

REAL JOBS FOR ALL!



Becci Heagney

Governments that try to “guarantee a job to every person are doomed to fail”, according to Tory Chancellor George Osborne. What an indictment of the capitalist system he represents! News headlines tell us that the government is committed to ‘full employment’. But Osborne’s speech showed that the Con-Dems remain committed to waging war on the unemployed, the young and the rest of the 99%.

Osborne has promised ‘full

employment’ for Britain, but not by creating real jobs. Creating jobs in the public sector isn’t a solution for the greedy bosses who boost their profits through privatisation, zero-hour contracts and low wages. The 900,000 young people who have been thrown on the unemployment scrapheap might want to work in a useful job such as in the NHS but most can only hope for McJobs.

The Con-Dems’ misnamed ‘Help to Work’ scheme will force the unemployed in to more workfare type jobs - working full-time for your dole money. But this time it will mean daily visits to the job centre as well! If you be-

come unemployed, you will have to look for work for a week before you can even claim Jobseeker’s Allowance. Those struggling on meagre benefits will be expected to struggle more as there will only be a 1% increase this year - in effect a cut.

It’s clear that austerity is failing. This latest government scheme is aimed at people who have already been on the Work Programme for two years and still have not found a job.

Osborne is still claiming that this is because of a “benefit culture”. This applies only to the private companies given contracts to run workfare schemes - they

benefit even if they don’t find people jobs!

Atos, the French company that carries out the ‘work capability assessments’ (a contract worth £500 million) has announced it will terminate the contract early in August. Undoubtedly, the protests held by disabled activists and others across the country have had an impact. Thousands of placards on demonstrations have starkly declared: “Atos kills”.

Between January and November in 2011, 10,600 people died within six weeks of being found “fit for work” by Atos.

Many people will be happy to see Atos go. However, the work

capability assessments should be scrapped completely, not just handed to another company.

Anyone unable to work due to sickness or disability should have a right to an income they can live on without the stress and humiliation of these tests.

Labour promises that in government it would make even deeper benefit cuts. Only Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition candidates stand for investment into creating socially useful jobs with proper contracts, guaranteed hours and a £10 an hour minimum wage.

See page 2 and www.tusc.org.uk for more

the Socialist

The paper of the Socialist Party. Issue 805.

The Socialist, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD Registered as a newspaper at the Post Office. Published by Socialist Publications, printed by Sharman & co Ltd. ISSN 1366-9621

No-cuts election challenge grows



440 candidates and counting – get involved!



Canvassing in Southampton photo Dave Reid



Tower Hamlets TUSC launch meeting

As we go to press the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) national steering committee is about to approve the 440th candidate for the challenge in May's local elections.

Out of the 160 councils with elections in May, TUSC already has candidates in place in 76. In twelve councils TUSC will be standing in at

least ten seats. In Coventry, Bristol and Portsmouth every seat will be contested, with nine RMT members on the list in the latter.

Fighting these elections is important. Evidence emerges daily of how councils – Labour, Tory, and Lib Dem alike – are acting as local agents of the austerity agenda. TUSC will mean a challenge to these establish-

ment parties – and to Ukip too.

Council cuts of £770 million to adult social care over the past three years mean that 168,000 older people are no longer getting help with essential tasks such as eating, washing and getting dressed, according to Age UK. In many areas youth services are becoming the stuff of memories.

Protests, demonstrations, strike action by council staff – all are vital to try to protect our public services. But offering a challenge at the ballot box is also part of the struggle. The question now, with weeks to go before nominations close, is how can the broadest and most effective anti-austerity electoral campaign be organised for the May polls?

We still have to fight to be heard

To be granted what the broadcasting authorities call 'fair media coverage', 15% of the seats up for election need to be contested by a party registered with the Electoral Commission. That means, for May's elections, 625 candidates standing under one banner, at least as it appears on the ballot paper. Recent events show this will also need a fight!

The media couldn't ignore the outpouring of grief by working class people at RMT leader Bob Crow's death. But they developed a line that Bob was 'not political'. A BBC website article by John Moylan stated that, "Mr Crow was not a member of any political party when he died".

A formal complaint was made pointing out that Bob Crow was a co-founder of TUSC and a member of the TUSC steering committee. Two days later it was amended to include a quote from TUSC national chairperson, Dave Nellist. Then, on 26 March, TUSC received an official reply from the BBC's Complaints department. In a Kafkaesque response they state: "we've looked at some of our articles which don't mention Bob Crow's connection to the TUSC but equally the article [by John Moylan] does".

In other words the only thing they could find to defend their coverage was the very article which we complained about which they had been forced to change.

How can we break the mainstream media's boycott of the anti-austerity socialist alternative? One step is to join the 440 people who have put themselves forward to date and become a TUSC candidate on 22 May.

Will you stand?

We still need to get application forms in quickly to get as close as possible to the broadcasting authorities' 'fair coverage' threshold of 625 candidates. To apply to be a TUSC local election candidate complete the council candidate authorisation

application form available on the Candidates page of the TUSC website at <http://www.tusc.org.uk/candidates.php> and email it to: Clive Heemskerk, the TUSC National Election Agent, at cliveheemskerk@socialistparty.org.uk

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is an electoral alliance that stands candidates against

all cuts and privatisation. It involves the RMT transport union, leading members of other unions and socialists including the Socialist Party.

This May TUSC plans to stand hundreds of no-cuts candidates in the council elections against all the austerity parties voting through the destruction of jobs and services. Could you be a candidate?

See tusc.org.uk

An appeal to anti-austerity campaigners

At its meeting on 26 February the TUSC national steering committee agreed to approach other anti-austerity campaigners and parties to ask if they would participate in the TUSC candidate lists – with their full rights preserved – even if just for this round of elections.

At the very least, the TUSC steering committee is committed to avoiding electoral clashes with other anti-austerity forces. But the opportunity is there to do much more, to break through the media boycott of the positive alternative to austerity.

On 2 March 2014 TUSC wrote to Left Unity regarding collaboration in the local elections. The letter explained that "TUSC is based on agreement on core policies which every prospective candidate is asked to endorse." The ten core policies include: oppose all cuts to council jobs, services, pay and conditions; refuse to implement the bedroom tax; support all workers' struggles against the cuts, privatisation and the government's policy of making ordinary people pay for the crisis caused by the bankers and the bosses and voting for councils to re-

fuse to implement the cuts.

The letter continues: "On that basis, any Left Unity members who wanted to stand in May would be guaranteed to receive the legally-necessary 'certificate of authorisation' to appear under the TUSC umbrella."

TUSC explains that: "This arrangement would guarantee the rights of Left Unity as an autonomous party. Beyond endorsing the core policies, candidates are responsible for their own campaign. The rights of Left Unity members who were authorised as candidates to produce their own material, to promote Left Unity as part of their campaign etc would be fully secured."

"There would obviously be issues to discuss if Left Unity were to accept this proposal. If the broadcast threshold was reached, for example, the organisations involved in the election campaign, now including Left Unity, would need to agree how this 'federal approach' would operate for media appearances, for instance in regard to a party election broadcast. But these could surely be resolved."

On 23 March LU's national secre-

tary Kate Hudson replied regarding the offer of collaboration saying: "In line with our approach and policy discussions on electoral work so far, I don't think it likely that we will take up your offer. As you will be aware, we have a national policy conference at the end of this month which will have further discussions about our electoral policy."

"However, following our initial discussion last year, we have no intention of conflicting electorally with TUSC, and following our conference, I am sure that the newly-elected officers would be very pleased to meet with you to discuss this matter further if you would wish to do so."

The TUSC appeal was continued in a letter to the Guardian by national election agent Clive Heemskerk, responding to a comment article by Ken Loach in the Guardian on 28 March.

"Ken Loach is absolutely right to say that 'Labour is part of the problem, not the solution' to the question, 'where is our political fightback' against austerity to come from?"

"At the forthcoming local council elections the Trade Unionist and So-

cialist Coalition (TUSC), co-founded by Bob Crow and since 2012 officially backed by the RMT union, is organising the biggest left of Labour challenge in such elections since the immediate aftermath of the second world war.

"The recently founded Left Unity group have been invited to participate in this election coalition, joining the anti-bedroom tax campaigners, trade union activists, and members of a number of different socialist organisations who will be standing under the TUSC umbrella in May. Possibly, together, we can reach the broadcasting authorities' threshold for 'fair coverage' during the election period. This would be a breakthrough for the anti-austerity socialist message, which I'm sure Ken would support."

Even if it proves impossible to agree formal arrangements nationally in the time available, individuals can still apply to appear on the ballot paper with the TUSC name, while promoting other compatible campaigns and organisations as they wish. The priority really must be to build the most effective challenge to the austerity consensus on 22 May.

Who are Left Unity?

