comprehensive education for all is becoming a distant memory.

It is now the responsibility of trade unions to use their strength, backed up by students and their communities, to defend the gains of the past against those like Gove who are trying to steal them away from us.

"There has to be selection because we are beginning to create aspirations which increasingly society cannot match ... When young people cannot find work at all ... or work which meets their abilities or expectations ... then we are only creating frustrations with perhaps disturbing social consequences ... people must be educated once more to know their place."

Senior civil servant quoted in Caroline Benn and Clyde Chitty's book - Thirty Years On: Is Comprehensive Education Alive and Well, or Struggling to Survive? - rumoured to be a senior adviser to Sir Keith Joseph



Gove has tried to ditch GCSEs photo Socialist Party

NUT members strike to defend teaching assistant posts at a Leicester school

Heather Rawling
Leicester retired NUT member

'Things are getting serious,' an NUT member told me on the picket line at Uplands Junior School in Leicester.

Teachers at this inner city school have taken three days of strike action to defend children's education and the jobs of eight teaching assistants.

The dispute is primarily against the head and governors' restructuring plan which proposes cutting eight teaching assistant posts. Previously staff passed a motion of no

confidence in the head teacher.

On the strike days teaching assistants stood in solidarity with NUT members on the picket line.

ATL members have balloted in support of strike action. Even admin staff did not want to work. Consequently, the school was completely shut on the third day of action.

The union Unison has finally agreed to requests from its members and their local full-time organiser to ballot for strike action.

The city council has appointed an independent person to investigate the NUT grievances.

Among other demands, the NUT

has asserted that it will cooperate with the investigation if the head is suspended and the restructuring process is halted. If these demands are not met there will be further strike action.

Three week process

The investigation will take a minimum of three weeks to read evidence of a whole raft of grievances, interview people and reach conclusions. The end of the academic year is only one week later.

Until the investigation process is completed, no one knows what

class they will be taking and what support from teaching assistants will be there.

A minority of parents are worried about the impact the action is having on their child's education. But teachers argue that not taking action will have a worse impact. "If we don't take two or three days' strike action, then the school may not be able to open in September."

It is vital that staff at the school continue to get the support of the parents and community. The head and governors are actively trying to turn them against the dispute.

A meeting with parents called by the unions could help forge even

stronger links and isolate the head and his governors.

At a meeting of staff from all unions, some staff expressed a lack of trust in the local authority.

It is important that whilst co-operating with the independent investigation, the option of continuing strike action is maintained to demonstrate the continued dissatisfaction of the staff and their determination to win their dispute.

Update: The restructuring has now been put on hold so the NUT has suspended strike action for as long as it feels the investigation is being conducted fairly.



WE CAN BEAT



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THE BEDROOM TAX!

Know your rights sheet



The bedroom tax has sparked fury. Thousands have protested against people being forced out of their homes or robbed of 14% or 25% of their housing benefit by millionaire Con-Dem ministers, many of whom have spare houses, never mind spare bedrooms. But we can stop this attack!

Twenty years ago a mass campaign defeated Thatcher's hated poll tax. Led by the Socialist Party's predecessor, Militant, a mass campaign of non-payment made the poll tax unviable. While the bedroom tax is different in many ways, one thing is clear – if we get organised we can defeat it.

Can't pay – will stay! No evictions!

I've cut back on every little thing I have. I'm eating one meal a day and not putting the heating on, all so I can pay this tax. £12 a week is everything when you can only afford £30 a fortnight on shopping before paying the bedroom tax."

The bedroom tax's impact on people's lives has been devastating. The case of Stephanie Botrill, who killed herself after losing £20 a week from her housing benefit, illustrated the human cost of the bedroom tax. Stephanie wrote to her son before committing suicide: "Don't blame yourself for me ending my life. The only people to blame are the government."

The bedroom tax affects 660,000 of the poorest households in Britain, many of them already suffering as a result of other Con-Dem cuts. £500 million is being stolen from housing benefit, with the tenant

responsible for making up the shortfall. How is it possible for people already living in dire poverty to pay? It is not and the figures prove it.

Anti-eviction army

Housing Associations revealed in May that thousands of their tenants had immediately fallen into rent arrears as a result of the bedroom tax. In Liverpool the Riverside Group said 50% of their 6,000 affected tenants have not paid anything in bedroom tax. Only a quarter paid the full amount in the first month. Wakefield in Yorkshire said 42% had underpaid their rent. In Glasgow 66% of Housing Association tenants have under paid.

