

Greece -
not a single
step back!
see page 2

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HSBC tax evasion scandal

TAKE THE WEALTH OFF THE SUPER-RICH!



Matt Gordon

The super-rich live on a different planet to the rest of us. They go on several foreign holidays every quarter. While away, they visit the bank manager. They don't change any money in advance but draw it out while there - in the form of huge bundles of cash in a currency denomination of no use in the country they're in. And all the while using 'Captain Haddock' as an alias... Surely something fishy is going on?

Recent media revelations show that the private banking service offered to HSBC's Swiss account holders is more akin to advisor to a mafia don than to a traditional financial advisor. The leak shows that HSBC's Swiss bank helped clients conceal black accounts and dodge taxes all over the world.

At its peak, the Swiss bank held accounts worth \$120 billion for 106,000 clients in 203 countries - including royals, celebrities, dia-

mond smugglers and business leaders - and helped them conceal illegality with fake account names and untraceable foreign bank notes. Some of these clients have subsequently been convicted of tax-dodging offences and claimed that it was HSBC who told them to do it in the first place!

Although these revelations are being made public now, the information was leaked in 2007 and made available to governments in 2010. Of the 7,000 UK citizens on the list, only one has been prosecuted in five years.

The US, France, Belgium and Argentina started criminal investigations against HSBC last year - but the UK government shows no sign of action against the London-based bank. That may be due to the role played in the Tory Party by HSBC boss at the time - Stephen Green. Green was made a Conservative peer and minister of trade and investment eight months after the allegations were known by the government.

He is quoted by the BBC as saying: "As a

matter of principle I will not comment on the business of HSBC past or present." He has a strange notion of principle, as this 'business' includes the 2011 admission that HSBC laundered money for Mexican drug cartels and the 2014 prosecution for Euribor fixing (inter-bank lending rates).

Labour has called for a public inquiry. But with Tristram Hunt, the shadow education minister, declaring that Labour is "furiously, passionately, aggressively pro-business", there is little chance that it would do anything to curb these excesses.

The billions held by HSBC in Switzerland, and all of the money held in other tax-havens around the globe, should be invested productively to provide jobs, services and a better quality of life for ordinary people.

Karl Marx explained that capitalists are rational misers, they invest money to make more, but misers are capitalists gone mad, they pile up cash out of greed alone.

These revelations show that the whole

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system has gone mad and needs to be replaced. The Socialist Party is 'furiously, passionately, aggressively' in favour of the 99% - not the 1%.

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Not a single step back!

Conflict between Syriza and EU escalates

'This is not negotiation, it's war'

Statement by the Editorial Board of Xekinima
(Greek sister party of the Socialist Party)

Syriza's first days in government has brought back, at last, smiles, optimism and pride to millions of workers in Greece. The new government's public commitments are not small issues. They include the first steps to the restoration of the minimum wage to €750; the abolition of anti-working class legislation; the reinstatement of collective bargaining; the reinstatement of the Christmas bonus for those on a low pension; the ending of mortgage foreclosures; the re-employment of the ERT (public TV broadcaster that was shut down by the previous government) workers; the ending of privatisation; the re-employment of sacked public sector workers; the abolition of the so-called 'evaluation' of public sector workers (by which 15% are automatically liable to layoff); the abolition of hospital charges. For a society that has been through the destructive whirlwind of pro-austerity governments, these announced reforms mark a big change. They are the beginning of the workers' counter offensive, to take back what we have been deprived of in the last few years.

But some appear determined to wipe out the smile from the face of the Greek workers. The decisions of the European Central Bank (ECB) and the stance of the German government made things absolutely clear: they are not willing to make any serious concessions to the Greek government in its effort to ensure the most elementary rights for the Greek working class and the poor.

Smaller amount

What the Greek government is, in reality, asking from the so-called European 'partners' is very small in relation to its initial declarations. The government's effort is focused on ensuring that instead of having about 4% of GDP every year going towards the repayment of the debt, a smaller amount will be given back to the lenders. It aims to do this by extending the payment of the Greek debt and reducing debt rates,

This translates to just three to four billion euros a year. This is a small amount. But it would allow the government to relieve, a little bit, the burden of poverty and despair

on the backs of millions of Greek workers, unemployed and poor. But to even this small concession, Brussels says 'no'.

Too many concessions

The Syriza-led government has made too many concessions already in its effort to strike a deal with the European Union (EU). It left aside the issue of reduction of the debt (cancellation or 'writing off of the biggest part') as well as the issue of an 'all-European conference on the debt' and any reference to the historic precedent of the reduction of the German debt after WW2. Syriza abandoned the issue of renationalising privatised public enterprises. Finance minister Yanis Varoufakis went as far as to claim that all investments are welcomed, such as Cosco (a Chinese company) buying Piraeus port because they "modernise the economy" and "increase competition". Varoufakis said that all of the Greek debt will be paid off "indeed with interest". Ministers have made clear that the government will not touch the running of the major banking conglomerates (even though the banks belong to the state, since it owns the majority of the shares, but their administration is in hands of the old private owners).

Despite all these concessions by Syriza, the ECB and the German ruling class said no. And not just them! Even the alleged 'allies' of Greece,

the French President Hollande and Italian Prime Minister Renzi, aligned themselves behind the ECB and German finance minister Schäuble, with the same ease that they were hugging Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras (below) the previous day declaring their 'understanding' and 'solidarity' with Greek claims! If you have such friends you don't need any enemies!

