



OSBORNE PLANS MORE CUTS



On 6 January Tory Chancellor George Osborne turned Blue Monday into Black Monday. The dreaded return to work for many was made much worse by Osborne's confirmation of plans for another £25 billion of cuts.

December was full of government claims of economic recovery in Britain. But 13 million of us had to pay for Christmas on credit because wages are low, bills are high and most rents are rising. In some areas the size of foodbank parcels was reduced to feed the increased numbers.

There has been some recovery – at

least for the top 0.00000005%! Globally the richest 300 people recorded a tidy \$524 billion increase in their combined wealth in 2013.

The super-rich then received a generous January bonus from the government as Osborne intends to limit himself to chiselling these latest cuts out of the poorest sections of society – yet again. £12 billion will be cut from the welfare budget.

Plans to cut housing benefit to the under-25s have been floated. Young people have been a key target for the Con-Dems' cold cruelty since 2010.

Osborne's speech has been seen as the Tory election campaign

launch for the 2015 general election. Austerity is unpopular but there is no voice in parliament which opposes it. Working class people cannot turn to Labour for an alternative to these cuts.

Labour little different

Shadow Chancellor Ed Balls grabbed the opportunity to re-commit Labour to the Coalition's spending plans for 2015-16.

When pushed on how a future Labour government would balance the budget, as Balls has pledged to, all he could offer was ending universalism in benefits for pensioners.

With a million pensioners staying in bed longer to avoid running up expensive heating bills, limiting access to the winter fuel allowance will result in more deaths.

On 22 May we'll get the first opportunity to punish the Con-Dems at the ballot box. The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC, tusc.org.uk) is aiming to stand 625 no-cuts candidates to kick out austerity.

Why don't you consider standing? Or get involved. See page 8 for details of the TUSC conference.

In what's been called his 'unhappy new year' speech, Osborne called 2014 the 'year of hard choices'. The

huge potential strength of workers could force the Con-Dems to make some very hard choices – to back off from austerity.

A 24-hour general strike would shift the balance of forces and build the confidence of the working class to resist.

Every week of 2013 the Socialist reported how workers have shown time and again that when a serious lead from the unions is given they will step up. This year the campaign for the TUC to call a 24-hour general strike continues to be urgent.

The best response to Osborne's speech is this New Year's resolution: build the fightback in 2014!

the **Socialist**

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what we think

Unite all workers to end bosses' race to the bottom

Much of the right-wing media whipped up hostility and alarm in the run up to the 1 January end of restrictions on entry to Britain for people from Romania and Bulgaria. Ninety Tory activists wrote to David Cameron demanding that he keep the restrictions, part of the pressure that led him to reaffirm measures reducing new immigrants' access to state benefits and welfare, and to promise further limits to net migration.

Tory justice minister Chris Grayling tried to divert the venom onto the Liberal Democrats: "David Cameron has said very clearly he'd like to see tougher rules in future, and we've always said we would have implemented tougher rules in the past, but we don't have a majority", he pleaded on Radio 4's Today programme.

This is one side of the government's stance - a 'tough on immigrants' face to placate the Tory right, media and to try to out-flank immigration-hostile Ukip so that it gains fewer Tory votes in May's elections.

The other side, however, is to aid the greed of the capitalists who are profiting hand over fist from cheaper migrant labour and want a plentiful supply to continue. Many of them have already been exploiting non-unionised eastern European migrants, including Romanians and Bulgarians, forcing them to suffer poverty pay and poor conditions.

The minimum wage is often ignored or outrageous 'deductions' made from it to pay for overcrowded 'accommodation' and other

'costs'. Official inspections are infrequent and incredibly only two employers have been prosecuted in four years for paying less than the minimum wage. In this way the bosses use migrant workers to push down wages for all workers in a 'race to the bottom' that drives workers into competition, causing division and antagonism.

Another pay-hitting tool of the bosses at present - used against both migrant and British workers - is the UK opt-out from the EU's Agency Workers Directive. The Directive gave agency workers entitlement to the same basic pay and conditions as permanent staff after 12 weeks, but the opt-out denies them this equality if they have a permanent contract with their agency.

Writing in the Independent on Sunday on 5 January, Labour leader Ed Miliband infuriated the CBI bosses' organisation by pledging to end this 'loophole' if Labour wins the next general election. He also proposes to increase fines for employers who breach minimum wage legislation, ban recruitment agencies from only targeting foreign workers, and stop firms paying less to workers who have accommodation tied to their job.

His remarks followed similar earlier ones made by Labour's shadow immigration minister, David Hanson.

Also shadow home secretary Yvette Cooper wrote on her blog: "We want to see action to stop immigration being abused and exploited as a source of cheap labour to undercut wages and jobs".

But Labour was content to aid the capitalist's thirst for cheaper foreign labour when it was last in power, and these statements of intent - while they could help a layer of workers - are deliberately nowhere near enough to seriously impede the bosses' race to the bottom. To start down the road of doing that, a major programme of job creation would be needed, combined with a substantially higher minimum wage with no exceptions and evasions.

Unions crucial

In addition, instead of Labour trying to divorce itself further from the trade unions and refusing to repeal the anti-trade union laws, it would be essential to recognise that the unions are crucial in enabling workers from all backgrounds to unite and fight for decent terms and conditions and improved pay across the board, in particular through collective bargaining rights.

An immediate rush of Romanian and Bulgarian workers into Britain in the first week of 2014 didn't materialise. As the EU commissioner for employment, social affairs and inclusion, László Andor, pointed out on New Year's Day: "Bulgarian and Romanian citizens have already been free to work without restrictions in 19 countries that were not applying transitional measures... since Bulgaria and Romania joined the EU in 2007.

As a result there are over three million people from Bulgaria and Romania already living in other Member States and it is unlikely that

there will be any major increase following the ending of the final restrictions".

Tory MP Mark Reckless and Labour MP Keith Vaz went to Luton airport on 1 January to meet a flight from Romania, only to find that a quarter of the plane's seats were empty and most of its Romanian passengers were already living and working in the UK. It has also been reported that advance air bookings for the first three months of this year from Romania or Bulgaria to Britain are down compared with 2013.

This shows the falsity of the latest scare-mongering predictions of Ukip and many Tories. But this won't deter them from continuing to try to use immigration as a divisive tool electorally.

Trade unionists and socialists must strongly oppose this, countering genuine fears of overstretched services and resources by fighting for decent housing, services and jobs for all.

Experience has shown that no oceans, fences, draconian border controls or other barriers can prevent people who are desperate for a better life from migrating. Only successful workers' struggles in their home countries to transform their prospects will diminish that motivation.

Likewise in Britain, workers' unity and struggle, with the trade unions reaching out to organise migrant workers alongside others, is vital to stop the capitalist class from lowering living standards for all workers, using pay inequality, racism and cuts in the process.

Cabinet papers reveal truth about Thatcher's war against the miners

Ken Smith

After 30 years of gathering dust in the National Archives, the declassification of secret government files has revealed how far Margaret Thatcher and the Tory government went to ensure defeat of the 1984-85 miners' strike.

Among the chilling revelations are how they considered declaring a state of emergency and using troops to move coal, despite official government denials about their use, and material exposing the undeclared civil war the ruling class conducted against Thatcher's 'enemy within'.

Although much of the 'new' material has slowly leaked out in recent years, or was widely suspected in advance of its release, these papers significantly confirm how close Thatcher and the Tories came to defeat in July and October 1984.

Victory possible

It underlines that if the Labour and trade union leaders had given full support to the miners, then at least a partial victory would have been won that could have helped stem the tide of job losses and closures.

The Socialist Party's 2004 book on the strike, *A Civil War without Guns*, details much of what has been confirmed in the Cabinet papers - particularly the wobbles that Thatcher had around the time of the proposed docks strike in July and the Nacods [the colliery deputies and under-officials' union] ballot for action in October.



cartoon Alan Hardman

Yet, as Thatcher wobbled, the book also showed that it was the right-wing leaders of the trade union movement and Labour leader Neil Kinnock, who came to her aid and allowed her to gain ultimate victory.

These new documents further confirm how historically justified the miners' struggle was to defend their communities.

Britain's coal industry would have been slashed to half its for-

mer size, at a stroke in 1984, had they not conducted their strike.