What these figures clearly show is that the bedroom tax cannot be afforded. Moreover, many tenants who have tried

to pay will not be able to sustain payment.

We need to build an anti-eviction army which will oppose tooth and nail any attempts to evict tenants as a result of bedroom tax arrears. Just as the 'bailiff busters' successfully prevented thousands of attempts by bailiffs to take poll tax non-payers' goods, we can build a mass campaign to prevent evictions.

Build mass campaigns

But threats of eviction by councils and Housing Associations for bedroom tax arrears are still at an early stage. There are many things tenants can do to defeat the tax now. All tenants should know their rights and how they can disrupt the process of their own housing benefit being cut, but this must be supplemented by building mass campaigns to scrap the

bedroom tax for all. This guide briefly explains your rights as a tenant and gives suggestions on how to build an anti-bedroom tax campaign in your area.

We demand:

- **Scrap the bedroom tax and write-off all the debt**
- **Defend all those who cannot or will not pay**
- **No evictions for rent arrears due to the tax or austerity cuts. Build an anti-eviction army.**
- **End all cuts - tax the bankers and the billionaires not bedrooms**
- **For a programme of new council house building to meet social need**
- **Build a mass movement against austerity starting with a 24-hour general strike organised by the trade unions**



How do I set up a campaign?



Street meeting in Waltham Forest, east London photo Suzanne Beishon

Book a room in a community centre, school or local pub for a public meeting. Print some leaflets and go door-to-door in areas where there are lots of council or housing association homes. Put up posters in the local shops. Contact us if you would like a speaker or help with leaflets.

At many local meetings people have

come along ready to help organise. If this is the case ask for volunteers for a steering committee to organise the campaign.

Contact us for details of other local groups in your area. You can then come together to organise town-wide work – including organising mass lobbies of your council. See contact details above.

What happens now?

Everyone affected by the bedroom tax has been sent a letter by the council telling them by how much their housing benefit will be cut. Tenants can ask the council to look again at the decision. You need to do this in writing within one month of receiving the 'benefit decision notice' which says that your benefit is being cut.

If you are still not happy after the council has looked again, you can appeal the decision. Again, this should be done in writing within one month of receiving the council's response to your request for them to look again. This is free and you have a legal right to do it. Model appeal letters are available from us or from your local anti-bedroom tax campaign.

Longer than a month since you received your benefit decision? It is still worth writing a letter of appeal, explaining why you have not done so earlier (you have been ill, away, in distress, you

didn't realise you could appeal...).

While no guarantee for success, some common reasons for appeal include:

- The bedroom is less than 70 square feet. This means that, according to the 1985 Housing Act, it is a box-room and not suitable to use as a bedroom.
- Due to you or your partner/dependent's documented medical condition the other bedroom is used for therapeutic activities/medical equipment.
- You use the other bedroom for fostering purposes.
- Your children/dependents use the bedroom as part of the custody agreement.
- The use of the other bedroom is for regularly visiting family/guests.
- You have a very small kitchen, and the landlord has mistakenly designated your dining room as a bedroom.
- You use your other bedroom for storage of your possessions.

Should I apply for the "discretionary housing fund" for help?

Yes. This is a small pot of money that councils have to help tenants. You should apply regardless of whether you think you will get it. An application for a payment can be used as evidence that you have tried to gain access to money to help with the bedroom tax – this can also help delay eviction proceedings.

338%
increase in applications for discretionary housing payments since the bedroom tax was introduced



photo Jim Halfpenny

Should I move to the private sector?



In general, no. This is even more expensive than most council or Housing Association properties, tenancies are usually short-term and insecure, and housing is often of poor quality.

If you genuinely want to move to a smaller council or Housing Association

home ask your landlord to put you on a list.

However, councils and HAs simply don't have the smaller properties available to house people affected by the bedroom tax. For the vast majority it's a case of Can't Pay - Will Stay.

Should I take out a Direct Debit to the council or social landlord?

No. A Direct Debit allows the council to increase the money it takes from your account to cover your bedroom tax and you will have less money for food, bills, etc.

