



Government hits sick and disabled

COLD, CRUEL CUTS



Fight the Con-Dem attacks

Mary Jackson

The government onslaught of attacks on the sick, disabled and terminally ill looks set to increase rapidly. Leaked plans show that Tory Chancellor George Osborne wants to savagely cut Employment and Support Allowance (ESA). If implemented, some of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable people could see their weekly income slashed by £30 a week.

Despite the staggering human cost, Osborne's grand plan is to cut welfare spending by an extra £25 billion - while slashing corporation

tax and the top rate of income tax.

The government is in crisis. Bailing out the banks and capitalist financial system has meant that it's borrowed more in four years than Labour did in 13 - giving £8 billion direct to the rich in tax cuts and the rest to its rich friends in payment to run (or in fact cut) public services. Not that Labour was any different in kicking the poor when last in office.

Osborne and his ilk lie about the 'soaring benefit bill' for ESA. In fact it's falling. They lie about thousands falsely claiming to be sick when in fact a quarter of a million sick and disabled people have overturned the decision that they

are 'fit for work', and an estimated 60,000 have died within three months of the decision.

562,620 have been found 'fit' for the work programme (run by private companies, paid millions from our taxes) but only 5% have been 'supported' into sustained work.

Instead of accepting the work test is flawed Osborne has decided to cut ESA almost to the level of Jobseeker's Allowance (see page 3).

Doctors, MPs, charities, PCS union members (who work at the Department for Work and Pensions) and disability groups all believe the test should be scrapped. But

this government is on a mission to make the working class pay for the capitalist crisis and is hitting the most vulnerable as an easy, unorganised target.

This isn't a fight that benefit claimants can fight alone. It's a battle that must be fought alongside the organised working class. We need a 24-hour general strike as a starting point to end austerity, and to restore our decimated services. We need benefits to reflect the cost of living.

All this and more is possible. After all, we live in one of the richest countries in the world. Let's change it so that the majority benefit, not the few super-rich.

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All main parties in crisis: where will the opposition go?

"This is not working... I mean all our financial institutions, government and power structures... I came here [a library in Gorton, Manchester] this morning to a place where 39 per cent of kids are below the poverty line. "It's the 21st century — all those years of Labour? I don't think this is working, everybody! I'm in a red-hot phase of meltdown. We're going to have to have a revolution."

Not Russell Brand attacking the political and economic elite this time, but wealthy Hollywood actress and former Labour supporter, Emma Thompson. These celebrities have captured the mood of a layer of young people and workers who are totally disillusioned with all the main parties, many feeling let down by Labour in particular.

This is reflected in the large numbers of people not voting in elections, and also in some workers using a vote for UKIP as a means to express their anger. While the leadership of Ukip are right wing millionaires, it is consciously trying to appeal to workers angry at endless austerity. Although taking support away from the Tories and winning the Clacton by-election with 60% of the vote, they also came within 600 votes of winning the Labour seat of Heywood and Middleton on the same day.

In the run-up to the 20 November parliamentary by election in Rochester and Strood, where a second Tory defector is ahead in the opinion polls, UKIP has maintained a national position of around 17%. One poll, published in the Observer on 25 October, suggested 31% of voters would back them if they thought there was a chance of UKIP winning in their constituency. Another showed a further spike in support after it was announced that Britain owed the European Union an extra £1.7 billion.

Immigration

Both the Tories and Labour have responded to the Ukip threat by attempting to echo their ideas on immigration. Cameron has made the chair of Migration Watch into a peer for his services to the cause of blaming immigrants for all our problems. Theresa May even suggested that migrants who, in desperation, try to cross the Mediterranean in leaky boats should be left to drown. Miliband has announced that a Labour government would bring in an immigration reform bill. All this does is further legitimise Ukip's message.



Above: the many faces of austerity; inset: TUSC marching in defence of the NHS

There is no doubt that large parts of the population have concerns about immigration, which Ukip has played on. These concerns are felt by many workers who consider themselves anti-racist but see big business using super-exploited migrants to lower wages and services being underfunded. Simply calling Ukip racist and bland campaigns to 'stop Ukip' are inadequate. Jointly campaigning against Ukip alongside pro-austerity parties is totally counterproductive.

The central reasons for workers' anger at all the establishment parties is the endless diet they are being offered of low pay, insecure jobs and declining public services. Above all the collapse of living standards — an 8% fall in real wages since 2007. If a mass party existed that put an anti-austerity alternative, Ukip's support could be cut across in working class areas. Such a party would also be able to cut across racism and nationalism — making clear that the only way to prevent the 'race to the bottom' is a united struggle for all workers — non-migrant and migrant — to receive 'the rate for the job'.



All the main parties are in crisis. It remains to be seen if more Tory MPs jump ship to Ukip after the Rochester vote, but the splits within the Tories between Cameron and the more Ukip leaning wing are widening. The likelihood that up to 100 right wing Tories will revolt in Parliament and vote against the European Arrest Warrant is a reflection of that.

On the other hand the government coalition is also cracking up. The bill, backed by Cameron, to force a referendum on membership of the European Union collapsed after the Lib Dems refused to support it. The recent resignation of Lib Dem minister, Norman Baker, is yet another crack.

The Lib Dems themselves are staring at an electoral hammering, having never recovered from betraying its promises to voters in the last general election. A recent opinion poll put them on 6%, below the Green Party.

Scotland

Labour also faces its own crisis. As reported in the Socialist last week, the impact in Scotland of Labour allying with the Tories and big business to front the No vote in the independence referendum has been massive. The mood for a Yes vote in the independence referendum among working class people in Scotland reflected an opposition to austerity and the anger at the main parties that fuels some of Ukip's support south of the border.

The resignation of Johann Lamont, the Scottish Labour leader, describing the party as treating Scottish Labour as a "branch office", is a measure of their crisis. One poll suggests that Labour's vote in Scotland could collapse to such an extent that they could be reduced from 40 to four MPs at the next general election in Scotland. Even if it does not collapse to that extent, as some Scottish workers will vote Labour through gritted teeth in order to defeat the Tories, the fall of the Labour vote in Scotland could have crucial results on the general election outcome.

At the moment the main beneficiary from that anger is the Scottish National Party (SNP), currently on 52% and on that showing would get 54 seats. The SNP have built their support by positioning themselves to the 'left' of Labour and, following the referendum campaign, had a huge influx of new members looking for an alternative to austerity.

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



www.tusc.org.uk

However as we have previously pointed out, the first act of the SNP Scottish government was to pass on cuts of £500 million. They are as much a big business party as Labour, the Tories and the Lib Dems.

What is needed in Scotland, and south of the border, is a new mass working class party that opposes austerity. The Scottish Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition conference, which took place in Glasgow on 1 November to discuss the standing of anti-cuts candidates, is a step in that direction. TUSC is aiming to stand 1,000 candidates across Britain in the local elections and 100 in the general election next year to raise the banner of a genuine working class alternative to austerity.

Mass movements

The result of the general election is uncertain. After years of savage attacks on living standards by this government, Labour should be miles ahead. Rochester is billed as a two horse race between Ukip and the Tories, but Labour previously held a seat in that area for 13 years up to 2010. However Labour's insistence on sticking to the Tories' spending cuts, and its own record in power, has resulted in polls that show only a tiny lead.

Whatever the result, we face another austerity government. The current mass movement against water charges in Ireland (see pages 6 and 7) is an indicator of what is to come. Battles to defend living standards and services both in workplaces and communities are inevitable. Out of those struggles the potential for a new mass working class party will be forged. The TUSC election challenge aims to boost that process.