Lies and conspiracies

The newly released papers conclusively confirm the existence of a conspiratorial plan to close 75 pits and axe more than 60,000 jobs in the industry, something vehemently denied at the time. The Tory government and National Coal Board (NCB) always claimed that only 20 or so collieries

were to close - an argument desperately repeated by the media and right wing in the labour movement to undermine the miners' struggle.

NUM leader Arthur Scargill, the majority of the miners, and their supporters, knew that the government and NCB were lying, that the 'economic' justification for pit closures was rigged, and that the real number of job losses and pit closures was going to be far higher if they didn't fight in 1984.

Critics of Scargill and the miners,

like multi-millionaire former Labour leader Neil Kinnock, also choose to forget that the spark that started the strike at Cortonwood, South Yorkshire, in March 1984 was because the NCB had blatantly flouted the nationally agreed pit closure procedure.

This was a clear signal that the NCB - on behalf of the government - would move to a rapid downsizing of the industry on a scale unseen before. It also showed that the traditional negotiation platforms open to the unions were going to be brutally shunted aside.

While it may not be such a great revelation that Thatcher lied over the closure plans and other matters, the extent of the conspiracies and 'abuse' of power conducted by the prime minister and her allies exposed in these official documents is breathtaking.

It confirms the malicious cruelty of the British ruling class, epitomised by the former Tory chancellor during the strike, Nigel Lawson.

He said that preparation for the strike - in effect to de-industrialise Britain, because of the fear of trade union militancy - was "just like re-arming to face the threat of Hitler in the 1930s".

It was always widely suspected that NCB chairman MacGregor and Thatcher were colluding with senior politicians from all sides, civil servants, right-wing union leaders and media bosses to demonise the miners and win the dispute.

Now it is there on record of how far they went - a black and white confirmation of the preparations today's activists seriously need to make to win future workers' struggles.

Privatisation Act lies behind the A&E crisis



NHS crisis warnings were ignored by a government determined to pass the Health Act photo Paul Mattsson

Alison Hill

There's a crisis in A&E provision in Britain's hospitals. Government statements have blamed this on people being unable to get access to GPs, especially out of hours, and an ageing population.

But a new report has let the cat out of the bag, exposing the fact that NHS chiefs have been so overwhelmed with introducing the government's Health and Social Care Act they ignored the warnings of a developing crisis in staffing of A&E units.

The College of Emergency Medicine says that NHS trusts have failed to recruit enough doctors trained in emergency medicine for three years running. The Health and Social Care Act - designed to throw the doors of the NHS open to private companies and private profit - was more important than keeping A&E units properly staffed.

The College estimates that there is a shortage of 375 emergency doc-

tors, leaving a shortfall of "750,000 patients a year who aren't going to be seen."

What has been Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt's reaction to this crisis? He rings up the hospital bosses who are missing their targets for A&E performance. Even the boss of the Care Quality Commission (CQC) says this is "crazy".

The consequences of these policies have been graphically shown at the Barking, Havering and Redbridge Trust in east London.

The CQC has put the Trust into

'special measures' because of poor performance, notably in A&E which has been suffering from a shortage of properly trained doctors. But the CQC don't mention the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) deals which have also contributed to the trust's crisis.

It's time to drop the drive to privatisation. Time to abolish PFI, which is saddling hospitals with unpayable debt. And time to bring the whole NHS into democratic public control, where long-term planning can be re-established.

A London health worker writes:

"Ads on the radio urging people not to use A&E? Seriously? This is a public health menace! Why have health professionals if Joe Public can self-diagnose what is an emergency?"

Many life threatening conditions start off with seemingly benign symptoms. Added to this, NHS Direct is replaced with an inferior privatised telephone health service. And then there's a confusing array of clinics and walk-in centres that are threatened with cuts and closures too!

In better times patients went to fully functional A&Es knowing that whatever was wrong would be put right. That's why 'triage' existed, so that trained nurses could sort out minor and major ailments and dispatch patients accordingly. Putting this responsibility onto the patient is both inappropriate and dangerous. Discouraging people from accessing healthcare will inevitably lead to increased deaths and disease."



Join the fightback! Join the Socialists!

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Greedy landlords create housing hell

Simon Carter

As Tory party leaders David Cameron and George Osborne prepare another vicious government cut to housing benefit in their 'year of hard truths' it's reported that Fergus Wilson - one of Britain's largest private landlords - says he will not accept any more applicants who rely on housing benefit to pay rent.

"Rents have gone north and benefit levels south," said Wilson, who has recently sent eviction notices to 200 tenants. He added that 'private landlords are running a business'. Yet the government has insisted that cuts in housing benefit will drive down rents.

In December 2013 the National Landlords' Association published figures showing that the number of private landlords letting to people

on benefits halved to only one in five.

This is increasing pressure on low income families many of whom are losing council tenancies because of the government's punitive 'bedroom tax' and therefore have to seek accommodation in the private sector.

This dire situation will inevitably worsen when the much criticised Universal Credit is introduced, squeezing incomes still further and switching housing benefit payments along with all other entitlements to claimants, once a month, instead of directly to landlords.

Those families still with a roof over their heads in the private rented sector increasingly have to endure sub-standard housing. In this largely unregulated market sector an estimated one million homes fail to meet basic standards of safety,

warmth and repair.

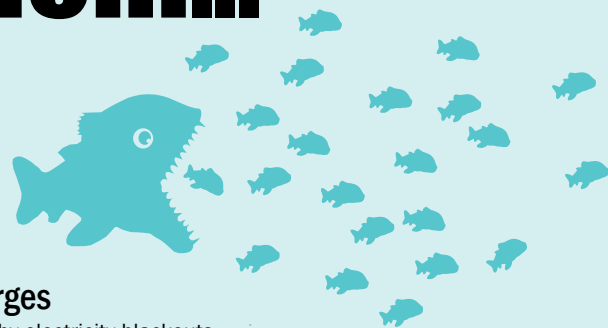
A report by IPPR North think tank also says that private properties are the most expensive to rent yet are in the worse condition. They add that tenants' fear of eviction allows landlords to get away with slum-like accommodation.

As well as one million sub-standard privately rented homes there were 217,000 council houses in 2011 which failed to meet the Decent Homes Standard.

Instead of forking out £9.3 billion a year in housing benefit to private landlords there should be rent controls and strictly enforced accommodation standards to ensure decent housing for all.

£9.3 billion a year directed instead toward a crash house building programme would begin to eliminate the current housing shortage crisis.

Them...



Call charges

Families hit by electricity blackouts over the festive period had injury heaped upon misery when callers to SP Energy Networks were left on hold for over 20 minutes. From a mobile phone the charge for such is around £9. Other companies do offer a freephone service but not from a mobile phone, often the only phone working during a flood/power cut.

axed from his Environment Agency, including an unspecified number from flood protection, as part of the government's austerity cuts. This is despite the increasing frequency of extreme weather events due to global warming.

Rich get richer

Hardly a day passes without more evidence of a widening wealth gap. The latest survey from the Bloomberg Billionaires Index shows the richest 300 people on the planet got even richer in 2013, adding \$524 billion to their collective net worth. The aggregate net worth of the world's top billionaires now stands at an astronomical \$3.7 trillion.

More pay

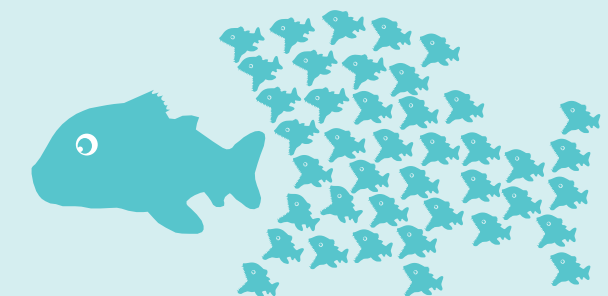
The GMB union estimates that the real value of national average earnings has slumped by 14% since the start of the recession in 2008. Surprisingly, a speech by the head of the bosses' organisation, the CBI, urged its members to pay their workers more!

John Cridland, director general of the CBI whose FTSE 100 members are paid 136 times the national average wage - around £2.1 million in 2012 - complained that "too many people are still collecting only the minimum wage".

Perhaps the underlying concern of the ruling class over declining living standards is the fear of a social explosion.

Unfortunately, Mr Cridland didn't embrace any fundamental redistribution of wealth programme but instead piously talked about companies giving workers a 'helping hand during the recovery'.