Left Unity was set up in March last year after 10,000 people clicked an online declaration supporting 'Ken Loach's appeal to discuss the formation of a new party' following the release of his film, Spirit of 45, a Guardian article and other media publicity.

But an online appeal and a media profile does not make a party. Just 377 people took part in recent elections for Left Unity's national leadership, conducted through a two-week long online ballot – less than the number of TUSC candidates in May! Seventeen of the 40 regional reps' places on Left Unity's national council have been left unfilled.

When Bob Crow was interviewed last September by Guardian journalist John Harris on the prospect for a new workers' party he was asked about Left Unity. "Well, it's another group of people. Good luck to 'em", he replied. But "there needs to be one party speaking on behalf of workers", with the unions central (9 September 2013). Organisations' rights are protected by the federal, 'umbrella' character of TUSC. Shouldn't Left Unity be part of the coalition?

IPCC climate change report

Socialism and global planning essential

Pete Mason

Climate change has arrived, and it is not politely knocking on the door. The latest report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a 'call to action', hit the headlines.

The IPCC pointed to the arrival of drought and floods affecting crops and warned of famine. It pointed to the spread of malaria and other tropical diseases and an increased risk of population dislocation and war. Sceptics joked that the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse are here.

Yet it was no joke for those who suffered and died in Britain's recent winters - the floods, storms, and snow. Or those fleeing wildfires in Australia's record 50C heat, or those caught in Hurricane Sandy. But the worst effected, the report re-iterated, are those living in poverty, particularly in the neocolonial world.

Typhoon Haiyan brought 6,201 deaths, 1.9 million homeless and 6,000,000 displaced last November. Racing across the Pacific, stoked up by extra carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and extra ocean heat - both cause and result of global warming - the category five hurricane tore the Philippines' Tacloban city slums apart. Starving slum-dwellers fighting for food from abandoned shops were labelled looters by the international capitalist media and shot at.

While coverage of the IPCC report was generally positive, capitalist media like the BBC, hell-bent on preventing any 'bias' in favour of well-established science, asked whether



A typhoon survivor's message

the IPCC is 'creating a sense of urgency or alarm' (31 March 2014). Picturing a tranquil bloom of coral, the BBC quotes Richard Tol, an economist, who blithely asserts global warming 'may have some benefits at lower levels of warming.' This must sicken those destitute in Tacloban.

The IPCC's call to action will most likely fall on deaf ears in the world's capitalist governments.

Individual capitalists may realise that climate change has already cost them billions - the floods in the UK were one of two billion-dollar weather disasters of 2014 so far - there were a record 41 billion-dollar weather disasters in 2013. But then some capitalists also realise that poverty is bad for businesses yet they force down wages.

Most capitalists are locked into the cheapest carbon-fuelled technologies for fear of cheaper competition from their competitors. They

cannot move directly to carbon-free technologies in a planned way. The same is true of capitalist governments, which defend their native businesses.

Will any government - Tory, Liberal or Labour - that bows the knee to big business be capable of breaking the grip of the multinational energy companies, some of which fund climate change denial?

To do so they would most likely have to carry out widespread nationalisations, firstly throughout the energy and transport industry. A democratically drawn up unified plan of action, using the multinational bosses' stashed billions, could swiftly implement carbon-free technology throughout the economy. There is no reason for household bills to rise. Bills should fall.

Capitalist governments have delayed too long. A genuine socialist government which will break with capitalism is deadly urgent.



Join the fightback! Join the Socialists!

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Unplug the 'Big Six' profiteers

John Sharpe

The massive energy price rises at the end of last year have forced 4.5 million households into fuel poverty, families deciding whether to heat their homes or to eat.

Such is the anger that this has provoked against the energy companies that politicians, regulators and big business have been forced to react.

The 'Big Six' energy companies (British Gas, SSE, npower, EDF Energy, ScottishPower and E.ON) control 95% of the market.

Ofgem (the energy regulator) has said that dual fuel prices, where a customer takes gas and electricity from the same supplier, had risen by 24% between 2009 and 2013. They also saw a big jump in suppliers' retail profits - from selling energy to households and businesses - from £233 million in 2009 to £1.1 billion in 2012, a cool 372% increase.

When Ed Miliband said last autumn that a Labour government would freeze energy prices for a very modest 20 months, energy bosses claimed it was the end of the world

- led most forcibly by Alistair Phillips-Davies, boss of SSE, the second biggest energy supplier. Now, feeling the heat, Phillips-Davies has announced that prices will be frozen until 2016.

Perhaps they have chosen to jump rather than be pushed. Ofgem has referred the Big Six to the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA). The Big Six could be broken up, including separating the supplier side from the generation side of the business - a convenient arrangement where power companies sell energy to themselves.

Cartel

Ofgem is also concerned that there might be "possible tacit collusion" between the companies on prices. How much are these people being paid? I could do that job!

The inquiry could take two years which would mean any decisions would be made after the next general election. Two years to find out what everyone knows. It's like an episode of the political sitcom 'Yes Minister'.

Big business pundits and analysts

are predicting that any threat to energy profits will lead to a withdrawal of much needed investment in new generation capacity.

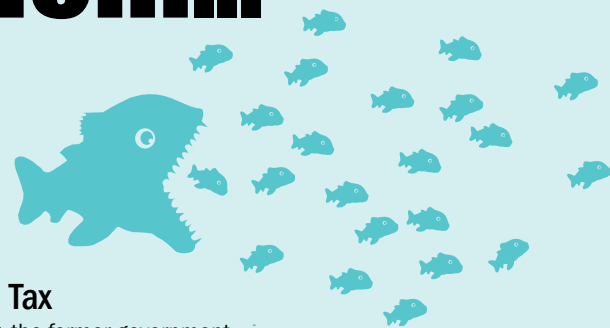
In 1990 the then state owned Central Electricity Generating Board operated on up to 25% surplus capacity margins. That is now down to 5%. The power companies raked in the profits without reinvesting in and maintaining capacity.

With the decommissioning of coal fired plants and end of life nuclear reactors and the now less than certain gas supplies from Russia, experts believe the situation could present risks of blackouts.

SSE's announcement also included its decision to withdraw involvement in four massive wind farm projects saying it was too expensive, there weren't enough subsidies and there is too much 'green crap' tax. No wonder the power companies are being accused of blackmail.

The power bosses have made their position clear. 'You touch our super profits, we'll turn out the lights.' Workers should reply, 'we'll keep the lights on, thank you very much, we'll turn you out instead.'

Them...



New Poll Tax

Lord Warner, the former government NHS minister under Tony Blair and cheerleader for private health-care, says the NHS is broken and needs fixing. So can we expect the ermine-collared peer to recommend increased resources, an end to rip-off PFI privatisation, nationalisation of the pharmaceutical giants? Fat chance!

Instead, Warner rubbishes the 'free at the point of use' NHS as "outdated, cosseted and unaffordable" and calls for a £10 monthly NHS tax on the public, dubbed by one doctor as "poisonous as the poll tax". In proposing this iniquity, Warner conveniently forgets that we already pay for the NHS through income tax and national insurance.

facts tell a different story. In 2013 there were fewer confiscation orders and less money recovered than in 2012. Moreover, government cuts mean that HMRC, responsible for chasing tax cheats, will lose 300 staff this year.

Council tax cudgel

An estimated 670,000 poor households will be clobbered by an average extra £120 a year council tax increase according to the Guardian and campaigning organisation, False Economy.

Last year, government austerity cuts resulted in slashing the council tax support to local authorities by a massive £500 million, while continuing to bail out the failed banks and capitalist financial system.

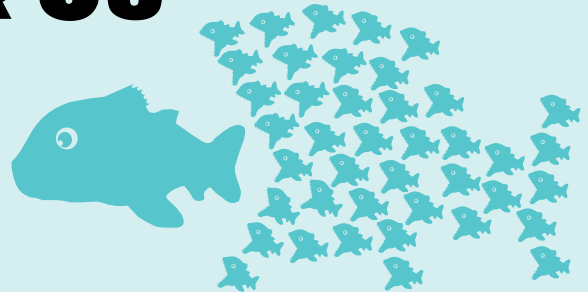
This savage cut was 'cushioned' by £100 million in transitional support, which has now ended. Local authorities, many Labour run, have meekly accepted these cuts and simply passed them on to those least able to shoulder them.

Housing costs

Hardly a week passes without a new report showing house prices reaching escape velocity! The latest, from Halifax, showed average house prices in the UK increasing by 16% in the last 12 months.

In England and Wales the average price for a property was £170,000. In London the average price of a home went up by £40,000 over the last year - a third more than the average London salary - to reach an utterly unaffordable £409,000. Yet any talk of government policies feeding a housing bubble - including the 'help to buy' schemes - were airily dismissed by David Cameron. As was the awkward fact that house-building is now at its lowest rate since the 1920s.