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The Con-Dems' Machiavellian cuts

Tony Aitman
Advice worker

Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), a replacement for Incapacity Benefit, was introduced in 2008 for paying benefits to those too ill to work or with a disability.

One of the aspects of ESA is that it is a benefit for people with long term illnesses or disabilities. Typically, this means that someone on ESA will have higher expenses than others. This has been recognised by making the rate of ESA higher than Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA).

On ESA, those in the Work Related Activity Group (Wrag) currently get £28.75 more. Now, leaked reports from the government suggest that they are considering reducing this to only 50p a week more, as part of a plan to cut billions off the welfare bill, which already includes freezing benefits for two years.

Appeals

To qualify for ESA, claimants must go through a work assessment interview, previously carried out by the disgraced Atos company. There can be three outcomes of this: you could be found fit for work and told to claim JSA; you could be found to have limited capability for work and put in Wrag; or you could be put in the support group.

Thousands who were either denied benefit or put in the wrong group have had the decisions overturned on appeal. The cost of appeals has tripled to £66 million in three years.

Last year, over 40% of appeals against Atos decisions were successful. That figure has dropped, not through better decision making but because the government has introduced new measures to prevent those on benefit from receiving it.



Last year, over 40% of assessment appeals succeeded photo Bob Severn

Previously, if you disagreed with a decision, you could go straight to appeal. Now, you have to ask for a Mandatory Reconsideration - where the decision is looked at again by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) decision maker.

Of course, you can't claim benefit while the Mandatory Reconsideration is being made, so claimants are driven into absolute poverty, forced to go to charities just to get vouchers for food.

Additionally, someone on ESA or JSA can also receive Housing Benefit. However, if it is stopped, Housing Benefit also stops, with the threat of homelessness.

At the agency where I work, the typical homeless person we saw in the past was an older man, with either drug or drink problems. Now, increasingly, it is younger people,

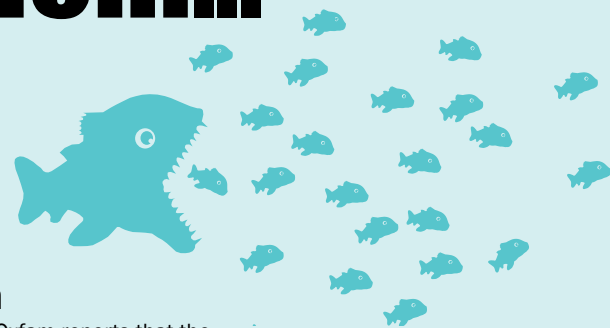
having no benefits or driven out of their homes by the 'bedroom tax'.

There is an extra Machiavellian twist to the government's benefits cuts. A claimant denied ESA receives no benefit while the Mandatory Reconsideration is being considered. And the DWP's advice? Claim JSA in the meantime.

However, to claim JSA means that the claimant is admitting that they are looking for and capable of work - and therefore ineligible for ESA!

Benefits claimants are given a programme by the DWP, outlining how many jobs they have to apply for each week. If they fail to meet these conditions, they are sanctioned - their benefits are stopped, often for indefinite periods. Particularly hard hit by this are those with mental health problems.

Them...



Get even

The charity Oxfam reports that the number of billionaires doubled between 2009 and 2014 - the 'Great Recession' - a period characterised by savage capitalist austerity involving mass welfare cuts and falling real incomes.

Earlier this year, Oxfam said the world's 85 billionaires owned the same wealth as the poorest half of the world's population. In its latest study - Even It Up - it says that this elite group had seen their wealth collectively increase by \$668million (£414million) a day in the 12 months to March 2014.

●That's almost \$500,000 dollars every minute.
●Oxfam blamed growing inequality on "market fundamentalism and the capture of politics by elites".
●The report adds that a (modest) 1.5% billionaire wealth tax would raise \$74 billion a year worldwide.

Google avoids paying more in UK taxes by designating its UK office as primarily a 'marketing operation' with its European HQ based in Ireland. However, a Reuters investigation alleged that Google's UK workers were responsible for sales not their Irish colleagues.

More than one in five workers (22%) earn less than the living wage

Unfriendly Barclays

Another employer paying the living wage is Barclays. The banking giant had earlier this year demonstrated its 'worker-friendly' credentials by announcing 9,000 job cuts in the UK.

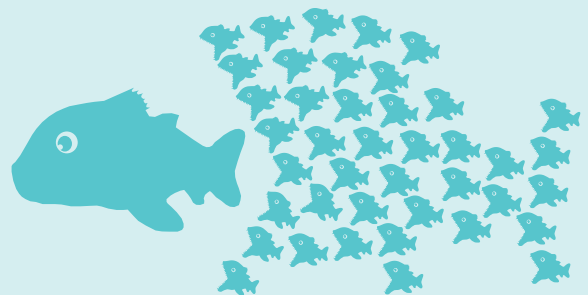
Debt charges

£2 billion would go a long way in investing in council housing, public services or wages. Instead, the government is intending to use this sum to repay government debt stretching back to the South Sea Bubble company collapse in 1720, the Napoleonic and Crimea wars, as well as World War One. Given that these bonds have no maturity date, and therefore the government never has to repay investors (the original ones are presumably all now dead), we can only praise George Osborne's priorities in these austere times!

Frugal Google

Google has boasted of signing up to the 'living wage' for its employees. The 'living wage' is currently £7.85 an hour (£9.15 an hour in London), compared to the statutory minimum wage of £6.50 an hour. However, it seems that the ubiquitous internet search engine gives with the one hand but takes back much more with the other. Last year Google again made the headlines but for the wrong reason; namely, that it paid only £11.6 million in UK corporate taxes despite generating £3.4 billion of business in the country and declaring a global profit of £6.1 billion for 2012.

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Pressure mounts on zero-hour contracts

Ian Pattison
Youth Fight for Jobs

Sports Direct, notorious for its widespread use of zero-hour employment contracts, has been forced to make clear in job adverts what its workers legal rights are. Although zero-hour contracts do not guarantee work, employees do qualify for statutory sick pay and holiday pay.

The company, owned by billionaire Mike Ashley, agreed to this change in an out of court settlement after a former worker was due to take Sports Direct to an employment tribunal over its alleged abuse of zero-hour contracts.

However, the company is not scrapping zero-hours - under which nearly 90% of its workforce is employed - so the fight to end this casual employment practice goes on.

Youth Fight for Jobs (YFJ), which has targeted Sports Direct with protests up and down the country over the last year, will continue to fight for permanent, full-time jobs on a living wage and for trade union

rights - the best antidote to exploitation in the workplace.

David Cameron, George Osborne, and other leading mil-

lionaire Tories are too 'confused' to explain how unemployment is down at the same time that wages are falling. But what the mil-

lionaire politicians can't work out is obvious to the millions who have been suffering under brutal austerity and rising use of zero-hour contracts for years.

YFJ works closely with the Bakers, Food, and Allied Workers Union (Bfawu) in the Fast Food Rights campaign.

Fast Food Rights' next big protest will be to lobby Parliament (Old Palace Yard, Westminster) on Friday 21 November, 12 noon, (two days after students will march for free education) when MPs discuss zero-hour contracts.

Zero-hour contracts must be scrapped, and all workers should receive a minimum wage of at least £10 an hour, as a step toward a living wage.

For more info contact
youthfightforjobs@gmail.com



photo Paul Mattsson

What we saw

Ukip Halloween horror in Rochester and Strood byelection



In brief

Ritz backs down

Due to the threat of strike action and a boycott of the Picturehouse cinema chain, the Ritz bosses have now backed down from the threat to sack 34 workers. This is a reflection of the tremendous campaigning work by the Bectu union members at the cinema in Lambeth, London, and the enormous public support for them. It also comes on the back of the victory of the workers at the Curzon cinema chain, winning the London Living Wage. However, the workers are not calling off the strike ballot until firmer assurances about job security are given.