...& Us



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

What we saw



and has advocated tirelessly for a \$15 minimum wage and for worker democracy at the city's Boeing plants."

www.salon.com/2013/12/31/the_5_biggest_political_heroes_of_2013/

more on page 9

"This year's five biggest political heroes"

- including **Kshama Sawant**

From 'Salon' website

CWU Royal Mail agreement: Defend our right to strike!

CWU member
Coventry, Postal

The Communication Workers Union (CWU) announced before Christmas that it has reached a “landmark agreement with Royal Mail that gives workers legal protections on their terms and conditions, increases pay over three years by 9.06%, sets out improved industrial stability and safeguards pensions”. But once the dust settles workers may be in for a bit of a shock. Tucked away under all the gloss we find the brutal reality of what the pay talks really means for Royal Mail workers - a no strike deal.

On the surface the pay increase seems generous, with a 3% pay rise in the first year, although employees will only be 0.1% better off once RPI is taken into consideration. Royal Mail reported £233 million in half-yearly pre-tax profits recently (or £1.58 billion if you include the one-off windfall resulting from a pension reform), so it can well afford a pay increase for workers. Other aspects of the proposed deal should be welcomed, such as “no employee will be engaged on a zero-hours contract” and “the employer will not outsource, sell or transfer any part of its business”. Yet the sticking point for CWU members is a clause in the legally

binding protections where the agreement can be torn up by Royal Mail if: “there is national-scale industrial action (in the form of a strike or action short of a strike) which has been authorised at national level by the CWU, namely industrial action which either (i) involves employees in the majority of operational workplaces across Royal Mail Group Limited; or (ii) involves employees in an integral part of the operation whereby taking action will have, or is reasonably likely to have, a similarly disruptive effect.” Once you take away the strongest weapon, our ability to withdraw our labour, then you are left with just a talking shop of constant com-

promise that inevitably favours the employer and erodes pay and conditions for workers. Royal Mail plan to introduce new ways of working over the coming years, buzz words like “efficiency” and “incentive arrangements” are littered throughout the proposed agreement and once those details finally emerge, workers will be squeezed even tighter to produce more profit for shareholders. There is a ballot on the deal this month but postal workers need to look beyond the cash incentives and think long and hard before they cast their vote. For me, I would never approve of a ballot that takes away my basic human right to strike.

Firefighters continue battle



Firefighters in London taking part in the continuing action in England and Wales in defence of pensions photo Heather Blockey

Hampshire Unison success shows potential for fightback

With ongoing attacks on jobs, pay and conditions in local government, two recent battles in Hampshire County Council show what is possible when a branch and its members are prepared to fight. A branch steward explains:

Last year when the council announced a full review of Trading Standards, what they really meant was cuts. They said ‘anything was on the table’. We said we were open to discussion but our branch position was opposed to any job cuts, pay cuts or worsening in terms and conditions. We laid our cards on the table and entered negotiations. Months later the council announced their review meant compulsory redundancies and a review of terms and conditions that meant an attack on pay grades and job roles. At that point we walked out of the meeting making it clear there was nothing to discuss. We informed the council we were in dispute over their proposals and would consult our members. We have among the highest member density in the council at Trading Standards and in an indicative ballot over 80% voted to take action. A couple of days after the ballot result everything suddenly changed. All compulsory redundancies were removed as well as attacks on terms and conditions. It shows what a branch can do when members are willing to take action and get the support of their officers. Elsewhere in the council, members revealed that a private com-

pany Apex Care, contracted to the council, were paying staff less than £3.50 an hour. Unison estimates over 200,000 care workers are paid below the minimum wage. They do this by only paying staff for work with clients, not for the travelling time between jobs. **Challenge** Unison members were willing to expose this scrooge employer and the branch challenged the council. The Unison press release stated: “This company is funded by Hampshire taxpayers. Apex’s refusal to pay their staff no less than the national minimum wage and Hampshire County Council’s failure to ensure Apex abides by the law is disgraceful.” As a result of the campaign the council has been forced to suspend the contract to Apex and concede that care providers would have to ensure they met the legal minimum wage. Across the country Unison members are under the cosh, facing wave after wave of attacks. These battles at Hampshire show what would be possible if a united campaign was built nationally and linked to coordinating action with other unions. That is what our branch is calling on the national leadership to deliver.

Every job matters on London Underground

Transport union RMT members working on London Underground (LU) are balloting for strike action in protest at the massive cuts being proposed to jobs and services. LU have announced the closure of all ticket offices by 2015 and the loss of 750 jobs. LU’s budget for 2013-14 has been cut by £33 million and £45 million for 2014-15. At the same time fares have in-

creased by 4.2% across the tube, bus and tram network. The RMT is running a campaign called “Every Job Matters” to unite passengers and the workforce against these proposals. **There is a public meeting on 16 January at 6.30pm, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, nearest tube Holborn. The ballot closes on 10 January.**

UPS workers’ victory

Unite members working at the UPS depot in Camden, north London, won an important victory at the end of December. The workers took strike action in November in protest at excessive workloads, forced overtime and a culture of bullying. This has triggered demands from UPS workers in depots across the country to be balloted on the same issues. The union has been building a national campaign - UPS workers in Camden do not want to be isolated. This is what happened in 2012 when a campaign at the depot ended badly, where members and reps became disillusioned and were picked off, including one rep who was sacked. In 2013 the union began rebuilding with some considerable success, including new members and newly elected shop stewards. Solid work on the ground, identifying the key issues and regular communication with workers built up confidence. This led to the magnificent strike in November - the first strike at UPS in

the UK. But on 10 December, in what was a clear act of trade union victimisation, UPS sacked one of the Camden reps. Unite prepared the necessary legal claim and agreed financial support to the rep but most importantly, the union issued notice for strike action on 20 December, the busiest day of the year for the company. The response from the company was immediate. The rep was reinstated, with the dismissal downgraded to a warning. The strike was postponed and talks are beginning at Acas. At the same time, the union will ballot the membership, should the Acas talks not be successful. It is possible to rebuild in workplaces, even where there have been past defeats and where the employer is as vicious as UPS. The Camden UPS campaign now needs to be built into a national campaign, with the full force of the biggest union in the country taking on UPS with the aim to make lasting change.



Lawyers at Leeds courts joined the national action on 6 January to protest at the cuts to legal aid. These cuts will leave many people with low incomes with no access to proper legal representation photo Tanis Belsham-Wray

In brief

PCS strike

PCS members at the national insurance number processing centre in Tower Hamlets, east London, struck on 2 January in protest at the refusal of leave requests over the holiday period. 89% had voted in favour of industrial action on a 63% turnout in a local ballot. The strike was solid. Only two out of 50 interview staff crossed the picket line, the only other people in the office were managers. “Throughout the year members have had tougher working conditions. We’re expected to deal with more customers, breaks have been removed, pensions are being cut and our pay is being restricted,” said one picket, “members feel the least local management could do is allow staff more time off while it’s quiet.”

Naomi Byron

Met police strike



The picket line at Scotland Yard photo Martin Reynolds

PCS members braved the rain outside the East London police control centre on New Year’s Eve, striking for fair pay for civilian staff in the Metropolitan Police. It’s decades since civilian staff in the police took strike action, but their action was well supported. At 7am there were only four people in the control centre answering calls when there would normally be around 15. Martin Reynolds spoke to Richard Rooney, president of the PCS Met Police group: “We have had a pay deal imposed on us after a three-year pay freeze. This means around 64p a day rise before tax. After tax around 50p. “We have tried negotiating at all levels. The government says its hands are tied with the 1% cap. The problem is those people imposing it haven’t got to live on it.” Strikers handed out leaflets to inform the public about the dispute. You could see a lot of people doing a double take, when they realised it was about strike action in the Met. The response from police officers was interesting. Some were annoyed at being told to come in and work in the control centre because of the strike, but most made supportive comments. It’s less than a year since 81% of police officers voted in favour of their own right to strike in a ballot organised by the Police Federation.

Save our fire services

Surrey County Council is due to discuss making serious cuts in the fire service at a meeting on 15 January and will put their proposals to a cabinet meeting on 4 February. Save Our Services in Surrey has organised a lobby of the meeting on 4 February at 12pm outside County Hall in Kingston. There will also be a public meeting on 22 January at 7.30pm in Staines Community Centre.



In 2013 the South African working class led by the miners, following the biggest strike wave in the world, challenged capitalism

Peter Taaffe, general secretary of the Socialist Party, reviews the developments and events of 2013 in Britain and worldwide, and discusses further struggles in 2014 and the development of the workers' movement.

