

- **80 billionaires own half the world...**
- **Widening inequality and growing poverty...**



# TAKE THE WEALTH OFF THE SUPER-RICH!

**Tony Mulhearn**  
TUSC prospective candidate,  
Merseyside

The charity Oxfam has produced a report showing that the richest 1% of people on this planet are on course to own more than 50% of the world's wealth by 2016 - a testament to the inherent greed and inequality of the capitalist system.

This obscene concentration of wealth is increasing. In Britain this trend, which existed under La-

bour, has now accelerated under the Tory/Lib Dem government. Just 100 rich families, whose income and assets went up by £15 billion last year, now have the same wealth as 30% of UK households.

Globally, in 2010, a mere 388 billionaires owned as much wealth as half the world's population - 3.5 billion people. Now, that figure has shrunk to only 80 super-rich individuals. In cash terms, these 80 people have doubled their wealth over the last five years.

The long-cherished idea propagated by former Tory prime minister Margaret Thatcher and her successors, that a prosperous super-rich would allow more wealth to 'trickle down' to the rest of us, has proved to be hogwash. As the Oxfam figures show, a combination of tax cuts and austerity policies by governments has meant the rich becoming richer at the expense of the poor, who have become poorer.

Oxfam's research coincides with the gathering of billionaire representatives at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. Oxfam's executive director, who will co-chair the Davos event, said she

would use the charity's high-profile role at the gathering to demand urgent action to narrow the gap between rich and poor.

That will be like trying to make water flow uphill. Even those like US president Barack Obama - who argue for reducing inequality and increasing living standards for the world's majority population, in order to prevent upheavals and revolution - are unlikely to win against the powerful political lobbying of the super-rich.

One force which can check the unremitting greed of the rich and powerful is the trade union movement who, by taking action togeth-

er, can reverse the fall in workers' living standards.

But any serious talk of achieving lasting equality and redistributing wealth, to provide the jobs, wages and public services we so desperately need, requires a new, mass political party of the working class to fight for our interests.

Every confirmation of the growth of vast wealth at the expense of the mass of working families underlines the need to build the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (in which the Socialist Party is a leading player) into a mighty force for defending working people. Join with us to achieve this aim.



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# Labour Party won't protect our NHS

## A political alternative is needed

As waiting times at A&E's hit their highest levels since records began, Labour's lead over the Tories on the NHS has widened to 18 points. Without doubt, one of the main motivations of Labour voters in the general election will be the hope that a Labour government would act to reverse the attacks on the NHS that have taken place in the last five years.

Labour has said it will repeal the Con-Dem's Health and Social Care Act, which has massively accelerated privatisation of the NHS, allowing – among other measures – hospitals to use up to 49% of their beds for private patients.

The aim of the Act is to move rapidly to fulfilling the dream of the head of the Independent (i.e. private) Healthcare Association that the NHS logo would become “simply a ‘kite-mark’ attached to the institutions and activities of a system of purely private providers”.

Last year the amount the NHS handed over to these providers exceeded £10 billion for the first time. That means tax payers money being handed to private companies whose primary motivation is not meeting our health needs, but making a profit.

No wonder opinion polls show 84% of people are opposed to privatisation of the NHS. It is understandable that some workers will vote Labour in order to see the Act repealed, and the current decimation of our health service halted.

Unfortunately, however, a Labour government does not offer a road to kicking the private profiteers out of the NHS, or for a

fully-funded service, free at the point of use, which is able to provide for everyone's health needs. Labour did pledge an extra £2.5 billion for the NHS, but this falls far short of the extra £20 billion a year that the Institute of Fiscal Studies estimates that the NHS will need to continue to meet patient demand.

Labour's insistence it will stick with Tory spending plans, however, means that it has since had to admit that it will not implement this minor pledge before halfway through its term of office!

### Council cuts

Nor is the pressure on hospitals only related to NHS funding. Cuts to council funding have decimated social care budgets over the last five years. Labour councils have merely passed on these government cuts.

The number of elderly people getting state-funded care in their home has fallen by 28%. The result is many more people stuck in hospital, unable to go home because of the absence of assistance to help them cope.

Labour has, however, made it very clear that they will not reverse any of the cuts made in council funding. They have also pledged that the 1% pay freeze for health workers would continue if they won the election.

Nor will a Labour government reverse the privatisation that underpins the Health and Social Care Act. When the private company Circle pulled out of running Britain's first wholly-privatised NHS hospital – Hinch-

ingbrooke – Andy Burnham, Labour's Shadow Health Minister, responded by saying the government had chosen the ‘wrong company’. Hardly opposition to privatisation!

This is no surprise, however, as the process of privatising Hinchingbrooke began under the last Labour government, when Andy Burnham was health minister. At the time of Labour leaving office three bidders – all private companies – were on the shortlist to run the hospital.

Successive Labour governments massively expanded privatisation of the NHS, creating a platform which the Con-Dems have built on. NHS Private Finance Initiative (PFI) deals introduced under Labour total £79 billion, of which only £6 billion has been paid off. They leave hospital trusts facing financial disaster and bankruptcy as they struggle to pay off their giant debt burdens.

### No safeguard

None of the possible governmental alternatives beyond 7 May offer a means to safeguard the NHS. We need the trade unions to urgently prepare for a mass movement to defend our health service and to oppose austerity beyond the general election.

At the same time it is necessary to begin to build a political alternative that does stand for kicking the privateers out of the NHS, and rebuilding it under democratic control.

Some workers will vote UKIP in the general election, seeing them as a means to protest against the major parties. But UKIP is a right

wing party led by millionaires and stockbrokers. Farage openly admits that he favours abolishing the NHS and moving to a private health insurance system!

**Labour's pledge of an extra £2.5 billion for the NHS falls far short of the extra £20 billion a year needed to meet patient demand**

We urgently need to create a party that stands for the majority – the working class – and puts defence of the NHS at the heart of its programme.

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition is aiming to stand in over one hundred seats in the general election as a step towards creating such a party. TUSC candidates will be fighting on a programme including:

- No cuts or closures – full funding for our health care
- End the Private Finance Initiative – bring PFI companies into public ownership
- Reverse council cuts to social care to ease the A+E crisis
- Public ownership of the drugs companies – private companies out the NHS
- Pay health workers – end the pay freeze and the low pay scandal

## Socialist Party election appeal: Don't just boo - help fund the fightback!

**Alistair Tice**  
Yorkshire Socialist Party

At a Doncaster Care UK strikers' reunion this month, any mention of local MP and Labour leader Ed Miliband's name was booed. This is because of his refusal during 90 days of strike action to publicly support their fight against “a cost of living crisis” of a 35% pay cut, and against privatisation of the NHS.

But it's not enough to boo, we need an alternative. That's why at least five ex-strikers will be standing as Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidates in May's local council elections and TUSC

are standing in all three Doncaster general election seats including Socialist Party member Mary Jackson challenging Miliband.

This all costs money. With at least ten Socialist Party members in Yorkshire standing as TUSC general election candidates, we need to raise at least £10,000.

### First of the gang

First to contribute to the Socialist Party's Election Appeal with £150 was part-time library worker Chris Bingham from Rotherham: “I think the most significant obstacle to socialist ideas taking hold amongst the majority of people is the exclusion or demonisation of socialist arguments in the media. That's why TUSC's strategy of the biggest ever left of Labour electoral challenge is ambitious, but achievable, to force that media to give socialism a mainstream platform.”

So far, fifty members have pledged to contribute £7,500 from around the region. This includes a week's income of £400 and £500 from better paid trade unionists, £120 from a disabled South Yorkshire Freedom Rider, £100 from a student, £20, £150, even £300 from retired workers.

Tanis from Leeds, on a minimum wage zero hours contract has pledged £150 “to scrap zero-hour contracts”. Dawn Wheelhouse, a teaching assistant in Dewsbury has



Be like a Care UK striker and help back anti-cuts election candidates photo K Lang

pledged £220 “to fight for £10 an hour minimum wage”.

Because of Con-Dem austerity, of job, pay and welfare cuts, some people can hardly afford to live, let alone donate much. But all members should be asked to contribute something and everyone can ask friends and family as well. The TUSC agent in York has received a £500 donation from his son in China!

And Socialist Party branches can organise fund-raising events specifically for the Election Appeal. Sheffield South branch raffled off Numsa (the South African metal workers union that's committed to a new workers party) T-shirts and caps raising £132 and York Socialist Party are organising another of their “99 Club” benefit nights.

