



CORPORATE KILLERS!

- End fuel poverty
- Nationalise the big six energy companies

Alistair Tice

The bosses of the 'big six' energy companies should be in the dock. 31,000 extra people, mostly pensioners, died last winter. With 3.2 million households in fuel poverty and one in four families forced to choose between eating and heating, how many more will die this winter?

With almost calculating cruelty, all the big energy suppliers have announced more and bigger price hikes just as we go into winter.

Even Ofgem, the toothless regulator, has admitted: "There is a deep mistrust of anything the energy companies do or say... It is not surprising the customers jump to the conclusion that prices are driven by profiteering." It is not surprising because it's true!

Fuel bills have gone up 152% in the last ten years. Their profits have gone up 74% since 2009, to £3.74 billion last year.

Scottish and Southern Energy (SSE) pay

over 60% of their profits to shareholders in dividends, and npower haven't paid any UK tax for the last three years!

British Gas paid just five bosses £16.4 million in bonuses in March this year. Parent company Centrica's chief executive Sam Laidlaw got £4.9 million in salary and bonuses last year, enough to pay the annual fuel bills of 3,500 households.

Huge public anger has forced politicians to be seen to be doing something. They all say "switch suppliers" but the big six, with 95% of all domestic customers, operate a price cartel and run a virtual monopoly.

The Con-Dems advised people suffering fuel poverty to wear an extra jumper, the Centrica boss said wear two! Ed Miliband says a Labour government would freeze energy prices for 20 months but we all know they'll just stick them up before and after.

Now Cameron and Clegg have said they will cut energy bills by £50. Wow! Fifty quid after prices have already gone up £300 a year

under the coalition.

But even this is a con. They say that the Warm's Homes Discount will now be funded by the government rather than paid on bills, by wait for it, "cracking down on tax avoidance". Yeah, like that's going to happen!

So customers will simply end up paying for it through taxes. And the Energy Companies Obligation (ECO) to provide insulation and energy saving is being watered down meaning higher bills for longer!

The insulation industry Association for the Conservation of Energy (ACE) got it right: "The government has been hoodwinked by the big six energy firms who don't want to insulate people's homes because it means less profit for them."

Spot on. Even some Tories have said that the energy market isn't working properly, and Ed Miliband wants to re-set it. But price fixing, tax avoidance and maximising profits is how the market, ie capitalism, works.

You can't control what you don't own.

That's why the Socialist Party says that the energy companies should be re-nationalised (which around 70% of people agree with), brought back into public ownership, and run democratically in the interests of workers and consumers.

Then, prices can be controlled, bills made affordable, and profits invested in cheaper, cleaner and safer energy supplies, rather than fat-cats' pockets and shareholder dividends!

A clause in the government's energy bill will remove 800,000 households out of fuel poverty. How? By re-defining fuel poverty!

Currently, a household is fuel poor if it spends 10% of income on heating. In future, households will only be deemed fuel poor if they have "required fuel costs that are above average and were they to spend that amount they would be left with a residual income below the official poverty line".

This is fixing the figures, not the problem!



Boris - it's the system, stupid

So Boris Johnson, the London Tory mayor, thinks working class people are poor because they are of low intelligence. His comment that "16% of our species have an IQ below 85" and that is "surely relevant" to "a conversation on inequality" has caused a furore.

But these kinds of views are common amongst Tories. After all they need to find justifications for the grotesque inequality that their system, capitalism, causes.

However Johnson, who is a possible future contender for the Tory Party leadership, does say that there are other factors "operating on human beings who are already far from equal in raw ability". In fact he recognises that inequality has been intensified by "the harshness of competition" which acts like a "violent economic centrifuge". At least in one respect he is more honest than other defenders of capitalism - he says inequality is a good thing! Inequality is essential for the spirit of envy and greed because these are a "valuable spur to economic activity".

Thatcher and Reagan

'Greed is good' was the mantra of the Thatcher and Reagan years when the controls on the finance and banking industry were relaxed and taxes were cut on the basis that if the rich got richer some of that wealth would trickle down to the rest of us. The reality, however, is that the rich got richer at our expense - since 1979 the wealth of the richest one per cent in the UK has

increased by 300% while that of the bottom 20% has increased by just 16%.

But there is an element of truth in some of what he says: Capitalism causes inequality. But more than that, inequality is built into its foundations. The bosses get rich because they are stealing the wealth created by workers. The more they exploit, the bigger the income gap. Whatever Ed Miliband may say about wanting a "responsible capitalism", it cannot exist without that exploitation.

This wealth gap has increased vastly in recent years. In the US, tax returns show that the gap between the top 1% and the remaining 99% is at a record high. 1% of earners now have 19.3% of household income, breaking the previous record from 1927.

In the UK, a study from the 'High Pay Centre' says the share of the national income going to the top 1% has more than doubled since 1979, to 14.5%. 2,714 bankers in Britain now earn more than a million Euros a year. On the other hand average weekly wages are still declining in real terms according to the Office of National Statistics, despite the so called 'recovery'.

Household debt in the UK is now at record levels, £1.43 trillion; it now exceeds the levels before the crisis of 2008. The real effect on the poorest in society is shown by the huge rise in the use of foodbanks and even the fact that the police report a rise in the numbers of people stealing food.

But if we are going to talk about who is stupid, what about the 'clever' top bankers and

financial speculators who either believed that the bubble of sub-prime mortgages would go on forever or at least didn't care that it wouldn't? How clever were they when they triggered the economic collapse of 2008?

How stupid is a system that goes into meltdown every few years, destroying the means of producing wealth, throwing workers - and all the talents that they do have - onto the scrapheap? It is a system that cannot plan to use the huge wealth that does exist to benefit the world's population or safeguard the environment of the planet we live on. These things exist because capitalism is based on the immediate and short term need for profit for those who own the big companies - who are the ruling class.

Wasteful system

It is an unplanned and wasteful system. The talents of billions of people are not utilised because of the lack of education and opportunity resulting from the way capitalism operates.

Just one example of this craziness is the fact that some housing associations are considering demolishing 3 Bedroom homes, and even 2 Bedroom flats because they can't get people to move in due to the Bedroom Tax. Yet it was supposedly designed to deal with the shortage of housing! An 'intelligent' system would use the skills of building workers to create affordable good quality council housing and solve the housing crisis, whilst abolishing legislation designed to hit the poorest.

Of course the ruling class themselves aren't really stupid, after all they are skilled in the task of holding on to their privileges. But a mass movement of working class people with a socialist alternative can remove them.

Ordinary working-class people aren't stupid either. They don't trust greedy bankers and greedy and corrupt capitalist politicians. Only 19% in the latest National Centre for Social Research survey think the banks are well run (down from 90% in 1983) and only 18% of people trust the government 'most of the time'. That is why the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition will be aiming to stand in as many seats as possible in the local elections next year, with a programme of using the wealth that is flowing to the top to restore public services and reverse the cuts.

The crux of the matter is that a system based on the motive of profit for Boris' mates (in reality a handful of rich and greedy businessmen), cannot provide for the needs of everyone and will always result in the impoverishment of billions worldwide. But a system based on democratically planning the resources of society for human need not private greed, a socialist system, would be a far more intelligent choice.

The Socialist Party fights against inequality and injustice, we support every struggle of working class people to defend and improve their living standards. But inequality and injustice can never be fully abolished until we get rid of capitalism altogether and replace it with socialism.

University and college staff unite in pay battle

Picket line reports from the 3 December strike

The University of East London docklands site was quieter than usual on 3 December as staff and students stayed away to support the one-day coordinated national strike for higher pay. After the first strike by higher education workers on 31 October, further education workers joined the action.

Jill, lecturers' University and College Union (UCU) representative for part-time staff told the Socialist: "It's very effective to have all the unions out together - it gives a sense of solidarity."

The Unison shop steward on the picket line said that this second day of strike action, involving the four unions on campuses in the UK, has taken place after a real-terms 13% fall in pay over the last four years, while staff have been offered just 1%.

On average, vice-chancellors were paid £207,318 back in 2009-10 and in addition, management have said they have a massive war chest - "yet we're expected to make do with a 1% pay rise". Nationally universities have amassed a surplus of £1.1 billion.

Teaching staff, Jill said, were now being offered contracts guaranteeing only 20 hours paid teaching a year - not far from zero-hour contracts - and that this was: "becoming more prevalent. But today is about pay. With inflation at 2.2%, we are being offered a pay cut."

The four unions on strike are UCU, Unison, Unite and in Scotland the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS). The picket was officially backed by the students' union NUS as a result of a resolution put by So-

cialist Party and NUS NEC member Edmund Schluessel (see the Socialist, issue 790).

Pete Mason

Newcastle and Gateshead FE colleges

At Newcastle college students joined the picket line in support of their lecturers. Liam Carr, branch secretary at Newcastle FE college told the Socialist: "Today the reason people have come out is because the Association of Colleges (AOC) have offered a 0.7% pay increase. This increase is at a time when the cost of living and prices are going through the roof."