...& Us



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

What we heard

Alabama 3 - Woke Up This Morning (Milwall Calling) Bob Crow Mix

https://m.soundcloud.com/hostagemusiclondon/alabama-3-woke-up-this-morning?utm_source=soundcloud&utm_campaign=share&utm_medium=facebook

photo soundcloud.com



On 26 March NUT members held a one-day strike against education secretary Gove's escalating attacks on teachers and education in general. The strike was very well-supported, with large, lively demonstrations and rallies all across England and Wales. For reports and pictures, see the Socialist Party's website: www.socialistparty.org.uk

photo Heather Blockey

Teachers' strike



Probation officers walk out

Sheffield

As 30 probation officers walked out of Peel House, Sheffield just after midday, one told me "We're striking to be unattractive!" What she meant was: 'If private companies see that we're a militant workforce then they won't want to tender for our service'.

She said that they'd just had an email saying they could stay in the Local Government pension scheme, which on top of the Framework Agreement giving most staff seven years protection of service continuity, means that this privatisation is becoming increasingly unattractive to the private vultures and can still be stopped. This is despite the government spending £9 million and employing 200 civil servants on trying to make it work, but as one speaker said: "they're just making it up on the hoof."

After marching to the Town Hall, the Napo members were joined by solicitors and lawyers taking two days of industrial action against the legal aid cuts. As their speaker Tim, a solicitor, said: "It's about access to justice, these cuts are going to mean

only the rich will get the best legal representation and the poor will get what's left from G4S or Serco!"

Alistair Tice

Leeds

Socialist Party members visited picket lines in Leeds in support of probation workers taking part in a 36-hour strike over privatisation of the probation service.

Pickets explained to us their anger at this reckless action, which with spiralling costs effectively means that taxpayers' money will be going to subsidise private companies taking over a public service.

At the magistrates' courts, the listings had been much reduced in anticipation of the disruption the strike was causing. Pickets there leafleted those going into the court and those passing by, determined to spread the message about the destruction Justice Minister, Chris Grayling, was wreaking to their service.

Please sign their petition against privatisation - <http://www.change.org/en-GB/petitions/stop-risking->



public-safety
Iain Dalton, Leeds Socialist Party

Birmingham

"Too right we need a general strike!" was the catchphrase on the probation officers' picket outside Bir-

mingham Crown Courts as Socialist Party members went to offer support. With over 20 workers there, the mood was combative and upbeat, not least because of the coffee shop across the road donating free drinks!

Nick Hart

Victory for Carmarthenshire Unison

Carmarthenshire County Unison member

Carmarthenshire Labour-led local authority has backed off from ending the trade union secondments (TUS) it funds.

There is no doubt that this decision was the result of our Unison branch's robust campaign.

We would like to thank the Socialist Party locally and nationally for its support as well as the trade union branches and individuals who signed our petition.

The decision to remove TUS was a political one - made to try and stifle our branch opposing all cuts and from defending our members' interests.

This victory demonstrates that militancy works. But it is a temporary victory - council leader Kevin Madge has stated that the decision will be reviewed within six months.

The local authority wants information about what seconded officers do. We have always been prepared to provide this information but senior HR officers were not prepared, we assume on the say so of those above, to

provide a computer so we could keep a diary. The council wants information they were not prepared to collect!

Kevin Madge indicated that he had revoked the decision to remove TUS in a letter to Simon Dunn, regional Unison organiser. He copied this to the branch secretary, Mark Evans.

Many in the branch are concerned that regional secretary Margaret Thomas and the regional organiser met with Kevin Madge and other executive board members without branch officers being present.

The meeting should not have happened without our branch officers being present. It flies in the face of the claim that we are a members-led union.

The intervention of the regional secretary sent a message that Unison regionally is unhappy but this intervention should have been agreed with our branch and on our terms with our involvement.

Our campaign got us this temporary victory. We will now continue it until this decision is made permanent and the TUS agreement is improved.

Unite EC elections start

Kevin Parslow
Unite LE12/28 branch secretary, personal capacity

Ballot papers have gone out to Unite members in elections for the union's executive council (EC). Ballots have to be returned by 12 noon on 23 April.

The new EC will face some crucial issues, particularly its relations with New Labour and its industrial response to a possible Miliband government pledged to continue austerity. It must also actively consider coordinating action with other unions when necessary to fight against attacks on jobs and living standards.

The EC, which has been reduced slightly in size from its present 63 members, has nevertheless seen 22 candidates elected unopposed! Socialist Party members in Unite are supporting the United Left (UL) slate, the full list of which can be found here: <http://www.unitedleft.org.uk/index.php/campaigns-a-elections>. The UL is likely to retain its majority but the right-wing 'Unite Now' group has a list of 15-20 candidates plus independents it is supporting.

The 'Grassroots Left' group associated with Jerry Hicks is fielding just three candidates. But one of these has pictures of himself on his Facebook page with various New Labour 'dignitaries'. Another, challenging left-

wing candidate Steve Miller in North East, Yorkshire and Humberside, is a senior steward in Scunthorpe steelworks who, as a Labour council candidate, stood on a programme of limited cuts in 2011.

The election comes following the executive's decision to support the Collins Review reforms of the Labour Party, which were backed by general secretary Len McCluskey. In the key vote, EC members supporting the main left grouping, UL, split three ways! This was despite the UL having supported the principle of the union's collective strength in the Labour Party almost unanimously a few months previously, and the broad agreement with this position at the December EC.

The decision to support the Collins' proposals has caused some disquiet and disillusion among Unite activists of all political persuasions. Socialist Party members have explained the character of New Labour, as a pro-big business party, and demanded that not a penny more should be given to this party. But we also recognise the potential political power of trade unions in Britain.

That's why we call for the unions to break with Labour and set up a new mass workers' party. That task will be on the agenda for the next EC and the union's Rules Revision Conference next year.

In brief

Orgreave protest



On 29 March around 100 protesters gathered outside the northern office of the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) in Wakefield to voice their anger at the continuing cover-up of the truth of the police operation to break the National Union of Miners picket outside the Orgreave coking plant just under 20 years ago. The protest was organised by the Orgreave Truth and Justice campaign. As their spokesperson, Barbara Jackson, introduced the speakers, she commented that the IPCC had moved at a "snail's pace" to review the events around Orgreave. This was after South Yorkshire Police referred themselves to the IPCC under pressure in the wake of the Hillsborough inquiry.

She also pointed out the limitations of IPCC, which is largely staffed by former police officers and is unable to compel police officers to testify. She called for more pressure on the IPCC but also for a public inquiry. The speakers included many trade union activists from South Yorkshire. An NUR [now RMT] member at the time explained the solidarity that rank and file railway workers gave to the miners in refusing to move coal. Kevin, a Doncaster Care UK striker who had been one of the miners arrested at Orgreave also spoke.



TNT Post

The Communication Workers Union is calling on postal regulator Ofcom to set service quality levels. This is because TNT Post has been operating in Manchester for some months with complaints about poor service, late and mis-delivered mail. Now TNT is starting a service in Liverpool, delivering mail every other day. As well as providing a poor service TNT has also been undermining postal workers' pay and conditions by paying staff less than the living wage and using zero-hour contracts.

Lambeth college

Lambeth College teachers struck on 1 April. Management has launched unprecedented attacks on hours, wages, sick pay and jobs. Four privatised "free schools" are set to carve up the Brixton campus. Staff backed action by 95% on a 70%. This is a record mandate for lecturers' union UCU. Pickets held an energetic morning protest and lunchtime rally at the main Clapham site. Local trade unionists and Socialist Party members supported the picket line throughout the day. Workers plan to follow up with indefinite strike action after Easter.



Youth Fight for Jobs (YFJ) called a day of action against zero-hour contracts on 29 March, which was supported by the Fast Food Rights campaign and the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union (BFAWU). 30 actions took place around the country to highlight the plight of workers on zero-hour contracts, call for a living wage of £10 an hour and contracted hours, and to appeal to those workers affected to get involved in the campaign and to join a union. **See youthfightforjobs.com**



Newcastle photo Paul Phillips

about taking our campaign forward and won't stop until we end zero-hour contracts.

Paul Phillips
Newcastle YFJ

Swansea

McDonald's felt the presence of the Fast Food Rights campaign in Swansea. Security and managers were posted at all entrances and we were barred from entering. But outside we had a great



Swansea



Lincoln photo Nick Parker

organise together to fight for your rights at work."

Lincoln and District TUC

Yorkshire

In Wakefield, Leeds and Sheffield, activists from YFJ were joined by other supporters of the Fast Food Rights campaign.

In Wakefield, activists ran a stall outside McDonald's on Kirkgate. We spoke to loads of people passing by,

those of people they know.