“Where is this up-rising from the left? This is a crisis that began on Wall Street. It really was rooted in the particular American model of liberalised finance. It hurt ordinary people tremendously, and it benefited the richest part of the country – the finance sector – which came through the crisis very well, thanks to government bailouts. You would have thought that this would pave the way for a rise of left-wing populism, as seen in the 1930s.” (interview with Francis Fukuyama, Spiegel Online international, 1 February 2012)

This smug conclusion came from the prophet of the idea that neoliberal capitalism represented “the end of history” in 1989. This ‘perfect’ model of capitalism had relegated the class struggle and socialism to the dustbin of history, it was claimed.

He was answered in theory in the pages of the Socialist and on the website of the Committee for a Workers’ International, the international to which the Socialist Party is affiliated, socialistworld.net. But more importantly he was answered through events with the outbreak of colossal mass movements of the working class and the poor.

In 2013, the South African working class led by the miners, following the biggest strike wave in the world, challenged capitalism. So to did the Brazilian workers and the Turkish and Egyptian masses, not to mention the continuous waves of struggle which have convulsed Europe. Greece alone has experienced 31 general strikes since 2009.

Lest it be thought that this was just a phenomenon restricted to the more ‘developed’ countries and continents, Nigeria has also seen eight general strikes since 2000.

ANOTHER YEAR OF MASS STRUGGLES BECKONS

Argentina is in social turmoil once more, with a police strike in December. An alliance of Trotskyists received 1.4 million votes in the general election.

Then there is the political earthquake represented by the election in Seattle, for the first time in 100 years, of a socialist. The over 90,000 votes for Kshama Sawant, sympathetic to the CWI was, moreover, a reflection of the anger brewing in the US against capitalism. The radical Democrat Bill de Blasio was elected as Mayor of New York City, with 73% of the vote. In Lorain County, Ohio, 24 ‘Independent Labor’ candidates sponsored by the unions were

elected. This undoubtedly betokens a movement towards a US radical third party on a national scale at a certain stage. Already opinion polls show two-thirds favour this.

These and many other examples could be given to refute the corrosive and morale sapping idea that the working class is reconciling itself to the capitalist system. At the same time that system is rent apart by one of the most devastating economic crises, maybe the worst in its history.

Yet even these facts have not prevented others, like the Financial Times, harping on Fukuyama’s theme, and jeeringly asking: “When

did the Irish become so accepting of their lot?” “Irish” is taken here for the working class as a whole, not just in Ireland. The myth is fostered that working people have laid down while the juggernaut of capitalism rolls over them.

The truth is that there are some workers, even within the labour movement, who may be seduced by similar arguments. Firstly, the Irish people, and particularly the working class, have not docilely accepted their “lot”. Witness the mass non-payment campaign over the property tax, where 80% initially refused to pay, with the Socialist Party in Ireland playing a leading and prom-

inent role. There was every prospect for success in the struggle but the Fine Gael/Labour government helped to derail this mass movement by deducting the tax at source.

In this sense, the Irish government learnt from the anti-poll tax struggle in Britain, which beat Thatcher, but did not, in the main, confront similar action by local authorities and the government. Checked on this plane, the Irish working class will turn to the forthcoming elections to punish those responsible – particularly the Labour Party, now a completely pro-capitalist force – for this punitive measure.

Continued on pages 6,7 and 8

APPEAL OF SOCIALIST CHANGE WILL GROW

Continued from page 5

It has increasingly borne in on even the ideologists of capitalism that this system is becoming more and more regressive: "The West is losing faith in its own future", muses Gideon Rachman in the Financial Times (the 'West' being synonymous with capitalism).

He points out that a recent Pew poll, conducted in 39 countries, indicated that in America: "only 33%... believe their children would live better, while 62% said they would live worse." Some other polls in the US have shown that this pessimism about the future is as high as 80%. Europeans were gloomier. Just 28% of Germans, 17% of Brits, 14% of Italians and 9% of French thought their children would be better off than previous generations.

The objective basis for a change in society – from capitalism to socialism – is revealed in these statistics. Revolution is knocking at the door of history, even in the most advanced capitalist society, the US. Unlike in Europe and elsewhere, the baleful heritage of discredited social democracy and the so-called 'Communist' parties, with their history of betrayals, does not weigh down the US working class. They come to socialist ideas fresh.

Confirmation of the dire situation of capitalism has come from the most unlikely sources. The populist demagogic – and largely right-wing – commentator, Nick Cohen, from the Observer newspaper, condemned the comedian Russell Brand, for calling for "revolution".

However Brand's views proved to be enormously popular, particularly among young people, as revealed by the huge number of YouTube hits. But in the middle of his tirade against Russell Brand, Cohen admits, almost in passing: "Today's crisis has left Europe in a pre-revolutionary situation".

Ready for change

In order to carry through socialist change, the objective factors have to be in place. The world is, if anything, rotten-ripe for transformation. This is obvious in the economic sphere, in the growing political crisis of the capitalists and their parties, the drop in electoral participation, as well as the massive environmental crisis.

The Guardian newspaper pointed to 90 giant multinationals, some in the 'public' sector, who are guilty of most of the terrible damage and dangers to humanity posed by their pollution, leading to global warming, the melting of the ice caps, etc.

For socialist change – the greatest task posed in human history – the majority of the working class and its allies, the poor of the cities, as well as the poor farmers, must become fully aware of what is required. The overwhelming balance of class forces is in their favour. Over 70% of the world's population is now concentrated in urban areas, giving the working class greater potential than at any other time to effect change.

Capitalism will not automatically disappear from the scene of history but will have to be helped to evacuate the stage. As former right-wing Labour luminary George Brown said in the 1970s: "No privileged group disappears from the scene of history

without a struggle, and usually that's with no holds barred."

Yet working class mass awareness of the realities of capitalism in crisis and what is to be done and what is the real alternative, has not yet matured fully. Consciousness has been shaped not just by events now but also by the period that has gone before. That period from 1990 to at least until the beginning of the economic crisis in 2007-08 was marked by the effects of the collapse of Stalinism.

Collapse of Stalinism

This collapse led not just to the welcome destruction of the bureaucratic apparatus of Stalinism but unfortunately also of the planned economy. Albeit bureaucratically controlled, this had represented a point of reference for the working class internationally. It was an indication of what could be achieved through a planned economy, if it was organised on a different basis to Stalinism through democratic workers' control and management.

Stalinism's collapse represented a giant turning back of the wheel of history. Revolution, as Marx pointed out, is the locomotive of history. Counter-revolution, sometimes but not always reflected in a dictatorship, represents a giant brake. Twenty years ago there was largely an ideological counter-revolution, in which the advantages of capitalism were extolled from thousands of platforms by the capitalists and their spokespersons. Fidel Castro even remarked that the disappearance of the 'Soviet Union' was as if "the sun had suddenly disappeared". Socialism was relegated to the margins, Marxism likewise 'discredited'.

In reality, the class struggle continued, as did socialism and Marxism. But the mass workers' parties collapsed under the avalanche of pro-capitalist propaganda and moved to the right, as did the majority of trade union leaders.

Then, when the crisis of 2007-08 broke, the working class was, in the main, completely politically unprepared. One section of the working masses was stunned and hoped that the storm would soon pass. They remain in this ambivalent situation. Another section, once the full gravity of the crisis dawned on them, threw themselves into struggle, as witnessed by the colossal exertion of energy by the working class of Greece, Spain, Portugal, Italy, etc, as they resisted the attempts to unload the cost of the crisis on their shoulders.

However, the outlook of the right-wing leaders of these parties and unions was and still is located in the past. They also hoped for a speedy return to the conditions which would allow them to remain in the calm of the bay. In vain. Capitalism in crisis was compelled to attack the working class and all its historic gains, which in turn forced these leaders to try and put themselves at the head of mass movements, the better to derail them.

The consequence of this was that the capitalists, in general, won the first and even the second rounds of the struggle since the crisis. However, a molecular



change in the consciousness of working class people has begun.

True, this is not yet at the level of consciousness that existed in the 1980s, when socialism was widely perceived as a real alternative. Nor is the working class, apart from a small advanced layer, fully aware of what is required in the present situation. For this, they need further experience through the formation of distinctive mass parties, accompanied by the strengthening of Marxism and a far-sighted leadership.