He went on to explain: "The 0.7% offer comes with strings attached. The AOC want to see an end to national pay agreements, with a move towards regional pay. This would be a disaster for the north east economy."

Lecturers on the picket line in Gateshead talked about the general worsening of conditions they were facing. They talked about the 15% pay cut lecturers have faced over the last few years. There was a mood of: our backs are against the wall - we have no alternative but to fight.

Elaine Brunskill

Brunel University

Three large picket lines took place at Brunel University in London. Students came out in force to support the staff. The largest picket had 15 people. There was a fighting mood among the staff who were looking forward to the new year and discussed how to take the fight for-



Strikers at Kings College photo Ian Pattison

ward and win a living wage for outsourced staff.

Helen Pattison

Swansea

Swansea Socialist Students brought solidarity, cakes and biscuits to our staff at Swansea University today taking strike action for the second time this term.

Forty members of staff held a very visible picket line at the university entrance. Everyone having met at the previous strike, the atmosphere

was cheerful and familiar. The picket discussed where the campaign for fair pay would be heading next term if employers refused to budge. But one thing staff at Swansea University know for certain is that they can count on students to support them. "See you next strike!" they said.

Ben Golightly

Manchester Met

Patrick Gannon, Manchester Metropolitan University Unison branch chair, spoke to the Socialist: "The

strike is noticeably affecting a wider span of areas today, the impact of our action has broadened. So, there's noticeably fewer cleaners and domestics going in, those at the worst end of low pay are increasingly engaging with the unions' campaign.

"We need to push harder before entering next year's pay claim, to seize a victory against low pay, and set an example to all workers that we can fight and we can win."

Salford University

Bernie Maguire, Salford University UCU branch president, told Socialist Party members: "What we need to do is escalate in January, hit them hard then because that's when management panics, and the UCU national executive needs to show more leadership to fight and win this dispute."

Kings College

At London University's King's College, more people had joined Unite, representing support staff, since the last strike. King's College Students' Union members were supporting the strike, and were on the picket lines from 7am.

Three strikers and their supporters bought copies of the Socialist. One student agreed to stand as a Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidate in 2014.

Ian Pattison, Socialist Students national chair

Formore reports see www.socialistparty.org.uk

Kent: Unions and parents unite against all the cuts

Dave Semple

Sixty people gathered outside County Hall in Maidstone on Monday 2 December, in protest against cuts to children's centres across Kent. The protest was part of an ongoing campaign mounted by the Kent Trades Union Councils and "Save Kent Children's Centres", a parents group outraged by the devastating impact the Tory-sponsored cuts are likely to have on vulnerable families.

Under the Tories, 600 jobs are to go across Kent council services over the next three years.

In the week running up to the protest, Kent County Council (KCC) retreated from its previous plans to close 23 children's centres. Tory councillor Jenny Whittle, cabinet member for specialist children's services, announced that of the original 23, 'only' 12 would now close, six would operate with reduced hours and five would remain open on their current basis.

Opposition

Parents and the trade union campaign had run a petition that garnered 6,000 signatures, had staged an earlier demonstration in September, and had been quietly acquiring the backing of dozens of union branches. The 2 December demonstration was scheduled to coincide with a meeting of the council's cabinet which we expected would debate the proposals.

Chants of "No ifs, no buts, No public sector cuts" rang around the pedestrianised plaza. Banners from the civil servants union, PCS, were



A young service user joins the protest photo Dave Semple

joined by union flags from posties, railway workers, local government and manual municipal workers, the unions of the Sure Start workers themselves and many more. KCC can be under no doubt that they face a lot of opposition.

Socialist Party members played the key role in pulling together opposition to the cuts. Our message was simple; not one closure, not one cut to hours, not one redundancy.

This was supported by enthusiastic applause when our speakers made these points, and plenty of debate was heard after the speeches about the position of the other political parties. It is well known that the Labour Party has made its share of the 578 Sure Start closures since 2010. And cuts implemented by the Green-led council in Brighton have

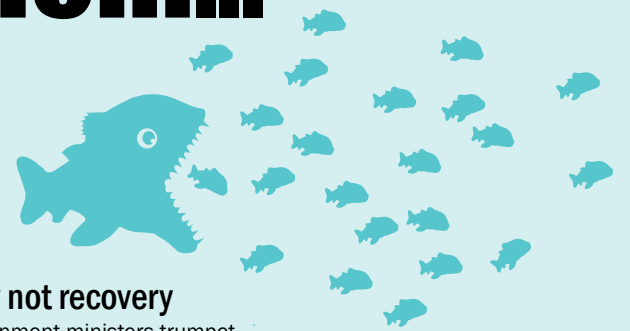
made ridiculous the anti-cuts pose by Green candidates in Kent.

Councillor Whittle accepted a delegation from amongst the parents present who went into County Hall and heard that £2.2 million 'savings' in staffing are planned, with the key staffing review to begin in January.

Talks have already begun with the local Unison branch about the potential for strike action amongst local government workers, particularly in the children's centres.

But the cuts also demand a political response. Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells will have local elections in 2014 and both are losing children's centres. The race is now on to find candidates who will stand for the only political group opposing all cuts: the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, TUSC.

Them...



Robbery not recovery

When government ministers trumpet an economic recovery they must be referring to the amassed fortunes of the super-rich rather than the other 99%.

Even the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) think tank, set up by welfare slashing Iain Duncan Smith, warned that his flagship policies of the bedroom tax and universal credit (which the CSJ proposed) could plunge people into more debt. The CSJ also pointed out that 5,000 people are made homeless each year - unable to pay their rent or mortgage, while average household debt now stands at a staggering £54,000 - double that of a decade ago.

cover them. This has generated an annual £4.8 billion market for rip-off payday lenders.

Going hungry

An estimated 500,000 plus households have been forced to rely on food banks to survive. Charities estimate that one in five of the population have gone hungry this year because they can't afford to buy a meal.

Worst pension

The UK's state pension is one of the worst in the developed world according to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Out of the 34 countries in the OECD bloc, only Mexico's state pension fares worse than the UK's. Here, a worker on average pay can expect a pension worth only 32.6% of final pay when they retire, compared to an OECD average of 54.4%. "With the legislated increases in retirement age to 67 for both men and women, expenditure is only expected to increase by 0.5% over the next 40 years to 8.2% of GDP, well below the OECD average of 11.7%", according to the OECD.

Deeper in debt

It's not just Nigella Lawson's former personal assistants who have been hammering the credit card; unsecured consumer debt has virtually tripled over the last 20 years to £160 billion - the equivalent of 94% of the UK's economic output. Only the Republic of Ireland has a higher ratio of personal debt to GDP within Europe.

Bored MPs

If you thought that fiddling expenses by establishment party MPs was down to good old fashioned greed, then think again. Commons' speaker John Bercow reckons that MPs fiddled their expenses as a "displacement activity" because Parliament had become irrelevant and ineffective ie because MPs are bored! Only the uncaring would suggest that said MPs become permanently displaced!

Payday misery

Needless to say it's the poorest that are bearing the brunt of the government's austerity measures. Essential household bills have rocketed by 27% since 2007, with one in six payday loans now being used to

Council tax liabilities

Since 1 April 2013, along with the Con-Dems' hated 'bedroom tax', many low income households have been hit hard by the government's council tax benefit cuts. Previously, low income households could obtain full council tax benefit but after the government cut funding by 10% many local authorities, often Labour controlled, have simply imposed this reduction on its poorest residents. According to a report by False Economy, who surveyed 200 councils, more than 25 people a day, unable to pay council tax bills, were issued with court liability orders between April and September - a 30% increase. Hundreds of thousands of people have been fined and are now threatened with bailiffs as a result.



Join the fightback! Join the Socialists!
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Fracking comes North...

Paul Gerrard

Fracking has come to the Tories' 'desolate North' - and with it the anti-fracking movement, which is beginning to strike roots in Salford, Greater Manchester.

I-Gas, a £250 million company, has been granted a licence to explore coal bed methane at Barton Moss in Salford. It is common knowledge that if they find methane they will want to 'frack' the shale beneath the coal bed, though for this they would need a further permit from the Labour-run council.

The site adjoins the M62 embankment and is next to an aerodrome and heliport. There are 1,500 homes nearby, with a council estate a couple of hundred yards away. The nearby M60 motorway is regularly clogged with traffic, either commuters or shoppers driving to the giant Trafford Centre two miles away.

From a health and safety point of view this development is insane. This is quite apart from the known health hazards of the 'fracking' process, which involves injecting water at high pressure, unspecified chemicals ('commercial secret') and sand into the shale. It means that dozens

of tankers would be carrying clean water to the site, and removing waste water every day, churning up roads and generating noise and dust.

A camp has been set up by veterans of the Balcombe protest in the summer and local activists. Leafletting of nearby estates has begun to bear fruit - 55 mostly local people attended a public meeting organised by anti-fracking groups on 29 November, and next Sunday (8 December) is a solidarity day when trade unionists are invited to support a demo at the camp with banners and pennants.