The demonstration we held was outside Sports Direct. A security guard who approached us to find out what we were all about left with a smile on his face and one of our leaflets in his hand. Another man stopped and told us he was an employer of 45 people and was utterly disgusted with the practice of zero-hour contracts.

We plan to continue the campaign and have further actions. It's time to get rid of zero-hour contracts.

Giorgio Moulas
Liverpool Socialist Party youth organiser

Coventry

Mark Best of Coventry Youth Fight For Jobs said "Young people today aren't represented by any of the main parties in parliament. We're not apathetic, we're angry and we're going to do something about it."

Cardiff

Our message was loud and clear in Cardiff, aimed at the fast-food companies who rake in huge profits at the

London

30 people marched through Lewisham town centre in south London protesting outside Subway, McDonald's, Burger King and KFC. The protest got a brilliant response from people shopping in the area who were disgusted at how low-paid workers in fast food restaurants and shops are being treated.

People took leaflets, stopped and listened to the chants and even joined the demonstration. Local trade unionists and anti-cuts campaigners had also turned out to support the protest.

When Fast Food Rights activists went into the restaurants to talk to staff we got an excellent response – one worker signed up to join BFAWU on the spot! The campaign is now discussing declaring Lewisham a 'living wage zone' and launching a huge fight to demand that all the area's employers pay workers at least £10 an hour.

There was more support later when campaigners carried out a tour of Leicester Square, one of central London's busiest eating areas.

Helen Pattison
London YFJ

Shirebrook

Around 30 people supported the YFJ protest outside Sports Direct in Shirebrook, north Derbyshire. Sports Direct employs around 5,000 people in the Shirebrook area - 4,700 are on

zero-hour contracts or temporary work arrangements. Mike Ashley who owns Sports Direct, as well as the best part of Newcastle United football club, recently agreed to award himself a £65 million bonus.

There are many migrant workers and under-18s who work at Sports Direct. Some workers are being paid as little as £3.50 an hour and workers have to undergo humiliating searches when clocking off.

Our protest helped to show that no worker has to be left alone and defenceless in the face of bullying management. Also on the protest were members of the GMB union, which organises some Sports Direct workers, the Fire Brigades Union, the Socialist Party and other activists.

Nathan Sharpe
Mansfield and north Derbyshire Socialist Party

Newcastle

Our second day of action had a big impact on workers in Newcastle. People agreed with our leaflets and many had their own stories to tell. Beth Farhat, regional secretary of the TUC, brought a lot of young workers to the stall while also promoting the TUC's fair pay fortnight.

We went inside the likes of Burger and McDonald's advertising our public meeting for fast food workers on the 12 April, Brunswick Church, 12pm. We also signed people up to the union. Everyone was enthusiastic

reception, with local people, young and old, flocking to sign our petition. We heard horror stories of young workers on one-hour contracts and other examples of exploitation.

YFJ worked alongside local Socialist Party members and Greggs workers organised in BFAWU.

Gareth Bromhall
Swansea YFJ

Lincoln

Nick Parker, secretary of Lincoln and District TUC, said: "we're proud to support the fight to put an end to low pay and the use of zero-hour contracts and commend Youth Fight for Jobs for calling this national day of action.

"Politicians like George Osborne keep telling us that the economy is in recovery and unemployment is falling. If that's true then companies like McDonald's, which made a UK profit of more than £243 million in 2012, can afford to share the proceeds of the recovery with their workers, and give them proper hours instead of permanent insecurity.

"We call on fast-food workers to emulate their US counterparts who have built up a magnificent movement of protests and walkouts for \$15 an hour. Join BFAWU and



London photo Jim Jepps



Yorkshire photo Iain Dalton

including one person who explained how McDonald's had forced her out by reducing her shifts after the first time she refused to do overtime.

Iain Dalton
Yorkshire YFJ organiser

Liverpool

In Liverpool the day of action was the latest in a series of protests and campaign stalls on the issue of zero-hour contracts. The fantastic response we received has come to be expected. I've lost count of the number of people, of all ages, who have approached us in solidarity, shaken our hands, and exchanged stories with us of their own experiences or

cost of exploiting their workers, with chants such as "What do we Want? Union Rights! When do we want them? Now!" and "Living Wage, no matter your age!"

We split into groups and leafleted some of the fast food workplaces along Queen Street, the main shopping area in Cardiff.

Then, following the example of activists across the pond in the US we tried a loop protest. We marched around in a circle chanting and waving placards. This form of protest developed because static protests are banned in the US. While they are allowed in the UK we thought that a loop protest would inject energy and draw more public attention. We weren't wrong!

Afterwards we set up a YFJ campaign stall and held a rally. We spoke about the need for fighting trade unions like BFAWU in fast food workplaces. We warned that if the government and employers get away with normalising zero-hour contracts then workers may as well be handed a blank piece of paper in place of a contract.



Shirebrook photo Elaine Evans

Ken Smith

Author, A Civil War Without Guns

From the 1970s on, Tory politicians meticulously and ruthlessly prepared an offensive to try to vanquish the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and ultimately trade unionism.

That showdown came in 1984 when the Tory government hoped for a short, sharp victory over the NUM. In response, the miners had no choice but to fight. At stake were not just jobs, but the future of their industry and their communities.

The Tories did not get the swift, decisive defeat they hoped for and such was the resistance and bitterness created by them during the strike that they have been haunted by it ever since.

The 30th anniversary has seen yet another avalanche of propaganda aimed at justifying the view that the strike was doomed to defeat and that the actions of just one man – Arthur Scargill – were responsible for that defeat and the ultimate demise of the once proud NUM and coal industry in Britain.

To reinforce that establishment view, a rogues' gallery of right-wing trade unionists and Labour politicians have used the 30th anniversary to say that the 'crushing' of the miners and their communities was because a confrontation-seeking Arthur Scargill decided to take on an uncompromising Margaret Thatcher.

Thirty years on, the strike is rightly regarded as the biggest, most significant, industrial battle of the end decades of the 20th century in Britain. Despite all the right-wing claptrap, the truth that cannot be silenced is that the miners and their supporters conducted a magnificent defensive struggle that nearly turned into victory.

A dying industry?

One of the arguments put forward by the right wing in the labour movement to justify their backsliding during the strike is that coal was a dying industry. They assert that the strike just accelerated the demise of the industry.

In 1983 about 100 million tonnes of coal were produced by the British coal industry. Now in 2014 it produces just over 15 million tonnes.

Yet, the UK consumed 64.1 million tonnes of coal in 2012, including 54.9 million tonnes in power stations, and coal imports to the UK were 44.8 million tonnes. This represented a large increase (+37.7%) on the previous year's amount, mainly because of a dramatic increase in electricity generated from coal. Coal-fired power stations still provide 41% of the UK's electricity (gas 26%, nuclear 20%, others such as renewables 13%).

Even following the strike, coal production remained at around 50 million tons until 1995. If this amount was still being produced in Britain, it would more than cover the amount used by the electricity industry currently.

The Tories lied through their teeth about pit closures and the economics of the industry in the run-up to the strike. Yet, it was never about the economics of the industry. As Thatcher blurted out in her memoirs it was a political battle for the Tories.

In 1948, more than 600,000 worked in the industry, by 1984 this was just 182,000.

On average, between eight to ten pits closed every year in this period and more pits closed under Labour governments than Tory.

Mines were made to look increasingly uneconomic and liable to closure during this period by a process of starving the industry of funding and investment. There was a continual rigging of the

National Coal Board (NCB) accounts – to portray the industry as a loss-making operation – and an increasing use of the discovery of geological problems at pits by a new more hardline NCB management, headed by Ian MacGregor since 1983.

The NCB was charged more than £100 million in interest to store the millions of tonnes of coal that was stockpiled. Additionally, British coal had the lowest level of state subsidy in Western Europe. West Germany received £8.60 subsidy per tonne, France and Belgium received more than £17 subsidy per tonne, whereas the UK industry received only £3.20 subsidy per tonne.

Plan for coal

Militant, the predecessor of the Socialist, argued for the same level of subsidy to apply to the British coal industry.

For a long time before the strike, and during it, Militant argued that while it was necessary to campaign against pit closures there also needed to be a socialist plan of production for the industry and a socialist, integrated energy policy. These demands first featured in a Militant NUM programme for action produced as a pamphlet in late 1977. Even then it was clear that at some stage there would be a massive conflict over the future of the coal industry.

The Plan for Coal drawn up by the NCB in 1973 had envisaged a much larger 'market' for coal than actually transpired in the early 1980s. In response to the threatened contraction of the industry, we argued for:

- No redundancies; fight all closures except on grounds of proven exhaustion or safety as determined by the union
- For workers' control and management of the coal industry
- For the setting up of a national fuel corporation
- For a socialist national fuel policy

During the strike, the late Andrew Glyn, an Oxford University economist, produced a pamphlet that showed that when many of the NCB's false over-heads were stripped away, the coal industry was not "insolvent" as the Tories claimed. It proved that "the production of coal in 1983-84 more or less covered its underlying costs of production and financed the industry's investment.