This process began even before the onset of the current economic crisis in which left parties have been created. However, the leaderships of these parties have been hesitant and not prepared to mobilise the working class in the struggle to defeat the brutal plans of the capitalists. For this to be carried through to a conclusion a fighting, socialist programme to confront rotten capitalism is necessary. Without this, setbacks and defeats are likely.

Before the titanic events of Greece, Spain, Portugal and even Britain, of massive demonstrations and strikes, it may have been possible (but incorrect) to argue that working people would not struggle as they were savaged by capitalism. But nobody now can dispute the preparedness of working people to hurl themselves into the fight whenever a lead is given. Events have left their mark on the working class's outlook, and particularly its advanced guiding layers.

Undoubtedly, if capitalism continues on its present course, as it will, through the piling on of more and more vicious anti-working class policies, a mass revolt along the lines of Greece is posed on a European and even world scale. The Greek people are offered no respite whatsoever from brutal and savage cuts: 'Endless austerity', or planned poverty, for at least another five years, and in reality much longer than that.

George Osborne, the Chancellor of the

Top: More than 30,000 African asylum seekers protested in Tel Aviv on 5 January
Above: protesters on the 750,000-strong TUC demo in London on 26 March 2011
Left: Brazil is preparing for more mass protests around this year's World Cup

Thailand

Thailand recently has provided the most remarkable and bizarre expression of political confusion when a clear workers' and socialist alternative has not been built. The present government, dominated by the Thaksin billionaire family, finds its base mostly in the rural areas. The opposition forces, on the other hand, are concentrated largely in the urban areas, and its leaders support the monarchy.

Thai workers and peasants are therefore tied to the coat-tails of different sections of their exploiters, the capitalists and landlords. The opposition is fuelled by the poverty and rampant corruption which scars the country. Because it is in the minority it opposes new elections which it calculates it will lose: "Demonstrators do not consent to allowing the dictatorial majority... To betray the people, to destroy the balance of democratic power." [Financial Times]

The government bussed in thousands of its own supporters from its rural heartland to oppose the mass demonstrations in Bangkok. The deadlock looks as though it will only be broken by the seizure of power by the generals, in what they will present as a 'soft coup'. A real party of the masses would find a different road by calling for elections to a revolutionary constituent assembly, alongside democratically elected committees, with elections and the right of recall in the towns and countryside.

This could outline a programme linked to the day-to-day conditions of working people and the peasantry, proposing this to be implemented by a 'workers and small farmers' government'. This could break the deadlock and prepare a democratic and socialist future for the Thai people.

Exchequer, also wants to return public expenditure to the level of 1948, with his and the coalition's programme of cuts. Therefore mass resistance, mass uprisings, even if the alleged leaders of the working class oppose them, could take place, threatening the very foundations of capitalism.

Look at the wave of 'pitchfork' revolts that swept Italy before Christmas. This is by no means a clear left expression – Berlusconi attempted to co-opt this movement and some of its leaders made clearly reactionary statements. But it reflects the inchoate movement of opposition and despair at the blind alley of Italian capitalism.

Need for new parties

The existence of this movement is also a clear criticism of the failure and incapacity of the union leaders to organise the working class movement to resist the onslaught of Italian capitalism. Similar movements have developed elsewhere, with the left intervening, particularly through the forces around ControCorrente (the CWI section in Italy) in Genoa, which led a successful strike wave that prevented privatisation and gained some victories.

This indicates, once more, the crying need for new mass working class formations to fill the vacuum that the capitulation of the leaders of the former workers' organisations has left. Capitalism will always find a way out of its crises unless the working class leads a movement that gathers all the exploited and downtrodden layers of society behind it in the struggle for power. Because such a force does not exist now, it means that a protracted struggle will develop, with victories and defeats, but which will prepare the basis for the emergence of real fighting parties and leadership.

This demand for a new mass workers' party expresses itself on all continents. There is an almost universal mood that the old parties are discredited and 'something new', is needed. This was dramatically revealed recently in Chile, for instance, when only 42% turned out in the final round of presidential elections.

Even in Britain, with a long democratic tradition, more and more workers are nevertheless declaring 'none of the above'. In a recent poll, 41% of the British electorate indicate that they do not intend to vote in the general election.

This is not because of any 'anti-political' mood or acquiescence to the status quo – on the contrary, a boiling anger exists – but none of the pro-capitalist major parties, including Labour, offer a real alternative.

Only the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC – an alliance between the Socialist Party in England and Wales and the rail workers union RMT and others) provides a working class and socialist alternative. TUSC will be standing widely in the council elections in May 2014.

This generalised mood was also dramatically revealed in South Africa at the stadium commemoration for Nelson

Mandela. The South African president, Jacob Zuma, was roundly booed, which was watched throughout the world. Significantly, South African television did not broadcast this expression of mass opposition to Zuma. A revolt is brewing against the open corruption of the rotten ANC government, symbolised by Zuma's building of his palatial residence at the reputed cost of around £12 million.

The movement towards a new mass workers' party is inexorable. The CWI members in South Africa have played a crucial role in laying the basis for the expression of a powerful movement in this direction through the formation of the Workers And Socialist Party (WASP).

This, in turn, has helped push the metalworkers' union (Numsa) towards declaring themselves in favour of a new mass workers' party based on the trade unions. But in politics, timing is of the essence, as Shakespeare illustrated in Julius Caesar: "There is a tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune."

Peter Hain, the Labour MP and formerly a steadfast supporter of the ANC, has warned in the Sunday Telegraph: "The economy delivers for just 9% of the population..." [In reality, it is a much smaller proportion of the population that benefits] "ANC rulers face a revolution of rising expectations and frustration." It is absolutely vital that an electoral challenge should be made in this year's election in South Africa. If Numsa does not take the initiative to stand in 2014, WASP should stand in order to provide an alternative to the rotten, corrupt ANC.

The idea of a new mass workers' party is not ephemeral and will not disappear from the political map. It is fuelled by the organic crisis of capitalism and the failure of all those parties that are tied to a dying system. The hopes of capitalist economic experts that the world economy would be experiencing 'escape velocity' in 2013 have been dashed.

Economic doldrums

In April 2013, the International Monetary Fund portrayed the world moving at three speeds. The so-called 'emerging markets' – Brazil, China, India, etc, in the neocolonial world – would experience growth, the US would continue to 'recover' from the crisis and only Europe would still be mired in the economic doldrums. Now, they have been forced to switch, recognising that growth has fallen in China, India and Brazil. Europe remains blighted.

Growth in the 'emerging markets' has been fuelled by the speculative funds arising from 'quantitative easing' in Europe and America. The mere announcement that this will now be 'tapered' by the US Federal Reserve resulted in a massive outflow of finance from these countries, which in turn helped to lower their growth prospects.

Among the advanced industrial countries, only the US and Germany have 'recovered' from the 2007-08 crisis, in the sense that production has managed to nudge ahead of the level of output prior to the crisis. However, this recovery is

Continued over

[illegible]

South Africa: Numsa's bold and historic decision to cut ties with the ANC

Workers And Socialist Party (WASP)

Delegates at the special congress of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa) have taken the bold and historic decision to cut ties with the governing party, the African National Congress (ANC).

With financial and logistical support for the ANC withheld, the ANC will be entering the 2014 elections without the support of the biggest and most politically influential union in Cosatu (the largest trade union federation in South Africa).

The ANC will emerge from the 2014 elections significantly weakened. The nightmare scenario of the ANC's own election strategists of receiving less than 50% of the vote cannot be ruled out.

The aftershocks of the earthquake detonated at Marikana (the police massacre of 34 striking mine workers in August 2012) have now found expression on the political plane. The golden bars of the political prison in which the working class has been kettled for going on 20 years, have been broken and the process of establishing political independence of the working class has begun.

Additionally, Numsa will cease financial contributions to the South African Communist Party (SACP) breaking the political link with this (in the words of Numsa general secretary, Irvin Jim) "ideologically bankrupt" party.

Betrayal

The anger and sense of betrayal that delegates felt for the ANC and SACP leaderships was on full display throughout the conference. At no point did a single delegate make any serious argument for continuing to support the ANC. In the minds of Numsa members the reality is clear: the ANC and the SACP are parties of the capitalist class. The next ANC-led government, with the neoliberal National Development Programme as its centrepiece, does not deserve the support of the working class.