So don't just boo the main parties,

dig deep to help fund the socialist alternative.

**You can donate on [www.socialistparty.org.uk/donate](http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/donate), phone 020 8988 8777 to make a card payment, or post a cheque made out to “Socialist Party” to PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD. Please include a note to say your donation is for the “election appeal 2015”.**

# Oil price crashes as world economy slows

Robin Clapp

World capitalism faces a gloomy future according to recent reports issued by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. They warn of lower than expected growth rates, continual volatility in the Eurozone, widespread creeping deflation and economic, social and political turmoil in oil producing countries as the price of 'black gold' continues to plummet.

Oil price movements are a sensitive barometer of economic health and in the last six months they have fallen by almost 60%. In parallel, many commodity prices are sliding rapidly, with copper crashing to its lowest level in seven years, highly significant given its key role in telecommunications, cables and infrastructural investment.

In essence, the rout in crude oil prices and other commodities signifies fears that the slowdown in the global economy might be much deeper than thought.

The OPEC oil cartel, with Saudi Arabia at its core, once commanded more than half of world oil production. Recently however the US has tapped into vast new domestic supplies as a result of the environmentally destructive shale fracking process and this has led to production of an additional 4 million barrels of oil annually.

Though still an oil importer, the US has become the world's biggest producer, giving it new leverage and release from its vulnerable position of having to rely upon OPEC supplies with all the attendant geopolitical uncertainties.

China's voracious appetite for raw materials has fuelled the commodities price boom over a whole period, but with growth there now sharply slowing, panic is rising among metal and mineral exporters like Australia at the prospect of falling prices and profits.

New contradictions appear every



Oil prices have slumped by almost 60% in six months

day, only worsening the economic uncertainties. US interest rates may rise later this year in order to cool the economy which has had a huge 'tax break' as a result of oil profits and cheaper petrol on the forecourts.

This could lead to a massive further exit from the oil market by

The rout in crude oil prices... signifies fears that the slowdown in the global economy might be much deeper than thought

speculators. Many speculators have bought oil for no other reason than as a vehicle to park an estimated \$9 trillion dollars of savings.

Higher US interest rates make those debts more costly to service. To prevent themselves going bust, speculators will dump their oil contracts, driving down the price further.

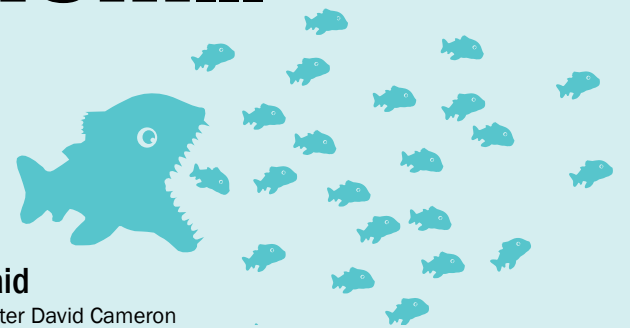
Russia is almost wholly dependent on oil exports for trade and has suffered hugely from the drop in price. The OPEC cartel too is susceptible to this development. The Saudis are currently keeping their production at existing levels in order both to protect market share and to damage the oil profits of their traditional Iranian rivals, but this game of 'who blinks first' cannot last indefinitely.

Nearer home, lower energy prices are causing havoc in the UK North Sea fields, where companies such as BP have already cut 300 jobs in Aberdeen. One third of UK offshore fields are in negative cash flow.

Cheaper prices are welcomed by workers, but oil's collapse further fuels deflationary trends, already evident in the EU. Workers will end up paying again and again as real debts rise and wages fall.

The paradoxical effects of oil's collapse on different countries illustrates the madness of unplanned global capitalism. Only international socialism with a world socialist plan of production can harmoniously utilise the rich resources on our planet for the long-lasting benefit of humankind.

## Them...



### Underpaid

Prime Minister David Cameron reckons he's getting tough with employers who pay below the statutory minimum wage of £6.50 an hour to their workers.

Presumably he's talking about the 37 companies who have just been collectively fined a paltry £51,000 (£1,400 each) for paying below the minimum wage. One, H&M, made more than £600 million in profit in three months alone.

Last year the National Audit Office reported that up to 220,000 care workers in England are illegally paid below the national minimum wage. Of course £6.50 is not a living wage. But some Tories, like Lord Freud, think that disabled workers should only be paid £2 an hour.

£9.3 billion: Housing benefit that private landlords pocketed from tenants in 2013-14.

### Costly advice

Tony Blair (whose legacy as Labour prime minister includes wars and privatising our public services), hasn't exactly struggled to make ends meet since leaving Number Ten in 2007. He is widely reported to have 'earned' £10 million since then.

However, according to press reports, accounts filed for Tony Blair Associates (TBA) show his consultancy business spending £57 million in salaries and expenses in four years - equivalent to £350,000 for each member of staff.

TBA is funded through a group

of companies called Windrush Ventures which made £800,000 post-tax profits, having spent an unspecified £35 million on "administrative expenses".

### Keeping fit

It's a tough ask representing the public. Presumably that's why MPs have refurbished their Commons gym at a cost of £1 million, four times the original estimate, (although that sum does include upgrading the sauna). And having worked up a sweat, MPs spent £518,635 on hotels, airline upgrades and bar bills last year to help them relax.

### Hospital sell-off

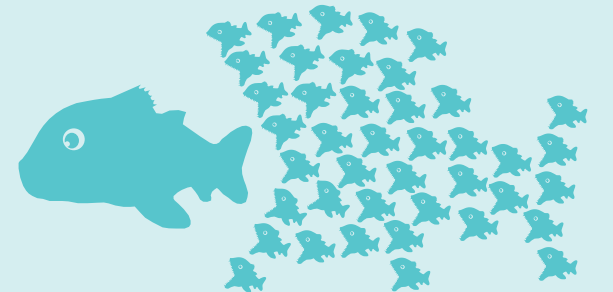
Chase Farm hospital in north London is evicting over 100 health workers from its staff accommodation to allow developers to build 500 homes on the land.

One doctor told the Evening Standard: "Staff are leaving for jobs in cheaper cities. They can't afford London." Chase Farm's Accident and Emergency department was closed in December 2013. Its maternity services have also been axed.

### Monkey business

Forced to compete for funding health projects, senior managers at East Kent Hospitals Foundation Trust are having to don gladiator or witches costumes and appear before a 'Dragons' Den' panel. One consultant said: "This is too ridiculous for words. We were told that there's so little money for extra services and equipment that the trust thought this would help them decide. When I attended I was confronted by a very senior manager wearing a chimpanzee mask!"

## ...& Us



Have you got news for the 'fishes'? Email: [editors@socialistparty.org.uk](mailto:editors@socialistparty.org.uk)

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# Care home scandal When profit comes first...

Hugh Caffrey

The privately run Parklands House care home in Rochdale was so bad that according to the Manchester Evening News: "Residents were seen sitting in soiled clothing, medication was left lying around and some patients were not receiving the right prescriptions." It stank so badly inside that inspectors could smell it from the outside.

The Care Quality Commission (CQC) found the for-profit care home (which accommodates people with dementia and mental health issues), run by Eldercare Limited, suffered from a shortage of trained staff and an over-reliance on agency workers, leaving residents at risk of abuse.



A Rochdale social care worker said: "It is unacceptable to the people in homes who deserve better, staff who deserve better, and the public who need to see better and have a trust that their family member is being well cared for."

The drive by private care home companies to make a profit means squeezing the wages bill, resulting in inadequate staffing levels and low pay, as well as insufficient spending on food and equipment.

Local community activist and Socialist Party member David Fenwick-Finn says: "It's not the only care home in Rochdale recently to get a negative CQC report; there have been ten recently reported as below standard, which nationwide equates to a system on the verge of collapse. Add to that council spending cuts on adult care yet to come and a growing elderly population.

"Clearly it is time to de-privatise social care and invest in proper standardised training, and a living wage of at least £10 an hour minimum."



### The Case for Socialism - Why You Should Join

This short pamphlet outlines what the Socialist Party stands for, and how we think socialism can be achieved.

If you agree - join us!

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# Unison activists discuss reclaiming the union

## Socialist Party members in Unison

Unison activists, under the banner 'Reclaim the Union', met in Manchester on 17 January to discuss developments in their union and the upcoming national executive elections. Also on the agenda was a debate around a single left candidate for the next general secretary election.