Laurence Maples

Landmarc dispute

On 3 November, South East Kent trade union council reps stood alongside range wardens striking over redundancies, safety issues and lack of consultation. Landmarc support services, which employs wardens and support staff on Britain's military estates, have undercut contracts and put 370 jobs across the country at risk.

Seth Cruse, South East Kent TUC

London buses

Unite members working on London buses have voted in a consultative ballot by 96% in favour of taking industrial action over sector-wide pay. The union has pressed for sector-wide negotiations on London buses. Three times it invited the bus companies to discuss pay around one table, without success. The next step is a formal postal ballot. But it is already clear drivers will unite and fight!

A London bus driver

University pensions

The University and College Union (UCU) has called a marking boycott from 6 November against pension cuts at 69 pre-1992 universities. University UK wants to scrap the final salary element of the Universities Superannuation Scheme, replacing it with a career average.

78% of members have voted to take strike action, and 87% voted for action short of a strike.

Sam Morecroft, Sheffield UCU

Lambeth College

UCU members at Lambeth College have voted by 92% to reject new contracts and ballot for strike action. The new contract includes cutting two weeks' holiday, massively reduced sick pay and longer hours. The UCU members took 26 days of consecutive action in June and July.

Nottingham care

50 home care workers from Unite and Unison protested noisily outside Nottingham city council offices. The Labour controlled council intends to slash its care budget by 30%! It plans to cut care workers' pay through downgrading. Carol Starr, Unite shop steward said: "We will keep the pressure up... we are prepared to take industrial action if necessary."

Cathy Meadows

Defend firefighters' right to strike!

Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue service (BFRS) has sacked FBU executive council member Ricky Matthews.

BFRS has previously attacked union action with 'lock-outs'. When the FBU took shorter periods of strike action than the latest four day walkout, BFRS docked firefighters a full day's pay and refused to allow them back to work.

BFRS then threatened Buckinghamshire firefighters with the sack if they participated in the legal strike. It blames not having an accurate union member list. However, this is because it ended the check-off union subscription method to try to undermine the union.

Not cowed

But the outpouring of anger from FBU members in Buckinghamshire and around the country (as well as many other trade unionists) shows that firefighters aren't cowed.

FBU members locally will be working out the best way to respond to this blatant act of victimisation.

An immediate vote in favour of a strike ballot to defend Ricky would send a strong message of defiance to BFRS. A national solidarity demo could be called during any local action.

The FBU is appealing for hardship fund donations to sort code 08-60-01, account number 20034726



Pickets at Shoreditch fire station in Hackney, East London photo Paul Mattsson

Firefighters struck in England for four days from 6pm on Friday 31 October against the government's attempt to increase their pension age from 55 to 60 while increasing pension contributions. The change would result in many firefighters over the age of 55 being forced out of a job by failing fitness tests. Rob Hall and John Howard at Ashfield station in Nottinghamshire

told John Dale: "This is a political dispute. It's a battle with the government. We're disappointed with the intransigence of the government but it only serves to strengthen our resolve." In Leicester, the Eastern station watch manager spoke to Mike Barker: "I think that united strike action would be a good idea, as the government is letting a lot of the public sector down... your emergency

services, your NHS, your teachers, they're the people that we all need." At Odsal fire station in Bradford, Peter Robson was told that in South Yorkshire a new computer system bought from the French government has attempted to dispatch a 'pump' from central Sheffield to a fire at Disneyland Paris! No FBU strike action took place in Wales due to the prospect of a deal with the Welsh government

St Mungo's workers to strike for ten more days

Paul Kershaw
Unite LE1111 branch

Workers at homelessness charity St Mungo's Broadway have voted to take a further ten days' strike from 5 November against pay cuts following their recent, rock solid, seven day action.

Membership has increased by over 250 during the strike with extra union reps elected.

Hundreds of strikers have attended rallies, two protests per day, and 19 picket lines. Solidarity messages, donations to the hardship fund and invitations for strikers to speak are coming in and the mood is ever more confident.

The retiring St Mungo's chief executive was given a £160,000 'pay

off' in addition to his salary of over £116,000 and the new boss has taken a £30,000 rise.

Management refuse to answer questions about other executive pay increases. As Unite convenor Adam Lambert said: "this is clearly an outrageous transfer of income from the lowest paid to the highest paid."

24-hours' notice

The changes were imposed with less than 24-hours' notice. If they get away with this, more drastic pay cuts in are likely the future.

St Mungo's Broadway has continued to win contracts on the basis of quality, budgeting on existing rates of pay.

But the new chief executive, Howard Sinclair, has repeatedly raised

the 'exciting' prospect of working with large private contractors such as the scandal hit 'Serco'. He invited a Serco executive to speak at a staff conference.

St Mungos Broadway is overseen by a non-executive board whose members' 'expertise' is mainly in business, property and finance rather than homelessness.

When Unite general secretary Len McCluskey spoke to strikers he emphasised the vital importance of the strike not only for St Mungo's Broadway, but for all involved in the supported housing and social care sector.

Unite has called on employers for a national pay agreement that could

serve as a guarantee of standards in the sector.

Unite LE1111 branch secretary and Socialist Party member Suzanne Muna said: "Unite has such an agreement with employers in Scotland; if they care about services for vulnerable people why not talk to Unite in England and Wales?"

Donations to account: Unite Housing Workers Branch LE1111, no: 20040639, sort code: 08-60-01. Cheques should be made out to 'Unite Housing Workers Branch LE1111' and sent to PO Box 66701, London E11 9FB. Please mark all donations 'St Mungos Broadway Campaign Funds'

Read more about these disputes at www.socialistparty.org.uk

Sheffield Green workers start indefinite action

Alistair Tice

After ten days of discontinuous strike action, 30 Sheffield recycling workers, all GMB union members, began an indefinite strike on Saturday 1 November.

The start date was delayed because the union had included on the notice of strike action two members who have been sacked or forced to leave the company since the dispute started!

The dispute has been caused by management bullying and the way the contract is being run by The Green Company. All the former senior management team were sacked or forced to leave after questioning the way the boss, Martine Laffan-Butler, claimed expenses and consultancy fees. These victimised managers have joined the picket line.

The workers intend to strike until the Labour council and Veolia, who run the city waste management contract, force Laffan-Butler out.

Continuous strike action will stretch the managers still working

The dispute has been caused by management bullying and the way the contract is being run

to breaking point. Socialist Party members continue to actively support the pickets. On 5 November strikers will lobby the council meeting to demand they intervene to sort this mess out.

Greenwich libraries victory

Paul Callanan

Library workers in Greenwich, south London, have scored a fantastic victory.

After two days of strike action, Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL - the private company that took over the borough's libraries in 2012) have agreed to the union's terms. They will now take on new work-

ers to work in unfilled posts creating 17 new jobs.

GLL has also agreed to implement the 2014 local government pay award.

This shows that workers taking action can win. It is also a vindication of the fighting strategy put forward by Socialist Party members who work in Greenwich libraries and who lead the Unite 20150 branch in the borough.

Police staff ballot for decent pay

Police staff in the Unison, Unite and GMB unions are being balloted for strike action to win a 3% pay increase.

This follows a consultative ballot in the summer when a large majority backed action.

Since 2010, police staff suffered a two year pay freeze, followed by a 1% raise last year. This means a real term cut of 13% according to Uni-

son. This year we have had the same paltry and insulting 'offer'.

To make matters worse, officer and staff job losses will reach 34,000 by 2015.