He also showed that when you added the devastating economic costs of shutting down pits then "there is not one single pit whose closure would benefit government revenue". He concluded, "under present circumstances there is no economic case whatsoever for pit closure before exhaustion of mineable reserves."

Ridley Report

Miners had known for some time that a titanic struggle on the future of their industry was looming. From Thatcher's election in 1979 to the start of the miners' strike, 1,600 jobs were lost every week in Britain with hardly a squeak of resistance from some union leaders. Even in the coal industry, where miners had shown themselves prepared to fight, more than 100 jobs were lost every week as unemployment soared to more than three million.

Still smarting from their defeat at the hands of the miners in the 1972 and 1974 strikes, the Tories were preparing to smash the miners at an opportune time.

From the Tory general election victory of 1979 onwards, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher had been gauging the temper of the British working class and, in particular, the willingness of the trade union and Labour leaders to struggle against the attacks she was embarking upon.

The Tories lied through their teeth about pit closures and the economics of the industry. As Thatcher blurted out in her memoirs it was a political battle for the Tories.

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE MINERS' STRIKE

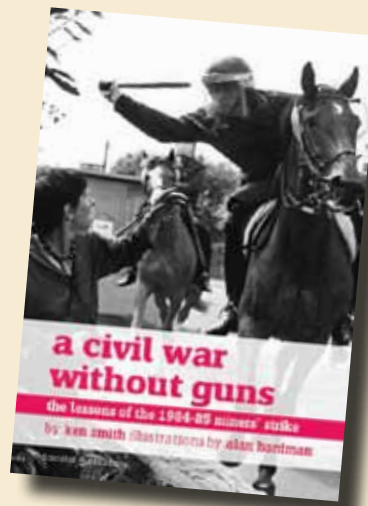


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"This was not about the subsidy, and it was not about revenge as such... We could not allow a group of industrial workers to hold us to ransom. It was something we or any other government had to deal with... We had to fight at the time of our choosing, and at a time when there was no way Scargill would have voluntarily chosen to fight"

The key elements in the Tories' preparations for the events of 1984-85 were the implementation of the Ridley Report proposals, which was 'leaked' in the Economist in 1978. Nicholas Ridley, who was later to become a Tory cabinet minister and Lord, wrote this infamous report. It proposed the following:

- A building up of coal stocks to see power supply last throughout a lengthy miners' strike.
- The increasing use of private, non-union haulage companies to carry coal.
- Power stations to be switched to dual coal and oil burning.
- A massive tooling up and increase of police powers to be combined with more draconian civil (anti-union) and criminal laws during the strike.

The Tories carried out all this and more with a vengeance. From 1980 to 1983 coal stocks were built up from 37.7 million tonnes to 58 million tonnes. In 1981 Sir Donald Maitland, Permanent Secretary at the Department of Energy, asked the Central Electricity Generation Board to prepare a contingency plan to cope with a miners' strike. It was ready within a few months.

Tory climb-downs

This followed on from the Thatcher government's humiliating climb-down at the hands of the miners in 1981, when the South Wales miners' bold and determined action against pit closures began to spread throughout the British coalfields. The Iron Lady was forced to retreat without using any of her newly established legal powers, like the Employment Act.

This victory, after the setback of the defeated national steel strike in 1980, gave confidence to other groups of workers taking industrial action. However, it was clear, as Militant warned at the time, that this was a temporary, tactical retreat by Thatcher and the ruling class. They would come back at a later stage, if they were allowed to, with further attacks.

This wasn't just a whim of Margaret Thatcher's. It was a conscious strategy for the ruling class in Britain.

Appearing on a recent BBC Wales documentary, Michael Heseltine, a member of Margaret Thatcher's cabinet in 1984-85 spelt it out very clearly.

Asked about whether the Tories had instigated the miners' strike to tackle the alleged £1 billion annual subsidy to the mining industry in Britain, his reply showed the cold calculation of the British ruling class at its most blunt. He said: "This was not about the subsidy, and it was not about revenge as such... We could not allow a group of industrial workers to hold us to ransom. It was something we or any other government had to deal with... We had to fight at the time of our choosing, and at a time when there was no way Scargill would have voluntarily chosen to fight."

Indeed, the strike started not because Arthur Scargill called it. Nor did the national or area leaderships of the National Union of Mineworkers start the strike. They were aware that with the massive stockpiles of coal, March 1984 was not the best time to take action, because it would mean a longer more difficult dispute with no guarantees of success.

Indeed, at the start of the strike, most experienced NUM members thought it could last for about three months.

Former Tory cabinet minister Norman Tebbit revealed in 1992, how worried the Tories were following threats of miners' strike action in 1982 and 1983. He concluded that the 1984 strike had been a "close-run thing" and 18 months earlier the miners would have almost certainly triumphed.

Notwithstanding the courage and determination shown during the strike and

after by the NUM national leaders, such as their president Arthur Scargill and general secretary Peter Heathfield, the beginning of the strike saw them caught off guard.

Many NUM leaders had the perspective of the overtime ban, which had been solidly endorsed in a national ballot, continuing until the autumn of 1984 and then taking strike action.

NUM general secretary Peter Heathfield had only a few weeks before the strike told a meeting in Derbyshire that he doubted whether the younger miners would go on strike because they had big mortgages and took foreign holidays.

Although ballots for industrial action against pit closures and on pay had been defeated, there had been increasing votes for action on pay in all areas in 1983, showing a growing mood to fight. Taking all these factors into consideration the Tories probably thought that the time was right for a pre-emptive move in March 1984.

Miners inspirational

That titanic struggle is rich with lessons about the strategy and tactics trade unionists need to learn from and apply today.

The tens of thousands of ordinary miners who stuck out for the whole 12 months can feel pride and will be an inspiration to workers for generations to come. It was not through lack of determination or fighting spirit on the part of these miners and their families and supporters that their struggle was defeated.

Their 12-month battle against difficult odds nearly won – as we shall chronicle in the Socialist over the 12 months of the 30th anniversary. Ultimately, their struggle was betrayed by the right-wing leaders of the TUC and Labour leader Neil Kinnock, though there are many lessons that should be discussed and learned from regarding the strategy of the NUM leaders, including Arthur Scargill.

Moreover, although the miners were forced back to work in March 1985 without an agreement, the inspiration of their struggle to defend their industry and communities continued, and remained a feature of the struggles to come. One such struggle led to the removal of the hated Thatcher through the successful anti-poll tax campaign led by Militant.

The miners' example in 1984 also led to a huge public outcry in 1992 against the re-elected Tory government's proposals for a massive further cut in deep-mined coal and the loss of more than 30,000 mining jobs.

Despite Peter Heathfield's concerns, it was the young miners at Cortonwood Colliery in south Yorkshire who started the strike. On 5 March 1984 they walked out following the announcement of the pit's closure without any reference by the NCB to the nationally agreed pit closure review procedure. This was a clear warning that the Tories' closure programme was about to be rapidly accelerated.

Young miners – many of them already at their third or fourth pit before the age of 35 – knew this would mean compulsory redundancies and the destruction of their communities.

It was the determined resistance of these younger miners that helped developed the strike's momentum, even following a hesitant start in some areas. This time there was no escape route for that generation: moving on to another pit when yours closed was becoming more difficult, as was the possibility of finding jobs outside the mining industry.

Yet, as the young miners at Cortonwood started the action on that March day, some felt this was going to be a long, bitter struggle, but few knew the scale of the battles that were to come.

France: Government punished in local elections

Far right gains highlight need for strong fighting left opposition

Local elections in France, which took place over two rounds on 23 and 30 March, confirmed the deepening crisis of the 'socialist' government of Francois Hollande. It is paying the price for its wholesale capitulation to big business interests after being elected in May 2012.

Although mainly elected because he was not Nicolas Sarkozy (the former right-wing UMP president) some hopes existed among workers in Hollande.

But a record number of people (the highest in over 20 years) abstained from the recent elections, showing the extinguishing of such hopes and disillusionment with the entire political establishment, which was especially strong among young people. Almost 40% of potential voters stayed away from polling stations.

In February, unemployment rose to a record high of 3.3 million (4.9 million when taking into account part time workers who want more hours). Last year the government announced €15 billion worth of cuts to the public sector. Nearly three million children live in poverty.

In Sunday's second round, the governing Socialist Party (PS) was routed, losing control of 155 large towns across the country, despite holding onto Paris. Despite its own crisis and deep divisions, the conservative UMP was able to make gains, winning 140 towns from the PS.