Overall the meeting was positive. The first half heard speakers from regions report that a united left executive slate had been agreed by consensus.

Unfortunately this method was not followed in the discussion on the general secretary election.

Having a single left general secretary candidate has been a contentious issue among the left in Unison. Socialist Party members believe this year's elections are particularly important given the massive attacks faced by public sector workers and the inept response by the union's leadership.

Therefore, a genuinely unified slate of candidates standing on a left, fighting programme would be an important step forward.

In the past three general secretary elections Socialist Party mem-

ber Roger Bannister has been the leading left candidate, consistently receiving the most votes of the challengers to the incumbent Dave Prentis. This was despite others on the left running a candidate against Roger on all three occasions. For example, at the last election in 2010 Roger Bannister received 42,651 votes to Paul Holmes' 28,114.

There have also been other divisions on the left, most noticeably the split of United Left last year.

## Election banner

In this context, the existence of 'Reclaim the Union' as a banner that different left forces within the union could unite around at election time has been a good development. Reclaim the Union has fielded a united slate of left candidates at national and service group executive elections since 2009.

A crucial ingredient in Reclaim the Union's success has been the consensus method of reaching decisions, instead of one faction being able to force decisions through weight of numbers.

Unfortunately, at the latest meeting, attendees around the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) and Max Watson chose to move away from the



Unison members need a fighting leadership photo Paul Mattsson

consensus method.

At the start of the meeting, Socialist Party members made it clear that we did not accept a non-consensus method and for that reason we did not participate in the gener-

al secretary candidate vote. In the vote, Karen Reissmann beat Paul Holmes, the vast majority of her votes coming from SWP members. However, Karen Reissmann cannot be considered the candidate of

Reclaim the Union.

Based on union profile and past votes we believe that Roger Bannister is still the best left challenger to the bureaucracy in the future general secretary election.

# UCU: clear strategy needed to reignite pension action

## Liam Curless

University of Manchester UCU branch committee member (personal capacity)

On 14 January the UCU lecturers' union continued the suspension of the marking boycott to allow for a ballot of members on new proposals from the employers, which will run from 16 to 26 January.

The boycott, in opposition to pension cuts at pre-1992 universities, began after the highest ballot turn-

out in UCU history, with 78% voting to strike and 87% voting for action short of a strike.

The boycott lasted two weeks from 6 November until it was suspended so that no pay deductions would be made and until further talks with the employers.

## Employers divided

This was at a time when the employers were clearly divided. Last autumn five universities - Oxford, Cambridge, Warwick, Essex and SOAS

publicly declared that the original proposals were unworkable, unsustainable and unnecessary.

But some universities, including York, Liverpool and Bradford, threatened to dock 100% of pay for workers taking part in the boycott. York backed down following a national backlash from staff and students. Other pay docks resulted in local strike ballots.

The promise of a national strike if members were victimised never materialised. Despite the strong ballot result, UCU promptly abandoned

its opposition to moving from final salary to career average pensions - a red line for many members.

## Negotiations

UCU suspended the marking boycott until 15 January with just the promise of more negotiations. These have led to marginal improvements to the original offer but will in fact still lead to substantial cuts to the pension scheme for the majority of members.

The selling point is an improvement in conditions for members

on the career average scheme from 2011. However these improvements could have been much higher with a stronger leadership and a clear strategy with industrial action.

Members should vote no on the offer. We must call for an emergency pensions conference to enable a clear strategy to get the industrial action back on track, involving all members from GTA (Graduate Teaching Assistants), fixed term contracts, academic and academic-related, to ensure that the most effective coordinated action is taken.

# Barbour workers accept improved offer

## Elaine Brunskill

Striking Barbour workers have voted to go back to work after winning concessions from the company.

Initially Barbour had threatened warehouse workers with a "sign or be sacked" ultimatum. However, the company retreated and the improved offer includes an increase in pay and allows for day shift working for those with family or caring responsibilities.

Key to this success has been the strike action, which included four days prior to Christmas and a further week of a planned month long strike in January.

Last week we reported that Barbour strikers were joined by the FBU, Unison, BFAWU bakers union and others in a march which descended onto Barbour's South Tyneside HQ. This march clearly impacted on the company.

Many of the strikers on that march pointed out that Barbour had ac-



Part of the Barbour workers' demo photo Elaine Brunskill

cused the union (Unite) of dragging their members into this dispute. But the demo clearly showed this was untrue and that warehouse workers were angered by Barbour's stance.

Local support for the strikers also

played an important role. One striker commented: "My kid's teacher pulled her to one side to let her know all the staff at the school supported the strike."

Many of Barbour's warehouse workers have worked for the company for many years, and until recently had felt it was a family company who looked after their staff. The attempt by Barbour to run rough shod over their rights has changed this perception.

Barbour workers have gained invaluable experience from this dispute, which will be important for future battles.

# Essex FBU fight lockout

Essex firefighters took strike action for three days from 9am on Wednesday 14 January. The action, initially planned to last a total of 29 hours across the three days, was escalated as the employers locked the FBU union members out for the whole three days.

The dispute is over changes to conditions for control room staff with the sticking point being an attempt to impose 12-hour shifts. But it also has to be seen against the background both of the national pension dispute and a local war of attrition waged by a hardnosed employer against one of the best organised fire brigades in the country.

While the pickets' shelter and brazier at the Basildon firestation could not compare with the luxurious new command and control centre in nearby Kelvedon (there are reports of travellers on the A12 pulling into the swanky new premises requesting bed and breakfast!) the picket line was well attended and morale was high.

**Dave Murray, Basildon Socialist Party**



photo Dave Murray

## Commemorate the 2004 Tebay Disaster in Cumbria

RMT annual rally to remember four workers who were killed by a runaway wagon. Five more were injured.

**Assemble 15 February, 12noon**, at the site of a memorial stone marking the tragedy, in Tebay, Cumbria, off the A685.

A buffet will follow at Tebay Sports, Social and Railway Club, Church Street, Tebay, Penrith, CA10 3SP.

The RMT are still campaigning for secondary protection for track workers.



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# Tesco: every little cut helps

## A Tesco worker

In a small store such as ours, managers often end up working side by side with ordinary staff, all doing the same job. It's called "rumble", and can be a fun activity, joking and chatting.

However, on a recent Friday there was a marked change. A feeling more like a friend had died, or the end of an era. With talks of closing 43 "unprofitable" stores, pay freezes and drastic changes to the pension schemes, the feeling was justified.

Managers and union reps are as much in the dark as we are, having got the news off BBC and papers like the Sun. The lack of info being fed to the shop floor is crippling colleagues' morale. Managers are even pointing out that these pressures are coming from their superiors' mistakes. They are being forced to make changes to react.

Lately, to cut costs, most team

leader roles have been absorbed into management. This places severe strain on those wanting to climb the ladder to earn a living wage. And this is a minor issue compared to what will face us in the months ahead.

## Change

Tesco was once seen as the better of the big four supermarkets to work for. This seems set to change rather rapidly.

Our staff briefing stated "investment in payroll will be flat." Effectively, that means job cuts or no one getting a pay rise next year. Not even the lower-than-inflation rises I have suffered my entire working life. They aren't even so bold as to tell us to our faces.

We are told there will be new "working hour flexibility." There have been two attempts to rejig the hours under the name "right hours, right place". This consists of man-

agement asking what permanent hours you can drop, and what "flexi-time" you can add to your contract. In "flexi-time", you can be called into work and can only decline with a 'suitable' reason. Pretty much a zero-hour contract, but with a few core hours.

## Tesco's higher ranks have nothing but feelings of bitter contempt for workers

Add all this to Tesco's use of workfare slave labour, and it's clear that the higher ranks of have nothing but feelings of bitter contempt for workers. They drool over their enormous salaries and pension pots, while financial woes continue to plague the

company.

These include the last chief exec and financial director cooking the books and huge failures in overseas markets. And it's us, the workers, who have to pay the price.

## Prize pets

And this is supposed to be an organised workplace! So where's the resistance? Our union, Usdaw, is in "partnership" with management. Its leaders think they can be the prized pets of the elite, and also the voice of the workers. It claims to be a "campaigning union" - but only for the discredited Labour Party.

Everyone working inside Tesco, from security guards and cleaners to the duty managers, knows the coming months will be either a period of struggle or of being trampled on.

Given the state of Usdaw at the moment, I'm practising my doormat impression. But with a fighting

lead, we can still pull the mat out from beneath their feet.