At this stage, Numsa has held back from taking a decision to support an alternative party in 2014. Instead, Numsa plans to launch a 'united front' modelled on the United Democratic Front of the 1980s to unite the struggles of workers and communities while simultaneously helping to bring into being a 'Movement for Socialism'.



WASP has appealed for Numsa to "take its place in the leadership of WASP" photo Sean Figg

WASP, in its open letter to Numsa made the call for the launching of a socialist trade union network to help overcome the divisions in the working class and the paralysis of united struggle caused by the crisis in Cosatu. We also made the call for an assembly of working class unity to draw up a battle plan for the struggles of the masses. In Numsa's decision to launch a united front and a movement for socialism we recognise these calls as broadly met.

However, with the national and provincial elections only months away we invited Numsa to "take its place in the leadership of WASP". WASP was launched to unite the struggles of workers, communities and youth and is organised in a democratic and federal way that would allow Numsa to use the WASP umbrella to stand its own candidates, selected by its own procedures.

At Numsa's special congress the leadership laid down criteria that any political party would have to meet in order to warrant political support. We believe WASP meets these criteria. WASP was

born out of the struggles of the mineworkers and bases itself on the working class; WASP stands for the nationalisation of the mines, the banks, the commercial farms, the factories and other big business on the basis of workers' control as part of the struggle for a socialist society; WASP is a thoroughly democratic organisation.

Monumental shift

As part of the adoption of their new political strategy, the Numsa leadership was given a mandate to "be alert" to a "party committed to socialism standing for elections in future". We therefore repeat our call for Numsa to take its place in the leadership of WASP and support and stand candidates under the WASP umbrella in the 2014 elections as a crucial part of building the new Movement for Socialism.

The limitations of Numsa's specific position on the 2014 elections cannot however detract from the monumental shift in the political landscape that Numsa's decision heralds.

Numsa sent a clear signal to

mineworkers and other workers that Numsa will not abandon them to the pro-capitalist misleadership of unions that continue to cling to the ANC.

Irvin Jim declared, in open defiance of Cosatu's "one union, one industry" policy, that Numsa "will no longer reject any worker". Jim even lamented that this has not been Numsa's policy at the time of Marikana. This will put Numsa on a collision course with the pro-ANC right-wing of Cosatu and almost certainly lead to the break-up of Cosatu.

With plans for rolling mass action in early 2014 and the extension of the hand of solidarity to the mineworkers by the congress - who will most likely be waging new struggles over wages and retrenchments in the new year - Numsa will be at the centre of workers' struggle in the next period.

Numsa has taken its first steps into the new landscape and, alongside WASP and the mineworkers, has taken up the historic task of rebuilding the political independence of the working class. WASP salutes the Numsa leadership and delegates for their decision.

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:



Middle East: The limits of US power

Workers' movements need determined opposition to Western imperialism and all Middle Eastern elites

Judy Beishon, *International Secretariat*



Syria: Popular revolution or sectarian conflict?

What should be the attitude of the socialist left?

Goncalo Romeiro, *Socialismo Revolucionario (CWI Portugal)*

US: The fight for \$15 minimum wage heats up in Seattle

Across the US low-wage workers are rising up, protesting, and striking for a \$15 an hour minimum wage.

Seattle is poised in 2014 to be the first major US city to win \$15. Voters in SeaTac, a small city outside Seattle, recently passed a ballot initiative for \$15. A leader in the fight for \$15 in Seattle, Kshama Sawant, shocked the corporate elite by winning a City Council seat in Seattle as a Socialist Alternative (co-thinkers of the Socialist Party in the US) candidate. Newly elected Mayor Ed Murray has also declared his support for \$15.

But big business will not let this pass without a fight. They will mobilise their resources to derail, delay, and dilute efforts to end the poverty wages that are the source of their profits.

The only way we can counter the power of corporate America is by building a massive grassroots campaign with local neighbourhood and campus groups, town hall

meetings, mass rallies, and strikes.

Kshama Sawant and a growing list of workers, unions, and activists, have come together to form 15 Now to organise this movement.

15 Now is currently centred in Seattle - where the fight for 15 has the best immediate prospects - but we aim to build a nationwide movement. A victory in Seattle in 2014 would open the floodgates for working people to demand \$15 in cities across the country.

To lay the basis for a serious campaign, we are launching an appeal for 1,000 people to donate \$15 a month. 15 Now will be holding a rally for \$15 on Sunday 12 January.

This year's inauguration ceremony, which took place on 6 January, was Seattle's biggest ever, largely because of the interest in Kshama's victory. 2,000 people had expressed an interest in attending the event, which Kshama used to explain the huge significance of her election.



Kshama being sworn into office



Latin America: moving back into the epicentre of world struggle

Report of discussion on Latin America at CWI's International Executive Committee

Danny Byrne, *CWI*

the Socialist postbag

Do you have something to say?

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

Gove's other war

Michael Gove chose the Daily Mail to launch his defence of the indefensible slaughter of World War One. Gove seems to think "Blackadder" was a documentary about the war rather than a comedy. But Gove is not just some ranting Tory down the pub. He is in charge of the education of the next generation. They are to be taught that it is glorious to die for a past and cowardly to live for a future. The senseless slaughter of a generation by generals and politicians was extremely lucrative for the arms dealers. No serious historian believes that the British Imperial General Staff were fighting for freedom and democracy. While they bleated about "gallant little Belgium" they were quite happy to see the masses of India and South Africa oppressed by their white "superiors". Gove thinks that enough time has passed and he can rewrite history. An astonishing 400,000 died because of the criminal incompetence of Field Marshal Haig. Don't let him rehabilitate this upper-class twit. Teachers will always fight against ignorance and if that means fighting against Gove he only has himself to blame.

Derek McMillan**Class and warfare**

Establishment "historian", Max Hastings, says World War One was fought to defend 'freedom and democracy'. He aims to reframe the war not as a senseless slaughter but as a noble cause to prevent a German takeover which would have ended "freedom and democracy." Clearly the ruling class want to use the centenary to reinforce their hold on ideas. World War One was caused by the capitalist system. Already by the turn of the 20th century, capitalism was approaching its limits and war was inevitable as powers vied for markets. This year's commemoration, taking place amid the unravelling of the capitalist system and people's increasing receptiveness to alternative ideas, is an opportunity for socialists to reclaim history.

**Rob Rooney
Plymouth****Tory scapegoating**

The BBC news on New Year's Day looked like a Ukip party political broadcast. The disgusting hatred against Bulgarians and Romanians ignored one simple, easily verified fact - there are over five million Brits working abroad. So a policy of "British jobs for British workers" could saddle us with a further five million unemployed as other countries respond with "Spanish jobs for Spanish workers" or "Argentine jobs for Argentine workers" etc. As for the "pressure on services", a quarter of all doctors and half of all nurses were born outside the UK. The health and welfare services would collapse if Ukip's "send them back" policy were carried out. The government has made a mess of the economy so the right look around

for a convenient scapegoat. The economic crisis, they assert, is not the fault of the government and the banks. It is all mysteriously caused by Romania and Bulgaria. And the BBC think we are stupid enough to believe such nonsense.

The BBC has given up journalistic integrity in favour of kissing the backsides of the Tories and the far right. Is this in our best interests? I wonder if it is in the BBC's.

Michael Davis**Kowtowing to the rich**

An ex-jailbird, Chris Huhne (described as a former cabinet minister) pontificates in the Guardian that there is too much 'kowtowing' to the old who, he says, should pony up for their lavish life-styles.

This millionaire and owner of several homes may count old millionaires among his friends, but the 39,000 elderly who died from cold last year and the hundreds of thousands who choose between heating and eating might like to tell Huhne what to do with his gibberish.

A Guardian/ICM poll 'revealed' at considerable expense why voting turnout has plumbed such low levels. 64% say politicians don't keep their promises; 46% say MPs are on the take; 34% say politicians don't say what they believe; 26% say parties are so similar it makes no difference.

Such penetrating vision is extraordinary. Thanks to the Guardian for making everything clear. All we need now is a headline saying 'TUSC is the obvious alternative'.

Tony Mulhearn**Why you should...**

Over three decades, the Tories sold off council housing and Labour sold whole estates in "stock transfers". Successive governments let the state subsidise private landlords through extortionate rents, using Housing Benefits rather than provide cheap housing for working class people.

The state subsidy should be invested directly into a programme of mass council housing building. The only political voice to call for this in 2014 is the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC).