A Unison poll of police and justice service group members showed that 39% are struggling to make ends meet with 80% cutting back on general living costs. A police staff worker



Agree with Russell Brand's call for revolution? JOIN THE SOCIALIST PARTY!

Tom Baldwin

When Russell Brand first said last year that none of the main parties were worth voting for he was vilified from all sides. Commentators and celebrities were dragged up one by one to criticise this 'childish' stance. Britain has a long and proud history of democracy they said, you get to make your choice every five years and you should be happy with that. How dare this upstart point out that for most people there is no choice at all?

But his mistrust of out-of-touch politicians, uninterested in the lives of ordinary people, is shared by millions of people. Turnouts in elections had been falling long before he appeared on Newsnight. It was his call for revolution as the alternative that really struck a chord with many. Revolution is now the title of his latest book which is flying off the shelves.

Is it any wonder that people are looking for a different way of running society when capitalism offers them so little? The cosy club of politicians Brand described will get an 11% pay rise next year, their reward for picking the pockets of the working class and helping the rich get richer. No such luck for the rest of us, more than one in five aren't even paid the living wage.

That's here in Britain, a rich

country - in most of the world things are even worse. Capitalism has developed such inequality that just 85 billionaires own as much wealth as the poorest half of humanity combined. The world is stumbling toward an environmental disaster but the profits of the rich are still being put first.

Young people

The list of reasons why the call for revolution has found an echo is endless. It has been clearest among young people who will be the first generation worse off than their parents, with restricted access to education, work and housing. With capitalist crisis revealing once again the failures of this system it is no surprise that people are looking for an alternative.

We've seen many of the gains our parents' and grandparents' generations won being taken away. Reforms like the welfare state and the NHS had been seen by some as steps in a gradual but unstoppable march towards greater equality and better living standards for all.

But the efforts of big business and the cabal of politicians that represent them to destroy so much of what we hold dear has proved that, while their capitalist system remains in place, they will stop at nothing to boost their profits at our expense. While we campaign hard for every possible improvement in the lives of ordinary people, only revolutionary change



photo Paul Mattsson

can make a lasting difference.

Knowing that things don't have to be like this is an important first step to making a difference. Brand's comments may have moved revolution up the agenda in Britain but they said less about what it would look like or how it could be achieved.

Socialist alternative

The Socialist Party stands for a completely different type of society - socialism. The biggest businesses that dominate the economy would be taken into public ownership, meaning the wealth created by workers belongs to society as a whole, rather than being sucked up into the pockets of the 1%.

Rather than have unelected bosses choosing whether or not to invest based on what makes them the biggest profit, we could democratically plan the economy

to meet the needs of people and planet.

Workers have the power to make this change. The capitalists play no useful role in society, they are entirely dependent on the work that we do to make their money.

Need for a party

A glimpse of the potential power of ordinary people was shown in the revolutions of the 'Arab Spring', where dictatorships in Tunisia and Egypt were overthrown in 2011.

But this also showed the need for us to be organised and united. A revolutionary party that was clear and consistent about what was needed could have helped resist the siren calls of those saying it was only this-or-that leader and not the system that needed changing.

If you agree with the need to change society then the next step is to get active and do something about it. The Socialist

Party organises in towns and cities across England and Wales and as part of the Committee for a Workers' International, across the whole world.

We're out campaigning every day, making the ideas of revolution relevant and real by linking them to the demands for a better standard of living, the defence of our NHS, the fight for decent housing, pay and pensions, etc.

So don't just get angry at the news or throw your hands in the air, wishing things would change, get out there and make a difference - join the Socialist Party and join the fightback!

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Cuts, fees and student debt: why I joined the Socialist Party

Leah Hibbs
Cardiff East Socialist Party

My first experience of socialism and activism was in 2010. I was a 15 year old doing my GCSEs when the Con-Dem government announced they planned to raise tuition fees to £9,000 and scrap the education maintenance allowance.

As an academically talented pupil, I had always seen university as my ultimate educational goal.

Therefore, the news that tuition fees would be trebling was a massive blow to me. My family is not very wealthy and the fees would mean tens of thou-

sands of pounds worth of debt.

My disgust at this issue led me to take part in my first protest. Around 2,000 school and university students marched through Bristol on that day in November 2010. It was the atmosphere and feeling of solidarity which motivated me over the past few years to continue my activism and join the Socialist Party.

Before even arriving at Cardiff University, I knew Socialist Students was the society for me. Now, as president of the society, I am organising protests, marches and election campaigns. I'm also leading discussions on opposing the continuing austerity onslaught.

We might have lost that first battle against tuition fees in 2010.



Leah protesting in Cardiff

But I know that, through being a member of the Socialist Party and Socialist Students, I can strive to make a difference and demand change.



after the historic \$15 minimum wage victory,
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Ireland: ‘We

The growing movement again

Kevin McLoughlin
Socialist Party (CWI Ireland)

11 October 2014 saw the opening of a whole new chapter in the struggle of the working class in Ireland. Discontent hit the streets of Dublin in a 100,000-strong demonstration against the new water tax and austerity.

On the same day, the same wave of anger catapulted Anti Austerity Alliance (AAA) candidate Paul Murphy to victory in the Dublin South West byelection, defeating a stunned Sinn Fein along the way.

Paul has been elected as an AAA TD (MP) to the Dáil (Irish Parliament), joining fellow Socialist Party members Joe Higgins, who was elected in the 2011 general election, and Ruth Coppinger, who won the Dublin West byelection in May this year. Paul’s campaign made the water tax the main issue in the election.

Water charges – until now covered through other existing taxes – will cost many more than €500 a year. Bills were due to arrive in January 2015 but the actual billing period started from 1 October. Irish Water, the new company established to oversee the charge, had begun sending out ‘information’ packs to each household in the country.

1 November saw further demonstrations against water charges in 93 towns and cities across the country and this time 150,000 turned out on a day of torrential rain. The byelection and these demonstrations together have given many people new confidence that now, after six years of austerity, there is a chance to build a new fighting movement for working class people.

One year’s difference

This is in stark contrast to the mood last year. Ironically, essential to this change was the extensive propaganda that Ireland is experiencing an economic recovery.

The heads of many people lifted as the talk of endless crisis was replaced with the prospect of an economic improvement. When the “recovery” turned out to be a recovery for the rich and austerity continued, particularly in the form of the new water charges, people proved more open, angry and impatient than before.

The change has gripped the most disadvantaged sections of the working class especially, alongside an understandable anti-party sentiment because of the role of Labour in particular.

The changed situation was reflected in the local and European elections in May when AAA, which the Socialist Party is part of, got 14 councillors elected in Dublin, Cork and Limerick. Some other lefts and “independents” (reflecting the disgust at the political establishment) also did well. The main gains however, were made by Sinn Fein who went from 54 councillors to 159, and no MEPs to three of Ireland’s eleven.

Sinn Fein got over 15% of the vote in

the locals and close to 20% in the Euro elections. With the unpopularity of the government, this put it in pole position to become the biggest party with the prospect of being in the next government.

On 9 October, the day before the Dublin South West byelection, a new opinion poll indicated that Sinn Fein had increased its national support by 4%, up to 24%.

The growth of Sinn Fein, as well as the vote it received in the Dublin South West area in May’s elections, caused all commentators to predict a Sinn Fein victory. Paddy Power bookmakers had Sinn Fein candidate Cathal King as the 1/25 odds-on favourite to win.

Positive message

But our positive message that people could refuse to pay and could defeat water charges exposed Sinn Fein’s utter cynicism.

Sinn Fein said that non-payment will mean people build up huge debts that they will inevitably have to pay and that people will also get hefty financial penalties. They were trying to instil fear and demoralisation as a means to win the election.