Last Wednesday (27 November) the attempt to bring drilling equipment up the narrow access road onto the site was delayed as dozens of protestors blocked the road. A couple of hundred could prevent access entirely.

A Socialist Party leaflet with a 'frack off' window poster on the reverse was much appreciated and widely displayed. SP members have been active in pressing the council to provide waste bins at the protest site, getting donations, petitioning in Eccles and Irlam, and mobilising for maximum turnout on the Solidarity Day.

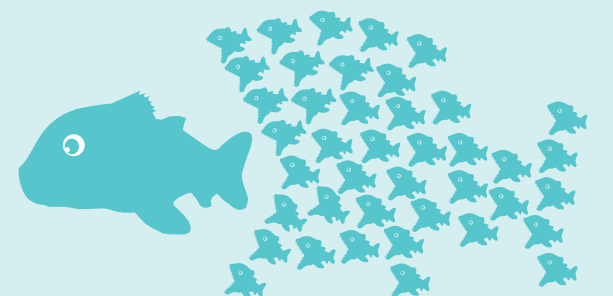
We say:

- Labour must refuse any further permits!
- Build for a mass mobilisation to close the site!
- Nationalise power production and distribution under democratic control
- Solve the energy crisis with a plan of production based around renewables
- For a cross-city challenge to Labour in Salford in May 2014 with anti-cuts and anti-fracking candidates on the same platform



photo Paul Gerrard

...& Us



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

What we read

American dream?

"The top 1% of incomes are close to full recovery (after the financial crisis) while the bottom 99% have hardly started to recover", says Emmanuel Saez of the University of California, Berkeley.

- During 2010-2012 the top 1% of incomes grew by 31% whereas the other 99% increased by only 0.4%

- The typical US family now earns less in real terms than in 1989

- Median household income fell from \$51,100 to \$51,017 in 2012 and is now 8.3% below its pre-recession peak in 2007 (US Census Bureau)

Npower job cuts must be fought!

Andy Bentley
Stoke on Trent

Npower have now announced that its call centre in Fenton, Stoke-on-Trent, will close next June as part of a total of 1,400 workers being thrown on the scrap heap nationally.

The plan is to outsource the 550 Stoke-on-Trent jobs to India under the 'management' of Tata Consultancy Services.

Npower say it is being done: "to improve our customer services and keep our costs down at a time of external pressure on customer's bills"

Does anyone believe this? Npower are so concerned about bills that they are increasing prices by 10.4% this month!

Npower are trying to turn cus-

tomers against their workers by saying that sacking 1,400 will reduce bills for customers. But the top employees and shareholders will pocket any 'savings,' not hard pressed customers.

One worker who has been at the Fenton site for over ten years told us: "I'm disgusted that our union Unison seem to be just accepting the redundancy package. They should be fighting to save our jobs and keep the Fenton site open".

Npower have now announced a 60-day 'consultation' period. Unison should make sure that this includes building a campaign to defend all these jobs.

They should link up with other Npower workplaces faced with job losses and closure in Oldbury, West Midlands and elsewhere.

In 2012 Npower posted a 25% increase in profits to a bumper £390 million just four months after increasing prices for customers by 9% and followed that with a further 8% increase in profits in the first nine months of this year.

As part of the 'consultation' Unison should demand that Npower's books are opened up to public scrutiny so we can see exactly where these profits are going.

Energy industry unions should draw the necessary conclusions from Npower's attempt to sack

Unison and other unions involved should fight this latest round of job cuts and launch a campaign for the immediate renationalisation of the major energy companies to be run in the interest of the majority

more workers while still increasing prices for customers.

Unison and other unions involved should fight this latest round of job cuts and launch a campaign for the immediate renationalisation of the major energy companies to be run in the interest of the majority. Only in this way could jobs be saved and customer prices be kept down now and in the future.

There would be no need to compensate the fat cat owners, although small shareholders would be compensated in cases of proven need.

In brief

Grangemouth

Grangemouth workers are facing 200 job losses in spite of recently agreeing cuts to pay and working conditions to keep the plant open. Unite has revealed that Ineos plans to close five plants on the site. So Ineos have already reneged on the agreement which forced workers to accept huge pay cuts and cuts to pensions and conditions.

Blacklisting

On 29 November the first hearing in a High Court case against blacklisting companies began. The case was originally launched by the Blacklist Support Group on behalf of nearly 100 claimants, mainly construction workers. The unions Unite, Ucat and GMB have now joined in. The case will proceed in April, when all the cases have been prepared.

Pay battle needed

At a recent meeting of the Unison Northwest local government Service Group Executive, branch representatives - both from the political left and right - spoke, stating that the Northwest region (along with Greater London) was right to oppose 1% this year and that we should be doing all we can to ensure that 2014-15 is the year Unison defeats the government's policy of public sector pay restraint. At the end of the meeting a motion was passed unanimously, which stated that Unison needs "to mobilise our activists and members in preparation for the need to take industrial action to support a decent pay rise for all." We cannot take it for granted that this will happen. We need to make sure that all aspects of any campaign on pay are accountable to rank and file activists and members. 2014 must be the year that Britain's largest public sector union takes action on pay.

A Unison member

Out of tune

Ghosts of co-ordinated action, past and future, are what haunts scrooge employers and the Con-Dem government. But my union has come up with a novel way of pressuring local government employers to grant a £1 an hour increase. On 18 December, members are being encouraged to gather to sing Christmas carols as we "Strike A Chord for Local Government Pay". I've no objection to using seasonal stunts to draw attention to campaigns, in fact, providing you've got branch members who can actually sing, it would certainly draw attention. But imagine how much more impact it would have if it was for Unison members in all sectors and, instead of being careful to encourage us to sing carols "at lunchtime or after work", the carols were sung on a walkout to draw people to a strike rally. This could have been the case if the Unison leadership hadn't dragged its feet on pay for the last two years, during which time we've had too many stunts and not enough preparing for action.

Another Unison member

Website

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

Save our fire service!



FBU area reps prepare for the march photos Paul Couchman

Paul Couchman

Save Our Services in Surrey and Spelthorne Socialist Party

Hundreds are planning to march behind the Save Our Services banner on a demonstration on 7 December to save fire stations in Surrey. Unison, FBU and at least 10 other trade unions are mobilising for the demo, along with residents' associations and councillors.

I spoke to a local firefighter who has recently joined the Socialist Party: "I have served in the Fire Service for over 24 years. I remember the dismembering of communities in Scotland and the North of England and then Wales under Thatcher.

I am now watching a similar and often more ruthless government break apart a public service that works.

Nationally, firefighters are experiencing the theft of our pension rights. We will have to work longer and will get less in return!

"From the age of 55 I will have to attend annual medicals. If I do not reach the required lung capacity requirement I may be dismissed on the grounds of capability, thus losing what I have saved for in retirement.

"Here in Surrey, we are also facing service cuts as part of this 'smash n grab' Tory-led culture. We face the closure of two firestations in Spelthorne.

"Tory led Surrey county council propose to close both Sunbury and Staines fire stations and rebuild one in a new location offer-

ing one appliance less in the middle of this densely populated and busy quarter of the county.

"Because of all these attacks I felt the need to re-visit my beliefs. I have watched subsequent governments and councillors lining their own pockets as they watch people fail.

I feel for me the only way forward, the only credible voice in returning some sense to the debate and people to where they rightly belong is the Socialist Party."



The local press is publicising the march

The March to Save Spelthorne Fire Stations on Saturday 7 December is assembling at 11.30am at Sunbury Fire Station and marching through Ashford Town Centre to Staines Fire Station (opposite Ashford Hospital). Join us.

Support striking St Mungos workers

Workers at St Mungo's hostel in Hitchin are staging a seven-day strike, the first strike in St Mungo's history. This is the result of a new macho management style. The fighting response forms part of a growing pattern of support workers fighting back when they know their union backs them. More strikes are planned if management does not see sense.

Managers have gone back on an agreement made when they took over the 'North Herts. Sanctuary' in Hitchin to move staff on to St Mungo's terms and conditions. The workers, members of the Unite LE 1111 housing branch, have moved to a more onerous shift pattern to help improve the service but the terms and conditions have remained unchanged.

The cost of adhering to the original agreement would be no more than £4,871 a year. It would mean that staff would be entitled to sick pay on a non-discretionary basis.

The shocking practice at the hostel has been for senior management to automatically refuse sick pay.

For example, managers have refused sick pay in the case of staff undergoing exploratory procedures in a suspected cancer case and for surgery. This has led workers to postpone vital medical procedures because they can't afford the time off.

Pickets have been supported by local people, and have been joined by activists from Stevenage trades council. Unite members are determined that workers must be treated decently and that union agreements must be kept.