Where are all the high-profile politicians trumpeting the position of women as literally hundreds of working class women and their children face homelessness and destitution? If you're a feminist, in the true sense of the word, then you oppose cuts that attack services that defend women.

Jane Smith**...vote TUSC!**

Sitting in my local laundrette, I heard Paula Mitchell of the Socialist Party speaking on a local London radio station. Facing a hostile interviewer she defended the miners' strike of 1984 following the release of the cabinet papers (see page 2 - Eds). People nodded in agreement with the points Paula made about this strike's importance and the consequences for young people today.

Meanwhile former Labour leader Neil Kinnock, now a millionaire along with his wife, was on BBC Radio 4 defending his betrayal of that struggle. He was well rewarded for services rendered for the British ruling classes. Remember Labour's role in 1984 and vote TUSC in 2014!

Nancy Taaffe

Why capitalism mourned Mandela

Keith Dickinson

After Nelson Mandela's death, the articles in the Socialist on the fight against apartheid and on South African workers' struggles stood alone in clearly explaining the real history.

Some comments in the media coverage confirm our analysis. Nadine Gordimer, the white South African author and anti-apartheid campaigner reminded people that Mandela's release was against the backdrop of big strikes and protests in the townships.

Time magazine confirmed this unconsciously by reprinting an interview from 2012 with Francois Pienaar, the South African Rugby captain. "A lot of people thought we were heading toward civil war. Instead Mandela delivered, and South Africa embraced a very difficult transition".

This capitalist "transition" has meant continuing poverty and struggle for the masses while ANC leaders, including Communist Party and Cosatu trade union leaders, have made themselves millionaires. They did this consciously, as was made clear in the Socialist's articles. This is why the leading representatives of the world's ruling class came to show appreciation to the saviours of capitalism at Mandela's funeral.

Newsnight interviewed the cynical British ambassador who had represented these capitalist interests in negotiating with the ANC and apartheid state leader de Klerk, for Mandela's release from prison. After Diane Abbott MP reminded him that Margaret Thatcher had earlier said Mandela should be executed, he said that Thatcher was in favour of his release but insisted he tell Mandela, it was on condition that he "drops his silly nationalisation ideas".

Socialist Party members always gave support to the workers in southern Africa, including the ANC. But we offered critical support of

**Mandela**

their programme, strategy and tactics which were influenced by the Stalinists and proved disastrous.

In the 1980s we helped build the South African Labour Education Project, with others who, after returning from exile, were active members of the ANC.

Solidarity

In Britain, with limited resources, we took part in the Movement for Colonial Freedom (MCF) and Anti-Apartheid. Our comrades at Sussex University even recruited Thabo Mbeki (later ANC leader and South African president) to the Labour Society in the early 1960s.

I was Liverpool Trades Council delegate to the Movement for Colonial Freedom and we organised a meeting to hear Joshua Nkomo, of what was then Rhodesia, speak. His Zimbabwe African Peoples Union forces were having to combat South African government forces crossing

the border to stop their independence struggle.

He explained to me that he had just walked out from the London negotiations after delivering his statement, as the British imperialists had proposed a constitution which would let them keep control through South Africa.

Socialist Party general secretary Peter Taaffe discussed with leading trade unionists about how to build Cosatu in its early days. But in the early 90s, after a long visit, Peter warned in his booklet that, as the ANC were not taking the socialist road, "how long will it be before an ANC government sends in police and army units against striking workers?"

Unfortunately this was tragically confirmed by the massacre of mine-workers at Marikana in 2012. This emphasises the importance of our help for the Democratic Socialist Party and its building of the broader mass workers' party (WASP).

Class injustice at Dickensian court

Between Christmas and New Year, thousands of tenants in rent arrears were dragged into courts across the country facing possession orders. Like something out of a Dickensian novel, I witnessed first hand one such case.

It was due to be heard at 10.30am but was not called until 90 minutes later. We were ushered into a room more like a headmaster's study than a court. Before we sat down the 'Beak' mumbled something unintelligible. There were no introductions, no explanation of process, just this

Judge dispensing summary injustice!

A statement of defence was left unread and unrepresented, just dismissed as unsigned. The duty solicitor said barely two words to explain the reasons for the arrears and the upcoming Benefit Tribunal.

In just two minutes a suspended possession order was granted with the weekly rent plus £10 towards the arrears to be paid from the following Monday. When the tenant said they didn't have the money and would have to use a credit card, the judge snorted: "I don't care where you get

the money."

The monthly rent and arrears payment was a few pounds short of the person's income. This showed the brutal class realities of life in benefit-slashed Tory Britain operated by one callous and ignorant Judge.

Apparently you have to seek permission to appeal against a magistrate's decision, and within two weeks. With limited resources and legal aid cuts, very few will be able to take this on. It's class injustice.

**Brian Debus
Hackney**

Time for a new workers' party

Socialist Party member Seth Cruse's letter (below) appeared in the 2 January Folkestone Herald in response to a 'disagreement' between a Lib Dem councillor and the local Tory MP.

"Why is Lib Dem Lynne Beaumont using expenses etc as, in her words, 'ammunition' to attack Tory MP Damian Collins, instead of attacking his

policies? Is it because both her party and Collins' Tory party share them as a coalition? How could she argue against what her own party endorses?"

Beaumont also states in the Folkestone Herald (19 December) that she puts her constituents first, yet it is her and Damian's Con-Dem government's actions that are damaging the community she claims to hold dear.

In reply to the question 'Which of the possible candidates will you vote

for?' it won't be Lynne or Damian, nor the Ukip candidate with damaging populist policies of no substance, and it won't be the Labour Party who no longer represent trade unions or workers, or the Greens who support this government's cuts.

I'm voting TUSC (Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition) who are standing a candidate for MP in the next general election. It's time for a new workers' party that will oppose all cuts."

Is UK car building back in Top Gear?

Bill Mullins

The thoroughly reactionary but entertaining Jeremy Clarkson, on his Top Gear programme's Christmas special, tried to demonstrate that UK vehicle manufacturing was healthier than ever. In contrast, Idris Elba, actor in the Wire and Luther, went to Detroit to be taken around the waste land that is the American car industry.

Elba, in his Speed programme on BBC1, was a 'petrol head' like Clarkson, but at least he was interested in what had happened to the car workers. Elba had worked at the Ford Dagenham factory as a youth. His dad was a shop steward there for 25 years.

Clarkson boasted about the wide

Inflated sales?

The Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders has boasted that UK new car sales for 2013 were the highest since 2007, with 2.26 million vehicles registered. However, around 74.5% of new cars are being bought on credit, which audit firms have called "unsustainable". Credit deals often mean drivers never really own a vehicle, but rent it before being offered to exchange it for another new car. Car figures have also been boosted by people spending PPI compensation money and record high pre-registrations, where cars are registered to a non-existent buyer in order to then sell them at a lower 'used' cost.

variety of vehicles being made today in the UK, filling up the Mall in London with them. But many of the cars on display were luxury brands such as Rolls Royces and Bentleys. These cars are far beyond the reach of working people and create relatively few jobs.

Clarkson tried to demonstrate as well that more cars were produced in Britain than ever before, claiming that the Nissan factory in Sunderland "made more cars than the whole of the Italian car industry".

But the cars made in Britain today are mainly made up of components shipped in from abroad. This is true in other countries, but it has gone much further in Britain than elsewhere.

Household supplier names that made up the British car industry have long disappeared. They employed tens of thousands of workers which were overwhelmingly unionised in the past. It is true that the vehicle industry employs over 700,000 workers, but these are mostly in the retail/service side of the industry and are generally not unionised and low paid.

The UK auto industry now directly employs 180,000 workers but compare that to the 775,000 in Germany and 220,000 in France (169,000 are directly employed in Italy).

All the main car factories are foreign owned, limiting possible political influence even if it was forthcoming from the Labour Party (which it isn't).

Nissan in Sunderland, Toyota in Derbyshire and Honda in Swindon are Japanese owned. The Mini production line in Cowley, Oxford is owned by German manufacturers BMW. Jaguar Land Rover in Solihull, Birmingham and Merseyside is



180,000 UK workers are employed in the car industry, compared to 775,000 in Germany

owned by Tata, the Indian conglomerate, and Vauxhall Luton and Merseyside is owned by GM of America.

Anti-union

When the Japanese manufacturers moved into Britain in the 1980s they made sure that all likely trade union activists were weeded out before they got anywhere near the shop floor. A massive questionnaire was given to all job applicants, drawn up by anti-union management consultants.

