



Let's organise...

AN AUTUMN OF ACTION AGAINST AUSTERITY

We say:

- Call a 24-hour general strike
- New mass workers' party needed

Alec Thraves
Swansea Trades Union Council

In the last 12 months the destruction of the NHS, the proposed privatisation of Royal Mail, the disappearance of vital council services in whole swathes of the country, together with the scandals of blacklisting and zero-hour contracts, have contributed to a seething anger which is reflected even in the most conservative of union conferences, the Trades Union Congress.

There was jubilation at last year's TUC, when the motion from the Prison Officers' Association calling on the General Council to investigate the practicalities of a general strike was overwhelmingly carried.

However, the General Council has since done zilch to turn this into action. Almost as soon as the motion was passed, the more right-wing trade union leaders began to pour scorn on the idea.

This includes Unison general secretary Dave Prentis. But even this trade union tortoise has now publicly demanded coordinated strikes against low pay!

Bank of England board member Prentis hasn't suddenly become a socialist fighter. He is obviously feeling the pressure from his members - public sector workers who've

suffered a four-year pay freeze and seen hundreds of thousands of their workmates lose their jobs.

The obvious support for the idea of a 24-hour general strike was reflected at the packed National Shop Stewards Network rally at the start of this year's TUC.

The defeat for the Tory warmongers over intervention in Syria has shown up the weakness of the millionaires' coalition. There is a growing feeling now that united industrial action could inflict a bloody defeat on them.

If there was any sort of opposition from Labour then this coalition wouldn't limp through to 2015. But Labour has revealed more than ever which class it serves.

The obviously false charges against Unite in Falkirk have been used by the Labour hierarchy as a pretext to remove the residual influence of the trade unions within the party.

Ed Miliband, arrogantly brushing aside the leaders of the trade union movement, says they are proceeding with the special conference for this purpose.

But the party hierarchy has been forced to admit, as were the police to whom they handed the accusations, there was no wrongdoing by Unite! There couldn't be a clearer signal of Labour's pride in slapping down the organised working class to



National Shop Stewards Network supporters lobby the TUC to call a general strike photo A Hill

appease its big business friends.

All remaining Labour-supporting unions should boycott Miliband's conference and instead use the occasion to begin working with other

trade unionists, like the RMT and the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) to create a new, mass working class party where trade unionists and socialist policies are

welcomed with open arms and not treated with contempt.

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Disaffiliate from pro-capitalist Labour

In a speech at the 2013 congress of the TUC, PCS president Janice Godrich set out the reality of Austerity Britain: 13 million people live in poverty, up by a million since the Coalition came to power; 1.8 million families are on housing waiting lists; half a million people are now reliant on food banks; one million workers are languishing on zero-hour contracts; 2.5 million are unemployed and 6.8 million more people are looking for more work.

This is the context for a key debate at the TUC congress – the question of coordinated action against austerity and the general strike – and the reason why the right-wing trade union leadership cannot smother it.

Ed Miliband's speech at the TUC has brought another issue to the fore – the relationship between the unions and Labour. It follows a summer which has seen debate on the issue rumble on, sparked by the Falkirk dispute which saw Labour accuse Unite, Britain's biggest union and Labour's biggest backer, of unfairly attempting to influence the outcome of the selection process.

No case of wrongdoing was found against Unite either by the police or by an internal inquiry. But that did not stop Miliband launching a terminal attack on the trade union bloc affiliation to the Labour Party, dancing, as he does, to the Tories' and big business' tune. He wants individual trade unionists to 'opt-in' to supporting Labour.

This is to be debated at a special Labour conference in the spring.

The Falkirk affair was not just an outrageous attack on the unions. Ending trade unions' collective voice within the Labour Party represents the conclusion of the political transformation of Labour from a party based on workers but with a pro-capitalist leadership, into an out and out pro-big business party.

Trade union affiliation (when democratically exercised by union members) enshrined the ability of the working class through the unions to control its political representatives.

While Labour will undoubtedly miss the significant amounts of money it receives from the unions – the GMB for example is to cut its affiliation from £1.2 million to £150,000 – the proposals pose a much more fundamental question: how can the working class control its political representatives? How can workers, through the unions, their main organisations, have a collective political voice?

The trade unions still have a 49% share of the Labour conference vote (down from 90%). However, changes have meant conferences no longer have any say over party policy. But Miliband is under pressure from the Tories and the Blairites to remove even these vestiges of the affiliated trade unions' collective voice within the party.

“Radicalism”

In a recent article left-wing writer Owen Jones calls on Labour to dramatically change its programme and to provide “more radicalism” and “bread-and-butter socialism”. But he sets out no mechanism by which the Labour leadership can be forced to change course from its current position – which is to maintain the Con-Dems' devastating cuts if Labour comes to power after the 2015 general election.

In the past trade union branches would send delegates to constituency Labour parties, which were a forum to debate policy and influence national decisions.

The introduction of ‘one member one vote’ in 1994 and other measures overturned this democratic structure. Since then party membership has fallen dramatically, particularly following the Labour government's invasion of Iraq, but contributed to by Labour's introduction of tuition fees, initiation of privatisation in the NHS and maintenance of the anti-trade union laws.

Unite at least had a plan of recruiting thousands to the Labour party in order to try and reclaim it for the working class. But the union's strategy was seriously challenged

when the small number of Labour councillors who defied the local leaderships and voted against cuts were suspended or expelled from Labour groups and the party. In Falkirk this strategy of Unite came across a further barrier.

The Socialist Party believes that the Labour Party cannot be reclaimed. New Labour has closed all the democratic avenues that once existed. We argue that a new mass workers' party is needed to give workers a collective political voice.

Unfortunately, despite all the abuse from Labour leaders towards the unions, the Unite leadership has not come out clearly against Miliband's attempts to destroy the remnants of a collective voice for the trade union movement. However, Unite leader Len McCluskey was correct when he recently said: “The relationship that we have with the Labour Party is on a collective basis. That's what trade unions operate on – collectivism – and it's important that people don't try to [change] collectivism to individualism”.

Len needs to draw the necessary conclusions from this and lead his union in opposition to Miliband. The members of affiliated unions should be allowed to debate the question of disaffiliation and all trade unionists should debate how the political funds are used. Non-political trade unionism is not the answer.

Len is not the only leader of an affiliated union to react to Miliband's attack. GMB general secretary Paul Kenny responded to the right-wing press, smashing the idea that it is somehow undemocratic for the unions to affiliate to Labour. He correctly made the point that trade unions have many more members than all the main political parties put together!

Miliband has attempted to paint the proposed move to individual affiliations as a beautiful flowering of democracy within the Labour party. But it is a deliberate step to remove trade union influence inside the party.

Given the degree to which political parties are discredited and distrusted most people

will struggle to share Miliband's mass membership vision for his party. According to the latest British Social Attitudes survey more people are saying they are interested in politics while scepticism towards parties has also increased. Only 18% said they trusted the government to regularly place the country's needs above their own party's interests.

Support

One indication of support for building a workers' political voice within the affiliated unions came at the 2012 manufacturing conference of the GMB. Socialist Party member Tony Mulhearn received a standing ovation when he addressed the members. In his speech he castigated Labour for offering no alternative to Tory cuts and said: “If they are not prepared to fight to defend our class with the same determination that Cameron and Osborne defend their class then the trade unions should break the link and set about creating a genuine party of the working class.”

“Already candidates standing on the no-cuts platform of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition are making their mark in elections. I stood in the Liverpool mayoral campaign, and won nearly 5,000 votes, coming ahead of the Tories and Ukip.”

“Such a party could be dedicated to defending the gains established in the post war period, repealing trade union laws and fighting for the establishment of a just civilised socialist society where everyone could share in the fabulous wealth currently in the hands of the top 1%.”

All Miliband's talk of a ‘different vision’, of ‘one nation’ and about ‘working people’ cannot hide the fact that Labour is committed to maintaining the capitalist system which means anti-working class policies.

Only fundamental change to how society is run in a socialist direction and the building of mass organisations of the working class to make that change can bring relief from this misery.

TUC congress dominated by questions of joint action and links to Labour Party

Neil Cafferky

“Your policies seem contradictory and they're confusing people. Can we get a clear answer: are you for or against austerity?” This question put by PCS president Janice Godrich to Labour leader Ed Miliband garnered the biggest applause at the TUC congress so far.

Increasing the confusion, Miliband replied that he was opposed to the coalition's austerity programme but confirmed that Labour would stick to Tory spending limits in order to appear “credible”.

The congress has been dominated by two questions – one is coordinated action in the autumn and two is the question of the trade unions' relationship to the Labour Party in the light of events in Falkirk.

The congress began with the NSSN lobby which attracted hundreds of trade union reps from around the country to push the idea of general strike action.

This was reflected in the halls of the congress in the debate around motion 54, put by the transport union RMT, on fighting austerity. This included the idea of coordinated action.