Send solidarity messages to stmungosunite@gmail.com Strike fund: account name Unite Housing Workers branch 1111, account number 20040639, sort code 08-60-01. Please reference all payments "St Mungo's Hitchin strike"

Low-paid workers win battle



The large, lively picket line photo Helen Pattison

After a two-day strike on 27 and 28 November low-paid workers at University of London (UoL) have won important concessions. The strikers are members of the Independent Workers Union of Great Britain (IWGB).

IWGB organises the overwhelmingly Colombian, Ecuadorian, and Bolivian workers.

Their action has won sick pay, paid holidays and pension rights.

But UoL are refusing to recognise the union.

UoL management are steaming ahead with plans to close the student union, University of London Union (ULU). This could threaten jobs.

The workers know they will have to continue the fight to ensure their demands are met.

Ian Pattison
Socialist Students national chair

Is workfare coming to Morrisons?

A Morrisons worker

The government's various workfare schemes force job-seekers to work for a company while being paid only their benefits.

This has been pushed through by the Tory and Liberal Democrat coalition government in the name of 'work experience', allegedly making young unemployed jobseekers employable. In reality, while young people are forced to work long hours for free or risk losing their benefits, big companies enjoy free labour and are not given any incentive to employ the exploited young person on a real contract at the end of the programme.

In a situation like we face in Britain today where 2.5 million are lining up at the dole queue, over a million of which are young people, workfare can also be used by the bosses to undercut real jobs, wages and terms and conditions for the already employed because there is always somebody who is going to be willing to work for less out of sheer desperation.

Along with zero-hour contracts, workfare undermines major gains won by the workers in the past such as holiday pay, sick pay and the minimum wage. It is fundamentally important that we organise to defeat such attacks.

Outrage

Morrisons is a company that until now has not wanted to be associated with the bad publicity caused by protests against workfare. There has been such outrage that the list of companies using it grew shorter and shorter as companies dropped out.

A high court judgement even ruled that the way one of the schemes had been implemented was breaking the law. This victory in the courts was prepared by cam-



Usdaw should organise against any attempt to bring in workfare at Morrisons

paigning in working class communities and the unions. Youth Fight for Jobs (YFJ) was an important part of this. YFJ members debated on national, regional and local news channels and radio stations, organised protests inside and outside of participating companies and raised awareness over the issue.

All of this work resulted in mounting pressure on both the guilty companies and the government. Morrisons is currently denying that it will use workfare but admits offering 'three day tasters sessions' which are sure to leave a bad taste

in the mouths of the victims of such sessions and also the contracted workers.

The company could sneak in workfare through the back door

Morrisons also claims it has no connection with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) although

the DWP claims that the scheme is a partnership between the jobcentre and the IGD (Institute of Grocery Distribution).

Morrisons has also claimed that anybody refusing to take part in this scheme will not be sanctioned but since participants are to be recruited from jobcentres, Morrisons has no say over who would get sanctioned.

As disgusting as it for Morrisons to use free labour, the real worry is that the 'taster sessions' could be just the beginning and a way for the company to sneak in workfare

through the back door.

In order to defend the interest of its members and to safeguard the wider community from exploitation, the shop workers union, Usdaw, must take a firm position against this scheme. Usdaw should raise awareness of the scheme and provide Morrisons workers with information about what it could potentially mean to their jobs.

Given the severity of the issue, Usdaw should not only demand that Morrisons does not use the scheme but should also be ready to ballot members for industrial action.

Nottingham council uses court against bedroom tax victims

Cathy Meadows

The first people to be taken to court by Labour-led Nottingham City Council for rent arrears caused by the bedroom tax had hearings on 21 November at Nottingham Crown Court.

Nottingham Defend Council Tax Benefit Campaign, which includes Socialist Party members, organised a protest outside the court to demand that the council implement a no-evictions policy. 25 people came to protest and show solidarity. The local TV crews covered the protest and the issue was discussed on local BBC radio throughout the day. Members of our campaign were interviewed.

Some of us went into the court building but, following objections from Nottingham City Council, the public were not allowed into the court hearings. We understand that the council argued that each case would only take three minutes so there was no point in having the public present!

There were 20 possession hearings listed for the day (we believe six concerned the bedroom tax). After more than half an hour only two cases had been heard. A campaign member had their case adjourned because the council could not ex-



The council is turning to the courts without looking at people's situations

plain the amount that was being deducted from their housing benefit and because they had not yet applied for a Discretionary Housing Payment.

Failings

From talking to others waiting to go into court, it appears that instead of using possession hearings as a last resort, the council is calling people to court before it has even looked properly at their situation (for ex-

ample one person had proof of not being under-occupied). This means that the council is not following the legal process that applies to social housing landlords.

Most of the people waiting did not have legal representation and were offered a five minute meeting with the duty solicitor. The duty solicitor does not represent people in court and, from one person's feedback, did not attempt to explore whether the council had followed the legal processes.

Civil service union calls for an end to violence in Jobcentres

The trade union branch representing Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) staff in Lincolnshire has appealed for an end to violence in local Jobcentres after a man was arrested following an incident involving a meat cleaver in the Lincoln office. The DWP Lincolnshire branch of the civil servants' union PCS represents nearly 500 staff working for the government department in Lincolnshire.

Branch secretary and Socialist Party member Nick Parker said: "Front-line jobcentre staff do a vital job to provide a helping hand to benefit claimants who find themselves out of a job to get them back on their feet and into work. Staff are doing this on deteriorating rates of pay and with increasing workloads. They have a right to be able to go about their daily working lives without the threat of being attacked or abused by a small minority of people whom they serve.

"There is a rising trend of unacceptable behaviour taking place in offices across the country, with many such incidents linked to benefit changes such as sanctions, the abolition of crisis loans, and re-assessment of sickness benefits. PCS warned the government that austerity policies would put our members at risk, and sadly this



A Jobcentre

prediction is coming true. Tens of thousands of jobs in the DWP have also been cut since 2010.

"PCS is committed to strengthening the health and safety protection for our members, staff and the public when incidents like this occur. The government should listen to PCS and a growing number of campaign groups and immediately withdraw and reverse all cuts to our society's welfare state."

Scottish constitutional referendum - SNP white paper

Yes to an independent socialist Scotland, no to a continuation of capitalist austerity

In anticipation of the referendum in September 2014, the Scottish government has produced its white paper on Scottish independence. This "blueprint for a better Scotland", as described by the SNP's first minister Alex Salmond, is a prospectus for a continuation of the profit-driven system of capitalism that will fail to deliver an end to austerity. Only through clear socialist policies, widespread public ownership and a war against poverty and low pay can a better, socialist Scotland be found as PHILIP STOTT (Socialist Party Scotland) explains.

At the launch of the white paper, Alex Salmond and Nicola Sturgeon (deputy first minister) described the debate on Scotland's relationship with the rest of the UK as a "choice between two futures". On the one hand, a future from the Better Together campaign and the pro-union parties of a continuation of Westminster cuts, attacks on welfare and low economic growth. On the other hand, a future under independence with the Scottish National Party (SNP) that would open up the possibility of a growing economy, higher wages and an amelioration of austerity.

The white paper promises some welcome commitments, including the abolition of the bedroom tax and an end to the rolling out of the dreaded Universal Credit and some improved childcare provision. In contrast to the savage austerity being carried out by the Con-Dem government, these modest reforms with the vague hope of something different under independence can boost support for a Yes vote in September 2014.

However, the detail of the white paper reveals that the SNP is completely committed to maintaining the foundations of a weakened and diseased capitalism that will mean continued falling living standards for the majority.

Neither of the "two futures" can offer a way out of increasing poverty and worsening social conditions for the working class. Not surprisingly, a 'third option' of a socialist Scotland based on democratic public ownership of the economy and an end to all cuts, is not put forward by any of the pro-big business parties.

Socialist future

Socialist Party Scotland is supporting a Yes vote in the referendum next year. But we reject completely the false options offered up by the official Yes and No campaigns. In contrast, we believe that the powers of independence should be used to carry through decisive measures against the shipwrecked vessel of capitalism - not attempt to patch it up and sail on regardless.

An independent socialist Scotland, linked to a voluntary and democratic confederation of socialist states, including England, Wales and Ireland, would lay the basis for a transformation in the lives of the majority and a permanent end to austerity.

Under the SNP plan an independent Scotland would continue with the pound and with the Queen as Head of State. It would apply to join both the capitalist institutions of Nato and the European Union (EU). Nor would there be any nationalisation of the key sectors of the economy, including the energy companies, oil and gas, transport and the banking system.

The commitment to join Nato would mean Scotland allowing nuclear armed submarines and vessels using Scottish ports and waters. Equally the SNP are proposing joint military arrangements

between an independent Scotland and the rest of the UK. This makes a mockery of the SNP's anti-nuclear weapons policy and signals their intention of being prepared to support and assist the military and foreign policy of British imperialism in the future.

To emphasise their enthusiasm for a big business agenda, a key plank in the SNP's plan is a promise to slash corporation tax to 3% below whatever the UK rate is in 2016.

In an independent Scotland the SNP expect labour productivity to rise by 1%, exports to China, India and Brazil would increase by 50% and this, alongside the cuts to business tax rates, would mean a total of 200,000 extra jobs in an independent Scotland.