It is not impossible to organise from below in these factories as Na-

tional Shop Steward's Network supporters have shown, but it is a long process.

There was extreme management control of the production process, which generally meant that it was younger workers who could last the pace.

Clarkson has exaggerated in his comparison of Sunderland Nissan and Italy, especially as Italian car maker Fiat has just bought up the 41% of US 'big four' auto firm Chrysler that it didn't already own.

Sixteen million cars were made in Europe in 2007 before the world economic crash. But in 2014, pro-

duction is still expected to be at least 20% lower due to the impact of the banking crisis. Motor manufacturers have moved much of their production from Europe to East Asia.

Clarkson's programme put a false gloss on British manufacturing; looking through rose tinted glasses for the future of British capitalism. But the main campaign of all international capitalist car producers is to play off workers of one country against another in a race to the bottom for pay and conditions.

Jeremy Clarkson's programme was part of that reactionary campaign.

Birmingham Labour council 'consults' over £87 million cuts

Clive Walder

Birmingham Socialist Party

Birmingham's Labour city council plans another £87 million of cuts in the 2014-15 financial year. As expected its 'consultation' was just an opportunity for the council leader to present a slick presentation with the usual mantra of 'there is nothing else we can do'.

Not one of the contributions from the floor supported the cuts. Damagingly for the council and its notion of handing over whole services to the voluntary sector, a number of volunteers who work in the city's parks categorically stated that they can't do their voluntary work without the help of professional council workers!

The council has abandoned the concept of public service and use as its blueprint the recently opened Harborne Leisure Centre which is council funded but run by the private sector!

No entire service will be closed in the next financial year but no such guarantees could be made for the year after that.

The council leader once again told the assembled audience that they could not pass a 'needs budget' because it would be unlawful and commissioners would be sent in.

But two anti-cuts councillors in Southampton last year proposed a 'legal' needs budget based on initially using reserves and borrowing, and campaigning for the needed funds

from central government. So why couldn't Birmingham do the same?

The council leader is misleading the public to hide his political cowardice.

A delegation from the Maypole Youth Centre applauded when I told the council leader he should resign.

There will be a strong anti-cuts challenge in this year's elections including candidates from the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition that will raise the profile of the fight against cuts and provide a political alternative to the Labour Party in Birmingham.



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



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Energy Bills: Labour's 'supermarket special offer'

Richard Worth

Bristol South Socialist Party

Labour is targeting Kingswood constituency in Bristol for the 2015 general election, using its promise to 'freeze energy bills' to gain support for Jo McCarron, the newly selected prospective parliamentary candidate.

The original candidate stood down after not paying over £2,000 of parking fines! Both were chosen over the trade union candidate.

After speaking with McCarron by phone I was invited to meet her and Labour's shadow energy secretary, Caroline Flint MP, at a supermarket café.

I went with another Socialist Party member, expecting a big event. Instead we found around a dozen Labour Party members plus 'party officials' in a corner of the large café that was still open for the public.

When Flint started speaking we had to contend with the noise of people ordering teas, coffees and cakes and chatting about the weather! Also there were announcements of Asda special offers over the speaker system!

Labour's 'special offer' was, if elected, to make energy companies freeze bills until 2017. They would also 'warn' energy companies against raising prices before the freeze came into effect.

This proposal had clearly energised some Labour Party members present who genuinely

Labour's 'special offer' was to freeze energy bills until 2017 and 'warn' energy companies against raising prices beforehand

wanted to make things better for working people.

Flint vaguely said how a future Labour government would replace weak energy industry regulator Ofgem with 'something better', make switching energy supplier easier and give some financial support to small community-based green energy production.

I pointed out these modest proposals had been met with widespread public support, but opinion polls had shown over 70% want energy companies taken into public ownership.

My words were met with enthusiastic applause from both the younger and older Labour Party members, far to the left of the Labour Party leadership and officials.

Their response showed how socialist ideas can win support from wide sections of the working class to fight back and take over the commanding heights of the economy to improve everyone's lives.

STOP

CRUEL

CARE

CUTS



photo the Socialist

Rob Green

Support staff in Doncaster received an early Christmas present on 16 December in the form of a letter outlining the 'proposed changes to service' by their new employer, Care UK, after its recent acquisition of a supported living service for vulnerable adults with learning disabilities.

The new conditions include no enhancements for working weekends, nights or bank holidays (which in itself will mean a pay cut

averaging £400 a month due to the fact we provide a 24/7 service), and only basic annual leave entitlements, statutory sick pay and statutory maternity pay.

Since this company took over in September staff teams who have worked together for decades have been turned over overnight, staff have had a drop in wages due to the fact they're just 'too expensive' to put on certain shifts and record numbers have applied for bank contracts with the health trust just to keep their foot in the door. Happy Christmas, eh?

This is not to mention the effect it has had on our service users - vulnerable people who have put their trust in us, relying on our familiar faces and the support we give. A lot of our service users are on the autistic spectrum and when 50% of a staff team is forced to leave out of fear of not being able to provide for their own families, issues will arise.

I spoke to a colleague in the day care service and she informed me that attendance from one service user has dropped from every morning to three or four times a month. Nowadays it seems he is afraid to leave the house.

It is inhuman to think that you can care for someone for the best part of a decade and not love them. Sadly that is the emotional blackmail that courses through the very veins of the care industry. Choose between the person you have cared for, worked with, rehabilitated; and keeping a roof over your family's head.

The mood in the homes is not anger, it's upset. We are carers, not fighters. But forced, we will stand our ground and never accept the terms imposed upon us.

Unison is in the process of balloting its members for strike action.

What we stand for

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

As capitalism dominates the globe, the struggle for genuine socialism must be international. The Socialist Party is part of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), a socialist international that organises in over 40 countries.

Our demands include:

PUBLIC SERVICES

- No to ALL cuts in jobs, pay, public services and benefits. Defend our pensions.
- No to privatisation and the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). Renationalise all privatised utilities and services, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need.
- Fully fund all services and run them under accountable, democratic committees that include representatives of service workers and users.

- Free, publicly run, good quality education, available to all at any age. Abolish university tuition fees now and introduce a living grant. No to academies and 'Free schools'!

- A socialist NHS to provide for everyone's health needs – free at the point of use and under democratic control. Kick out private contractors!
- Keep council housing publicly owned. For a massive building programme of publicly owned housing, on an environmentally sustainable basis, to provide good quality homes with low rents.

WORK AND INCOME

- Trade union struggle to increase the minimum wage to £8 an hour without exemptions as an immediate step towards £10 an hour. For an annual increase in the minimum wage linked to average earnings.
- All workers, including part-timers, temps, casual and migrant workers to have trade union rates of pay, employment protection, and sickness and holiday rights from day one of employment.
- An immediate 50% increase in the state retirement pension, as a step towards a living pension.
- Reject 'Workfare'. For the right to decent benefits, education, training, or a job, without compulsion.
- Scrap the anti-trade union laws! For fighting trade

unions, democratically controlled by their members. Full-time union officials to be regularly elected and receive no more than a worker's wage. Support the National Shop Stewards Network.

- A maximum 35-hour week with no loss of pay.

ENVIRONMENT

- Major research and investment into replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy and into ending the problems of early obsolescence and un-recycled waste.
- Public ownership of the energy generating industries. No to nuclear power. No to Trident.
- A democratically planned, low fare, publicly owned transport system, as part of an overall plan against environmental pollution.

RIGHTS

- Oppose discrimination on the grounds of race, sex, disability, sexuality, age, and all other forms of prejudice.
- Repeal all laws that trample over civil liberties. For the right to protest! End police harassment.
- Defend abortion rights. For a woman's right to choose when and whether to have children.
- For the right to asylum. No to racist immigration laws.

NEW WORKERS' PARTY

- For a new mass workers' party drawing together workers, young people and activists from workplace, community, environmental and anti-war campaigns, to provide a fighting, political alternative to the pro-big business parties.
- Trade unions to disaffiliate from the Labour Party now and aid the building of a new workers' party! Support the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition as an important step towards this.

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

- No to imperialist wars and occupations. Withdraw the troops immediately from Afghanistan!
- Tax the super-rich! For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and the banking system that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working class control and management. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need.
- A democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, and in a way that safeguards the environment.
- No to the bosses' neoliberal European Union! For a socialist Europe and a socialist world!