The historic battering received by the PS has provoked a deep crisis in the government, with the resignation of the prime minister, Aryault, replaced by Manuel Valls, former interior minister. Hollande will announce a further cabinet shake-up in the next few days, as rumours abound that he may sack a series of other ministers, including finance minister, Moscovici.

Marine Le Pen's National Front (FN) won a record number of local governments, with 14 mayors elected, almost tripling its previous high point in the 1990s. However, this should not be understood as reflecting mass support or enthusiasm for the FN's populist, xenophobic policies. The FN took power in many traditionally 'socialist' towns, reflecting that the former-social democratic PS's betrayal of the working class is an important part of the roots of the FN's success.

Being incapable of dealing with the crisis that the FN opportunistically exploits, the main parties' response to the FN's resurgence has been to move to the right to "cover its terrain".

The appointment of Valls as prime minister reflects a move along these lines by the PS. Valls, though merely representing a small right-wing faction in the PS, has been made famous for his xenophobic declarations and policies against immigrants, spearheading the expulsion of Leonarda Dibrani, a Roma schoolgirl snatched by police while on a school trip last year.

Vacuum

The FN's rise also reflects the vacuum to the left of the government and the absence of a mass force of the left and workers' movement capable of giving the mass opposition to Hollande a clearly progressive, anti-capitalist character.

Despite being blacked out of the international media, the good results of the Front de Gauche (Left Front, FdG) where it stood independent left lists against the government and the right wing, confirms the potential that exists for such a

A million march for dignity in Madrid

Angel Morano

Socialismo Revolucionario (CWI in Spain)

"De Norte a Sur, de Este a Oeste, la lucha sigue, cueste lo que cueste" (From North to South, East to West, the struggle continues no matter what the cost)

The above chant rang through the streets of Madrid as a deafening roar on 22 March (22M).

The city was shut down by an unprecedented human sea in the "marches for dignity".

Estimations of the attendance on the marches range from one to two million, in what was possibly the biggest demonstration in Spain since the fall of the Franco dictatorship.

Thousands arrived in Madrid from all corners of the country, in six columns, many of which had set out from their home towns on foot, up to a month prior to 22M. The masses flooded the city, under the banner of "bread, jobs and housing for all - no payment of the debt, out with the governments of the Troika".

In the context of the crippling economic crisis and mass misery, and of the criminal failure of the leaders of the workers' movement to mobilise the necessary fight-back, 22M represents the working class entering the stage to break the logjam and open up a new phase of struggle.

22M must be the spark that ignites a coordinated struggle to build a left and rank and file opposition to the 'pactism' of the main union leaders, extended throughout the entire union movement.

Following the mass explosion from below of 22M, a new general



At least a million took part in the demonstration

strike cannot be as those which have gone before, organised by the union leaders to let off steam and followed by demobilisation and defeat.

We need a new general strike, built from below with a political programme based on the demands of 22M, a political general strike.

This would be the first step in a sustained and escalating plan of action which can only end in the fall of the Rajoy government and a break with the capitalist regime established following the transition in 1978.

Finally, we must stress the impact of Izquierda Unida on the march, which was covered with a sea of its flags and filled with its activists.

If IU is to become the political



CWI flag on the demonstration photo Socialismo Revolucionario

force which can give the movement a voice and lead it to victory, it is crucial that it adopts a clear political programme for the socialist

transformation of society, to break with the Troika and capitalism.

See socialistworld.net for a fuller report and analysis

force. These left lists (sometimes involving other left organisations such as the NPA) won over 2,000 councilors in the first round.

Where the Front de Gauche's components (especially the Communist Party) stood in alliance with the PS, they largely shared in its humiliation and defeat. This represents a victory for the policy of left independence from the social democracy which has long turned its back on the working class, a debate which rages throughout the European left.

Here we publish an extract of an article by Gauche Revolutionnaire (CWI in France) following the first round of elections (full article online at socialistworld.net).

Clear opposition

The more the FdG clearly stood for an alternative to the government, the better the votes in most cases. As we said, what was needed was lists of the FdG and the broader non-governmental left without any ambiguity vis-à-vis the PS.

We share the point of view of Mélenchon (leader of FdG), who said it would have been better if the FdG and all its components had a clear line of opposition to the PS and presented united lists everywhere. It is clear that such lists would have allowed at least the beginnings of an opposition of the left to the Hollande-Ayrault government.

But what Mélenchon does not say is that in the combinations he proposes, he combines the lists with EELV (which supports the govern-

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

ment) - this was the case in 90 cities.

In the next few months the Responsibility Pact cuts package of Hollande will start to be implemented, with many new attacks against public services, wages, welfare and numerous new gifts to the rich and the bosses. It goes without saying that Hollande has the same policy as Sarkozy - making workers pay for the crisis of capitalism.

Some may have believed that by voting FN it was a sufficiently noisy protest against the policies of the PS and the harshness of the economic and social situation. It is obviously nothing of the sort. The FN is in no way arguing for the end of capitalist exploitation, or the maintenance of all public services. The protec-



Francois Hollande

tionist proposals or discriminatory measures it proposes against some foreign workers only mask the real culprits - the capitalists.

The good votes for some lists to the left of the PS show that there are some real possibilities and the situation shows that there is an urgent need to build a left opposition to Hollande and all the pro-capitalist parties.

Such a broad and democratic opposition, bringing together all workers - youth, unemployed, retired, men and women, French or from

abroad - who want to fight against policies that favour the bankers, big bosses and shareholders, can be discussed and put forward from now.

On April 12, a large demonstration calling for a 'Left Revolt' is being organised on the initiative of Mélenchon, Besancenot (leader of the NPA) and most of the forces to the left of the Socialist Party. This can be the first step towards building a genuine, united struggle against the policies of Hollande and against capitalism.

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.

**Tory protection racket**

Victims of domestic violence, who are at risk and have been helped to create 'panic rooms' in their homes for protection, now face the vicious bedroom tax on their safe havens. A quarter of homes with panic rooms are affected in the North East, the worst nationally. The brutal tax means vulnerable women and children face their housing benefit being cut if they don't stump up the extra cash to pay for the potentially life-saving rooms which are considered 'spare'. This is just another example of the Con-Dems' austerity agenda putting women at risk.

We need to stamp out this tax that only serves to throw the most vulnerable sections of society into debt, insecurity and homelessness while the rich laugh all the way to the bank.

Suzanne Beishon

End this stupid tax

I have been in my place since 1963. My ex-wife left in 2004 and remarried in 2006. I have been sick and disabled for a number of years. When the bedroom tax came in last year, I did not pay it at first but I was being threatened with eviction so I started paying it in August, paying part of the arrears every week. Then a loophole was found in January. Anyone who has been on housing benefit from 1996 would not have to pay it. I was exempt. So I received £907 back that I had paid, I was getting all my rent paid again. Recently Wyre council sent me a letter saying the loophole had been closed so I have to start paying £25 every week bedroom tax again. I didn't know how they could change the loophole so fast. I should still be exempt as I have been in this property for 51 years in October. Many other people will receive letters saying they are no longer exempt from bedroom tax and have to pay the shortfall towards their housing benefit to their



landlord as they will no longer get 100% housing benefit.

My blood pressure was all right a few months ago but now my doctor tells me it's very high. Other people in similar positions should write in and we can end this stupid tax.

David Scarfe, Fleetwood

Welfare myths

Karen Rowlingson, social policy professor at Birmingham University, has described the idea that welfare spending spiralled out of control as a "myth". Between 1995 and 2011 "expenditure on benefits, as a proportion of GDP, fell sharply and then remained stable for the longest period since the foundation of the welfare state."

This has not stopped the Tories putting a cap on welfare spending which will

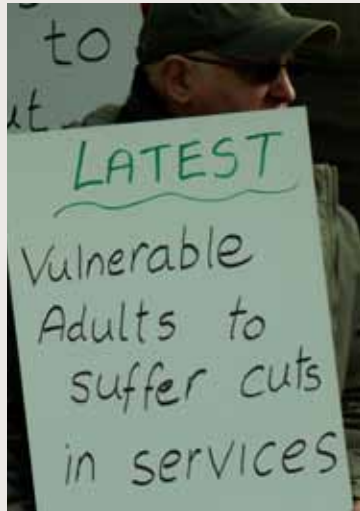
make the poorest suffer most. Nor has it prevented the Labour party from agreeing right away that they will stick to this policy. But there is no cap on either MPs' expenses or bankers' bonuses. The rich will still get richer and the poor will get poorer.

No political party will oppose this except the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC). TUSC policy is based on the truth of the situation while the Con-Dems and Labour base theirs on a convenient lie parroted on every occasion. Labour will go into the election with the inspiring slogan "Vote for us, we're exactly the same as the Tories, we promise." That will get them flocking to the ballot boxes.