In a rousing speech, RMT general secretary Bob Crow made the case for a general strike as a part of this strategy, asking: “if the FBU are out, if the NUT are out and if the PCS are



On the NSSN lobby at the beginning of the congress photo Alison Hill

out, then why can't we all be out?”

In the debate, the division between left and right was clearly seen. Mary Bousted from the teaching union ATL, for example, called the idea of a general strike ‘daft’. She said: “There's more chance of the Con-Dems changing their austerity policies than there is of the TUC or-

ganising general strike action.”

Janice Godrich rejected this by saying that general strike action was not daft or deluded but determined. PCS vice-president John McNally said that there should be no place in the trade union movement for that kind of cynicism. In his contribution supporting a motion by Unison

general secretary David Prentice on anti-austerity campaigning, John raised the need for a coordinated pay claim across the public sector, backed up by coordinated strike action if necessary.

PCS delegate Lee Vernon, in the discussion on organising young workers, received big applause

when he said that when unions organise and fight they are more attractive to young members and that the trade unions should work closely with organisations like Youth Fight for Jobs to improve the lives of young workers.

In his speech Ed Miliband made passing reference to the dispute with Unite around the events in Falkirk. But it was those events that dominated discussions on the sidelines of the conference.

The job of one of the suspended Labour Party members, Stevie Deans, is under threat. There has been discussion about possible strike action in defence of his job at the Grangemouth oil refinery.

The Socialist Party leaflet on the trade unions and the Labour Party has had a fantastic reception with many delegates agreeing with our position.

It appears from the fringe meetings that Unite's position is hardening against Miliband's attacks on collectivism.

In one fringe meeting, Jennie Formby, Unite's national political officer, said that collectivism is “non-negotiable”. The Socialist Party leaflet made clear that if Miliband's proposals do go through unions should: “break the link with New Labour and form a new worker-based party which would reflect union policies and keep the collective strength of workers' organisations.”

The government's Alice in Wongaland recovery

Alistair Tice

Following a series of improved economic data and forecasts over summer, Tory Chancellor George Osborne announced on 9 September that Britain's economy was "turning the corner". He claimed that signs of economic recovery in the last six months vindicated his fiscal (austerity) policies and that "those in favour of Plan B have lost the argument."

Such optimism follows a "Boom Britain" headline last month in the London Evening Standard which pointed to "surging manufacturing output, strong car sales, rising property prices and record retail figures".

Well, there's certainly no economic recovery for the majority of us. According to the Trade Union Congress, average pay has fallen 6.3% in real terms over the last five years. Working 40 hours a week, the average worker is over £30 a week worse off after inflation than in 2008. One million have been unemployed for over a year, 1.5 million part-time workers want full-time work and over a million are on zero-hours contracts.

Recovery for who?

It's not surprising then that despite the Tory propaganda most people don't feel better off. A YouGov poll last month found that only 10% of people thought that economic improvement had benefitted people on middle and lower incomes. 70% thought it had not.

So what is happening in the economy? Is there a recovery or not? After revised GDP figures, Britain apparently avoided a 'triple-dip' recession and has recorded 0.3% and 0.7% growth in the first two quarters of this year, with forecasts of 0.9% for the third quarter. Is that enough growth to record a dip?

One commentator has described the 'recovery' as "Alice in Wongaland" because of the 70% rise in payday loans over the last year. There are now one million families taking out such loans every month. And half a million people have gone



Osborne claims the economy has turned a corner - into a dead end?

to food banks in the last year.

The head of market analysis at a foreign exchange firm said: "This growth is the result of debt-fuelled consumer spending, underpinned by a drop in the savings ratio and higher house prices." Indeed, fuelled by the government's Funding for Lending and Help to Buy schemes, there are fears of a new housing bubble with prices rising over 5% in the last year.

Reality

Pointing to manufacturing output in June, July and August's Purchasing Managers Index reaching a two and a half year high, the Con-Dems claim that the economic recovery is broad-based and sustainable.

Let's put these figures in perspec-

tive. Britain's GDP is still 2.9% below its peak before the recession. Manufacturing output is still 10% below its 2008 level.

Business investment last year was 10% below 2010. Despite a 25% fall in sterling making British exports cheaper, July's trade deficit doubled to £3.1 billion with exports to the EU flat and to the rest of the world falling.

Tory hopes of economic recovery are likely to be dashed against the continued fall in real living standards as Osborne's back-loaded cuts hit even harder and "the slowdown in the emerging markets [China, India, Brazil], the possibility of further turbulence in the eurozone, and the risk that instability in the Middle East will push up oil prices" (Osborne's own words!).

Zero faith in Labour on zero-hours

Helen Pattison

East London Socialist Party

New research by Unite the Union has found that as many as 5.5 million workers could be on zero-hour contracts.

This is a scandal and a big increase from the 250,000 suggested by the Office for National Statistics survey in July. That figure was believed to be accurate until a week later when it was revealed that Sports Direct alone employed 20,000 people on the contracts. Half of all workers under 30 are thought to be affected.

Ed Miliband travelled all the way to TUC congress on 10 September to say: "we must stop flexibility being used as the excuse for exploitation".

This just shows what hypocrites he

and the Labour Party are. They have only now chosen to speak out against the controversial contracts which were also widely used under the last Labour government. And Newham all-Labour council employs 546 people on zero-hours contracts. Labour-controlled councils in Tower Hamlets, Ealing, Brent, Merton and Hounslow, are also using them.

Labour's plans to guarantee set hours unless workers opt-out will have little impact. Un-unionised workers who don't want to opt-out will be shown the door by bullying bosses.

Many practices that are illegal go on in un-organised workplaces - workers are forced to work without a break, are underpaid for the hours they work and essentially fired for trying to join trade unions by having

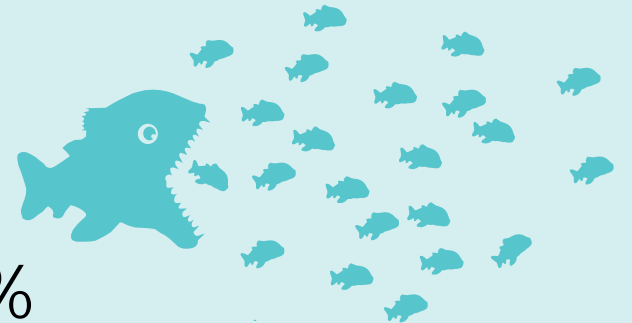
their hours cut to nothing.

Youth Fight for Jobs, through the Sick Of Your Boss? initiative, is helping young workers to organise in their workplaces and build the trade unions to stop practices like these.

We can't rely on the Labour Party to come to our rescue. The only way to end zero-hour contracts, to end wages less than the cost of living and stop soaring unemployment and underemployment is for the trade unions to organise a united fight-back. Strike action by members of the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union brought about the scrapping of zero-hour contracts at Hovis in Wigan.

We need a united effort to organise young workers on zero-hours contracts, but also against all the cuts and attacks on workers' rights.

Their homes...



27%

of parents with children aged 21 to 40 still have at least one adult child living at home, according to research by the National Housing Federation (NHF). Unsurprisingly, two thirds say this is because of the price of housing. 23% say the situation causes them stress.

80%

of market value now counts as 'affordable' rent. Tory Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, has introduced policy which forces councils in the capital to abide by this upper limit provided by the government, overriding opposition on the London Assembly from those who recognise that this means pricing all but the richest out of London.

10 year

high in the number of families being put into B&B accommodation. At the end of June 2,090 families were living in B&Bs for temporary accommodation while councils tried to house them. This is an 8% increase on the same time last year.

B&Bs are supposed to be used only as emergency accommodation and for a short period but a third of the families had been there for longer than six weeks.

5%

rise in house prices in the last year. The average cost of buying a house in England and Wales is now £164,000.

£105m

is how much you'd have to pay to get your hands on what has been called "arguably the best private house to become available in prime central London in the past quarter of a century." The mansion, located in central London but away from any roads or public walkways, includes six bedrooms, five bathrooms, seven reception rooms, a 48-foot drawing room and over half an acre of land.

65

new homes were started or acquired by councils using money from Right to Buy sales from April to June 2013. That's even fewer than the 844 new homes built in the entire preceding year and is despite £129 million worth of sales under the scheme.

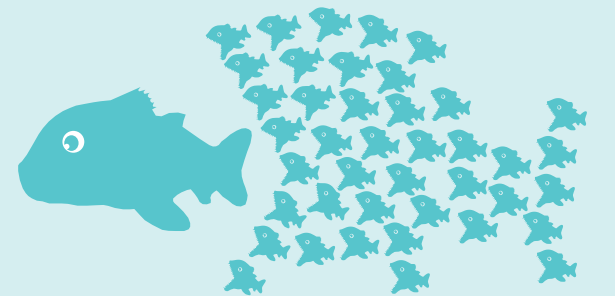
The relaunch of Right to Buy, where social tenants can buy their properties at a discount of up to £75,000 (increased to £100,000 in London after an initial low take-up), was supposed to be a solution to the housing crisis. Unlike under Margaret Thatcher's original scheme, the income from sales is now allowed to fund the building of new homes.