■ Socialist Party member Amy Murphy is standing for Usdaw's presidency and executive council, to give the union the fighting leadership its members deserve. Read more at: [usdawactivist.wordpress.com](http://usdawactivist.wordpress.com).

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# Youth unemployment: anxiety and anger

## Laurence Maples

A new report by the Prince's Trust shows the devastating impact of unemployment on young people in Britain. Over half of those interviewed - under-25s not in education, employment or training - suffer from anxiety in everyday situations. One third reported they regularly "fall apart" emotionally.

Two in five are not eating properly. More than a third avoid leaving the house. The impact on long-term unemployed youth is even worse: 25% have self-harmed and 32% contemplated suicide. Rather than treat them, the government has cut youth mental-health services by £50 million.

## Crisis

Joblessness is rampant, due to the economic crisis and government austerity. Officially, there are 754,000 unemployed young people - a staggering 17%. Yet the government claims this as a success, because it is slightly less than a year ago! And the jobless figure doubles when including those who have given up looking, discouraged after months or years of rejections.

The benefits system is not designed for the unemployed and low paid. It is deliberately so complex that most



struggle to navigate it.

There is little help towards real training and jobs. Instead the unemployed are bullied into slave-labour "workfare" schemes. Nearly a million benefits claimants were sanctioned last year, with welfare withdrawn for reasons as petty as turning up a couple of minutes late.

## Languishing

Even if young people do find work, the problems don't end there. 5.5 million are languishing on zero-hour contracts. Workers under 21 don't even qualify for the pitifully low full minimum wage. And many jobs are dressed up as "apprenticeships" where employers legally pay as little as £2.73 an hour.

Money-grubbing bosses are not interested in developing young workers. They simply want to maximise profits, through blatant, brutal exploitation.

Unemployed workers have a proud history of resisting. Between the wars there were enormous demonstrations demanding work. They were supported by fighting, working class political representatives - such as those in Poplar, east London. Those Labour councillors fought the Liberal-led coalition government, and their own party's leadership, for more money to increase welfare payments.

In 2011, the trade union Unite

launched "community membership" to help organise the unemployed. Jobless workers' struggles must be linked to the connected interests and organised strength of the wider trade-union movement.

Crucially, we need a political alternative to represent ordinary people, based on trade unions and community campaigns. The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC - see centre pages) is a step towards this. All unemployed activists should consider standing as TUSC candidates in local or parliamentary elections, to show the bosses we won't pay for their crisis.

## The Socialist demands:

- End slave-labour workfare schemes
- Benefits we can live on - no to starvation rations
- End benefit sanctions - 'sanction' the criminal bankers who caused the crisis!
- The right to decent benefits, education, training or a job, without compulsion
- A massive programme of home building and job creation
- A £10-an-hour minimum wage with no exceptions
- Scrap zero-hour contracts - for flexible working on our terms, not the bosses'

# Opposing the establishment parties is not a 'wasted vote'

On 24 January, the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is meeting to discuss the 2015 elections. Taking up the 'vote Labour as the lesser evil' arguments of Guardian journalist Polly Toynbee, the Socialist Party's Clive Heemskerck, who is also the TUSC national election agent, puts the case for the biggest possible challenge in both the general election and local council contests on 7 May.

"A great many voters will be rightly angry on 8 May," wrote Guardian columnist Polly Toynbee in her New Year's Eve assessment of politics in 2015, because they felt obliged to "choose the least worst of two parties from which they feel increasingly alienated".

But, she went on, there is no alternative to voting Labour on 7 May because "another five years of the Conservatives" would set "an irreversible seal" on the government's policies. Obeying "the tactical dictates of the two-party game" is an "iron rule" and those backing anyone else will have "wasted their vote".

As polling day gets nearer this argument will be repeated again and again. And not just in the pages of the Guardian which, with one or two maverick exceptions, is a house-journal of 'austerity Labour'. Many trade union leaders also do not want to answer this profoundly pessimistic idea.

But the argument is wrong. The alienation from the establishment parties, conceded by Toynbee, is so deep that it is approaching a qualitative shift. Whatever government emerges from the general election will be weak and unstable.

Yes, it will attempt to push through austerity measures but they will not be as easily imposed as Toynbee imagines, and certainly not 'irreversible'. Yes, the opposition in the workplaces and communities will have to be organised more boldly and extensively, particularly by the main union leaders, than in the last five years. Opportunities to unseat Cameron - from the 2011 public sector pension strikes to the Scottish referendum

- were not taken only because they failed to give a lead.

But one thing is clear. Voting for the establishment parties will only bolster the justification they give when they face opposition to their policies, the fig leaf of electoral 'legitimacy'. Backing the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) election challenge on 7 May, on the other hand, is not a 'wasted vote' but another step in the fight back.

## Austerity Labour

Not surprisingly, Polly Toynbee isn't able to make a positive case for voting Labour. The New Year skirmish between the parties on public spending once again shows why.

The Tories claimed that Labour had made 'unfunded' spending commitments of £21 billion above the government's current plans. In response Labour issued a 'rebuttal dossier', entitled 'The Tories Smear Analysis of Labour Policy', which mainly consisted of denying that the policy commitments had ever been made.

Shadow chancellor Ed Balls insisted that when Labour criticise certain cuts this does not mean that they will be reversed. He singled out local council spending cuts, and the 1% public sector pay limit, as two examples that a Labour government would categorically not undo. No wonder Toynbee says that "keeping expectations low while inspiring enthusiasm to get the vote out" is a "tricky balancing act".

Toynbee also acknowledges the alienation from the capitalist establishment

parties that exists. But when she talks about a government doing "irreversible damage" while "lacking the consent of more than a third" she underestimates how deep it has become.

Many commentators have made similar points to Toynbee - that this could be the first general election where the combined vote for Labour and the Conservatives is less than 65%. But a more significant figure is what the two parties score as a percentage of the total electorate, not just those who vote.

In 1951 80% of the population voted for either Labour (40.3%) or the Tories (39.6%). In 2010 the combined figure had fallen to 42%. Old allegiances are breaking down. Whatever the result this time in terms of parliamentary seats, the election 'winner' is likely to have less of a social base than any government before it. It will not be able to impose its will if opposition is organised.

## What if the Tories win?

But what about Polly Toynbee's implied argument that, however weak its popular support, having secured a parliamentary majority a new Tory-led government would be in a position to carry through a five-year 'irreversible' assault on the remnants of the welfare state? Union leaders lining up behind Labour point to a new attack on trade union rights that would be threatened. Wouldn't the Tories have a 'mandate' for their policies?

Ironically, Toynbee's article appeared in the same edition of the Guardian that carried reports of the cabinet papers released under the 30 year rule on the 1985 debates in Margaret Thatcher's government over plans to introduce the poll tax. This was the measure, of course - the tipping point - that provoked the mass movement which led to her downfall.

The papers showed that in May 1985 the Tory cabinet did not agree with replacing domestic rates on households by an individual residential charge. The then chancellor Nigel Lawson warned of 'political catastrophe' and the home secretary Douglas Hurd even compared the likely enforcement difficulties with the problem of collecting BBC licence fees in west Belfast. But by November 1985 the cabinet had changed their minds and agreed with the poll tax and the plan, carried out in the 1987 election, to impose it first in Scotland.

What had changed between May and November 1985? In the spring twenty Labour councils had come together to defy the Tories' rate-capping cuts on local government. By the summer, however, all but Liverpool and Lambeth councils had capitulated. In October Labour leader Neil Kinnock made his infamous Labour Party conference speech attacking Liverpool council. Clearly, by November,



Could you be a TUSC candidate? photo Senan

The alienation from the establishment parties is so deep that it is approaching a qualitative shift. Whatever government emerges from the general election will be weak and unstable

having measured the preparedness to fight of the Labour Party and trade union leaderships - and 'radical journalists' like Toynbee (then in the Social Democratic Party) - the Tories had regained their confidence to move on to their next assault.

The Guardian editorialised on the newly-released papers as an example only of personal hubris by Thatcher and her then policy advisor (and current Tory MP) Oliver Letwin. But that misses the real lesson for today.

The Tory government of 1983-87 had won with 42% of the vote (31% of the electorate, far more than the next government will receive). But the cabinet papers show that they still had to act cautiously when they discussed introducing the poll tax, only moving when the labour movement showed weakness.