Two days before the election, news filtered through that Sinn Fein leaders Gerry Adams and Mary Lou McDonald had, when responding to a press conference question, admitted they would pay their water charges. This was not prominently featured in most of the mainstream media – but we made sure many voters knew about it!

After the first count Sinn Fein had 7,288 votes (30%) and the AAA were 748 votes behind on 6,540 (27%). However when the other candidates were progressively eliminated, the AAA got an additional 3,025 transfer votes while Sinn Fein got just 1,711, meaning Paul Murphy and the AAA won by 566 votes.

In May in these areas Sinn Fein got 9,737 first preference votes, so they were down 2,449 votes in October’s election. In May the AAA got 3,537, so actually increased its vote by an incredible 3,003 votes, an 85% increase on a significantly lower turnout compared to the local elections.

It wasn’t only Sinn Fein who was stunned, so too was the political establishment, the media and probably many on the left. Immediately the government brought in minor concessions on the water charges, but this has only emboldened the view that they must be scrapped altogether.

This byelection was the most dramatic illustration yet of the decisive shift that is taking place away from the parties of the capitalist establishment – Fine Gael, Labour and Fianna Fail. Their combined vote was just 26% – less than Paul Murphy on his own.

On the march

The demonstration of 100,000 on 11 October had a very working class composition. But most importantly it was a mass mobilisation from below – a DIY or self-



Sinn Fein: not a left alternative

Sinn Fein is not a party of the left and its rise will result in a similar situation as with Irish Labour: wasted hopes and disappointment. Unfortunately some, including the People Before Profit Alliance and the Socialist Workers Party, refer to Sinn Fein as ‘left’ and imply that it has something to offer the working class. If the AAA had adopted a similar approach in the Dublin South West byelection, Sinn Fein would have romped home.

The water charges clearly show that sell-out is inherent in Sinn Fein’s approach. It wanted to use water charges as a bargaining chip in the formation of the next government, that’s why it refused to say water charges were a redline issue. That means either it would keep water charges if in government or, if it did abolish them, would accept other austerity measures instead.

Sinn Fein is preparing to manage austerity in the south, as it has done in

the north, because it works within the confines of the capitalist system.

If the left, new activists and groups that are emerging came together and advocated the programme below and took up Sinn Fein in a firm way, a strong and principled working class left alternative could emerge out of the next general election, just over a year away:

- Mass non-payment of water charges
- Scrap all the new taxes and charges
- No more austerity
- No support for coalition government with capitalist establishment parties
- Put need before greed – for democratic public ownership of the key sectors of the economy

That could be the real opposition to the next capitalist government, whether it includes Sinn Fein or not, and could put a genuine fight for socialist change on the agenda in the years ahead.

'We won't pay'

Against water tax and austerity

A poll published on 2 November showed a collapse in support for the Fine Gael and Labour government coalition. Sinn Féin is now the most popular party, but almost half polled want a new political party.

Demonstrators in Swords, Dublin on 1 November



In Galway on 1 November



Joe Higgins (left) and Paul Murphy (centre) celebrate the byelection victory

Demonstrators in Blanchardstown, Dublin on 1 November



mobilisation of the working class.

This reflected the anger at and intense activity against the installation of water meters by Irish Water that have engulfed many working class communities, particularly in Dublin, in recent months.

The demonstration was called under the umbrella banner of Right2Water, which was initiated earlier this year by People Before Profit Alliance (PBPA) and a couple of unions (the AAA and Socialist Party are part of Right2Water).

But it was clear for some weeks beforehand that ordinary people themselves has seized that date and were mobilising to make a stand against water charges and austerity.

The original plan was to have a demonstration in September, but the Socialist Party argued within Right2Water that it should be in October, closer to Budget Day, 14 October.

Trade union leaders

Its significance is re-enforced when compared to the last demonstration organised by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions on 9 October 2013.

In total ICTU mobilised 60,000 around the country that day and certainly no more than 40,000 people in Dublin itself; most of them left disgusted when ICTU leaders failed to put forward plans for real action against austerity.

But by 11 October, working class people had cut through the demoralising fog created by ICTU's ongoing sell-out of the last six years, and organised their own mass mobilisation.

A number of years ago, residents of Ballyhea, a small village in County Cork, began holding a protest march every Sunday through the main street against the bailouts of the banks and austerity under the banner "Ballyhea Says No".

The idea of "Says No" entered the popular psyche and now in parts of the cities, groups of ordinary people have come together and in quite a number of cases have put the name of the area before "Says No", or used some other similar name.

The installation of water meters was the catalyst that caused many of these groups to emerge. Local Facebook pages have sprung up, warning where water meter installations are taking place and mobilising people to protest.

There have also been some serious skirmishes with the police in a number of areas, particularly in parts of Dublin, but also in Cork.

Disgracefully the police have been mobilised to assist Irish Water to impose its metering policy. Many have been arrested but no one has been sent to prison, so far.

Street meetings

Street meetings have emerged as a simple and very quick way of pulling the community together against the water charges. By word of mouth or simple flyers, people are meeting, often at the green patches in estates or communities.

One part of north east Dublin has seen

more than ten "Says No" type groups being established with thousands attending street meetings. These developments fed into the mass mobilisation on 11 October.

Two weeks later and given the size of the city, equally as impressive as 11 October, was the 10,000 that marched through the streets of Limerick led by We Won't Pay, the non-payment campaign initiated by the AAA. Very big demonstrations continued in many areas, culminating in the national day of action on 1 November.

The strong sentiment on these demonstrations and among the working class generally, particularly those under fifty, is not to pay the water charges. However, while Right2Water put out the date for what became a mass demonstration, it makes a virtue out of not advocating mass non-payment.

From the start Right2Water pointed people towards a more conservative campaign of political pressure on the parties and not towards an active campaign to build mass non-payment. Because of this there is a serious question mark over whether it can play a positive role or will cause confusion.

Right2Water is now being used by some, including Sinn Féin and some unions, as a cloak to hide their refusal to actually fight against water charges. The more the Dublin South West byelection has exposed Sinn Féin's real position, the more it tries to wear the Right2Water banner.

Lead the battle

Unfortunately there is a prevarication by some, such as PBPA and some left TDs on the issue of non-payment, creating a danger for the new movement. While there is huge hatred and anger at the water charges, significant layers, particularly of older people are still fearful and not confident about non-payment.

A recent opinion poll indicated that only two-fifths - 41% - would pay the water charges, 25% wouldn't, 18% said 'it depends' and the charges weren't applicable to the other 8%.

In this situation, lefts and socialists should be leading the battle and giving people the confidence to add mass non-payment to the mass mobilisations. They should explain that water charges can't be deducted from people's income, that people's water can't be disconnected anymore and that this weakened government can be decisively knocked back by mass non-payment and an active struggle.

Instead non-payment is sometimes mentioned in the odd speech or in the small print in a leaflet, with a refusal to advocate mass non-payment as the essential and central tactic to defeat the water tax.

11 October and 1 November represent the emergence of a new working class movement, beginning in the communities. But whether this movement can win depends on the development of a fighting leadership that gives people confidence to say 'we won't pay'.

Burkina Faso: Mass uprising ousts dictator

CWI reporters, Ivory Coast

After 27 years in power, Blaise Compaoré was planning to die in his presidential chair. But recent events have changed everything in Burkina Faso, one of the world's poorest countries.

Since the 'Arab Spring', youth in the western African country have questioned the ruling elite and tested the regime by protesting against it.

Faced with the possibility of a parliamentary vote for reform of the country's constitution - which would have allowed Compaoré to seek re-election three more times - deep anger enveloped the masses and a popular uprising broke out.