But clearly that doesn't guarantee building happens.

£21,000

was claimed for a move to a new flat by Liberal Democrat MP for Cardiff Central Jenny Willott over the 2012-2013 period. It would be nice for us all to have that sort of help with the cost of moving house - unfortunately the rest of us have to pay for it out of our existing income - which for MPs isn't exactly small. Willott had the highest expenses claim of any Welsh MP with a grand total of £57,384.55.

...& Ours



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



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What we saw



Teaching unions prepare for campaign of autumn strikes

Martin Powell-Davies
Member of the NUT national executive

Teaching unions NUT and NASUWT have confirmed the dates of regional strike action. On Tuesday 1 October there will be strike action in the Eastern, East Midlands, West Midlands, Yorkshire and Humber-side regions and on Thursday 17 October, strike action in North East, London, South East and South West regions.

A decision as to whether to include Wales in the regional action is still to be finalised.

A one-day national strike is scheduled before the end of the autumn term, likely to be towards the end of November.

Now every school rep and Local Association [NUT branch] needs to

urgently get this news out to members and build for the firmest action possible on the two regional strike days.

As I have consistently argued on the executive ever since Education Secretary Gove announced his performance-pay attacks back in December, the intolerable pressures in most schools mean that teachers will overwhelmingly support a clear call from their unions to take action.

Build on success

The solid strike across the North West on 27 June confirmed that. Now NUT and NASUWT members in the rest of England have their chance to build on that success in the two regional strike days in October.

We must then aim for a complete shutdown of schools - and more besides if we can persuade other un-

ions to join with us - when we take national strike action in November.

We must also make clear to Gove, and to teachers, that this time we're not just going to make a protest and then step back. If Gove refuses to retreat, we have to announce a further calendar of action for 2014, perhaps stepping up to a two-day national strike.

The harsh reality of Gove's performance-pay regime may quickly be brought home when dates start being set for appraisal review meetings. Some teachers will again be under pressure to accept objectives linked to unachievable targets. Under some pay policies, 'failure' could mean no pay progression in 2014.

We need to encourage staff to collectively refuse both unacceptable targets and unacceptable pay policies. If we end up trying to defend

teachers just through individual pay appeals, we'll collapse under a mountain of casework. That's why some Associations, including my own in Lewisham, are preparing for sustained local action over new pay policies, alongside the calendar of national action.

With a bold plan of action, reaching out to parents too, we can defeat this divided government.

- Saturday 14 September: NUT/NASUWT rallies for education, 11am in London and Nottingham.
- Saturday 21 September: NUT/NASUWT rallies for education, 11am in Cambridge and Exeter.

- **Monday 30 September: Closing date for nominations for NUT national officers. Martin is seeking nominations to stand for NUT vice-president. For more information see: electmartin1.blogspot.com**

Fighting prison privatisation

Iain Dalton

Around 100 prison officers' union POA members at HMP Leeds held a gate meeting on 5 September, to discuss the government announcement about four prisons closing by the end of the financial year. The four prisons are Northallerton, Blundeston, Dorchester and Reading.

As Richard Chamberlain, Leeds POA branch chair, pointed out when he introduced the meeting, these closures will worsen the growing problem of overcrowding.

Most prisons are operating way above their Certified Normal Accommodation (CNA), for example Leeds has a CNA of 826, but as of February 2013 had an average population of 1,155.

The prison population has increased from 43,000 in 1993 to over 86,000 in 2013 while staffing levels have remained static.

Leeds is being sent 'overflow' prisoners from the recently privatised HMP Birmingham. Birmingham had been similarly overcrowded, although now it is run by the private sector, its population has been reduced down to its CNA so as not to incur hefty penalty charges.

The mood of staff was very angry, with discussions about what kind of action POA members could take to resist these attacks, which the branch and the union as a whole will no doubt be discussing further.

POA members also walked out to hold protest meetings at Blundeston in Suffolk, Liverpool, Lancaster Farms, Frankland, Risley and many more prisons across the country.

Housing workers strike again



The lively picket line in Chalk Farm photo Arti Dillon

Chris Newby and Helen Pattison

One Housing Group (OHG) workers blowing vuvuzelas and whistles and waving Unite flags and placards made sure that no-one in Chalk Farm, north London, was unaware of their latest five day strike. Add Unite's giant inflatable rat and the union sound system and the picket line really was unmissable.

OHG workers also held picket lines in Wandsworth, south London, Enfield and Caledonian Road, north London.

The strike was called as management refused to back down over their plans to slash frontline workers' wages by up to 25%, meaning some workers losing up to £8,000.

Unite housing workers' branch LE1111 has seen membership grow

among OHG workers as a result of the fighting stand taken by the union. This was reflected by an increased number of workers out on strike and an increased determination to stop management's attacks.

Why does a not-for-profit organisation, which has huge reserves, is making money and has funding secured for years to come, cut wages by £8,000? The answer is that the bosses don't care about the service. They only care about bonuses and their own pay packets.

Despite a real downpour on the last strike day the mood was not dampened. One striker who was preparing for future action said they would probably have to have picket lines in the snow.

The picket line was also visited by many trade unionists and other supporters bringing messages of

support. These included Steve Hedley, assistant general secretary of the RMT, who raised the desperate need for a new mass workers' party.

This was met by loud applause, as were the comments of Helen Pattison, Sick of Your Boss campaign organiser, when she spoke of the campaign against zero-hour contracts.

Rob Williams, bringing a message of support from the National Shop Stewards Network, also received loud cheers when he spoke about the need for a one-day general strike.

The message from this latest set of strikes, this is now the eleventh strike day, is that the workers backed up by their union are even more determined to win this dispute and stop these massive attacks going through.

Yorkshire Ambulance: The battle against union derecognition

Leeds Socialist Party

Around 40 Unite members and supporters protested outside Yorkshire Ambulance Service (YAS) headquarters near Wakefield on 3 September. The protest, outside an extraordinary board meeting of the trust, demanded the re-recognition of Unite as well as full training of

Emergency Care Assistants (ECA) to the level of technicians with the correct rate of pay for that job.

Debbie Wilkinson, YAS Unite branch secretary explained that: "The Trust say they derecognised us because we weren't constructive during the initial stages of the review". In other words Unite didn't roll over and accept the imposition of staff who have only been through a few weeks'

training to crew ambulances instead of technicians or paramedics with much longer training periods.

ECA's earn less than technicians and paramedics. This attack on patient safety as well as the jobs of ambulance service staff is part of a £46 million package of cuts.

Debbie also pointed to the irony of the Trust derecognising Unite for raising concerns over patient

safety at around the same time as the Francis report into Mid Staffs NHS Trust advocated that NHS staff should do just that!

The battle continues in YAS NHS Trust with a further protest organised for 24 September at 8.30am outside Cutler's Hall, Church Street, Sheffield, S1 1HG. The branch can also be followed on twitter @UniteYASmembers.

In brief

Blacklisting

The TUC has called a day of action against blacklisting on 20 November. They are planning a lobby of Parliament, the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly as well as a number of other protests. The scandal of blacklisting in the construction and offshore oil industries has now been comprehensively exposed and the idea of a day of action is a good one. But it would be much better if the day of action was linked to united strike action against this major attack on workers' livelihoods.

In it together?

Unison, GMB and Unite trade unions at Warrington Council have challenged proposals for a senior management restructure. This is being considered at a council meeting on 9 September. The proposals mean pay increases of up to £10,275 a year for some of the senior managers (between 4% and 13%.) This is far above the 1% national pay award for everyone else.

The council has attempted to justify this on the grounds that senior managers have taken on more responsibility. But the trade unions have pointed out that staff cuts have meant the whole workforce has taken on more responsibilities. The unions have organised a protest at the council meeting.

Beer supply threat

Workers at KNDL delivery company are on a 24-hour strike on 11-12 September. 85% of workers voted to strike over the company's plans to reorganise 29 depots into three super hubs, threatening jobs. The strike will disrupt deliveries to many pubs, clubs and hotels. The workers' union Unite is warning of further action if the company continues to refuse to negotiate.

School strike

Support staff, members of GMB and Unison, at an inner city school in Leicester took strike action on 4 September against plans to halve the number of teaching assistants (TAs).

Last term there were three days of strike action by teachers in the NUT at Uplands junior school. These were over grievances against the headteacher and management and included opposition to the cuts in the numbers of TAs. Cuts in support staff are taking place at schools across the country. The workers at Uplands have shown that it is possible to fight. A united struggle can win!

Steve Score

City Link

RMT members working for transport company City Link have voted by nine to one for strike action against the company's plans to attack working conditions. City Link was sold off this year by Rentokil Initial to private equity group Better Capital who certainly seem to be trying to live up to their name. The RMT is considering the next stage.