The lesson for 2015 is not to vote for the austerity parties on 7 May, to add to their claim to have 'electoral legitimacy'. Instead the task is to prepare the ground politically, industrially, amongst young people and in working class communities for the battles to come whoever wins. Building the TUSC challenge - standing for TUSC in the local and parliamentary elections, campaigning for TUSC candidates, and voting TUSC where possible - is part of that process.

## A tipping point election

Toynbee tries to present her position as one that shows concern "for those at the sharp end, the low-paid, the food bank users, bedroom tax debtors and all who struggle with rising rents and unpayable bills on fallen incomes". She contrasts her call for a Labour vote with the "Westminster watchers" enjoying "the larks" an inconclusive election result - the most likely outcome - will create.

But in fact she is as equally divorced as the "political junkies" she criticises from

the real social forces developing on the ground. Tender concern for the consequences of rampant capitalism, six years after the great recession, will not stop the developing rage. Attempting to stuff it back into "the tactical dictates of the two-party game" is both futile and feeds reaction. If there is no outlet in a working class alternative then UKIP's right wing populism can partially fill the vacuum.

Socialists will be sympathetic to the many workers, particularly that older layer, who on 7 May will reluctantly vote Labour as "the least worst" option. But a new Labour government, or the post-election positioning that will occur both between and within the parliamentary parties in the event that no one party has an overall majority, will show once again - there is no mass political organisation consistently opposed to austerity.

Even the Green Party leader, Natalie Bennett, when asked in a Daily Politics interview (17 December) "would you back Labour's decision to make cuts every year to current spending through the next parliament?" if the Greens held the balance of power, admitted that "we would have to, in the end, make a choice between that and even worse Tory cuts".

The question will be posed in even starker relief - where is the political voice of the working class? TUSC's challenge, in both the general election and the local elections, however modest the results may be this time, points the way forward. No trade unionist, socialist or working class community campaigner should stand aside from the fight.

**TUSC 2015 elections conference**  
Student Central (formerly ULU), Malet Street, London, WC1E 7HY  
Saturday 24 January, 11am to 4.30pm  
Registration fee: £10 waged and £2 unwaged/low-waged  
Capped pooled fare of £10  
See full details at [www.tusc.org.uk](http://www.tusc.org.uk)



TUSC campaigners calling for rent caps instead of benefit caps photo Paul Mattsson

## TUSC's fighting programme to stop the council cuts

Ed Balls singled out government funding of local council spending as an example of the Tory cuts that an incoming Labour government will not reverse. This alone is justification of TUSC's decision to appeal for the widest spread possible of candidates in the English local council elections that are taking place at the same time as the general election.

The TUSC national steering committee has agreed to stand at least 100 candidates in the general election. It is also aiming to build on the record 560 candidates TUSC stood in the 2014 local council elections, the biggest working class left-of-Labour election challenge since the aftermath of world war two.

The TUSC conference will discuss the local elections core policies (below) which every candidate must commit to. In many ways the council elections are as important as the general election in deciding what will happen to the vital public services provided by local authorities. With all the establishment parties committed to austerity, the best that will happen in the Westminster elections is that there will be a change of 'management style' at the top.

## Local services

That's why it is important to have local councillors who will refuse to vote for cuts in the council chamber. And that

is why TUSC is appealing to trade union members, anti-cuts campaigners, young people - everyone in fact who opposes the austerity agenda - to themselves come forward as council candidates in May.

The local elections are a clear way to explain the critical difference between TUSC and Labour candidates, and the Greens, who may verbally 'oppose the cuts' but carry them out in practice.

## All TUSC councillors will:

- Oppose all cuts to council jobs, services, pay and conditions. We reject the claim that 'some cuts' are necessary to our services or that the national debt is a reason for austerity.
- Refuse to implement the Bedroom Tax now. Councils should write off all bedroom tax-related arrears, withdraw all court proceedings and eviction orders where the bedroom tax has been a factor, and call on Housing Associations to do the same.
- Support all workers' struggles against the cuts, privatisation and government policies making ordinary people pay for the crisis caused by the bankers and the bosses. Defend the national collective bargaining arrangements for council workers.
- Reject increases in council tax, rent and service charges to compensate for government cuts.
- Vote against the privatisation of council jobs and services, or the transfer of council services to 'social enterprises' or 'arms-length' management organisations, which are first steps to privatisation.
- Oppose racism and fascism and stand up for equality for all.
- Campaign for the introduction of a Living Wage above the minimum wage, including for council employees and those working for council contractors.
- Use all the legal powers available to councils to oppose both the cuts and government policies which centrally impose the transfer of public services to private bodies. This includes using councils' powers to refer local NHS decisions, initiate referenda and organise public commissions and consultations in campaigns to defend public services.
- Vote for councils to refuse to implement the cuts. We will support councils which in the first instance use their reserves and prudential borrowing powers to avoid making cuts. But we argue that the best way to mobilise the mass campaign that is necessary to defeat the dismantling of council services is to set a budget that meets the needs of the local community and demands that government funding makes up the shortfall.
- Support action against climate change and for a future where sustainability comes before profit.

**Socialism TODAY**

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Clive Heemskerck defends a working class alternative to mainstream parties
- **World economy**  
The world is stuck in the great stagnation, writes Peter Taaffe
- **Caste discrimination**  
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# Why I joined the Socialist Party

**Laurel Fogarty**

Lambeth and South West London Socialist Party

I moved to London from San Francisco in October 2014. I had been a member of an unrelated socialist group in the US. My comrades there put me in touch with a few young activists in London, but for one reason or another no meetings materialised.

With London bubbling over with anger at Tory cuts and Lib Dem betrayals, getting on the streets seemed more important than chasing up emails. So I ditched an afternoon at my new job, and went to join the huge student protest in November.

At that demonstration, both Socialist Students and the Socialist Party had a strong presence, manning stands, selling papers and handing out signs. So I decided to come to a Socialist Party branch meeting.

Socialist meetings I attended in the past (mostly on privileged university campuses) have often left me in awe of activists' commitment to learning. But this meeting left me with something more than that. It left me with the feeling that this is what a socialist party should be.

After a talk on economic theory, members began discussing the strikes they were supporting and



"To get rid of capitalism, we need parties like the Socialist Party" photo Senan

the work their unions were doing. Jokingly wishing that people would stop going on strike at 4am in the middle of winter - but fully intending to get up, put on a woolly hat, and support them anyway.

I joined because if we are going

to get rid of capitalism, we need parties like the Socialist Party. On the streets protesting, supporting workers when they need it, patiently showing us the change we need is within our grasp - and explaining how we can reach out and grab it.

## Hackney women give TUSC their blessing

**Claire Laker-Mansfield**

Hackney Socialist Party

"Before I heard about TUSC, I was thinking I wouldn't vote in the elections. Now I have a reason to."

That was the reaction of one attendee at a Christian women's community meeting in Hackney this Saturday.

The women were predominantly of West African origin. Discussion was conducted in two languages: French and English - very testing for someone with only GCSE language skills! Nana Asante, the TUSC prospective parliamentary candidate for Harrow East and former mayor of Harrow, addressed the gathering.

Nana gave a forceful description of the cruelty of austerity. But more importantly, she was able to give a

sense of how we can fight it. Through community campaigns, trade unions taking action - and, crucially, by fighting for a political alternative to the big-business parties.

The rich discussion that followed grappled with many of the pressing questions on workers' minds: do we have to vote Labour as the "lesser evil"? Are cuts necessary? How can we be organised to win?

Speakers drew on their experiences of day-to-day life. One woman, a care worker, talked about how the disabled people she looks after are made to suffer as the result of a crisis caused by the rich. Other speakers raised points on tax avoidance, pointing out the huge wealth concentrated in the hands of the super-rich 1%.

Nana explained why she herself - as a former Labour Party represent-

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



[www.tusc.org.uk](http://www.tusc.org.uk)

ative - feels it's now necessary to build an alternative. She reminded the meeting that Labour itself would never have been set up if the "lesser evil" argument had prevailed.

We encouraged everyone there to attend the TUSC conference on Saturday 24 January, and get involved locally in the campaign - especially in the run-up to the election.

## 5,000 residents force council debate on pool closure

**Chris Fernandez**

TUSC prospective parliamentary candidate for Derby South

Derby TUSC is fighting Derby council's closure of Moorways sports complex, including two swimming pools. Workers were told their jobs would go only one day before the press was. Over 5,000 people have signed an online petition, forcing the council to debate the issue.

The Labour council promised a new pool - in 2018. Thanks to the public response, the council now "may well look at" keeping the pool open for an extra year.