Derek McMillan

Mental health crisis

Reportedly there are only 160 mental health beds in the whole of Kent which has a population of 1.5 million. 35 beds



at Medway Maritime Hospital were set to go after the Mental Health Crisis Block was approved by Kent county council to be shut down back in July last year. Patients are told that there are no beds available in the area so they have to travel to west London or Essex for mental health care. This could be a factor in the suicide of a 21 year old Kent woman who jumped in front of a tube train on the way to Ealing hospital, where she was receiving treatment.

We need investment in the NHS, but the Con-Dems are currently paving the way for downgrading and closing hospitals, as evidenced by recent legislation (Chapter 4 and clause 119, Care bill) that allows the secretary of health, Jeremy Hunt, or people he appoints, to do just this within a 40 day period with no proper public consultation. We have to fight back.

Alec Price

I'm standing for TUSC

Earlier this year I attended two demonstrations against the racist East Anglian Patriots in my home town, Lincoln. People came and listened to speakers and seemed genuinely interested in the cause. From speaking to friends and colleagues afterwards I felt a lot of support had been gained. After that I became both a union rep and a member of the Socialist Party.

Lincolnshire is a rural area where the poorer and more vulnerable are often isolated not only financially but also by the fact that transport links are poor. Cuts to welfare are increasing this isolation and vulnerability. As a result people can feel less connected to one another and unable to make changes.

I am hoping to be a candidate in my area for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) and to stand in the



May elections to show the people of Lincolnshire that there is a party that will fight for them. Stop the cuts and start to build a future.

Nicole Good, public sector worker

Positive portrayal

It was great that Sarah Wrack highlighted the progressive aspects of Call the Midwife, which brings alive the positive aspects of the NHS being created, and the harshness of life for working people. It also shows the middle class and working class working together for a common cause. That's the kind of equality that we need more of today.

Graeme Kemp, Wellington, Shropshire

Spare room blues

Lynne Sample, member of the 'Smash the Bedroom Tax' campaign and Newcastle Socialist Party sent us this song. Sung to the tune of Matt McGinn's Jeely Piece Song, part based on Adam McNaughton's version and added to by Smash the Bedroom Tax. Nick Forbes is Newcastle's Labour council leader.

You cannot have a spare room
In your tiny council flat
Cameron and Clegg and Co
They put a stop to that
They said 'move to a smaller home'
They said that was the plan
But the odds against our finding one
Was 99 to one.

If you have a bedroom
It must have a bed
That is what the judges
At tribunals have said
A bedroom should have 70
Square feet upon the floor
Not including cupboards
Or an inward opening door

While they hang out in mansions
With 23 spare rooms
We haven't even got the space
To store our mops and brooms,
Disablement equipment
And a wheelchair in the way
We cannot even have
Our kids and relatives to stay!

We thought the Labour councillors
Would all be on our side
They did nothing to oppose it
They are just a bunch of 'snides'
We've been to all their surgeries
We've launched verbal attacks
But they do not want to give
The bedroom tax the axe

They've whined and moaned and argued
They cried the tears of crocs

They promise to reduce the need
For banks of foodstuff stocks
Some do not pick up the phone
Or answer all our letters
Some don't reply to emails
And so have never met us

We've had marches, we've had demos
We've had meetings by the score
But Labour say they have no choice
And it is such a bore!
And like the Scarlet Pimpernel
Nick Forbes can't be found
But until we've sniffed him out
We're going to stand our ground

They barred us from the Civic
And guarded the main entrance
They threatened us with coppers
And a minor prison sentence
They threatened to eject us
From the public gallery
But we just keep on heckling
Our opinion should be free

At the council meeting
We are going to put a motion
Even though it's probably
A small drop in the ocean
Their actions are unlawful
We are going to state the facts
And we will keep on fighting
Till they axe the bedroom tax

Hypocrisy

Labour MP Patricia Hewitt resigned as a non-executive director of British Telecom after the association was revealed between the Paedophile Information Exchange (PIE) and the National Council for Civil Liberties when she was its leader.

BT Chairman Sir Michael Rake's only



comment was that Hewitt had helped lead the company as it transformed itself through big investments. "Patricia played a full part in this important chapter in the history of BT and the company is extremely grateful for the advice and service she has given since joining the company in 2008," he said. Hewitt denied the PIE scandal had anything to do with her resignation from BT's board but said "I am a strong believer that good corporate governance requires a healthy amount of movement among non-executive directors. After two full terms on the board, the completion of my sixth year is the right time for me to stand down."

Virtually no one will believe this explanation for her behaviour but most will see it as an insult to the victims of paedophile actions. In establishment eyes, Patricia Hewitt's real achievements are condoning privatisation of the NHS when she was Health Secretary and doing nothing to reverse the steady decline of BT workers' pay. The rest is probably forgivable to them.

A BT worker

Kent 'peasants' storm Rochester



Sue Berry

North Kent Socialist Party

The peasants are revolting again in Kent! Dubbed by Medway Tory leader Alan Jarrett as 'peasants' for refusing to shut up at a council meeting, 200 angry Strood Library activists took to the streets on 29 March with local trade unionists and marched to Rochester for a rally.

As they swept past Rochester Castle, which was stormed by rebels in the 1381 revolt, local Tories must have wondered what they have taken on.

Strood Library Action Group was set up following a council decision to close the current purpose-built site and merge facilities with other services in a so-called 'community hub' while ousting Strood Community Project, a popular charity delivering services for vulnerable people, from its High Street location. This has caused a storm of opposition including a 5,000 name petition, three council lobbies and a public meeting attended by 60 local residents.

Addressing the marchers, local resident and Unison NEC member Jacqui Berry said: "This isn't just about the downsizing of one library. It's about the loss of widely used and much loved facilities to pay for the Tories' austerity agenda.

"What's fantastic about this campaign is that it's linked up local residents with trade unionists fighting cuts in their workplace. It's a powerful combination that can win."

At the Rochester rally Tania Earnshaw, representing Medway local government Unison, laid into the plans to create 'community hubs' by cutting jobs while stealing money from other services.

Tory arrogance

A number of people representing local voluntary groups spoke along with Kim West who runs Strood Community Project (retail). Kim said that the arrogance of the Tory administration is down to the lack of local opposition. Her comments highlighted Labour's feeble council chamber politics and inability to mobilise grass roots campaigns against Tory cuts.

It has taken local community activists, supported by Socialist Party members and trade unionists, to galvanise the opposition and take the fight direct to the council. Many are asking 'what's the point of Labour' and the ground is being prepared for TUSC and anti-cuts candidates to make strong challenges for council seats next year.

Quinn Square Rent Strike 1938

London's East End battle against high rents and slum conditions

Jack Palmer

The women's poster demonstration was the first the locals in Bethnal Green in London's East End knew about their rent strike. Quinn Square was a slum. The posters were nailed to broom sticks and the demos were impromptu. The tenants of Quinn Square had stopped paying their rents and they were going to let everyone know about it. They were demanding lower rents and better repairs. Their struggle sparked a new movement against escalating rents. The Conservative Party-led National Government had relaxed rent controls and wanted to abolish all forms of rent restrictions.

Rent controls

Rent controls were introduced in 1915 after a magnificent rent strike by workers on Clydeside in Glasgow. As the war munitions factories sprung up, so did the need for accommodation, so the landlords felt 'obliged' to push up the rents. Over 20,000 families participated in the Clydeside strike and with the threat to munition production, the government reinstated rents at pre-war levels. This Rent Act protected all working class tenants. Following the end of the war, Tory governments began to remove all restraints on the landlords' exploitation of their tenants. This meant there were both controlled and uncontrolled rents for the same type of accommodation - even in the same building. The Quinn Square landlords were prepared to exploit this confusion. There was a minuscule amount of protection for those in controlled accommodation but for those in the decontrolled sector the rents were exorbitant. Families were paying to live in slums. The flats had no running water or toilets; they shared one tap between four households and one lavatory for every two families. Because of overcrowding it could mean 30 people could be sharing these meagre amenities. Inside the flats, there were no cupboards for food or clothes. Repairs, if done at all, were poor. The blocks were considered model dwellings when they were built in 1882-84 - six storeys high and with a large square in the middle in which the children could play. The drive for more revenue meant another block was built in the children's play area. Within months of its formation, the tenants' association won rent reductions and defended tenants in court against eviction notices. When the caretaker, bailiffs and five police officers turned up to evict a tenant, a human wall of tenants was swiftly erected. The solidarity action forced the bailiffs and the police to retreat without enforcing the eviction. The first tenants' meeting saw Mosley's fascists appear - they were sent packing. Mosley was a big property owner. The women were often harassed by the fascists as they marched but they were not intimidated. The committee carried out a