Compaoré exhausted all efforts to hold on to power. He declared a state of emergency after protesters stormed parliament and burnt other state buildings. Protesters were shot dead or injured by state forces but the demonstrations continued.

Resignation

On 30 October, Compaoré was forced to say he would discuss setting up a 'transitional government' with the opposition, at the end of which he would hand over power. But the dye was cast and Compaoré was forced to resign the next day. In a statement, Compaoré said the presidency was "vacant" and called for elections within 90 days.

The head of the military, General Honore Traore, said he had taken over as head of state "in line with constitutional measures". The news of Compaoré's resignation saw crowds celebrating in the capital, Ouagadougou.

The long years of the dictatorship of Compaoré - a close ally of US and French imperialism - are over but the question remains - what alter-

native will follow his departure?

For the triumph of a revolution, protests are not enough. In the early stages of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions, mass protests and general strikes or the threats of general strikes forced the departure of dictators, but were not enough to bring about fundamental change for the masses.

The departure of Compaoré is very welcome but only a beginning. Without the construction of a genuine mass alternative, a 'transitional regime', under the control of the army, is likely to be posed.

Opposition

This may be followed by elections in which most attention will be focused on opposition figure, Zephyrinus Diabré, yet another pawn of Western imperialism.

All the ills that afflict society - unemployment, lack of housing, high prices and underdevelopment - will continue under any pro-capitalist successor

All the ills that afflict society - unemployment, lack of housing, high prices and underdevelopment - will continue under any pro-capitalist successor. Many demonstrators correctly regard General Traore - formerly Compaoré's aide de camp - as no real change.

To ensure the success and democracy of the struggle, it is urgent



Protesters gather in Ouagadougou

to build popular committees in the neighbourhoods to begin the revolutionary reorganisation of society, not only politically but also economically. These committees should be aimed at defending the mass movement against attacks by troops on the payroll of the ex-dictator or the new rulers.

Military

The rank-and-file soldiers of the army must be split away from the ruling system. Soldiers can be won to the movement by creating democratic committees of soldiers which elect their own officers.

Any anti-democratic 'military transition' needs to be opposed. The call should go out for the convening of a revolutionary constituent assembly composed of delegates from all parts of the country, elected by popular assemblies, so that the people can decide for themselves about their future. For the establishment of a 'republic of the poor', a government of workers, youth and the masses!

This would see the nationalisation of the key sectors of the economy, under the democratic control of elected representatives of workers, young people and the poor, subject to recall, at any time and receiving no material privileges. A workers' government would oversee a planned economy, democratically run according to the needs of the majority.

Finally, the movement should not be limited to Burkina Faso. The departure of Compaoré, the 'gendarme of West Africa', will open the door to protest movements throughout Africa.

No concessions

The grassroots movement 'Balai citoyen' (Citizen's Broom), which has reportedly played a heroic role in this struggle so far, must not make any concessions to the generals nor to the various pro-capitalist parties who are manoeuvring to take power.

The mass uprising shows the potential for a new party for workers,

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 or see

www.socialistworld.net

the poor and young people.

Building a strong, independent alternative for the masses will be essential for their struggle not to be hijacked by the forces of 'democratic' capitalist reaction and to ensure, on the contrary, the continuation and deepening of the revolutionary struggle to fully satisfy the masses' demands.

Portsmouth jihadis: austerity and alienation to blame

Ben Norman

Portsmouth Socialist Party

Nineteen year old Mehdi Hassan has become the latest young Muslim from Portsmouth to be killed in Syria. Part of the self-proclaimed 'Al-Britaini Brigade Bangladeshi Bad Boys', Hassan is one of six Portsmouth men known to have joined the Salafist extremists of the Islamic State (IS).

Hassan is reported to have been killed in the Syrian border city of Kobane and the rest of his 'brigade' have fared little better. Four are dead, one is imprisoned and the final member is believed to remain trapped on Kobani's besieged front lines.

Propaganda

The social media campaigns of IS promise its recruits a 'five star jihad', a beguiling blend of Call of Duty and evangelical belonging. Yet the reality is infinitely more cruel. Compared to the battle hardened veterans of Syria, Iraq or Yemen, IS considers its European recruits theologically illiterate and a military liability.

While a handful, including hos-

tage murderer 'Jihadi John', are used as propaganda tools, the majority of Europeans find themselves thrown into suicidal battles as expendable fodder against the Kurdish Peshmerga when IS wishes to protect its more seasoned fighters.

Portsmouth's jihadis may be partially explained by naivety, evangelicalism and even a idealised view of a 'homeland' they've never known. However, it is clear the root cause is a poisonous mix of austerity and alienation.

Poverty

The city's Charles Dickens ward, home to the majority of the group, is ravaged by unemployment and cuts. 57% of children are estimated to live in income-deprived families, while the average household income is £430 per week, far below the British average of £670.

The British security service's own report highlights the impact of austerity, noting the path to radicalisation begins with high youth unemployment, a reliance on axed public services and the 'managed decline' of the dockyard, responsible for over 900 job losses.

In this regard, the 'Pompey Six'



Portsmouth's shipyard has shed 900 jobs

are no different to the rest of their community, where disillusionment and political despondency run high. In May's local elections the sitting MP, Mike Hancock, lost his council seat to Ukip on a turnout of only 24%.

The difference is that, alienated by British austerity, the six men turned to social media, ensnaring themselves in an international trap of despondence and demagoguery which has targeted young Muslims from Portsmouth to Tunis.

While it is no doubt the bloodiest, IS is just one manifestation of the hard line Salafist ideology which is being exported by the wealthy Gulf States.

Threatened by the Arab Spring revolutions, the absolute monarchies of Qatar, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates have spread Salafism as a weaponised theology of counter-revolution.

Unity

That this extremism can find purchase in a small minority of Portsmouth's Muslims is because the ground has been prepared by austerity, not as some would claim, a failure of multiculturalism.

Nor is there an issue with community segregation. In the most densely populated British city outside of London there is no room for ghettos. This community suffers its decline as one.

If the problems of alienation, despair and radicalisation are to be tackled, our movement must cut across the extremist's message, uniting the community in a common struggle against austerity and the social problems which blight our city.

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.

Angry Unison members

On October's pay demonstration in London, I was one of tens of thousands of people answering the TUC's call for action against the pay freeze. Members of Unison on my coach were angry the local government strikes were called off because of a proposal that would mean only a measly 2.2% pay rise covering the next two years. All because Unison leader Prentis lacks the drive to stand up for his members – perhaps not surprising when you compare his wages to those of workers he supposedly represents. I still think if the TUC put up a real fight for a one day general strike, coordinated across the private and public sector – the country would stop. We could show Cameron and his class how strong we are, and bring this government to its knees.

Claire Job
Swansea

**Poppies and patriotism**

The poppies placed outside the Tower of London are a reminder of the hundreds of thousands who died in wars. It looks like a moat of blood, as the arrogant ruling class (and politicians and generals) defend their power and privilege with the blood of better people than themselves.

After World War One, people celebrated peace and wore the poppy to remember the fallen. The last thing they wanted was military parades and exhortations to fight another war...and another...and another. Politicians pretend to honour 'the unknown soldier' but forget the 'unknown civilian'.

There is a huge difference between the attitude of workers towards remembering the war and that of the captains and kings. Trotsky remarked "When workers speak about defence of the fatherland, they mean defence of their homes, their families and other similar families from invasion, bombs and poison gas. The capitalists understand by defence of the fatherland the seizure of colonies and markets, the predatory increase of the 'national' share of world income."

War is often enough between the rich and the poor. And the rich make sure that somebody else does the actual fighting for them.