The Tories say that if elected they

won't close Moorways until the new pool is opened. But with cuts guaranteed to continue no matter who wins the general election, none of these promises mean anything without a strategy to take on the government.

The council has £7.1 million in uncommitted reserves. Cllr Alison Martin, cabinet member for leisure, told the Derby Evening Telegraph that the minimum costs for keeping the pool open another three years are only £1.6 million.

TUSC proposes setting a needs budget - a spending plan based on providing the jobs and services communities need, not on cuts. Having bought time by spending reserves, we could organise a seri-

ous campaign based on trade unions and communities to win that money back.

A movement led by rebel Labour councillors - who subsequently joined TUSC - saved a Southampton pool in 2012. Derby TUSC calls on all those opposed to the closure to come to our public meeting, and to join us in lobbying the council debate on the closure.

TUSC public meeting: Save Oaklands Pool! Saturday 24 January, 1pm at the Crown Hotel, 1 Chellaston Road, Derby DE24 9AD

Lobby of Derby City Council: Wednesday 28 January, 6pm in the Council Chamber, Council House, Corporation Street, Derby DE1 2FS

## Cardiff happy to get the blues

**Steffan Bateman**

Cardiff Socialist Party

Cardiff City fans are celebrating their club's return to blue. Billionaire owner Vincent Tan, who changed the strip to red in June 2012, was forced to back down by a mass campaign of supporters.

Tan's massively unpopular decision looked to be unshakable. Representatives of the owner only met with fans after years of work and several protests.

The largest demo saw over 3,000 supporters march through the city. A match boycott caused the lowest ever attendance at Cardiff City Stadium, playing Colchester in the FA cup.

Tan only last month claimed "Protesting will not make me change my mind... Cardiff will stay red" - a last statement of defiance before he was given no option but to undo the rebrand.

When Cardiff started at home, in blue, against Fulham last Saturday, the attendance was up and so was the atmosphere. This helped

the team get their first win in five league matches.

As well as the return to blue, and the crest being redesigned to feature a prominent bluebird, season ticket prices will be reduced. These are big concessions, but there are many other issues on-field and off which need to be resolved.

Fans need to be the ones making decisions about the future of the club, not unelected billionaires. There is still a big debt problem: the club owes £118 million, with just over half - £66 million - owed to Tan.

The vast majority of fans never stopped wearing blue, and the campaign worked because it was unified: 15 different supporters' groups joined forces on protests. Many fans have learnt lessons from this protest movement, and will be just as organised if further attacks on their club come from the owner.

This isn't the biggest victory working class people will win in the coming year. But it does show, if we're united and determined, we can take on the bosses and win!



Cardiff City fans in blue

### Public meeting Against all cuts

Lancaster Friends Meeting House, Meeting House Lane 7.30pm, 29 January

Speakers from RMT (Darren Ireland), Unison, FBU, NUT and parliamentary candidates (Labour, Greens, Tories, Lib Dems, and TUSC) invited to answer the question "why are cuts needed at all?"

Organised by Lancaster/Morcombe Trades Union Council.

### With banners held high Day of music, film, drama, debate and exhibitions

11am-5pm, 7 March Unity Works, Wakefield, WF1 1EP

Celebrate the courage, strength and spirit of the miners and their communities on the 30th anniversary of the return to work after the year long strike

Includes an exhibition by Women Against Pit Closures, music by the Sentimentalists, guest speaker Dennis Skinner MP and the premiere of film 'With Banners Held High'

## SOCIALIST PARTY FIGHTING FUND

	£ received	£ target	January-March 2015	Deadline 6 April 2015
Southern	153	1,200	█	
West Midlands	246	2,100	█	
North West	138	1,200	█	
East Midlands	139	1,600	█	
Wales	196	2,300	█	
Eastern	83	1,200	█	
London	193	6,100	█	
South West	41	1,400	█	
South East	5	750	█	
Yorkshire	9	2,900	█	
Northern	0	600	█	
England & Wales	100	3,650	█	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,302</b>	<b>24,400</b>	█	



Syriza supporters rally in Athens

## Greek elections update

# Syriza victory would raise workers' hopes

On 19 January, 6 days before the Greek general election, the Socialist spoke to Andros Payiatsos from Xekinima (CWI in Greece).

**Last time we spoke you told us of the campaign of fear by the establishment to try and prevent people voting for Syriza. How has this developed?**

The circus of the ruling class and its political representatives are now demoralised. They started a big fear campaign but it became absolutely clear that it would have no significant effect and that Syriza will be the next government. The question now is, will it be a minority or a majority government?

**What now seems the likely outcome of the election?**

It's generally accepted here and internationally that Syriza will win. In the last week there has been a small increase for Syriza in the opinion polls - about 1%. Really this is a stabilisation of Syriza's lead. Including abstentions Syriza's support stands at just below 30%, discounting these it rises to about 33% - close to, but not sufficient for, a majority government.

The Syriza leadership see Independent Greeks - a 'patriotic', populist split from New Democracy (the main right wing, capitalist party) as the most viable possibility for a coalition partner. This party took a position against the Memorandum and the Troika from the beginning.

Most of the main left parties are not willing to cooperate with Syriza. The Communist Party re-

jects even the possibility of voting in parliament for Syriza to form a government - they have a disastrous, sectarian position.

If Independent Greece don't have enough MPs either, then Syriza would be pushed to collaborate with parties which are considered to be 'Troikan' parties (those that have accepted and implemented the austerity policies inflicted on Greece by the International Monetary Fund, the European Union and the European Central Bank).

**What is the response of the ruling class to the increasing likelihood of a Syriza victory?**

They now concentrate on trying to make sure a Syriza government will be as stable and effective as possible for them.

There are big sections in Greece and internationally which say it's time to negotiate and be flexible etc. This is an attempt to incorporate Syriza into the establishment and to put a brake on the dangers which Syriza may represent for their interests in terms of releasing powerful mass movements and taking measures which go against austerity.

But it's important to know that it's not uniform. For example, the German ruling class and the countries around it still have a hard line against any serious negotiation.

**How is Syriza responding to this pressure?**

The leadership is responding in

precisely the way that the ruling class would like. Syriza's political programme has become absolutely blurred. Even some of the reforms that have been considered very basic are now under question.

For example, Syriza leader Alexis Tsipras was recently asked in an interview about the major struggle of the people of Halkidiki against the gold mines. He didn't take a clear position but he said "the law will be enforced" and "the contracts will be scrutinised" - what does that mean?

In relation to the minimum wage, which was one of the major points in the programme of

Syriza, it's now not clear when it's going to be done - there's now talk of a gradual implementation. In regard to the privatisations and the sackings of thousands from the public sector that have taken place, they say: "We shall study the lawfulness of what took place."

So as a general rule in society there is no enthusiasm for Syriza. But there is also a feeling that there is no choice, we have to vote for Syriza and give it a majority government if possible. There is a feeling that even if they do one tenth of what they promise, things will still be better than today.

**How has Xekinima participated in the elections and why?**

We support Syriza and have launched a very big campaign. We

produced 150,000 four-page leaflets and a special edition of our paper which sold out, so we have reproduced it.

The main reason we support Syriza, despite its limitations, is that there is an expectation from the working class that some of their demands will be satisfied. So despite the lack of clarity on the part of the leadership, we believe that a Syriza victory will have a liberating effect on society. It will represent a significant shift in the balance of class forces in Greek society and can unleash a new period of working class struggle

Maybe Syriza will not change the law about the labour market, which has been completely deregulated, but workers will come out to demand their right not to be sacked, to an eight hour day, to overtime payments etc. We expect this throughout the working class movement in Greece.

Whatever compromises the leadership is willing to do, the workers will feel there's a much better environment to fight to defend their rights and this is the fundamental reason that Syriza should be given conditional/critical support.

**What does Xekinima think that a Syriza government should do the day after it's elected?**

Of course, it should immediately paralyse the payment of the debt and rip up the memorandum with the Troika. It should change the labour laws and laws for the universities (to allow for asylum, freedom of speech, assemblies etc). Raise the minimum wage to what it was before the onset of the Troika - back to €750 a month.

Close down the body which is responsible for the privatisations of the public works and the natural beauties and resources of the country. And freeze and reverse all privatisations that have taken place in recent years. Put an end to controversial projects which are under

construction now - like Halkidiki.