However, the SNP prospectus takes no account of the outlook for either the world economy in general, or the terrible position in the eurozone and the rest of the UK.

Nordic model

The Scottish government highlights the Nordic States and Germany as the ideal templates for a future independent Scotland. Yet as Socialist Party Scotland has pointed out many times, the so-called Nordic Model is in the process of being dismantled, a result of the deep economic crisis engulfing world capitalism and the savage austerity that has come in its wake (see <http://www.socialistworld.net/doc/6330>).

It is a complete illusion to believe that under the conditions of economic crisis, falling growth rates in China, India and Brazil, a frozen eurozone, etc, that a capitalist independent Scotland could find a road to economic recovery and sustained rising living standards.

Poverty, underemployment and low pay are rampant in Scotland, which the SNP's report does highlight. The capitalists and pro-big business governments are intent on imposing a long-term readjustment in expectations. They hope to teach the working class to live on less, with fewer benefits and worsening public services, including health and education, while those at the top of society continue to get richer at our expense.

The proposals from the SNP leadership for an independent Scotland would not alter that trend, rooted as it is in the same economic system that has created the social crisis that we have today.

Straightjacket

In reality, the SNP's white paper recognises the straightjacket that an independent capitalist Scotland would be operating within.

In the section on the first budget that the SNP would propose in a newly independent Scotland, they firmly come out against a major increase in public spending. "The government will ensure that Scotland has stable and sustainable public finances, underpinned by the dis-



The SNP's Alex Salmond - praying for a referendum win

cipline of a fiscal framework."

The SNP would therefore maintain almost 90% of the cuts suffered in the last few years by public services, workers jobs, incomes and pensions.

The SNP do commit to abolish the bedroom tax, increase government-funded childcare to 30 hours a week during term-time for three and four year olds, among some other changes. The paltry minimum wage would rise by inflation, but there is no commitment to legislate for a real living minimum wage.

Pensions would be a poor £1.10 a week higher in Scotland than in the rest of the UK. But there are no commitments to reverse the devastating cuts suffered by millions of people in the last few years. There is also a commitment to "negotiate" the renationalisation of Royal Mail and to remove Trident from Scotland within five years.

There will be no tax increases on the rich or big business. There will be a range of other "incentives" for business to invest in Scotland, tax breaks, write-offs and government subsidies. The white paper makes clear that the 'rules' of capitalism will be followed to the letter.

Team Scotland

The SNP model for independence proposes a "Team Scotland" approach post-independence, with workers and employers and the government ensuring a "greater social partnership approach to be rolled out across all aspects of economic and social policy."

The Scottish government put forward a document to the trade unions in Scotland in 2011 proposing the unions agree to wage freezes and other attacks on terms and conditions as a trade-off to ensure no compulsory redundancies. This was rejected by a majority of the unions.

However, the SNP in power in Holyrood and in local government have implemented these attacks anyway, not in partnership, but unilaterally. The 'part-

nership' model is a dead-end for the trade union movement and can only weaken and undermine their collective strength.

The SNP's role in the events at Grange-mouth is a warning to anyone who thinks that their model for independence would be a welcome relief from workers' facing savage attacks on their rights. Salmond, it should be remembered, called on Unite to sign a no strike deal with billionaire Ratcliffe and Ineos.

Project Fear

"Project Fear" is the apt working title given to the Better Together campaign. Typical propaganda leaflets proclaim: "Can you afford to go it alone?" They raise the threatening spectre that under independence pensions, benefits and wages would be under threat. The craven irony of these statements from politicians who have heaped a tsunami of austerity onto the heads of the working class is not lost on many.

Predictably, the leaders of the main capitalist pro-union parties have ratcheted up their anti-independence propaganda in response to the white paper. This has followed on from the not so veiled threats from Labour and Tory politicians that the Scottish shipyards would lose MoD contracts and thousands of jobs in the wake of independence.

Leading figures in the European Union, who are looking over their shoulders at the threat to other multinational states, have also suggested that Scotland would need to re-apply for membership. The right-wing Rajoy government in Spain, facing a major national conflict in Catalonia and other areas of the Spanish state, has threatened to veto an independent Scotland's application for membership.

Although the SNP leadership are completely committed to a capitalist project in the form of Scottish independence, the overwhelming interests of British capitalism are against the break-up of the UK.

The SNP leadership's proposals for independence, which are really changing one union in favour of another reformed union, reflect that pressure.

Nevertheless, there is a real fear that the consequences of a Yes vote in 2014 would destabilise what is left of the UK state even further. This includes deepening sectarian division in Northern Ireland and driving forward demands for further devolution, and independence for Wales.

Additionally, the prestige of British imperialism would also suffer a real blow in the event of the break of the UK state. For all these reasons the attacks of Project Fear will continue and even be stepped up, particularly in the event of an increase in support for independence in the run-up to the referendum date.

Socialist programme

From the beginning of the debate around the referendum Socialist Party Scotland has been calling for a specific trade union-led, anti-cuts and pro-working class campaign. One that, while supporting a Yes vote, would also fight for the powers, under independence, to end and reverse the cuts and nationalise the main sectors of the economy and the privatised utilities, alongside increases in the minimum wage, benefits and pensions, an end to privatisation, and a reversal of all anti-trade union laws.

The left-led Scotland No.2 branch of the Communications Workers Union (CWU) has played an important role in helping to establish the Trade Unionists

for Independence campaign.

However, a majority of the socialist left in Scotland have been largely uncritical supporters of the Yes campaign. They have also given their backing to the ideas around the Common Weal Project, which was set-up by the Jimmy Reid Foundation, and the Radical Independence Campaign, which bases itself on the Nordic capitalist model as a way forward for an independent Scotland.

The majority of trade union leaderships in Scotland, however, are currently taking a back seat and failing to actively put forward a pro-working class campaign. Some unions including Usdaw, Aslef, Community and the GMB are supporting the Better Together campaign, many of them without proper consultation with their own members in Scotland.

In contrast, the PCS civil service union, within which the Socialist Party plays an important role, will be holding a special conference of its Scottish branches and membership to draw up a platform for the referendum.

Socialist Party Scotland members in other trade unions, including Unison and Unite will be calling for a debate and a democratic discussion to allow members to draw up a policy that puts the interests of the working class centre stage in the referendum debate.

The voice of the organised working class needs to be heard with a clear anti-austerity and pro-public ownership message. One that also recognises that there are differences among the working class on the issue of the referendum, al-

though the vast majority of polls show a big class polarisation in voting intentions with highest support for independence among the poorest and the low paid.

Central to this is the burning need to build a new mass working class party that would fight for the powers of independence to be used in the interests of the working class. The Labour affiliated trade unions should break their links with Labour and along with the unions like the PCS, FBU, RMT, etc, prepare a conference to launch a new working class party.

Socialist Party Scotland calls for the powers of independence to be used to dramatically increase taxes on the rich and big business. We also argue for an immediate levy - of at least 50% of the uninvested funds of the big corporations - to be used to develop a massive programme of socially useful production, job creation and public services.

A socialist government would take urgent steps to solve the economic crisis by taking into democratic public ownership the major corporations that control the economy, including finance, oil, transport, and manufacturing.

To be successful in the long term an independent socialist Scotland would seek to build a united movement with the working class in the other nations in the UK, Europe and internationally. This would lay the basis for a voluntary socialist confederation of states and an international plan of production.

The full version of this article can be read on socialistpartyscotland.org.uk

Radical Independence Campaign needs clear socialist policies



Matt Dobson

Around 1,000 people attended the Radical Independence Campaign (RIC) conference on 23 November. There were a large number of young people, mainly students, and also mobilisations from the SNP and Greens. Over 100 trade unionists attended a session on "industrial democracy". This was the second RIC conference, in 2012 around 800 attended.

This year also saw a higher turnout from the Third Sector and even business people, showing this layer is comfortable with the political direction of the leadership of RIC - the Jimmy Reid Foundation think tank (authors of the Common Weal Project) and the International Socialist Group a split from the SWP.

SNP MSPs were given an uncritical platform at the conference despite their record of implementing Tory cuts and refusing to use their powers to mitigate the bedroom tax.

The session aimed at trade unionists on "industrial democracy" showed the contradictions present at the conference. Many attending expressed a wish to discuss key issues for the working class such as political representation and challenging the onslaught on wages and conditions by the capitalist class.

This came up against the agenda of the RIC leadership who wanted to focus on how principles of industrial democracy and cooperation between bosses and workers would be a cornerstone of an independent Scotland.

The RIC leadership is putting forward the false perspective that it isn't possible for trade unionists and workers to win struggles against the "British state" and that only a breakaway offers the Scottish working class the chance of winning victories. The key demand for a one-day general strike across the whole of the UK was absent from the speeches of RIC activists.

However, it was raised by trade unionists in the discussion. The idea of "workers on boards" and cooperation between workers and bosses was put forward by academics such as Gregor Gall.