19%
increase in debt of tenants reported by one Housing Association



More people will struggle with the cost of living because of the bedroom tax and other welfare cuts

Q&A: BEDROOM TAX

The Socialist will be carrying regular articles on the bedroom tax. Subscribe via website. Send us your stories to: editors@socialistparty.org.uk

Get in touch for campaign resources including leaflets and posters: info@socialistparty.org.uk 020 8988 8777

How do we fight this?

Join the anti-bedroom tax campaign today. Massive pressure must be put on councils and Housing Associations to write off all debt arising from the bedroom tax.

We will continue to lobby, protest and demonstrate to demand the politicians act to stop these attacks on the poorest.

This is a fight we can win. If we stick together we can defeat the bedroom tax, all the cuts and bring down this rotten government of the rich.

See socialistparty.org.uk for regular reports and updates on the anti-bedroom tax campaigns



Campaigning against the bedroom tax in Pease photo Matt Carey

What should I do if I get a letter saying my landlord is going to take me to court?

If you are threatened with a court hearing get in touch with us or the local anti-bedroom tax campaign immediately. We can give you advice but also, if you wish, organise protests against court action being taken. This is the best way to prevent evictions.

During the poll tax battle mass protests at courts hearing poll tax cases helped make the court system unworkable. If councils try to take tenants to court we need to mobilise a similar movement against evictions.

In other words, a request for an eviction by a landlord is not a straightforward process and can be stalled or overturned. The campaign can and will ensure that no one goes to court on their own. We will seek legal advice to give guidance and support for you



as well.

Above all, even if an eviction order was granted anti-bedroom tax campaigners would mobilise to physically prevent bailiffs from removing a tenant from their home as a result of being unable to pay the bedroom tax.

Will I be evicted?

Court proceedings: At a certain point court proceedings can be used for debt recovery. However, councils and Housing Associations almost always have to do a number of things before they can take you to court.

They have to:

- Contact you and try to reach an agreement with you to repay the debt gradually. There is a rent arrears protocol which they are expected to follow.
- Help you with housing benefit problems if you are under 18 or 'vulnerable'
- Agree not to start court proceedings if you keep to an agreement to repay the debt gradually
- If they do decide to take you to court they have to give you written notice of their intention to do so prior to any court hearing
- Once the period of the notice has expired the court then has to decide if the landlord has 'grounds for possession'
- Only then can they take you to court to try and obtain a 'possession order'
- If it is granted you are sent a written copy of a 'defence form' which you have 14 days to fill out.
- The case then goes to court. It is important that you attend the court and put your side of the case. Remember to take evidence with you to help your case, the letters you have written to the landlord, the steps you have taken to cover the reduction in your housing benefit, etc. Whatever happens attend the court hearing!
- At the court hearing the judge needs to con-

sider whether a ground for possession has been satisfied, is it 'reasonable' to grant a possession order? Is it 'proportionate' to grant a possession order?

In most cases the courts will follow the procedure above. This will be the case for all 'secure tenants'. If you are a council tenant you will have a secure tenancy (except for a very few new council tenants). If your property used to be council, but has been transferred to a Housing Association, you may still have a secure tenancy.

However, most Housing Association tenants have 'assured tenancies' which give you fewer rights than secure tenancies. Most assured tenants threatened with eviction will be treated like secure tenants in court.

Some Housing Associations have occasionally used something called 'Ground 8' in the courts against assured tenants. This takes away the judge's discretion and makes a possession order virtually automatic if you have eight weeks or more of arrears (for 100% of the rent so that is at least 32 weeks of bedroom tax arrears). Take advice urgently if they try to evict on Ground 8.

If you are a housing association tenant a first step for your campaign should be a lobby of the Housing Association board demanding that they join the eleven Housing Associations that have already pledged to rule out using Ground 8.

Remember: It costs an average of £6,000 to evict someone. That is more than 200 weeks of bedroom tax rent arrears. For this reason, and also because it would be so unpopular, councils and Housing Associations are hesitating to take this road, a mass campaign can stop them from doing so.

What happens if I can't or won't pay the bedroom tax?

Letters will be sent telling you that you are in rent arrears. Don't ignore these letters – contact the council and your local Welfare Rights team and Citizens Advice Bureau, community legal teams, etc. Even if you can't access legal advice, don't ignore the letters, write to your landlord and tell them you can't pay and the reasons why.

If you can't get an appointment, or they give you bad advice (ie telling you that you just 'have to pay') make sure you get in touch with your local anti-bedroom tax campaign.