Website

For more industrial and trade union news see www.socialistparty.org.uk

NSSN calls for mass anti-cuts action

Nick Chaffey
Socialist Party southern region secretary

Boiling anger at austerity is pointing towards an autumn of important battles and the ever-growing call for the TUC to name the date for a 24-hour general strike. This will be the conclusion of hundreds of trade union activists who attended the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) rally and lobby at the TUC on 8 September.

Opening the rally NSSN national secretary Linda Taaffe said: "A 24-hour coordinated strike is the clearest way to send a message to the government. It's no good waiting for Labour. The NSSN calls on the TUC and the trade unions to build a mighty force that can make Cameron retreat."

"The NSSN rally" said PCS president Janice Godrich, "has become a regular event at the TUC, setting the tone and a fighting agenda to turn words into action this year."

It was a rally that brought together TUC delegates and up to 300 activists to hear contributions from members of the TUC general council, Bob Crow, union general secretaries Steve Gillan for the POA, Ronnie Draper from the bakers' union BFAWU and Ian Lawrence from NAPo the probation officers, with activists from many unions and campaigns.

There was no doubt that with the attacks raining down, with battles



Lobbying the TUC after the NSSN rally photo Alison Hill

unfolding, the task facing supporters of the NSSN was to turn the anger into action. Speaker after speaker listed the pain bought to workers and their communities from the Con-Dem posh boys while their rich friends benefitted.

Striking One Housing Unite member Candy slammed her employers: "Massive profits are on the rise, £4 million in 2011, to £35 million in 2013 for this London housing provider while £8,000 cuts are made to frontline workers' pay."

Helen Pattison from Youth Fight for Jobs was one of many to highlight the toxic effect of zero-hour contracts facing up to 5.5 million workers. "I haven't spoken to anyone who isn't sick of your boss. From one week to the next you don't know your hours and how you will pay your rent."

Those in the leadership of the TUC who have opposed the demands of last year's TUC delegates for a 24-hour general strike have offered the prospect of an elected Labour government as a way out. But who can wait in the face of these cuts and what will change if Labour are committed to austerity of their own?

Bob Crow raised the need to challenge Ukip and the Tories' right-wing anti-EU demagoguery with a clear stand against the bosses' EU. He

called for support for the 'No2EU - Yes to Workers' Rights' European election platform.

Other speakers, including Ronnie Draper, raised the need for a new workers' party, while others spoke in support of the need to build a socialist alternative through the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition.

In the key battleground of the NHS, Len Hockey, Unison rep from Whipps Cross Hospital, speaking in a personal capacity, brought news of their fight: "Our union branch chair has been attacked by management, health bosses have announced the need for 'turnaround measures' and Price Waterhouse Cooper consultants have been bought in with no experience of the NHS."

Members have made the link between the three events. We are taking the lead, our public meeting was attended by over 100, with two demos planned for 16 and 21 September."

Prison officers held gate protests last week over closures and overcrowding. "Since 1994 we have not been allowed to take lawful action.

Our mantra is if our members want to take action, we will. I was proud to stand with brave prison officers outside prisons on unofficial action. They couldn't stop it and have taken no action against us," reported POA general secretary Steve Gillan.

Probation officers are on the verge of national strike action for the first time in their history. Napo general secretary Ian Lawrence explained: "Con-Dem minister Grayling wants to sell off efficient services that turn around the lives of thousands of people. He thinks we are ripe for profit."

We are moving increasingly towards industrial action, not on our own but with members of the POA, PCS and Unison in the probation service."

Dave Smith from the rank and file Blacklist Support Group announced their campaign's recent victory with the reinstatement of Unite member Frank Morris at the Crossrail site in London. "Thanks to the NSSN and everyone who has supported us. This is an historic victory for the unions."

In every contribution the demand for the TUC to provide leadership

In every contribution the demand for the TUC to provide leadership and act boldly was raised

and act boldly was raised. Bob Crow received a standing ovation for his call, "to start after leaving here to organise a general strike, let's put a date down and go out and do it!"

With ongoing national action in the PCS, teachers planning strikes, the FBU voting by 78% for national strike action and CWU members in Royal Mail balloting against the effects of privatisation, an army is being prepared for action.

Inactivity of TUC

Ending the rally before leaving to lobby the TUC delegates arriving in Bournemouth, Rob Williams from the NSSN challenged the inactivity of the TUC. "They say a week is a long time in politics, we've had fifty-two weeks waiting for the TUC to act. How is it possible for that resolution to be left on the table when cuts have been deeper than ever?"

Rob railed at the injustices of mass redundancies in the public sector, the pay freeze, bedroom tax, loan sharks, food banks and the implosion of the NHS, often to pay the debts of PFI vultures: "The NSSN supports the NHS march on 29 September but that demo will not be enough on its own. Cameron's defeat over Syria shows they are not all powerful and can be defeated if the necessary steps are taken. If every worker went on strike, on the same day together, that would have an impact. That's what's at stake at the TUC this week."

This message needs to be taken by NSSN supporters to every trade union branch across the country. NSSN meetings need to be prepared to build solidarity for those teachers and others taking action. Organised from below, growing pressure on the tops of the TUC allied to those unions taking action, can lay the basis for an historic step forward in the months ahead.

Action needed now

I attended the National Shop Stewards Network lobby of the TUC conference in Bournemouth. I was determined to make the TUC listen, inspired by activists and general secretaries alike who heeded the call for a general strike, delighted to hear the motion was carried by conference later that afternoon and angered that of the four unions to oppose, my union Usdaw was one of them.

Ushaw general secretary John Hannett said the motion gave the media and government a stick to beat us with and that a general strike would be illegal.

Well, the government and their cronies in the media are beating us with a stick and it's certainly hurting! If previous working class fighters had considered legality, we wouldn't have trade unions at all.

If over six million people in Britain took strike action, joined by students, the unemployed and others then the government would have a very hard time declaring it illegal and doing something about it.

If John Hannett spent some time working on a checkout or distribution centre like his members he would know the hardships they face, their willingness to struggle and the need for a mass fightback.

An Ushaw shop steward

Hovis victory

Chancellor Osborne has argued that cuts to the public sector would pave the way for growth in the private sector. This myth was demolished by Ronnie Draper, general secretary of the bakers union BFAWU: "We have achieved nothing without a fight, nothing has ever been given. Workers at Hovis in Wigan have been on a week-long strike, defending their jobs against the introduction of zero-hour contracts. They have won a victory with 24 workers given full time jobs." But the battle continues. There is further action on 11 September against the use of agencies - which allows zero-hour contracts to be brought in by a third party.

SESSIONS INCLUDE:

- Will there be a general strike in Britain?
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Merseyside People's Assembly: A lost opportunity

Tony Mulhearn

Liverpool 47 councillor, 1984-87, and TUSC Liverpool mayoral candidate in 2012

The scene at the Adelphi Hotel, Liverpool. An anti-austerity attendance of 800-plus. An atmosphere of expectation for a fighting programme of action to defeat the Con-Dems.

The adoption of a socialist alternative to the policies of the three main parties who all agree on maintaining austerity?

The reality was that the event failed to rise to the occasion. A line-up of speakers attacked the Con-Dems without - bar one or two muted exceptions - taking up the position of the TUC leadership or the Labour Party.

It was astonishing that neither the speaker from Unite the Union, Steve Turner, nor left Labour commentator Owen Jones, made any reference to the events in Falkirk or to the attacks which Miliband made on Unite. 'Malpractice, bad practice or even corrupt practice' were the scandalous words used by Miliband to attack Unite, and this was not deemed worthy of comment by these speakers.

They shuffled off any responsibility of the trade union leadership to organise industrial action to stop the Con-Dems and instead called for civil disobedience and community action to stop austerity. Civil disobedience and community action is to be welcomed and developed, but must be viewed as an important auxiliary to the potential power of the organised working class taking industrial action.

The bulletin of the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) has reported on important trade union victories for Unite, the RMT, the PCS, and locally the bin workers in Liverpool a couple of weeks ago, demonstrating that workers, responding to firm leadership, can stop the attacks from employers in their tracks. But these facts were completely lost on the majority of speakers.

Mark Steel gave a humorous speech ironically articulating the brazen policy of the Con-Dems who are making the poor pay for the crisis caused by the rich.

His criticism of Labour was muted, and even suggested that Labour could be 'changed'. He referred to two events for which he admired Liverpool's history of struggle: the dockers' struggle and the Hillsborough 96. For him the struggle of the 47 councillors is a closed book.

At 8.30pm there was an exodus of speakers who had trains to catch to return to London.

Disabled People Against Cuts comedian Laurence Clark gave a humorous performance in which he graphically portrayed the plight of the disabled under the Con-Dems.

Markedly different

In a speech markedly different to the others Martin Kelsey, PCS regional chair, told the meeting of the struggles of the PCS and praised the action of the 47 who had taken on the Tories and won.