It's clear from this conference, and with the Yes demonstration which attracted 20,000 in September, that the pro-independence movement is growing and attracting radicalised layers of young people and workers.

However, what is being put forward by the leaders of RIC will leave even those participating in the campaign with questions about how a "fairer society" will actually be achieved without breaking with capitalism and struggling for socialism.

Under the SNP plan an independent Scotland would continue with the pound and with the Queen as Head of State. It would apply to join both the capitalist institutions of Nato and the European Union (EU). Nor would there be any nationalisation of the key sectors of the economy, including the energy companies, oil and gas, transport and the banking system.



A socialist government would take urgent steps to solve the economic crisis by taking into democratic public ownership the major corporations that control the economy photo Jim Halfpenny

Socialist Party Christmas appeal

Support the fightback in Con-Dems' Dickensian Britain

Ken Douglas
Socialist Party national treasurer

Christmas is coming and the bankers are getting fat! While wage cuts and fuel price rises are the norm for us, we can at least console ourselves that Britain is leading Europe in the number of fat-cat bankers earning more than €1 million.

It could be a scene from Dickens' Christmas Carol with Scrooge sitting on his piles of money while refusing to light the fire in the grate for his freezing workers.

However, unlike Scrooge, there will be no miraculous transformation in Cameron and Osborne. They may fear that the piling up of such extreme wealth while they preach austerity could ignite a movement against the corrupt bankers and their political lackeys, but they will carry on so long as they can get away with it.

They can be put under pressure -

their reaction to the popular wave of anger against the fuel companies' profiteering shows this.

Like Scrooge allowing his workers a few sticks of kindling, the government has been forced to make some apparent concessions. But at the same time, despite their per-household profits rising by 300% in

Britain leads Europe for bankers paid over €1 million

three years, the fuel companies still threaten more price rises.

That's why this Christmas, as always, members of the Socialist Party will be out campaigning in the workplaces, the town centres and on the housing estates.

Workers are fighting back against this Scrooge government - uni-

versity lecturers, housing workers, firefighters, teachers have all taken action recently. But to have the maximum effect we need to combine all the struggles against austerity in the form of a 24-hour general strike.

The ghosts of Christmas past, present and future changed Scrooge's outlook but it is the reawakening of the tradition of struggle of the working class that will drive the Con-Dems back.

The Socialist Party has a vital role to play in this process. That's why we are appealing to all readers of the Socialist to consider making a donation to the fighting fund to help us end the year with the finance we need to continue our struggle in 2014.

We know that money is tight for our readers but every donation, no matter how small, will help us get to our target. You can donate using the form below, via our website socialistparty.org.uk/donate or by telephoning 020 8988 8777.

London TUSC groups plan for 2014 elections

Paula Mitchell
London Socialist Party secretary

TUSC groups and committees are meeting all over London to put plans in place for the elections next year.

In Brent, Haringey, Hackney and Islington, Waltham Forest, Lewisham, Tower Hamlets and Hillingdon, socialists, trade unionists and community activists have come together. New groups are about to meet in Ealing and Newham. Candidates are coming forward in Camden, Sutton, Croydon, Barking, Enfield, Lambeth and many other places.

Inspired by socialist Kshama Sawant's election victory in Seattle, Socialist Party members are playing our full part. We'll be standing alongside many other trade unionists and campaigners. TUSC candidates look set to include anti-cuts campaigners, Turkish and Kurdish community activists, Afro-Caribbean community activists, and housing and NHS campaigners. Members of various trade unions have put their names forward, so there'll be housing workers, hospital porters and cleaners, nurses,

teachers, tube workers, fire fighters, civil servants - all standing together.


There'll be people who have lost their jobs due to the cuts, people who have had services and benefits stripped away, and whose housing has been under attack. Students have put their names forward too. Ex-Labour Party members are joining in, alongside people who have stood as independent candidates previously, and a former Lewisham Socialist Party councillor.

Local authority workers can't stand for election in the authority they work for (though if they live in a different authority area they can stand there) but that doesn't mean they can't take part. Everyone can get involved in building support and winning votes.

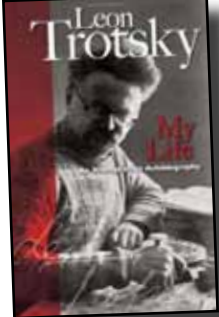
TUSC candidates standing for council will say to those council workers - vote for TUSC and we won't vote for cuts!

See tusc.org.uk for more info about standing






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South West	1,400	1,441	██████████	██████████
West Midlands	2,100	2,012	██████████	██████████
Wales	2,300	2,193	██████████	██████████
East Midlands	1,600	1,428	██████████	██████████
Yorkshire	2,900	2,212	██████████	██████████
London	6,100	4,650	██████████	██████████
Northern	600	447	██████████	██████████
North West	1,200	680	██████████	██████████
Southern	1,200	458	██████████	██████████
South East	750	243	██████████	██████████
England & Wales	3,650	2,234	██████████	██████████
TOTAL	25,000	19,516	██████████	██████████

The fight against low pay in the United States

Black Friday and beyond

Cheyenne Gracia

In the US, low-wage workers, from fastfood to retail, have protested, picketed, and gone on strike multiple times this year to demand higher wages and rights on the job.

'The busiest shopping day of the year', Black Friday, is the culmination of capitalistic voyeurism, resulting in near riots among consumers as they scramble to purchase cheaply made imported goods. Meanwhile, employees are forced to work longer hours in hectic conditions at wages that make it impossible to support themselves.

Though Black Friday sales entice shoppers with big savings, the cost of operating retail stores like Walmart falls heavily on taxpayers. Working in the second-largest employer in the country, the average Walmart worker earns \$8.86 [£5.40] an hour. Lack of benefits, sick leave, and a sufficient salary force many employees to rely on public assistance to ensure they will have access to basic necessities.

A recent study found that more than half of low-wage workers in the fastfood industry rely on some form of public assistance, amounting to \$7 billion dollars a year. Profits in the fastfood industry reach into the billions, while forcing the public to foot the bill.

While public assistance is an important and necessary part of or-



Kshama Sawant protesting with fastfood workers demanding \$15 an hour photo Socialist Alternative

ganised society, it is ridiculous that some of the largest employers in the country force their workers to depend on social programmes so they can eat and pay their rent.

The demand for a \$15 an hour minimum wage is a direct result of companies like McDonald's and Walmart hoarding profits while ignoring the needs of workers.

In 2012, 400 Walmart workers walked off the job in the midst of the Black Friday chaos. Despite the anti-union policies of the global conglomerate, employees managed to organise another Black Friday strike this year.

Citizens of SeaTac, a town just outside Seattle, recently voted on a ballot over adopting a \$15 mini-

mum wage in the town.

In Seattle itself, Socialist Alternative (co-thinkers of the Socialist Party in the US) member Kshama Sawant won her election campaign to Seattle City Council with more than 90,000 votes. A major feature of her campaign was demanding an implementation of a similar \$15 an hour initiative.

Interview with a fastfood worker activist

Socialist Alternative member Adam interviews a fastfood worker activist - Carlos Hernandez - who has become a leader in the struggle of low-paid workers in Seattle.

Why are fastfood workers upset?

The working conditions are very bad. Workers are left completely unprotected. They don't have the opportunity to live a dignified life, to pay the bills, to be able to provide for their families. The majority of workers are always paid the minimum. They aren't paid overtime.

What are the demands of fastfood workers?

One of the first things is healthcare, because most people don't have it, and if they do it's very expensive. There should be more regulation of working conditions, in order to be sure that workers have protection.

One of the most popular demands is for \$15 an hour, which would then give workers the capacity to improve their lives and go to school, because they wouldn't have to work two or three jobs.

We are the ones that make this industry move. We are the ones who open the restaurants, attend to the customers, clean, and make the food. But the bosses don't care about all this. They don't care about our wages.

As long as they're making money the people are recyclable - throw away. When someone gets sick, they're out. Right now less than 1% of fastfood places have unions. It's

very important that we have them in the fastfood industry.

How have the fastfood companies responded?

The employers are responding exactly as we expected them to. They're doing whatever they can to make this fail.

A lot of workers are afraid because they have families and they don't want to lose their jobs. So right now the bosses are using intimidation a lot. In my case, I have been fired twice from my job for trying to improve conditions.

We are the ones who open the restaurants, attend to the customers, clean, and make the food

I don't want conditions at these jobs to stay the same forever. It's not just me or the others who are working now. A lot of new workers are going to come and start working there, and it's going to be the same. Owners will become bigger and bigger millionaires on the backs of the people who are working there.

After I went to my first strike and started talking to other workers about their rights, they started segregating me from other workers - Spanish-speaking workers especially. I'm a good worker so it

was difficult for them to fire me. They knew that if they fired me people would be all over them. So they looked for a legal way to fire me.

They fired me for giving a cookie to a kid. Unfortunately, there are no regulations and they are able to do that. They were always monitoring me with the camera waiting for me to do something 'bad'.