Derek McMillan

**Taxing questions**

On 14 October the Irish government abolished the 'double Irish', the tax

mechanism used by the likes of Google and Amazon to virtually eliminate their tax bill worldwide. The opposition to blatant tax dodging by multi-billion dollar companies is obviously growing. But the Irish Times says all is not doom and gloom for the money grabbing multinationals. The new rules say intellectual property and tax should be registered in the same country, so Ireland's scandalously low level of corporation tax will leave them well placed for registration of intellectual property. Even this decision was made because tax justice groups and political radicals raised the profile of tax evasion and we should have no illusions in capitalist governments attacking tax evasion in a meaningful way. That requires a mass workers' party and socialism.

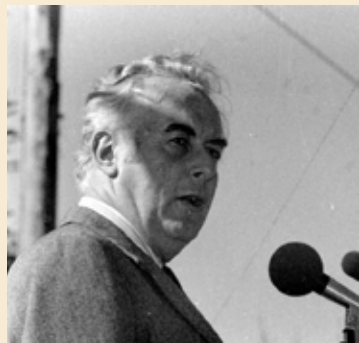
Telecoms worker
Birmingham

Something stinks

The work carried out by St.Helens borough council's cleansing department is fetid at the best of times, yet the two-shift system the council now use is fetid in its own right. The department's scheme has two working patterns, the normal 37 hour per week contract for local government employees and an additional 30 hour per week contract for those working evenings. Some of those employed on the nationally agreed 37 hour working week need vouchers for food banks. Their money does not cover the basic necessities after paying the bills, so they suffer the indignity of applying for vouchers to feed their families..

Those on the later 30 hour working week can obtain working credits totalling more in monetary value than those employees on the contracted 37 hour working week. Yes the work is smelly, yet something else is causing the stink within this Labour controlled council.

St Helens Socialist Party member

**Did CIA ditch Whitlam?**

Becci Heagney's article on Gough Whitlam (Socialist 831) gave a very useful insight into how the monarchy can be used to subvert radical governments. The involvement of the CIA and security services in the overthrow of Gough Whitlam's Australian government may have been even greater than her article suggests.

John Pilger wrote a book to coincide with the bicentenary of Australia's foundation that gave much of the country's real history. Pilger says the plot to overthrow Whitlam was hatched because of his government's refusal to renew a lease on land owned by the Australian government which housed a CIA listening station.

He says the parliamentary gridlock over the budget was just a public justification for the real policy of the ruling class which was to continue spying operations on 'enemies of the state'.

Clive Walder

Obituary: Benny Adams

Benny Adams died after a long illness on 6 October, aged 65. Benny was active in Militant, the Socialist Party's forerunner, in Northern Ireland from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s. Benny had seven brothers and sisters and lived in his early years at the British Army Barracks in Ballymena, where his father was a career soldier.

In 1976 Benny and several comrades, including brother Ronnie, came across Militant. All from a Protestant background, they formed their own socialist group in Ballymena. Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) was growing and threatening to impose his fundamentalist ideas on everyone else by, for example, closing the local swimming pool on Sundays.

Benny and his comrades led the opposition. While on a cavalcade through the town, Paisley spotted Benny, and menacingly bellowed: "There stands an atheist!"

Alternative to sectarianism

At the 1977 local government elections the DUP took control of Ballymena council. By then the Northern Ireland Labour Party (NILP) had collapsed as even a possible alternative to the sectarian parties.

Militant supporters took part in the Labour and Trade Union Coordinating Group (LTUG) which stood in elections to put forward a non-sectarian, working class-based alternative. The remnants of the NILP merely issued a statement condemning the LTUG and its links to Trotskyism.

Militant recruited many young people in the early 1980s through setting up the Young Socialists (YS). Benny had obvious ability to reach out to young people questioning the system.

A dozen young people attended YS meetings and carried out street campaigning each Saturday, often suffering harassment by the Ulster Defence Regiment who routinely forced teenagers up against a wall,



Benny Adams (left) photo Socialist Party

at gunpoint, in front of shoppers.

Benny became a full-time political worker and in the mid-1980s moved to Belfast mainly to work on the Militant newspaper.

Arrested

During the Chelsea Girl shop strike in the late 80s the RUC tried to make Benny turn informer after arresting him during picketing. Benny reported straight back to Militant comrades, who went to the press. Next day the police's murky anti-socialist tactics were exposed in the

Irish News.

Benny was creative with layout and design, a gifted guitar player, a painter and chess-player. But he was troubled by severe illness from his early 50s, robbing him of his intellect, memory, and eventually the power of speech.

The Socialist Party continues the brave struggle, begun in difficult times by comrades like Benny. In Benny's own words, we still "advocate socialist policies and raise socialist demands in all areas of Northern Ireland".

Ciaran Mulholland

Take over software giants

John Sharpe

The article "Private companies hold NHS to ransom" (Socialist 830) showed how giant software companies can exploit their near monopoly position. It isn't only the NHS that finds itself in this position. And apart from Microsoft, Adobe, McAfee and others are all at it.

As the article explains, Open Source software could be an alternative to continually handing over money to big business. Everyone would back that. One drawback - you have to support it yourself.

Free to use?

Even a small network of say, fifty users, would be hard to support without a dedicated team of skilled software engineers. The email system alone is horrendously complex to make secure and reliable. These costs tie even large companies to Microsoft and their ilk. 'Free to download' is not the same as 'free to use'.

The Open Source community can offer support and fixes, eventually. But when the boss stands next to



The costs of supporting a network tie companies to Microsoft etc

your desk constantly, demanding to know where his emails are, it can be career limiting.

'In the cloud'

The next big wheeze is 'in the cloud' computing. You don't buy or own any software, but for a monthly per user fee you can rent it. That cranks up the dial on the treadmill to eleven.

These big companies will also keep all your data on their servers,

which is very kind of them. Decline and decide to stick with what you've got, and you face having unsupported software that will become ever more out of date and vulnerable to attack from viruses. That's exactly the position the NHS was in.

Cloud computing is not necessarily a bad idea and might be developed in a socialist society. That is why the article rightly demands that "the huge IT companies should be run under democratic working class control and management".

Ebola virus crisis - no profit, no vaccine

Andy Ford

Unite union health sector

In November 2010 the medical journal *The Lancet* ran a seminar on Ebola saying: "Previously, the usefulness of an Ebola virus vaccine was disputed, because of the disease's rarity, little interest by industry, and the potential cost. Frequent outbreaks in the past decade, several imported cases of viral haemorrhagic fever and laboratory exposures, and the potential misuse of Ebola virus as a biothreat agent has changed that view."

So, because of the "potential cost" and lack of interest by Big Pharma, nothing more was done. An Ebola vaccine was eventually started only a few weeks ago and it is hoped to have 10,000 doses ready for December this year. Initial results look promising.

Even more astonishing than the four year delay is the fact that the World Health Organisation (WHO)

The people who are paying the price for this criminal complacency are the workers and poor farmers of West Africa...

and drug giant GSK jointly decided in March, as the current outbreak began, not to proceed with production of an Ebola vaccine because the existing counter measures were sufficient, and "No-one anticipated that we would need a vaccine" (*Pharma Times*, Oct 17th, 2014).

Of course each now blames the other, but that decision must rank as one of the most misguided in recent history.

We can only imagine the difference 10,000 doses of vaccine started in March would have made. For the want of timely production of a vac-



cine hundreds of dedicated health workers in West Africa have lost their lives, and there is the threat of over a million cases by the New Year.

WHO seems to have been functioning on auto-pilot at best during this crisis. Or perhaps acting more as a meetings, banqueting and foreign trips organisation which did some healthcare on the side; while the big drugs companies hung back until a profitable return was assured.