This would cause a reaction of major capital, nationally and internationally. So in our opinion they should then begin nationalising the banks and the commanding heights of the economy to plan the economy on the basis of need, not profit. This should be done on the basis of democratic workers' control and management.

And it must be linked to the struggles of the workers across Europe. We are sure that if Syriza went ahead with such a programme it would have a major effect internationally, particularly for the working class of southern Europe.

This can only be achieved through the mass intervention of the working class, and the masses, which could, under certain conditions, push Syriza far further to the left than the leadership envisage.

This is what Xekinima will be struggling for in the period after Syriza is elected to government.

**Andros' previous interview, 'Greece: towards a Syriza government?', appeared in the Socialist issue 838 and can be found at socialistparty.org.uk**

### 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](mailto:cwi@worldsoc.co.uk) [www.socialistworld.net](http://www.socialistworld.net)



Halkidiki gold mine protest



Tsipras



## 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.

**Ever widening gap**

The BBC's two part documentary – the Super-rich and Us – was an eye-opening expose of how the top 1% of the population has accumulated massive levels of wealth at the expense of the majority 99%, whose income and assets markedly declined during the 'great recession'. The documentary maker, Jacques Peretti, explains that the ever-widening wealth gap and rising inequality threatens the capitalist system of the super-rich by provoking a backlash from increasingly socially excluded and angry people. However, Peretti shows the 2011 riots in English cities as the only likely response to this situation. But the blind rage expressed in the riots did not change this exploitative capitalist system nor even curtail the super-rich's greed. Clearly, another alternative is needed.

What the programme did not consider is the possibility of militant action by the working class through strikes, protests and demonstrations, combined with the development of a new left party fighting for socialist change. This is the perspective that organised workers and socialists must build for.

**Simon Carter,**  
East London

**Stolen votes**

'Individual voter registration', introduced by the Con-Dem government, could leave many (mainly young) people without the right to vote this May. Students who previously would be automatically registered by their university accommodation could find themselves disenfranchised. Students do still have the right to vote in their home constituency. You



Yes voters in Scotland

can and should register to vote both in your home and college constituency at [www.gov.uk/register.to.vote](http://www.gov.uk/register.to.vote). Thousands of 16-17 year olds grabbed the opportunity to turn out in big numbers to vote 'yes' in the Scottish independence referendum. This Tory move is in line with anti-democratic attacks in the USA where laws demanding voters provide identification have been used by the Republicans to remove black, Latino, and immigrant voters from the electoral roll, as they are unlikely to vote Republican. A quarter of African Americans don't possess a

government-issued ID, more than twice the population as a whole. Right-wing backbench Tories had their attempt to block Irish citizens living in Britain from voting in UK elections quashed. The National Union of Students (NUS) is campaigning to register students to vote, but this has to be linked to providing students with something to vote for. Cameron and the Tories are cynically trying to get voter turnout figures up when support for establishment parties is at an all time low.

**Ian Pattison**

**Knight errant**

Theodore Agnew was made Sir Theo by the gracious sword of HM the Queen in this year's, very feudal, ritual of the New Year's honours list. Sir Theo is no knight of the round table but very much a modern capitalist. Educated at the very expensive fee-paying (and pretty feudal) Rugby school, he made a fortune in insurance in Australia and was a director of a massive Lloyds insurance business. He was knighted mainly for giving the Tories £134,000.

Recently Sir Theo was appointed a deputy lieutenant of the county of Norfolk. But such neo-feudal flummery cannot hide the fact that he is also non-executive director of the Department for Education and chairs the Academies Board, which makes decisions on whether state schools should become academies. This public school educated millionaire will decide the educational future of students in areas like Lewisham where many schools are threatened with becoming academies. Keep fighting these feudal knights and the capitalist system they maintain!

**Keith White**

**Inspiring choice**

After reading Rob Rooney's letter (Socialist 838) asking: 'Who inspired you to become a socialist?' I thought for a while then one name jumped out at me - Thatcher! I didn't know how to vote up to that point. After Thatcher, I did.

**Phil Collings, Suffolk**

**Tories' real face?**

Tory Paymaster General Francis Maude went on an anti-union rant on Any Questions on 16 January. The Conservatives got 36.1% of the vote in the last election; Maude himself only got 38% of the eligible vote (if you include people who didn't vote) in Horsham. However they intend to impose a quota of 40% of the entire membership, including those who don't vote, on trade union ballots. Maude raged about trade unions "endangering public safety" and "inconveniencing millions". In the Tories 'doublespeak' this is so even when unions strike over safety issues. Even Liberal Norman Baker had to reassert workers' right to strike, something Maude is not keen on.

Conservatives seldom talk about class war, they're too busy fighting it, so it was instructive to hear the nasty party in full spate. Workers need a party to fight their corner as fiercely as Maude and his ilk fight for the bosses.

**Derek McMillan**

# Halt the cutbacks in hearing aid provision

**Charlie Taylor**

In Devon, NHS patients who suffer from deafness have been told that they can in future only have one hearing aid. This could be a sign of things to come in the NHS nationwide. 25 Clinical Commissioning Groups are currently planning to cut audiology services. At least two may deny hearing aids to people with "mild to moderate" hearing loss.

As a 57 year old who has just had two new NHS digital hearing aids these proposals horrify me. Hearing loss is a disability and can have a debilitating effect. My last pair of aids lasted eight years. What will happen when my new ones need replacing?

Trying to function day-to-day - even with the best aids - can be very difficult. Some situations are impossible depending on surrounding noise. Every day I find myself having to tell someone that I am not ignorant, but I can't hear what they are saying. Very often they will reply 'eh' jokingly. If only they knew how difficult it can be.

Before Christmas I declined to join the annual get together with my ex-workmates as they tend to visit



25 clinical commissioning groups are planning to cut audiology services

noisy bars. I end up feeling isolated and frustrated at not being able to join in and can't see the point of being there. They just think of me as a party pooper.

My hearing loss started at a very young age but in those days the signs were not picked up. I struggled at school not realising it was due to not being able to hear well and keep

up with lessons. As a result I was shy and insular as a young child. The impact lasts a lifetime.

These signs are picked up today which enables young children to be given special needs. They will still, however, be the deaf adults of the future and if they are denied hearing aids then they are denied the right to a better quality of life.

## Privatisation worsens NHS crisis

The growing crisis in Accident and Emergency (A&E) departments is the result of government policies, as well described in the Socialist (8 January).

Simon Carter gave four key reasons for A&E departments becoming overwhelmed by patients – difficulty getting a GP appointment, shortage of permanent A&E staff (which is partly due to cuts in nurse training but also because working conditions are becoming intolerable so staff leave), cuts to social care and closure of A&E departments.

Another important reason is NHS 111 – the number for less urgent calls than 999. The service was provided

by NHS Direct but privatised in 2013. Care UK is now the biggest provider, running 20 of 45 call centres.

NHS Direct spent an average £13 per call. That was cut to £7-9 a call, by cutting clinically qualified staff. Instead of most call handlers being trained nurses, there are now as few as one nurse for 25 call handlers. To cut the risk to the company of being sued for wrong advice, patients are directed to A&E more often. The publicly owned ambulance and hospital services have to pay out so privately run NHS 111 centres run profitably.

**Jon Dale**

## TTIP it into the Atlantic

**Neil Cafferky**

50,000 people marched in Berlin on Saturday in opposition to the proposed TTIP treaty and new farming technologies.

TTIP (Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership) has been



Big business will gain from TTIP

ringing alarm bells among the public on both sides of the Atlantic, long before secretive negotiations began between the European Union and the USA in February, last year.

Readers will be hard pressed to think of any benefit to ordinary people that comes from secret government negotiations. On the other hand a list of very bad things to emerge from negotiations shrouded in mystery (contracting out torture to dictatorships, cyber spying, IMF 'bail-outs', etc) is both easy to compile and depressingly long.

The official spin from big business backers of TTIP is that the treaty will create prosperity for all. Tory Lord Livingston, minister for trade and investment, has claimed the average family could be £400 a year better off. What few details have emerged however has certainly justified the alarm being raised, mostly by workers' organisations and the environmental movement.

Under the guise of "regulatory convergence" European employment rights and health regulations, already under assault from the Tory/Lib Dem government in the UK, will be levelled down to US standards where much looser rules apply.

Worst of all, TTIP will allow mul-

tinational corporations to sue governments for laws that harm their profits. There have already been examples of this under existing international trade treaties, such as Dutch health insurer Achmea seizing €30 million in foreign assets belonging to the Slovakian government after they renationalised their health insurance scheme.