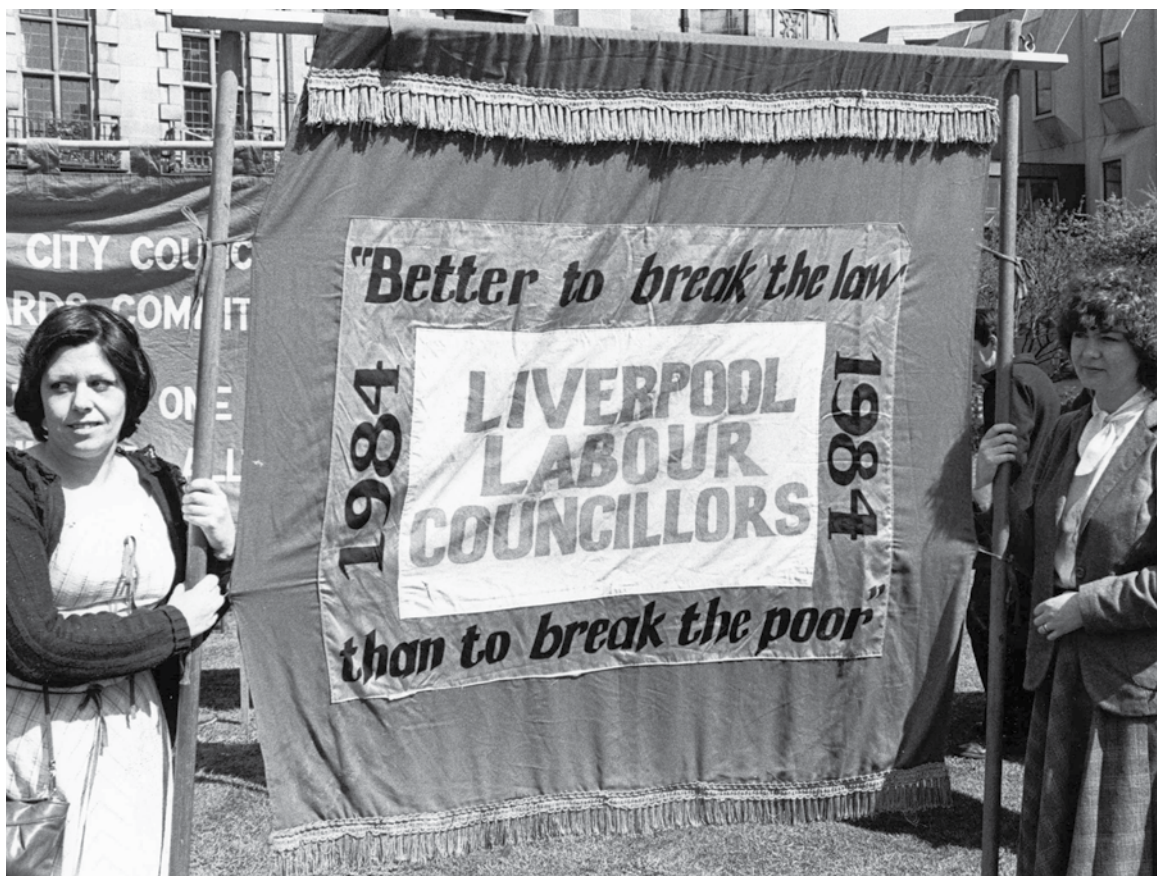
He urged people to attend the 47 exhibition which is on display at Unite HQ in Liverpool. He also attacked Mayor Anderson for his programme of cuts and congratulated, to applause, the decision of the GMB to slash its Labour Party funding.

The absence of a programme of action resulted in the initial enthusiasm draining out of the assembly.

In the dying minutes of the event, rebel Warrington councillor Kevin Bennett reported on events which culminated in his suspension by Labour and declared his determination to continue to oppose and campaign against cuts. This was greeted with loud applause from a by then diminished audience.

Trades council secretary Mark Hoskins, at the fag end of the meeting, called for support for a 24-hour general strike, this was greeted with applause from the remaining rump of the meeting.

This event was a lost opportunity



Most of the speakers ignored the Liverpool 47 council, who took on the Tories and won photo Dave Sinclair

to raise the whole issue of an alternative programme to austerity, and to mobilise support to pressurise the TUC to enact the policy agreed at its last congress, and to link that to the need for a political challenge to the three capitalist parties.

No speaker from the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) or the Socialist Party was called on, so any concrete proposal for action was absent.

The theme from keynote speakers was 'unity', which translated into a subliminal 'don't attack Labour or Labour councillors'. Nye Bevan famously described this as the 'unity of the graveyard'.

It remains to be seen whether the People's Assembly will develop into another weapon in the armoury of the working class.

TUSC and the Socialist Party have indicated their willingness to work with the People's Assembly in the interests of unifying all anti-austerity forces.

If this meeting represents the out-

look of the leadership of the PA, it is unlikely to act as a rallying point for those sections of the working class who are moving into action, or those millions who will make their mark in the next stage of the struggle.



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Bolton victory shows we can beat the bedroom tax

Matt Kilsby

Last month the Bolton at Home housing association became the first in the country to introduce a policy of "no homelessness" for those tenants in arrears because of the bedroom tax.

This step forward is thanks to an excellent local campaign, led by people affected by the tax and supported by the local trade union movement.

Janet Bryan, Unison executive member and steward in Bolton at Home, speaking in a personal capacity, told the Socialist: "It is inspiring to see those affected by the bedroom tax getting together, organising meetings across the town

and lobbying Bolton council and the housing association at every opportunity. The trade union movement in Bolton is fully behind the campaign."

While the move to a "no homelessness" policy must be applauded, we do not believe that it goes far enough. To be considered for alternative housing under the new policy, tenants will receive a "one-time only" offer of a property.

Alarming, such an alternative could be in the private rented sector, which could leave tenants at the mercy of unscrupulous landlords charging sky-high rents.

The Bolton at Home joint shop stewards committee has agreed a motion calling on the housing asso-

ciation to announce a policy of "no evictions".

And if union members feel unable to either process documentation that leads to or assist in the eviction of a Bolton at Home customer who faces eviction solely for bedroom tax arrears, they will get the full backing and support of their union locally.

Keep up the pressure

Clearly the pressure needs to be kept up on Bolton at Home and the Labour councillors that sit on its board. With the Labour Party apparently now opposing the bedroom tax, Bolton at Home should be passing a "no evictions" policy.

Councils should also refuse to

evict, and Labour leader Ed Miliband - if his party really means it - must pledge that an incoming Labour government would repay all money lost as a result.

Local campaigners are clear that the Bolton at Home policy does not go far enough and they want to keep piling on the pressure. That is why they have organised a protest and march in Bolton on Saturday 14 September.

Kieran Grogan (pc), Unison steward in Bolton at Home, said: "It is important that residents of Bolton, whether affected by the bedroom tax or not, turn out in big numbers and join the protest on Saturday. Tenants, trade unionists and residents of Bolton united can axe the tax."

Help reach the target

East London Socialist Party, having made over £100 at a clothes party the week before, raised another £107 at an evening barbecue.

Members in Nottingham raised over £50 at the city's Caribbean Carnival and Green Festival, helping the branch to smash its quarterly fighting fund target - reaching 119% so far. The quarter ends on 27 September, so all Socialist Party branches should make sure they've got their campaigning activity and fundraising social plans sorted to make sure they beat their target.

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	£ target	£ received	July-September 2013	Deadline 27 September
South West	1,400	1,495	████████████████████	████████████████████
West Midlands	2,100	1,514	████████████████████	████████████████████
North West	1,200	797	████████████████████	████████████████████
Northern	600	377	████████████████████	████████████████████
East Midlands	1,600	975	████████████████████	████████████████████
South East	750	449	████████████████████	████████████████████
Wales	2,300	1,310	████████████████████	████████████████████
Southern	1,200	536	████████████████████	████████████████████
Yorkshire	2,900	1,280	████████████████████	████████████████████
Eastern	1,200	380	████████████████████	████████████████████
London	6,100	1,669	████████████████████	████████████████████
England & Wales	3,650	221	████████████████████	████████████████████
TOTAL	25,000	11,009	████████████████████	████████████████████

Obama's drums of war fail to win support for Syria strike

Judy Beishon

As the G20 summit in Russia ended, the capitalist powers internationally were divided into two opposing camps on whether to launch a military attack on Syria. Meanwhile, Obama's quest for an attack was meeting significant opposition from within the two main political parties in the US.

Members of the US Senate and House of Representatives came under strong public pressure against an attack, making it uncertain whether Obama would get the endorsement he was seeking.

Republican party leaders are divided between the hold-back "cautious realism" of the likes of senator Rand Paul and the aggressive interventionism of John McCain.