How can the struggle move forward?

It's not so easy but it's also not impossible. There are a lot of people putting their hearts into this struggle so things can change, not only for immigrants or Latinos, but for the majority in this country. The goal is to win better working conditions, win a wage that allows us to provide for our family and have a more dignified life. We need to survive and we can't. We are just a step away from the streets. Our kids are just a step away from drugs.

It's really important for the people, the communities, the churches, and the politicians to be aware of the conditions, how much they pay the workers and the exploitation that's occurring. In that respect, I think we are succeeding - people are becoming more and more aware of the conditions in fastfood.

Another of the goals is to get organised so we can win better conditions and win \$15 an hour. They always try to scare people saying that the price of the food will rise and that the economy will suffer, but the economy is already very bad.

The majority of fast food work-

ers depend on the government to survive, with food stamps or childcare. That's another one of the goals, for workers to be able to survive on their own, but the companies don't want that.

You supported Kshama Sawant's campaign with a lot of enthusiasm. Why?

As a worker and student I think we need politicians who have had the same experiences and faced the same obstacles as us - especially poor people who don't have the resources, and minorities, there are very few people who represent us. The majority in this country are poor workers who barely survive and many are people of colour. Their voice isn't heard.

The Democrat and Republican politicians who supposedly support workers go to the pickets and rallies but then don't do anything when there are no longer cameras. At almost every picket I see somebody who represents Kshama and I think we need people who are aware of things like her, who want to help the poor population, those who are most needy, most likely to suffer injustice, minorities.

We don't have representatives who struggle on our behalf. There are representatives, but representatives for those who have the most. We need people who represent the working class, the people below, the minorities, those who need help.

Full versions of this article and interview can be seen at socialistalternative.org

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

www.socialistworld.net

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



World: Thesis for the International Executive Committee (IEC) of the CWI 2013

The world situation and the tasks for the CWI

International Secretariat of the CWI



Europe: extreme-right parties form alliance

Populist, anti-immigrant parties aim to exploit anti-EU mood in May elections

Per-Åke Westerlund, from Offensiv, weekly newspaper of Rättvisepartiet Socialisterna (CWI Sweden)



Kazakhstan: Supreme Court in Astana denies justice for Vadim Kuramshin

Urgent solidarity needed

Campaign Kazakhstan

Film review: Catching Fire

Mary Finch reviews *Catching Fire*, part two of the popular *Hunger Games* trilogy.

This film's story now resonates more than ever. Ruled by a dictatorial state, Panem, which uses the brutal annual Hunger Games to force submission to it - this is a dystopian future. *Catching Fire* brings in the politics and ideology from Suzanne Collins' books that the first film largely neglected.

The indulgence of the wealthy Capitol seems to have no end. Parties, decadence, and glamour; everything is colourful and exciting, and luxuries and money are treated as disposable commodities. This stands in sharp contrast to the abject poverty of the surrounding districts, and the grey industrial areas that are home to ordinary citizens.

Class politics

At the heart of the trilogy is class politics. The relationship between the class elites and those at the very end of the scale in Panem reflect the reality of modern capitalism. The state, headed by President Snow, has a social base in the elite classes living in the Capitol.

But this elite needs the working class - the Capitol and Panem keep going only because the districts do. This makes the state and class society fragile. For capitalism, in creating the working class, is forging its own destruction. President Snow says that no force can be stronger than the state, but the rebellions that sparked the creation of *The Hunger Games* very nearly overthrew the Capitol, and the districts are rebelling again.

The film's closing images see the main protagonist Katniss, distraught at learning that her home was bombed and effectively destroyed. But her sadness quickly turns to anger and determination. She is ready to fight back.

The revolutionary consciousness builds throughout the film and explodes into a revolution against the Capitol. In the first film, Katniss attempts suicide in the Games to prevent the Capitol having a victor to display.

This shows the first sparks of rebellion: her victory tour sees riots in almost every district; violence breaks out against 'Peacekeepers', the agents of the state.

Her final symbolic rebellion is uncovered at the ceremony before the 75th Hunger Games. Katniss is forced to wear what would have been her wedding dress - which burns away and becomes a black dress with wings. She embodies the revolution, and in the final book becomes its figurehead.

But the revolution is wider than her alone. The Capitol tries to make Katniss distant from the ordinary citizens, hoping that the revolutionary mood will pass; but movements based on the strength of the working class cannot be so breakable.

The consciousness of the citizens in the districts broadens beyond individual struggles and becomes a struggle to liberate everyone, by encouraging them to liberate themselves through participation in the revolution.

Working in solidarity with each other, the working class can overthrow capitalist states.



The film is set in a dictatorial state photo Murray Close

But revolution is not just a work of fiction. The recent Arab Spring saw mass uprisings turn into revolutions that overthrew dictatorial regimes that once seemed unstoppable; a million people walked the streets of Brazil this summer, over a small rise in bus fares, and Turkey saw mass demonstrations and occupations, met with a brutal backlash from the

police, in defence of a park.

In the worst crisis since the Great Depression, capitalism's contradictions are being exposed, as are its inequalities.

The rich get richer and the poor get poorer: and eventually, something has to give. This film will encourage all those of us in the real world who are fighting for socialism.

Veteran actor Donald Sutherland, who plays President Snow in the film, told the press that he wants the film to stir revolt, a youth uprising. He cited corporate tax dodging, racism, denying food stamps to starving Americans and drone strikes as reasons to take action.

Why I believe in socialism

Seventeen year old Matt, a new member of York Socialist Party, gave a speech on 'why socialism' at his school. Below we print excerpts.

I would like to see the return of class politics to Britain. Some of our country's greatest political achievements have been socialist in nature - the NHS, the general strike, the welfare system. I believe the presence of socialism in our political scene would be in the interest of every ordinary person.

There are socialists across the world, and workers from all cultures must join together in the struggle against oppression. In Britain we live in a country devastated by a financial crisis which has rocked the world and a catastrophic financial crash has shaken the very foundations of society.

1.6 million children are growing up in poverty in Britain with the Red Cross distributing food packages for the first time since World War Two, while the super-rich have had it easy.

Our attentions are directed towards the "scroungers" - an imaginary underclass of benefit layabouts - while those who caused this crash, the real scroungers, the tax-dodging bankers get off scot-free, subsidised for their mistakes through cuts to our services.

This attack on ordinary people is overseen by an Eton-educated political elite which cares not for workers, but for the interests of corporations and their own greed. How can we expect them to strive for ordinary people, when they receive their own

campaign funds from big business?

Throughout the history of capitalism, we have seen horror stories such as this - booms and busts (an inevitable symptom), poorhouses, starvation, illness, corruption and above all - exploitation. Today, the average shopfloor worker makes 100 times less than the average chief executive. A lust for profit and greed has created a system in which some have it all, while others have none.

Food and water have been turned into profitable industries, commodities, for the benefit of those in charge, but to the detriment of the people who require them to survive.

Unjust system

It's time we stood up for the rights of ordinary people. Our current system is unsustainable, unfair and unjust, and it's time for change. We need to value and appreciate the hard work of every member of our society - the important role which every worker plays in keeping society running.

Through socialism, I believe it would be possible to fix a myriad of problems which face our society today. The nationalisation of basic services would give every person a proper standard of living. Eliminate the profit system, and it would be possible for services to be delivered at the minimal cost to both the individual and the environment.

There would be no need to charge extortionate amounts for fuel and energy. The need to cut corners on environmental policies, in order to generate surplus value, would be eliminated.

As profit is done away with, we would see a noticeable decrease in income disparity. Money previously directed towards ultra-rich bosses would instead be invested in wages, with workers seeing noticeable increases in salary, and advancement in working conditions. From here, we may choose to go further; to give the people shared ownership of most, if not all industries.

We should look towards politics, and tackle the increasing alienation which people feel towards it. We should work to establish a democracy free from private interest and profit. In which politicians' wages reflect those of ordinary people, and their interests reflect those of the workers around them.

As well as the immediate benefits of the return of socialist ideas, we would hope to see even more advancements over time, as the idea of profit and exploitation fades, we would see an end to recessions and depressions - a symptom of capitalist greed, an end to conflict over money and land, an end to poverty, to starvation, to thirst. We could build a better world. I believe in socialism, because we should value people over profit.



"Some have it all while others have none" photo Lash



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Peter Taaffe reviews
- **Middle East quagmire**
Judy Beishon writes

We need mass house building

Not more subsidies for lenders and landlords!

Paul Kershaw

All the politicians say we need more housing. But new home 'completions' in England fell 8% to 107,910, in the year to September according to Homes and Communities Agency figures issued last month.

The number of 'affordable' homes completed fell 16% in the first six months of 2013/14. Even these 'affordable' homes are much more expensive than social rents, making them unaffordable for most in many parts of the country.

When the Con-Dems came to power they cut spending on housing but promised that the private sector would fill the gap. But they have found more money for private housing initiatives.