Nationalise

The people who are paying the price for this criminal complacency are the workers and poor farmers of West Africa, and most particularly and needlessly, the doctors, nurses and healthcare workers of Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia.

As socialists we call for the na-

tionalisation of the drugs and pharmaceutical companies, under democratic workers' control, so that drugs and vaccines are developed on the basis of need not profit; for

complete re-organisation of the WHO; and for an urgent programme of state-funded research into treatments and vaccines for Ebola to get this outbreak under control.

Failure of profit-driven 'free market'

Ten years ago the Public Health Agency of Canada patented a vaccine that prevents Ebola in monkeys. Unfortunately, the Canadian government handed over this vaccine to the private sector - for a pittance. In 2010 it licensed the Ebola vaccine to a small US firm called NewLink Genetics. The profit-maximising calculations of NewLink's executives meant that the promising vaccine sat on the shelf for years with no human trials until this year's outbreak.

See previous articles on the Ebola virus health crisis in the *Socialist* - **Ebola outbreak: one face of austerity** by Jon Dale and **Nigeria: Neoliberalism has undermined healthcare** by Peluola Adewale, **Democratic Socialist Movement (CWI, Nigeria)** on www.socialistparty.org.uk

We need a working class response

The news media keep saying how help is desperately needed to combat the Ebola virus: from the World Health Organisation to Barack Obama, David Cameron and the President of Liberia. But I haven't heard anything specific being asked for - just 'more action' and 'more coordination'.

This sense of powerlessness can lead to the attitude of 'let's batten down the hatches at home.' This is reinforced by David Cameron's emphasis on introducing screening at some airports and a national exercise to test the UK's response to Ebola.

As socialists we know that this is not the answer. The best people to provide a solution are the organised working class in countries directly affected and most at risk, in particular health and community workers, some of whom have been on strike because they have not been paid and don't have the resources to do the job.

Britain's health unions need to support those affected health unions to draw up a programme of what exactly is needed and from whom - including the necessary drugs and resources and adequate pay and training and resources to protect all medical workers involved (local, international, volunteers, armed forces).

Then they need to launch a mass campaign nationally and internationally to demand the programme is met without cuts to any other public services and benefits and (legitimate) development aid anywhere.

Cathy Meadows,
Nottingham

Repel the Tories' attacks on our democratic rights

Paul Heron

Haldane Society of Socialist Lawyers (personal capacity)

In early October the Tories set themselves against the Human Rights Act. Leading Tory ministers Cameron, May and Grayling all contributed speeches and newspaper interviews reheating *Daily Mail* headlines to justify their stance against the Act.

In their 'little Englander' speeches terrorists, foreigners, and prisoners have all used human rights to override our sovereignty, they declared.

In a twist of irony Prime Minister Cameron in the earlier part of his Tory conference speech mentioned the mid-Staffordshire Hospital abuse scandal, but failed to mention that the elderly and vulnerable who had suffered there are currently using the Human Rights Act to take legal action.

The Tories are in an internal meltdown as they deal with their electoral threat from Ukip. This has resulted in Tory ministers, in a scattergun approach, deriding human rights as some form of foreign concept imposed on the UK. Yet the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR) was developed as a

result of the revulsion the European working class had towards the horrors of world war two in general, and the attacks on workers by fascism in particular.

The value of human rights is welcomed by the working class - it is seen as another potential legal shield against the excesses of capitalism. The ECHR is of course limited in its scope and impact. At the time it was hoped that it would act as a way of legally limiting the oppression by the state, and would champion such rights as freedom of speech and the right to organise.

Extension

In later years it was hoped that human rights would not just cover issues such as political and civil rights - such as freedom of expression, freedom from torture, slavery, arbitrary arrest and detention, but that it would also embrace social and economic rights such as the right to work, education, health and housing - although these rights have been historically resisted by Western capitalism.

Limited as it is there is still value in defending the Human Rights Act. The law is not completely and totally



Blacklisted workers are using the HRA to pursue building companies who victimised trade unionists

bound to the interests of the ruling class. Law and the courts have been used successfully by the trade union movement and socialists to defend workers' rights.

Law can be influenced by developments in society. Indeed the ECHR, and its interpretation has developed over time in a way that can assist workers.

Take for instance the fact that in the English common law there is no right to privacy; yet there is something akin to that in Article 8 of the ECHR.

Currently, blacklisted workers in the UK are using the right to privacy contained within Article 8 and Article 11 - freedom of association - to pursue those building companies

complicit in victimising trade unionists.

The workers' movement must campaign to defend the Human Rights Act. It can be a valuable additional weapon in defending against oppression while understanding that united mass action of the working class is the only guarantee to secure democratic rights.

BACK FRESH STRIKES TO SAVE THE NHS



NHS None of the main parties will be satisfied until the NHS is a dried up, ruined husk. Cuts to pay and staff, and privatisation of facilities and services, mean soaring waiting times and plummeting care quality. And it's all in the name of more money for the bosses. An important weapon against this Tory-Liberal-Labour onslaught is effective industrial action by health workers, writes NHS nurse **Helen Ridett**.

Health unions, including Unison, are calling members out on a second round of industrial action. It begins with a four hour strike from 7-11am on 24 November.

NHS workers have endured a pay freeze since 2011. The value of our pay has fallen a whopping 10-14%

as a result.

This huge pay cut has enabled the Tories to transfer £20 billion in "efficiency savings" out of the NHS to fund tax breaks for big business and military intervention in the Middle East. In the meantime, Unison reports that one in five NHS

workers is now forced to take on a second job to make ends meet.

Threats

We are also faced with ongoing threats of redundancy, down-banding (being moved to a lower pay grade) and attacks on our terms and conditions. All are inherent in privatisation deals.

Speaking on Radio 4's Today Show during the last health service strike, health minister Jeremy Hunt said cutting NHS pay is justified, as NHS workers get incremental pay increases. However, a survey by Unison revealed that 60% of NHS workers had already reached the top of their pay band.

More cuts are to follow, as demands for a further £22 billion from the NHS hit the headlines. If cuts on this scale are allowed to go ahead, the very concept of a state provided healthcare system will be annihilated. Profit will come before patient care.

Protection

Protecting the NHS and the quality of our workforce is of paramount importance. It is vital the trade unions take the lead on this.

Unison has 1.3 million members - half a million of us work in the NHS. The health unions have huge potential power, especially if more members get actively involved in

branches and organise properly.

Nurses and other health workers must strike on 24 November. We're not just fighting for our pay, but for our patients and the futures of our kids.

Support

The picket lines and public support were huge on 13 October. This time, nurses and other health workers have a real chance to build for an even bigger turnout.

Unionised health staff must continue the urgent tasks of recruiting colleagues into the unions, and also collectively demand further industrial action in coordination with other trade unions.

What we stand for

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

As capitalism dominates the globe, the struggle for genuine socialism must be international. The Socialist Party is part of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), a socialist international that organises in 45 countries.

Our demands include:

PUBLIC SERVICES

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

- Free, publicly run, good quality education, available to all at any age. Abolish university tuition fees now and introduce a living grant. No to academies and 'Free schools'!
- A socialist NHS to provide for everyone's health needs – free at the point of use and under democratic control. Kick out private contractors!
- Keep council housing publicly owned. For a massive building programme of publicly owned housing, on an environmentally sustainable basis, to provide good quality homes with low rents.

WORK AND INCOME

- Trade union struggle to increase the minimum wage to £10 an hour without exemptions as a step towards a real living wage. 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 MASS 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 mass workers' party! Support the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition as an important step towards this.

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

- No to imperialist wars and occupations.
- 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!