Democrats want to avoid damaging Obama's standing by voting no, but many fear the consequences of voting yes. Losing the votes would be an almighty blow to Obama's prestige, as it was for Cameron when he was defeated in the UK parliament. This explains moves in the US government to draw out the decision-making, citing possible negotiations over control of the stocks of chemical weapons.

Attacks

Facing a congressional defeat, it seems that Obama has been offered an unexpected political lifeline from his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin. Putin has proposed that the Syrian regime of Assad hands over its chemical weapons to United Nations oversight to avert US-led air strikes on Syria's military bases.

But an assault is not yet definitely off their agenda whether sooner or later and depending on events it's not precluded that Cameron could try again to give British back-up, through securing support from wavering Miliband. So anti-war campaigning by trade unionists, socialists and other activists must be maintained, saying no to any imperialist intervention in Syria.

In trying to win support in the US for an attack, Obama's propaganda machine was cranked up, promoting videos put together by the Syrian opposition and the CIA of gas attack victims. The footage is horrific, but the jury is still out on the perpetrator - whether it was Assad, military commanders without his approval (as reported in a German newspa-



Putin appears to have handed Obama a 'get-out-of-jail' card over a US-led attack on Syria

per), or opposition forces.

In any case, the possibility of missiles from the west is not fundamentally about chemical weapons. Tory Lord Lamont blurted this out in a letter to the Times (5 September) in which he recalled that in 1988 the west turned a "blind eye" when Saddam Hussein used mustard gas and sarin against Iranian troops, killing 20,000. He added: "A recent article in the US magazine Foreign Policy claimed that US officials who gave Iraq intelligence about Iranian troop movements knew that chemical weapons would be used against them."

US missiles won't prevent chemical weapons being used again, or stop them falling into terrorist hands, or remove the hidden stocks. A US-led onslaught would be a blood-soaked 'gesture' to uphold US ruling class prestige in the US and globally and protect its interests in the Middle East, after Obama rashly promised that use of chemical weapons would be a 'red line'.

Other repercussions would be inevitable - with the possibilities including attacks on US bases in the region, rockets hitting Israel, terrorist attacks in the US and its allied countries, and disruption to oil supply routes.

US missiles would also increase the prospect of escalation of the Syrian civil war and its further spread into neighbouring countries. There would be more refugees, already numbering a phenomenal six million inside and outside Syria.

Ironically, the Syrian population could be more at risk from chemical weapons if the US strikes. Evidence from US air strikes on Saddam Hussein's chemical weapons plants in the 1991 Gulf war showed that instead of vaporising the deadly sarin gas, the strikes actually spread it over military bases 600 kilometres away.

The leaning of the US and UK governments on 'humanitarianism' to drum up public support for intervention has been seen

A US-led onslaught would be a blood-soaked 'gesture' to uphold US ruling class prestige in the US and globally

through by a majority of people in those countries. Not forgotten is the staunch support of western imperialists for repressive and dictatorial Arab elites; their mass slaughter of Iraqi civilians; their support for onslaughts by the Israeli regime on Gaza; the murder of civilians by US drones in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Yemen; their acceptance of the renewed repression by the military in Egypt and other backing for brutality when it's suited them.

To avoid US losses and becoming immersed in a prolonged interven-

tion, US strikes would most likely be missiles fired from a distance rather than overhead bombing. They would inevitably damage Assad's armed forces, but Russia can resupply him, so his military superiority over the Syrian opposition could be maintained. And Assad would gain in 'victim status', especially among his Syrian support base and in Russia, Iran and China.

The war in Syria has developed a gruesome momentum, with regular atrocities from both sides. Left to Assad's rump vicious regime and the opposition aspiring capitalists - fuelling 50 shades of division and sectarianism - the war is likely to continue until both sides achieve as much as they can by military means.

Many foreign capitalist powers are meddling in the country, with all their 'solutions' showing their bankruptcy in offering an end to the nightmare for ordinary Syrians.

Only the building of non-sectarian, democratically run workers' organisations at grassroots level, linking up with each other, can point the way forward to an altogether different scenario. They would need to build mass armed resistance to Assad's forces and all the militias led by right-wingers who are motivated by personal gain, religious or ethnic division, or revenge.

Workers' unity can be developed through the attraction of a socialist programme posing public ownership of the key industries and resources, with an economic plan to wipe out exploitation and poverty.

The Committee for a Workers' International

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

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The CWI website contains news, reports and analysis from around the world. Recent articles include:



Australia: Conservative Liberal-national coalition swept to power

Establishment corporate parties are no 'choice' for working people.

Editorial from *The Socialist*, newspaper of the Socialist Party (CWI Australia)



Russia: G20 Summit

Fear of having to come to defence of Assad is leading Putin to pressure Syria for a settlement.

Rob Jones (Moscow)



Greece: Court prosecution of anti-Golden Dawn activists fails

State continues to prepare for intensification of repression as social upheavals loom.

Xekinima reporters (CWI Greece)

Large counter-demo against racist EDL in Tower Hamlets

Several thousand anti-racists turned out on Saturday 7 September to prevent the hooligan English Defence League (EDL) from marching to the East London Mosque in Tower Hamlets.

Young people and trade unionists from across London joined with local people to prevent the EDL from breaking away from their agreed rallying point at Aldgate in the City.

Unite Against Fascism (UAF) and the local community campaign accepted the police and court ruling that the EDL march and rally should go ahead as long as it did not come significantly into the borough.

Only 300-400 EDL supporters attended, which was dwarfed by the counter-demonstration. Since

its defeat last year in Walthamstow - where Socialist Party members and Daymer Turkish and Kurdish activists helped protesters break out of a police blockade and stop the EDL from rallying - the EDL has not broken the unity of working people in London by playing its racist and anti-Muslim card. It hasn't been able to mobilise significant numbers in the wake of the murder of soldier Lee Rigby.

Arrests

During Saturday's march the EDL abused Asian passers-by according to many reports but the massive police presence - some 3,000 officers - continued to protect the EDL.

Frustrated by the counter-protest organisers' unwillingness to even attempt to stop the EDL - preferring instead to remain hundreds of yards away - many small groups of protesters left the static counter-demo hoping to reassemble to stop the EDL.

However, unfortunately they were scattered and too few in number to succeed on this occasion.

Later, several hundred anarchist-led protesters marched away from the static counter-demo and were eventually kettled by the police. Many of them were arrested.

Many local youth opted to stay on their estates to defend local people. The Socialist Party received a good hearing from these young people.

One explained: "We have to get rid of capitalism - look at how they expect us to live in the shadow of their luxury houses!"

At the anti-EDL rally, while some trade union speakers spoke against austerity, Steve Hedley assistant general secretary of the RMT trade union went further and made clear the need for a new workers' party to stop the development of the EDL and other far-right parties.

Socialist Party leaflets which linked the battle to defeat the EDL with the struggle against austerity were well received as were the Socialist Party placards calling for 'Jobs and Homes not racism'.

Socialist Party reporters

the Socialist postbag

Do you have something to say?

Send your news, views and criticism in not more than 150 words to Socialist Postbag, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD, or phone 020 8988 8771, email: editors@socialistparty.org.uk. We reserve the right to shorten letters. Don't forget to give your name, address and phone number. Confidentiality will be respected if requested.

Charity or politics

After our weekly meeting recently, some Waltham Forest Socialist Party members bumped into our local Labour MP, Stella Creasy, going around a pub with a bucket asking people to donate for the local food bank. We pointed out that none of us are well off and that it's more than a little contradictory for her to ask people to donate when she refuses to put out a public statement condemning the hundreds of job cuts and massive attacks on services that have been made by Waltham Forest council – leading to a huge increase in poverty. Stella was very defensive and accused us of political point-scoring when people are really struggling and she's trying to help. She refused to even discuss the idea of having a public debate about solutions to poverty and austerity and seemed aghast that we would dare to politically challenge and criticise her while she was doing charitable work. But her job is to represent Walthamstow residents in Parliament, to fight for our interests, not to be a general do-gooder. Being an MP isn't (or shouldn't be anyway) the same as being a church minister. Anyone can go round with a collecting bucket but I for one would prefer our MP spend her time being a real opposition in Parliament, supporting workers' struggles and putting pressure on the local council to stop the cuts. The debate continued later on Twitter, where Socialist Party member Nancy Taaffe summed up Stella's attitude: "If I feed the poor they call me a saint, if I ask why the poor are hungry, they call me a communist."

Sarah Wrack

Taking liberties

I haven't heard anything for a while about the Libor interest rate-fixing scandal that cost Barclays bosses their jobs. The whole issue was rather quickly "dealt with" by the mainstream media – probably claiming we weren't bright enough to understand it. However, our trade unions should be raising the issue. The union leadership should take the opportunity to press the Con-Dems and the banks, in which they invest our pension funds, about the losses resulting from the Libor scandal. Our NHS and schools – and many more social institutions – are paying ridiculous amounts to private businesses through interest rates that have now been found to be "fixed". Councils facing reduced funds have lost money by investing our money on lowered interest rates. This would not have happened in a so-

cialist government, but it has happened now so let's make them explain their actions, ask what they are going to do to rectify the failings of their fabulous capitalist banking systems.