The government's 'help to buy' scheme that subsidises

low deposit (higher risk) mortgages on houses worth up to £600,000 is budgeted to cost £12 billion. As much as £130 billion of mortgages could be financed by the scheme over the next three years with the government underwriting them in the event of default.

Apparently Chancellor George Osborne cynically joked to the cabinet that it would create a housing boom in time for the election.

If rising prices were enough to create an increased supply of housing, the house price inflation of recent decades would have produced a mega boom in house building. Instead the Tories want to secure the vote of current homeowners.

Even capitalist commentators warn of a new bubble. Economist Nouriel Roubini said: "What we are witnessing in many countries looks like a slow-motion replay of the last housing-market train wreck. And, like last time, the bigger the bubbles

become, the nastier the collision with reality will be" (project-syndicate.org, 29 November). Mark Carney, bank of England governor has warned borrowers of the impact of future interest rate rises.

'Build to rent'

The government have also put £1 billion into the 'build to rent' scheme that subsidises growth in the private rented sector by incentivising institutional investors. Both parties support the private rented sector with Labour making some noises about longer tenancies but not putting forward a real alternative.

The Intergenerational Foundation calculates that private landlords get £5 billion subsidy in tax relief. A quarter of Tory MPs and 12.5% of Labour's are private landlords themselves.

A recent report by the mainstream pro-capitalist 'think tank' the Social Market Foundation concludes that governments of the last 35 years have failed to boost house building. At the 1966 election both Labour and Tories promised to build 500,000 homes a year. In 1968 426,000 homes were actually built. Now Labour's 'ambition' is to build just 200,000 homes a year by 2020.

No serious capitalist commentator projects the sort of growth in housing supply needed to address the crisis.

Rather than inventing new subsidies for the bankers and financiers, we need to nationalise the banks and run them democratically in the interest of the 99%. That, as part of a wider socialist plan, would allow resources to be mobilised for a massive programme of building truly affordable housing and improving existing housing and providing proper insulation.

Since 2012, 10,954 council homes have been sold under Right to Buy, with only 1,597 replacement homes being built - not quite the "one for one" ratio promised by Housing Minister Grant Shapps. Last year, the total number of new social homes built fell by 50%, to 17,580



Apparently Chancellor George Osborne cynically joked to the cabinet that it would create a housing boom in time for the election photo the Socialist

London's young workers stuck in battery hen conditions

Suzanne Beishon

When you're young and say 'I never want to grow up', you don't really mean it. But that is the new reality for graduates in London today - a lifetime of living out of a cramped room.

The alternative that many young people are resorting to is moving in with whoever you're in a relationship with earlier than you would chose to, ironically, get some space. Or as the Financial Times has named it, 'hutching up'.

Except 'hutching up' makes it sound cute and cosy. Young people aren't snuggled up like bunny rabbits.

They are being forced like battery farm hens into unregulated, poor quality, sometimes even windowless rooms or sheds in the capital for extortionate prices.

While the latest round of gradu-

Over 20,000 luxury homes could be built in London in the next ten years, according to a group of consultants. EC Harris said in this year alone, over 4,600 high priced properties, worth several millions of pounds each, have been built, approved or planned. Shelter have said over 62,000 London children are likely to be homeless this Christmas

ates to enter the workplace earn 12% less than their pre-economic crisis counterparts (with 60% more student debt), rents have continued to soar - 10% in the last year alone - as 'investors' continue to exploit London's housing stock.

Young Londoners face the crazy

catch-22 of needing to work in London to make their degree pay, only for fat-cat landlords to swallow up that wage in rent.

As more social housing is demolished in inner London to make way for luxury flats, the situation is only being exacerbated.

The government offers 'help to buy' as a solution. But for young workers paying a huge proportion of their wages in rent, saving for even a 5% deposit is a pipe dream.

And to use 'help to buy' in outer London you are likely to need a household income of over £35,000 to qualify for - and be able to pay - a mortgage that in many cases would be even more expensive than renting.

If the government was serious about housing it would cap rents to stop parasitic landlords who suck wages and the benefits system dry solely to line their pockets.

Waltham Forest: Standing up to the racketeers

Waltham Forest Socialist Party made a splash with a campaign stall targeting sky high rents and rip off landlords on Saturday 30 November.

Thousands of Waltham Forest residents are spending more than 70% of their income on rent. So it's no wonder that our demand for the council to take urgent action gained broad support.

One supportive young couple had recently been forced to leave neighbouring borough Hackney because of the rapidly increasing cost of housing there.

They are now facing being forced even further out of London as rents in Waltham Forest also spiral.

Many others who came to show support expressed disgust at the inaction of the Labour council, who are rightly held responsible for both leaving rents completely unchecked and failing to address the

Thousands of Waltham Forest residents are spending more than 70% of their income on rent

dearth of available social housing.

That's why the Socialist Party are encouraging anti-cuts and community campaigners to stand in next May's local elections as part of TUSC.

If Labour councillors lack the backbone to stand up to racketeer landlords and letting agencies, they need to stand aside and make way for those who will!
Claire Laker-Mansfield

'Housing 4 All' campaigner to stand for TUSC

Housing campaigner and mother of five, Isabel Counihan Sanchez, will be standing in next year's local elections for Brent Trade Union and Socialist Coalition.

Isabel and family were made homeless in April 2012 when their benefits were dramatically cut by the London borough's council.

Despite her husband Anthony working full-time as a bus driver, the family were still reliant on these benefits to pay the staggering rent of £690 a week for their home in Kilburn. After being evicted they were placed in inadequate temporary accommodation in Ealing with an unaffordable rent of £500 a week.

After a determined 18-month

campaign, the family finally achieved some success, being placed in a suitable home in Brent this year. Throughout the campaign Izzie has come into contact with other Brent residents at the sharp end of benefit changes and cuts.

Izzie launched the 'Housing 4 All'

campaign with demands including no evictions due to benefit cuts, more council housing at affordable rents and rent controls.

Brent TUSC believes local councillors should put up a fight against this government and not just passively carry through cuts.



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 groups including the Socialist Party.
www.tusc.org.uk

Health service in crisis

BUILD ACTION TO SAVE OUR NHS!

The public health service is facing another severe crisis this winter as the Con-Dems' and previous Labour governments' policies continue to wreak havoc in the NHS. They have meant billions of pounds in 'efficiency savings' ie cuts, thousands of job losses, A&E and ward closures, and unsustainable PFI privatisations. In England, the Tories' Health and Social Care Act, overwhelmingly opposed by health workers, is little more than a privatisation charter. This systematic dismantling of our public health service will only benefit the private profit vulture companies.

Roger Shriver

After years of cuts, large and small, in the cash-strapped National Health Service (NHS), Con-Dem government ministers are expecting a crisis for patients and staff alike. With fears of another cold winter, Britain's hospitals are desperately trying not to become snowed under with patients with illnesses such as flu and injuries due to falls and accidents.

Health workers are used to winter crises and many see them as part of the job, though constant attacks on NHS pay, conditions and regular stress is leading many nursing staff to leave the service.

But the Con-Dems are worried that an election is on the horizon and an NHS crisis is a vote-loser. After their cuts in frontline staff and ward closures, they have even been reopening closed wards in some areas. An increased number of emergency patients had been admitted already by October. Some of these were doubtless due to previous closures in vital services such as walk-in centres.

Clearly, the tipping point has

been reached and a new disaster looms. But Tory panic measures will make little difference.

Already the Nuffield Trust health think tank has told MPs that one in three hospitals could end up in major financial difficulties within months after a huge cash squeeze to try to make 'efficiency savings' ie cut £20-£30 billion from the NHS. They say: "Many hospitals face severe and potentially unsustainable financial pressures", and so have a question mark over their future viability.

The NHS may soon no longer be able to bail out hospitals in trouble because "hospital trusts could start becoming unsustainable in larger number than the current system is designed to address", says the Trust.

So, government cuts policies are forcing many hospitals to consider severe cuts and even closures, or be told that the only solution is to let privatising firms 'help' them - for a healthy profit.

Throughout Europe, health services that are free at the point of use are under attack as big business grabs its opportunity to make big money out of people's health worries.

So as winter takes hold, the grim prospect of a new crisis in emergen-

cy services appears again.

People are angry about this assault on a vital public service but they need to get organised. Health campaigners should get behind the call for health unions to build a massive national weekend demo and for trade unions to organise a 24-hour general strike to defeat this NHS-wrecking government.

The Socialist Party fights for:

- No cuts. Abolish the Health and Social Care Act which allows the further selling off of our NHS to private companies
- End big business profiteering from the NHS: Abandon the Private Finance Initiative which is bleeding the NHS dry
- End NHS job losses and low pay. No downbanding
- A fully publicly funded NHS, free for all at the point of use
- United action to defend the NHS - the TUC must name the day for a 24-hour general strike against austerity



photo TU Senan



New pamphlet:

Defend the NHS!

A compilation of articles by campaigners fighting to stop the destruction of the NHS

Just £2 including p&p
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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 45 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!