photo London Collection, Bishopsgate Institute

Number of rooms	Rent controlled	Rent decontrolled
1	average 4s 6d	as much as 6s 8d, the average 6s
2	average 7s 3d	as much as 11s, the average 10s 4d
3	average 9s 1d	as much as 14s 6d, the average 14s
4	average 11s 7d	as much as £1 0s 8d, the average 18s

survey of the controlled tenants and discovered out of 90 that 70 were paying too much. The tenants agreed to fight for fair rents for both those in controlled and decontrolled flats and a rent strike was planned. Another issue aroused the tenants' anger, and was effectively used in their propaganda. London county council housing estate flats had running water, toilets, electricity and baths but the rents were only half what the Quinn Square tenants paid. The strike got attention from the national and local newspapers. Thousands of tenants in the same situation were watching the battle and its outcome. It was this type of publicity that the tenants wanted. "Ill-advised strike" was the headline in the Hackney Gazette. The tenants bombarded the editor with 200 post cards. This prompted the paper to defend their position and under the headline "Gazette attitude justified". The tenants sent a delegation to see the editor. After a few days of the strike, the landlord's agent listened to their protest and committed himself to a meeting at the weekend. Instead of meeting the committee, he rushed round offering discounts to the uncontrolled tenants. Clearly, the landlords hoped to undermine the tenants' solidarity. Clear demands The tenants' answer was clear. As the second payment day arrived, the tenants placed pickets on the agent's office door. This time not one of the tenants from 247 flats paid their rent. Pickets were deployed every day. The role of picketing was left to the women. They wore paper hats with the word 'picket' pencilled on the front. Other groups of women would be standing around the square waiting. The agent, accompanied by police officers, was followed around the estate by the women and their children.

The landlords' next move was to attempt to use their courts to evict tenants. They issued summons against ten tenants for non-payment. The tenants' association replied with court summons for payment of over-charged rents. By the end of the second week, the strike was still solid. The landlords sat down with the tenants and this time they listened. The result was the landlord's humiliating defeat. The tenants of Quinn Square won: 1. Recognition by the landlord of their Association 2. The understanding that necessary repairs will be carried out 3. That no legal or other action will be taken by the landlord against any tenant without first consulting the Tenants' Association 4. The following scale of maximum rents for decontrolled tenants above which the landlord cannot charge:

Number of rooms	Rent	Average reduction
1	5s 4d	8d
2	9s	1s 4d
3	12s	2s
4	15s 9d	2s 3d

Within weeks of victory, other strikes by tenants took place, in Welwyn Garden City, Motherwell, West Wickham and New Maldon. There has always been a housing crisis for poor Londoners. The struggle was against slum conditions and high rents. Today, poor Londoners face the difficulty of finding affordable accommodation. Both rents and the cost of buying a flat or house are spiralling out of control. What is needed is rent control and a council house building programme.

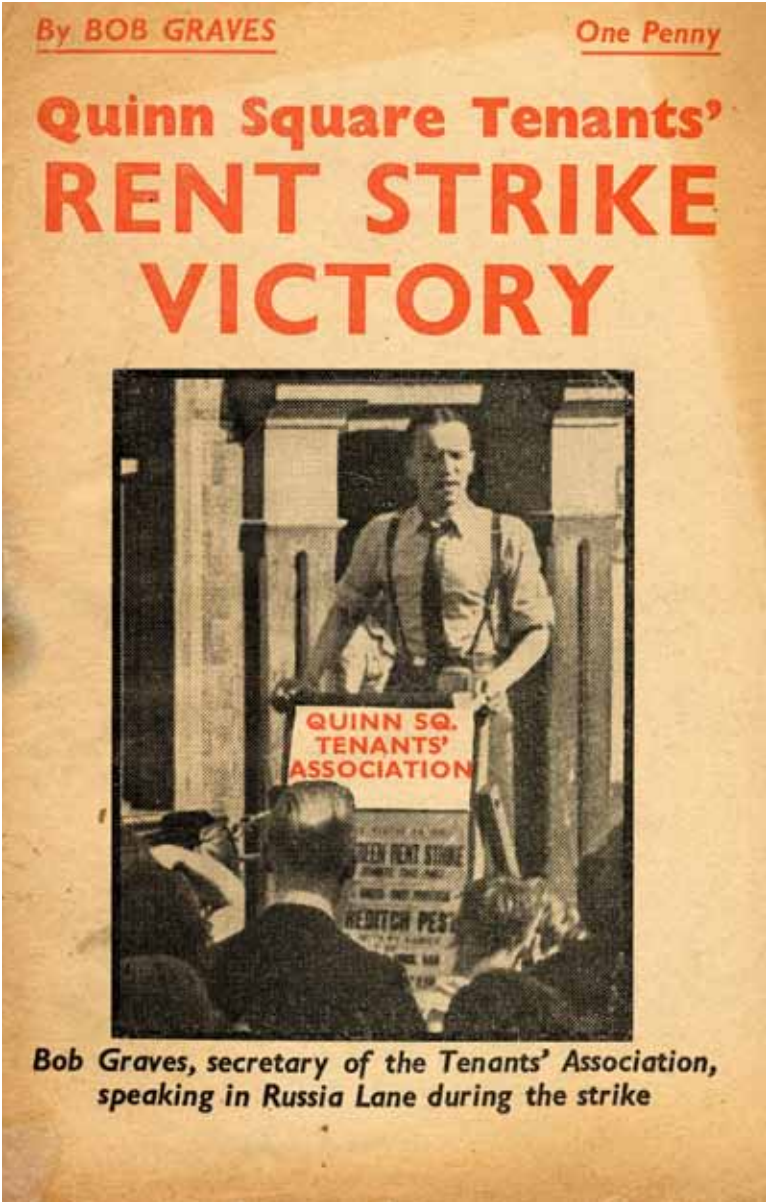


photo London Collection, Bishopsgate Institute



Protest outside landlords conference photo B Severn

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) says: Stop rip off landlords! A cap on rents in the private sector is needed to bring private rents in line with social housing rents. Councils should have a compulsory register of private landlords - they should refuse to issue a license to landlords letting overcrowded, poor quality housing at rip-off rents. They could also set up a council-run, not-for-profit letting agency. TUSC was set up to enable trade unionists, anti-cuts campaigners and socialists to stand candidates against all the main parties. The TUSC campaign has started. On 22 May 2014, TUSC aims to contest 625 seats in the local elections. Join with us Apply to stand Or help us campaign: www.tusc.org.uk

DONCASTER STRIKE

Alistair Tice

Doncaster striker Carole Hanson says: "We are all still solid, and passionately believe we are doing the right thing, even though we are all skint this month. However if we don't fight to win, being skint will be our future every month so that has made us more determined."

Like the lager advert says, Doncaster Care UK strike - probably the most important trade union dispute in the country right now. On one side Care UK, a multi-million pound Tory-supporting private care company slashing workers' terms and conditions. On the other, over 100 careworkers, privatised last year and now facing an average 35% pay cut, are fighting back.

These Unison members who have already taken two full weeks of action, voted by 95-1 to begin a further three-day strike on 6 April to be followed by four more days over the Easter weekend.

Working to just exist

Care UK have torn up the TUPE transfer agreement, reducing holidays and sick pay and scrapping unsociable hours enhancements. Carole, a senior support worker, says: "The over £300 a month loss of pay for me means the difference between living or just existing."

"I resent the fact that Care UK say the cuts are necessary when we all know a chunk of it is for their profit pot. I am concerned how easy it was to privatise our service after being NHS for 68 years."

Janet Howle, support worker and Unison shop steward says: "To me this means earning the same wage now as I did eight years ago. This is why we are on strike. As private companies take over the NHS, wages and living standards will be eroded. The service provided will be affected. The NHS should not be treated as a commodity to make profits. We are in a caring profession



because we want to give a good level of care."

This strike is a 'cause celebre'. Solidarity and support funds have been pouring in. Strike supporter Jason Fawley, whose wife is one of the strikers, went collecting funds in London: "A man riding past on his bike heard me say 'Care UK Doncaster'. After I explained what it was about he put £10 in the collection

and wished us luck. A young lad even offered us his bus fare."

But the same support has not been forthcoming from Labour. Despite these pay cuts being a 'cost of living crisis' for every single careworker and their families, not a single Labour councillor or MP has visited the picket line, including Doncaster North MP Ed Miliband.

That's why Jason, striker Greg

Beaumont, and two other branch stewards are standing as Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidates in Doncaster in the May council elections (see www.tusc.org.uk).

The three-day strike deliberately coincides with the company's extended deadline for signing up to the new contracts. Another deadline, another bonfire of contracts.

Support the strikers

Send messages of support to:
admin@unison-dab.org.uk

Send donations/cheques, made out to 'Doncaster, District & Bassetlaw Health Branch', to
Jenkinson House, White Rose Way, Doncaster DN4 5GJ

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!