The unions should get the establishment to put a price on the failure of their system to the taxpayer. It might



photo A Hill

be a little higher than the Con-Dems' flaunted "cost" of "scroungers" and "shirkers".

**Sally Griffiths,
Salford**

Outing the rich

"There is no suggestion of any unlawfulness." That was the only good news for the Financial Times as it reported that the man appointed to lead the fight against financial crime would not now be taking up the job "for personal reasons".

Jeremy Outen, a former partner in the massive KPMG tax advisory and outsourcing accountants, was appointed director of Theresa May's National Crime Agency (NCA) in April. He took up a role at the Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA – shortly due to be part of the NCA).

Then SOCA chair and former top MoD bureaucrat Sir Ian Andrews resigned after failing to declare that he and his wife owned a security and management consultancy in a potential clash of interests. Now Outen is out, with 'people in the know' telling the FT they thought his tax arrangements were behind his decision.

The NCA was set up by a Tory home secretary and appointed top financiers – KPMG partners are paid on average £580,000 – to run an FBI-style crime-busting operation. Clearly trying to clean the Augean stables of financial hanky-panky is not a job to be entrusted to the 'great and the good' and the ultra-rich.

Steve Rogers

Art Review

The vanity of small differences

Greg Randall

It is rare today for an artist's work to address the existence of class. The self-appointed arbiters of culture tell us that class is outdated and irrelevant save for the occasional, fearful, pause to shout 'chav' at working class youth.

Turner Prize winner Grayson Perry now tackles class with a series of tapestries collectively entitled *The Vanity of Small Differences*, based on "tribes" he met in Sunderland, Tunbridge Wells and the Cotswolds when making his 2012 TV series *All In The Best Possible Taste* with Grayson Perry.

Over six scenes Perry tells the life story of Tim Rakewell, from his birth to a working class single mother in Sunderland to country house riches as an IT millionaire and early death in a car crash.

Class is shown here by means of consumption and taste. In the first tapestry 'The Adoration of the Cage Fighters', baby Tim is offered symbols of north east masculinity while his mother prepares for a night out "on the lash".

This is a subjective view of class, not Marx's analysis of relationships to the means of production. There is no production as Tim's mother says: "there are no jobs around here anymore". Of course, IT millionaires try to keep as far away from production as they can.

Seeing class subjectively isn't necessarily wrong. It is how we all first encounter class and learn where we fit into society, but this is how these 'vanities' arise. When Tim moves from working to middle



Grayson Perry's The Upper Class At Bay

class, in 'Expulsion from Number 8 Eden Close', the gap between the real statuses within the system of his mother, who now lives with a Tory voter on a private estate, and that of his girlfriend's middle class family at a dinner party is little, but to those involved it seems massive.

Such vanity (and the fetishisation through consumption of small differences) are a massive help to the ruling class. Despite being less than 1% of the population, they own and run society for themselves against the interests of the working and middle classes.

By the fifth tapestry, 'The Upper Class At Bay', Tim is part of the ruling class, but still haunted by status. A protest camp is outside his country house, for he is a tax-dodging fat cat, but as "new money" he cannot join the landed gentry.

In 'Lamentation' Tim dies road racing in his sports car, surrounded by the detritus of capitalism: retail

parks, gossip magazines and late-night fast food. Notably, it is public sector workers who clean up the mess: a fireman, a nurse and paramedics.

The series can be seen as a massive six-panel comic strip, with references to past art, most explicitly 18th century artist William Hogarth's 'The Rake's Progress' and religious works by old masters. But it is accessible without knowledge of art history, as Perry presents Tim's life without condescension to either viewer or his characters.

Perry said he conceived this as a public artwork, and hopes "that wherever it goes it not only delights the eye but also sparks debate about class, taste and British society." This it will undoubtedly do.

The *Vanity of Small Differences* is at Sunderland Museum until 29 September and will tour to Manchester, Birmingham, Liverpool and Leeds for the rest of the year.

TV Review

Failed by the privatising NHS

Josh Asker

Southampton Socialist Party

A recent BBC documentary "Failed by the NHS" shows the inability of the NHS and the government to help young people suffering from mental illness. Despite 1,600 young people taking their lives every year, services have been cut.

In times of austerity, unemployment and service cuts increase the pressures on young people. Depression and anxiety are four to ten times more prevalent among people who have been unemployed for over 12 weeks.

In the last two years the number of psychiatric beds has been cut by 2,000. This often leads to people with mental health problems being detained in police cells. In 2011/12 more than 9,000 people were detained in cells under the mental health act, where by law they can be detained for three days. Even some police

chiefs complain that about a fifth of their time is spent dealing with mentally unwell people.

Government cuts have been particularly devastating for young people with mental illness. The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, treating people aged under 18, has suffered a two-thirds funding reduction since 2010. Meanwhile suicide rates are increasing. The number of people taking their own lives rose 8% between 2010 and 2011.

This government consistently picks on the sections of society where people are less likely to speak up. People suffering from mental illness are likely to be among the most vulnerable and isolated.

The NHS was a monumental gain achieved through working class struggle. But policies of privatisation carried through by Labour and now the Con-Dems and the brutal effects of austerity mean the service is consistently being undermined. A socialist NHS would reverse privatisation initiatives and invest in services required to meet all our needs.

Book review: Capital - in Manga!

Tanis Belsham-Wray

'Capital - in Manga!' is a Japanese style illustrated story about a cheese-maker, Robin, who sets up a factory with a loan from a financial speculator.

The story shows Robin's conflict of morality between making profit to pay back the loan and the exploitation of his workers. As it follows other characters, it shows different perspectives of class struggle and its effects on different layers of society.

One character is a worker who begins to understand the exploitation. The book shows attempts to fight back against the system. But another character, Robin's childhood friend, is forced into prostitution to support her family.

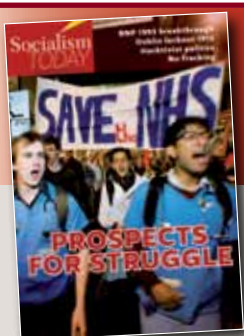
The book's main purpose is as an introduction to some key concepts in volume 1 of Karl Marx's *Capital*. The basic terminology is explained as different concepts are explained to Robin by those around him.

It begins by explaining the process of capitalist production, the

concept of value and the sale and purchase of labour power and how this inevitably leads to exploitation of the working class, who will then in turn fight against the system that exploits them.

While having nowhere near the same detail as *Capital*, *Capital - in Manga!* is a less daunting introduction to some of Marx's theories.

It is worth reading as a prelude to *Capital* or just as a good story illustrating some of capitalism's fundamental flaws and the resulting struggles.



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Reinvigorate the student movement: Protest, occupy, strike for our education

Ian Pattison
Socialist Students national chair

This autumn's new students will be the second batch forced to pay the Con-Dems' extortionate £9,000 a year price tag for university education. Many others have been priced-out of education. 30,000 fewer students applied to go to university last year than the previous year, and numbers haven't recovered this time round.

Universities are facing a funding crisis. While trebling tuition fees the Con-Dems slashed the higher education teaching budget by 80% (100% for humanities!). University managements can only see one solution - cuts and privatisation.

There could be devastating attacks on courses, services, and jobs this autumn. Rents for student accommodation, on and off campus, are shooting up. All the while, private sector vultures are creaming a profit out of our education. Greedy vice-chancellors (VCs) receive extravagant pay packets. VCs at top universities pay themselves on average of over £300,000!

The Student Loan Company (SLC) faces privatisation. It has even been suggested by Con-Dem government ministers that the interest rate on our tuition fee loans could be raised to make them attractive to private companies seeking profit. Some have called for the income threshold for when we pay back these loans to be lowered.

Fightback

However, students are not likely to be passive. The energetic student movement of 2010 erupted in response to the Con-Dem plans to treble tuition fees, abolish EMA and ALG (the grants paid to poorer students to help them through college), and drive through cuts and privatisation.

It was sparked by the 50,000-strong national student demonstration called by the National Union of Students (NUS). Huge anger was felt on that demonstration - thousands occupied the Tory Party HQ at Millbank. Young people were looking for a lead on how to take the movement forward but none came from NUS.

Socialist Students gave out 10,000 leaflets on that demonstration calling for student strikes. Two weeks later, 120,000 walked out - against the wishes of the right-wing New Labour NUS leadership who warned students not to join the protests.



We need a national student demonstration this academic year photo Paul Mattsson



Megaphone

Magazine of Socialist Students 2013 edition includes articles on NUS, fighting the EDL and zero-hour contracts.

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Many students occupied university campuses for the next month.