Keep all letters you are sent, and copies of any replies you send to your landlord. These can be very important if you have to argue your case in court.

Councils and Housing Associations can also try for a deduction of benefit for rent arrears. There is a standard



One of many mass burnings of poll tax bills in the 1990s. 18 million people refused to pay and organised a huge campaign - the tax was defeated photo Socialist Party

practice of a deduction for rent arrears of around £3.65 a week from benefit.

We demand all bedroom tax debt be written off and that the Con-Dem government bails out councils who refuse to implement it, including refusing to chase arrears that arise from austerity cuts.

What can my landlord do to pressurise me to pay bedroom tax?

Initially, councils and Housing Associations are phoning, writing to and visiting tenants who cannot pay all their rent as a result of the deductions from their housing benefit. If your landlord arranges a visit to your home, ask other anti-bedroom tax campaigners to come round and support you.

Landlords are hoping to apply pressure on tenants to make a payment arrangement to prevent a big loss in rental income. Social landlords need to understand that people cannot pay the bedroom tax – and we are not the enemy. They should stand by their tenants and demand the scrapping of the bedroom tax.

It is worthwhile explaining to your landlord why you cannot pay the bedroom tax, that your income and expenditure leaves no room for the



bedroom tax to be paid. It may be worthwhile putting this in writing to your landlord (make sure to keep a copy of the letter). This explanation can help later on if the landlord attempts to push for an eviction.



What can councils do?

Councils can refuse to implement the bedroom tax and demand that all Housing Associations in their area do the same thing. We call on councils to:

- Refuse to implement the bedroom tax!
- Use their borrowing powers and any reserves to assist tenants while working with the campaign to build a mass movement to defeat the tax.
- Make a clear pledge not to evict any tenant in arrears due to the bedroom tax or as a result of austerity.
- Demand that Housing Associations in the area (which often have councillors on their boards) pledge never to use Ground 8 to force through evictions, and pledge not to evict tenants for bedroom tax arrears or other arrears as a result of austerity.
- Write off bedroom tax arrears and/or 're-designate' properties as having fewer bedrooms to prevent the effects of the bedroom tax.
- A number of councils and Housing Associations have carried out some of these measures. Nine councils – mainly in areas where bedroom tax campaigns are strong – have promised no evictions for a year and several landlords – including Leeds council – have promised to re-designate homes.

These partial measures show campaigning works, but we need to keep the pressure on councils to do more. Labour claim to oppose the bedroom tax, yet Labour councils are implementing it. If they all refused to do so the tax would be unworkable.

Join the Socialists!



photo Senan

Anti-bedroom tax campaigners should stand for the council

Labour claims to oppose the bedroom tax but Labour councils are implementing it, and Labour nationally have refused to pledge to repeal it if they win the general election. We need councillors who will really stand up for us.

Next May the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition will be bringing together campaigners against cuts to stand as many anti-cuts candidates as possible in the local elections. Standing candidates in the local elections is an effective way of building the campaign against councillors that are implementing the bedroom tax.



The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is an electoral alliance that stands candidates against all cuts and privatisation. It involves the RMT transport workers' union, leading members of other trade unions including the PCS, NUT and POA and socialist organisations including the Socialist Party.

www.tusc.org.uk

The bedroom tax is only one attack in the blizzard of cuts bombarding working class people. Reductions in council tax benefits will force more people onto the breadline in Foodbank Britain.

But while most of us tighten our belts a few households and families are gorging on a feast of riches. The combined wealth of Britain's richest 1,000 people increased by almost 5% to £414 billion in 2012! Those households and major corporations have all

been given a generous tax cut – helping them to get even richer. No question – this is a government for the millionaires not the millions.

But potentially we have the strength of millions to stop them! The bedroom tax makes it clearer than ever – the trade union movement must urgently set the date for a 24-hour general strike against austerity.

This would be the most effective way of channelling the burning anger at the government into

a movement capable of stopping the cuts.

If you agree with us – join the socialists! We stand for a different way of running things – where the wealth of society is used to provide people with the things we need – decent homes, jobs, a good education and NHS.

We want a society for the 99% not the 1%. That is why we stand for a socialist alternative which is based on a democratic plan of production to meet the needs of all.

What the Socialist Party stands 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, pay, 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!