In effect, governments will be punished for implementing the democratic wishes of their voters if it affects corporation's profits.

There must be clear opposition, including trade union action, to any trade deals that lowers living standards and workers' rights on either side of the Atlantic. Any negotiations must be to bring labour and environmental standards up to the highest level, not a race to the bottom.

However, this will never be the aim when such negotiations are conducted in secret by global corporations and their political allies in government. Only by workers' governments nationalising big business, as part of a democratic socialist plan of production, can genuine economic negotiation and cooperation begin between different parts of the world.



# PCS: Safeguarding its future in the face of vicious Tory attacks

**Rob Williams**  
Socialist Party industrial organiser

As the Tories threaten to increase Britain's draconian anti-trade union laws beyond the general election, thousands of trade union reps across the trade union movement are even now facing huge cuts in their facility time. At national level the PCS civil servants union is already suffering the biggest attack on a trade union since the miners' strike with the abolition of check-off (deduction of subscriptions to the union by the employer from each union member's pay) and the establishment of a scab union.

The PCS must be defended by the wider trade union movement. This is essential preparation for the battle to defend the movement from further attacks. Relying on Labour winning the election to solve the situation would be a huge mistake, as Labour has made no promises to repeal the anti-trade union laws or to reverse these latest attacks.

Faced with a temporary but very sharp drop in income as a result of check-off ending, the PCS NEC has had to make difficult decisions to cut expenditure, including suspending for one year the union's annual elections. Some on the left have condemned this decision, clearly not understanding the urgent need for the PCS to take the necessary measures to safeguard its future in the face of this vicious attack, in order to retain its fighting strength for the next round of the struggle.

## Record

The PCS has a left leadership with a proud record of democratising the union. This record isn't lessened by, on this occasion, being reluctantly forced into extremely difficult, pragmatic, tactical decisions. These are necessary in order to shore up the union for a hopefully short period while it embarks on the mammoth task of trying to recruit up to 60% of its members onto direct debit subs payments.

PCS's NEC wants to throw all the union's resources at the direct debit campaign in what would normally



PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka speaks at Socialism 2014 photo Senan

be the election period, at the same time that management are denying lay reps facility time.

The experience of the NUT showed that such a campaign can recoup lost subs but it took the NUT up to three years. PCS is equally confident of recovering the losses but it doesn't have three years of leeway - it has no option but to implement emergency measures to ensure the ongoing viability of the union. The suspension of the annual elections for one year is one of a raft of options that were explored, including selling the union's HQ.

## Not just financial

The financial attack is only part of the Con-Dem assault on the democratic rights of PCS and its members. If PCS's union density falls in some departments, the government could be emboldened to attempt to de-recognise the union. Facility time, from local reps to the national leadership, has been slashed and in the second biggest group, HMRC, a new staff association, in reality a scab union, has been launched.

Worryingly, Unison has been granted negotiating rights in the civil service in a move that raises the spectre of another new front against PCS, something that the left in Uni-

son should question and oppose. In a very welcome development, some Unison branches have sent messages of support and solidarity to PCS.

## Other unions

Of course, PCS is not alone in facing attacks on its hard-won rights. Many reps from a whole number of unions have had facility time removed. This has been part of an offensive (built on the platform of Thatcher's anti-union laws and maintained by Blair and Brown) by big business and their representatives in parliament and increasingly in local councils controlled by any of the main parties, including Labour. They want to weaken, if not smash the unions and render them powerless in the face of the austerity offensive against the historic gains of the working class.

In the months before Christmas, the Tory Fire Authority in Buckinghamshire outrageously sacked FBU executive member Ricky Matthews and Haringey Labour council is presently victimising NUT branch secretary Julie Davies.

It is clear however, that the government-led attack on PCS is of a qualitatively different scale and is comparable in some respects to that faced by the NUM 30 years ago when Thatcher had it in her sights. It

is also for the same reason. Since the left won a majority in the PCS union's leadership over a decade ago, with Socialist Party members playing a leading role alongside Mark Serwotka, PCS has played a key role in resisting the attacks on jobs, pay and pensions from successive Labour and Con-Dem governments.

## Lever

In particular, during the tenure of the present Tory-led coalition, PCS has acted as a left lever on the other far bigger unions in the public sector to build mass co-ordinated strike action which peaked in the N30 2011 pensions dispute walk-out of two million workers. PCS was central to building this joint action and in attempting to retrieve it after union leaders like Unison's Prentis stalled the strikes.

The government's present assault on the PCS is only possible because of the failure of the TUC leadership to build on the 2011 public sector general strike in order to create a movement that could have defeated the Con-Dems. At every stage the PCS has fought to escalate the co-ordinated strike action against austerity, but it has unfortunately been isolated in doing so.

The left PCS leadership has impeccable democratic credentials.

It was instrumental in introducing and maintaining annual elections and conferences - both were two-yearly when PCS was created by the merger of the CPSA and PTC. Janice Godrich, PCS president and Socialist Party Scotland member, has won 13 consecutive annual elections, unheard of in almost every other union.

Elections every two years, or even three, are the norm in most unions. In 2002 Mark Serwotka and Janice along with left PCS activists and rank and file members had to fight to uphold the democratic decision of members when the right wing was defeated in the union's elections, opening the door to PCS being transformed into a fighting union.

As we near the general election, there will be those union leaders who have a vested interest in playing down the potential that the union movement has had to force back the Con-Dems and their austerity offensive.

## Challenges ahead

Despite the legacy of the last decades on workers' confidence, on a number of occasions and particularly around N30, the unions had the opportunity to win significant and even fundamental victories. PCS, a fifth to a quarter the size of Unison and Unite, played a pivotal role in this resistance and is now being targeted by the government, the author of brutal cuts.

It has no option but to marshal its troops in this extremely challenging situation to ensure defence of its members in this period and the next. The alternative would be a huge defeat both for PCS and the whole working-class movement, opening the door to further offensives on the unions. PCS is up for the fight and the rest of the trade union movement should show them all the support that they need.

All union left activists need to call on their respective leaderships to approach PCS (and other unions under attack) and to discuss individually and collectively on the TUC General Council what solidarity measures are needed.

## Striking **NHS** workers say:

# 'GIVE US PAY WE CAN LIVE ON'

### A London mental health worker

**A**ngry NHS workers are due to take a further 12 hours strike action on 29 January and go out again for a full 24 hours in February. Over the past five years we have seen the pay of NHS bosses soar while the real value of our pay has fallen.

Between 2013 and 2014 nurses have lost an average of £422 off our annual pay and we have seen 10,000 NHS jobs lost. Outside of the NHS we see judges getting an 18% pay rise, senior civil servants get 14% and MPs award themselves a 9% rise.

The unfairness of this really hits home when the Unison union say one third of NHS staff cannot afford to live on their take home pay.

The 1% pay rise is only being offered to a minority of NHS staff. This is in spite of the independent pay review body recommending NHS workers get a 1% pay rise across the board!

Health unions have already given up benefits for health workers including car allowances. We are now hearing that unsociable hours pay is

## Save our health service

**W**e have seen over the recent weeks increasing media coverage on the NHS as the Westminster parties start gearing up for the general election in May.

But has this NHS crisis just suddenly happened? If you ask NHS staff and unions the answer is no!

For years we have pointed out that cuts in A&E departments won't reduce demand, but mean more work for remaining staff. We have argued against cuts in university training budgets. We have argued against privatisation. Treating the NHS like a business doesn't work.

Yet the NHS still has to find the

'efficiency savings' - ie further cuts - demanded by all establishment political parties.

How can the NHS be more efficient when other areas such as social services are also being cut, delaying patients' return into the community?

And now Cameron has the cheek to tell private employers they should increase pay whilst his government won't even speak to NHS staff unions over pay.

We want a pay rise yes, but we also want an end to the cuts, top-down reorganisations and privatisation. That's why we are striking.

**A Buckinghamshire NHS worker**

ending in the NHS too!

But the two previous four hour strikes and work-to-rule days were overwhelmingly supported by health workers. Tory leader David Cameron and his cronies are doing a wonderful job of turning us into a militant workforce!

If you are a health worker and are not in a union yet join one now and get active!

The fightback on NHS pay is escalating and we need all health workers to show this greedy, uncaring government that we have had enough!

**Labour and the NHS - see page 2**



Striking health unions include Unison, Unite, GMB and the Royal College of Midwives photo Paul Mattsson

### 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 £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 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!