Socialist Students recognised before the movement kicked off that, faced with these attacks, students would be forced to take action to defend their education. This year, faced with cuts and privatisation, we could see a re-emergence of the movement. We need to organise protests, occupations, and strikes to defend every course, service, and job that is threatened with cuts or closure. Socialist Students supports the building of local anti-cuts campaigns on every campus to organise the struggle.

NUS failure

While it is the responsibility of NUS to coordinate the student movement, despite the myriad of attacks facing students, the NUS leadership has disgracefully so far refused to call a national student demonstration.

We should put as much pressure as possible on the NUS leadership,

but if it refuses to provide a programme of mass student action, others must step in. Socialist Students has written to the other left-wing student groups to discuss a joint national demonstration.

A national demonstration led by the broad range of left-wing student groups, anti-cuts campaigns, and student unions, reaching out to the mass of students with the key demands affecting them - no to fees, cuts and privatisation - would have the best chance of mobilising the biggest numbers.

Link up the struggles

Students aren't the only group in society suffering under the boot of Con-Dem austerity. On Sunday 29 September thousands of workers and others will descend on Manchester to protest outside the Tory Party conference in defence of the NHS. That demo must be the first step in an autumn of protest.

Even though students didn't win in 2010, many workers were inspired by student struggle but mistakenly the leadership of the trade unions did not bring their members out to join the students in what would have been a very powerful movement.

In 2011 700,000 trade unionists marched against austerity, and two million public sector workers took coordinated strike action to defend their pensions.

Teachers, lecturers, firefighters, postal workers, and university support staff could all be taking strike action this autumn. It makes sense for workers to strike together, and when education workers take action, stu-

dents should strike alongside them.

The crushing defeat of Cameron in Parliament over military intervention in Syria shows this is a weak government in crisis. We should strike while the iron is hot. A key step in the battle to stop austerity and bring down the Con-Dem government is for the trade unions to build a 24-hour general strike.

Socialist Students says:

- No to sky-high tuition fees - tax the rich to fund free education
- Stop cuts and privatisation - kick big business out of education
- Cap and slash rents - university accommodation must be affordable for all
- Stop the privatisation of the Student Loan Company
- Bring Back EMA and ALG - we need living grants for all college and uni students

- Build campus anti-cuts campaigns wherever courses and services are threatened with cuts and closure

- Build a national student demonstration on the most important issues affecting ordinary students

- Build for a massive student mobilisation to protest the Tory Party conference in Manchester on 29 September

- Protest, occupy, and strike for our education

- Support the demand of rank and file trade unionists for a 24-hour general strike

- For a socialist world, where the big monopolies are taken into public ownership, the economy is democratically planned and resources are used to meet the needs of all humanity

For reports from freshers fairs see socialiststudents.org.uk and future issues of the Socialist

Solidarity with Syria at London colleges

Socialist Students recently held two successful campaign stalls at colleges in Waltham Forest against military intervention in Syria.

There was a very positive response from both students and passers-by, all in opposition to the proposed bombings. People agreed with us when we said that the necessary route to toppling a dictatorial regime such as Assad's is not through 'coordinated strikes', but

through democratic working class movements.

Today's college students may not remember the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, or the million-strong demonstration against the invasion of Iraq, but the legacy of the anti-war movement has made the opposition to intervention in Syria urgent for this generation - especially given that we are all too aware that the disastrous effects of

those wars are still being felt today.

Campaigning in solidarity with suffering workers and young people in Syria is a good way to start the year for Socialist Students at sixth forms and colleges across the country. We sold eight copies of the Socialist and raised £8 towards campaign funds.

Mary Finch
Waltham Forest Socialist Students

What is Socialist Students?

Socialist Students is the biggest socialist organisation on university campuses. We'll be having discussion and debates on socialism, Marxism and Trotskyism, strategic questions facing the anti-austerity movement, international struggles, and the issues affecting ordinary students at colleges and on university campuses across the country.

Socialist Students is a democratic campaigning organisation. This autumn follows a summer when zero-hour contracts, where you have no guaranteed work or pay whatsoever, provoked a wave of disgust and revulsion. Zero-hour contracts mean maximum flexibility for big business, maximum poverty for the rest of us.

Socialist Students supports the Youth Fight for Jobs (YFJ) campaign which this year launched Sick Of Your Boss? - an initiative targeting underemployment. Sick Of Your Boss organised protests, occupations, and marches against bosses that use zero-hour con-

tracts such as Sports Direct.

It has been exposed that more than half of universities and more than two-thirds of colleges use zero-hour contracts, including for teaching staff. With YFJ, we should challenge every university management that uses zero-hour contracts.

Last year Socialist Students launched the Rape Is No Joke campaign to challenge sexism in comedy, and fight rape culture. We will be joining Tamil Solidarity on the protests against Cameron visiting Sri Lanka for the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in November, thereby giving legitimacy to genocidal Sri Lankan President, Rajapaksa. Socialist Students campaigns to stop sexism, racism, and homophobia everywhere they raise their ugly head.

Socialist Students will help to build a united movement against fees, all cuts, and austerity, and fight for a socialist alternative to rotten, crisis-ridden capitalism in Britain and across the world.

SAVE OUR NHS!



Kick out the corporate vultures

Chris Moore
Gloucestershire Socialist Party

In 2004 Tory cabinet minister Oliver Letwin boasted that "the NHS will not exist" within five years of a Conservative victory. In April 2013, the Health and Social Care Act opened the floodgates to the private sector. Since then nearly 200 contracts, worth £2.5 billion, have been offered to outsource NHS services.

The NHS is set to become a US-style state subsidised private healthcare market. In the US, 62% of the 900,000 personal bankruptcies a year are due to medical expenses.

The Daily Mirror recently revealed that a contract for NHS brain cancer treatment was handed to the world's largest private hospital group, Hospital Corporation of America (HCA), that just happened to be a Tory Party donor. HCA was part of the 'largest healthcare fraud' according to the US Justice Department and in Tennessee paid doctors to refer patients to their facilities.

'Conveniently' the government

had just transferred responsibility for cancer care to NHS England.

Britain's top NHS brain cancer centre, University College Hospital London, was informed that it will no longer receive funding for NHS patients. Current patients are to be transferred to Barts Hospital, where HCA owns the Gamma Knife Centre.

Lucrative

Successive Tory, Labour and now Coalition governments have privatised and undermined the NHS. There is a scramble among the big health corporations to get their snouts in the trough.

Since 2001 the Tories have received donations of over £10 million from private healthcare companies. At a time of economic crisis, our illness and injury is a lucrative business.

While doors are opened for private companies at Barts Hospital, Barts Health NHS Trust is loaded with PFI (private finance initiative) debts. Losing £2 million a week, it announced £77.5 million cuts, the

biggest of any NHS trust.

A Care Quality Commission report, that identified 'systemic failings' at Whipps Cross Hospital (part of the Barts Trust), is being used to justify cuts and privatisation. Like the Mid Staffs crisis, where the management response to a £10 million deficit was to make hundreds of redundancies, increase the ratio of untrained staff and impose a bullying culture, the impact on the standard of care was devastating.

In April, 50,000 marched against the threat of closure to Stafford hospital, forcing management to back-track. At Whipps Cross, the Unison health branch has called protests and is ready to call strike action if necessary.

Strike action by NHS staff at Mid Yorkshire Health Trust recently won important concessions on pay and redundancies. Mass action by the campaign to Save Lewisham Hospital, including a 25,000-strong demonstration and legal challenge, have thwarted health secretary Jeremy Hunt's plans to scrap A&E and other key hospital services.

Protests in Gloucestershire also

Protest at the Tory Conference

- **SAVE OUR NHS**
- **Defend Jobs and Services**
- **No to Austerity**

March and Rally - Sunday 29 September

Assemble at Liverpool Road, Manchester M3 4FP, 11am
Marching to a rally in Whitworth Park

held back NHS privatisation. Successful legal arguments were part of the campaign, but the government response was to change the law!

From the national demonstration in Manchester on 29 September, health unions should launch a national campaign to link up all the local NHS struggles, supporting all local strikes and preparing national industrial action.

Mass action, starting with a 24-hour general strike, is the way to challenge this government and secure the publicly funded and properly funded NHS we deserve.

Defend all Barts health services and staff

Protest: Monday 16 September, 5pm, Whipps Cross Hospital main gate

Demonstrate: Saturday 21 September, 12noon, The Green by Whipps Cross Hospital (near roundabout bus stops), marching to Walthamstow town square

What we stand for

The Socialist Party fights for socialism – a democratic society run for the needs of all and not the profits of a few. We also oppose every cut, fighting in our day-to-day campaigning for every possible improvement for working class people. The organised working class has the potential power to stop the cuts and transform society.

As capitalism dominates the globe, the struggle for genuine socialism must be international.

The Socialist Party is part of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), a socialist international that organises in over 40 countries.

Our demands include:

PUBLIC SERVICES

- No to ALL cuts in jobs, 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!