The Greek government says that negotiations have begun. But what began on the first day of Syriza's electoral victory is not negotiation, it's war!

As predicted repeatedly by Xekinima, Brussels would not be willing to tolerate the binning of austerity in Greece, particularly as this would

We have to raise our voice and boldly say: we won't pay their debt

set an example to the peoples of the rest of Europe, and especially of the south.

Brussels and the ruling classes of Europe are not willing to tolerate the Greek workers' refusal to submit! They demand we continue to pay for decades a debt that we did not create and for which we are not responsible, so that those who actually are responsible continue to make profits and get richer on our backs.

The 'weapon' of the Troika (the

ECB, EU and International Monetary Fund) is, once again, threatening that Greece will be kicked out of the eurozone, ending the funding of the budget deficits and the ending of liquidity from the ECB to the Greek banking system.

Greek exit

This does not mean that they want Greece's exit from the eurozone, as such. They well know that this will have a cost and that it contains serious dangers for the stability (actually the very future) of the eurozone and the European economies. But for them it would represent a much bigger cost if a small nation, like Greece, brings about the complete jettisoning of the austerity policies that they have imposed on the entire EU. Therefore, they want to maintain the eurozone and for Greece to remain in it but under the condition that the Greek people submit to their demands!

In other words, they want us within the eurozone but on our knees. They aim to pressurise the Syriza government to make it accept a new deal in exchange for peanuts.

What should our answer be? The Greek working class, the masses and the social movements must demand from the government: not a single step back!

If Brussels' answer to the Greek government's effort to put an end to the hurricane that is wrecking Greek society is financial asphyxiation, then our answer cannot be any other but this: the euro is not the

'sacred cow' that Brussels thinks it is.

Varoufakis recently stated what everyone in Greece knows: more than 90% of the euros that the Troika give to Greece go back to its creditors. So the answer is simple: if you don't give us the euros that are necessary to pay back the debt, then you won't be getting the payment instalments for it.

We have to raise our voice and boldly say: we won't pay their debt and we will proceed to nationalise the banking system, i.e. put it in the hands of society and the workers; we will nationalise the commanding heights of the economy; we will implement workers' and social control and management, i.e. democracy, and end corruption and theft; we will put an end to the games of the speculators through currency controls and through state control of foreign trade; we will move to the planning of the economy for the needs of workers and the masses; we will build democratic structures in society, through assemblies and rank and file committees, in workplaces and local communities, so that we control the decisions that determine our lives.

Answering threats

This is the answer to the threats of Draghi (president of the ECB) and Schäuble. At the same time, we should seek our real allies! We will not find them at government level (either in the south or elsewhere in Europe) but amongst the working masses and from the rising forces of the left, already seen in a number of European countries and worldwide.

The Syriza leadership believes that it can reform the EU of the bosses and the multinationals, that it can be made democratic and humane through 'negotiations'. They are wrong!

It is an outright reactionary, undemocratic structure, only capable of imposing brutal, anti-working class policies. It has to be thrown into the dustbin of history. This is the task of the working class. And we can achieve it through common struggles of the working class from all over Europe, with the aim of a Europe that will not be controlled by the bosses and the multinationals but by the workers themselves - a Europe united on a voluntary, democratic and equal basis, a socialist Europe.



Is Labour anti-big business?

Stefano Pessina the tax-exile billionaire boss of Boots has rounded on Labour's election tax plans as 'anti-growth and anti-business'. However, **Tessa Warrington** argues that, on the contrary, Labour remains subservient to big business interests, at our expense.

Labour Party leader Ed Miliband responded to Pessina's criticism by saying he "ought to pay his taxes" rather than "lecture people" about voting. While this may be hard to swallow coming from a party whose own MPs were implicated in the Westminster expenses scandal, it has led to media and big business critics accusing Labour as being 'anti-business'.

I can see why Labour would want to be. Considering the role of big business in causing the economic crisis and engineering austerity to protect their profits, a party that based itself on being against such greed and inequality would appeal to the vast struggling majority. But is Labour that party?

Hardly, Mr Pessina and his media pals appear to have forgotten that it was the last Labour government that gave billions of pounds from the public purse to bailout the greedy banks and the rotten, failed capitalist profit system.

Election policies

In their general election demands Miliband and Co have pledged to raise taxes on the rich in order to improve public services. But minuscule tax increases on the huge wealth of the elite won't solve the fundamental problems facing working class people.

Labour has also refused to commit to the renationalisation of any of the privatised utilities, including Royal Mail, despite huge public support.

This is not surprising as Labour is bankrolled to the tune of millions by big business, including the likes of Lord Sainsbury and John Mills

of JML who dismissed Labour's plans to cap energy prices as "just rhetoric". Many Labour MPs and Lords are also connected with private companies, including private healthcare companies.

Ultimately, the Labour party does not oppose austerity because it does not oppose the dictates of big business and the banks.

Instead it has voted overwhelmingly for brutal spending cuts contained in the government's Charter for Budget Responsibility. Labour-controlled local councils have

The dynamic government is getting tough with tax dodgers. It's put some adverts on the number seven bus route in Durrington, West Sussex, warning that the government is watching them. It may have escaped its attention but Stefano Pessina does not take the number seven bus - it certainly doesn't go to Monaco where this 'non-dom' worthy resides. Pessina attacked the mild attempts of Labour to tackle tax avoidance, as stopping tax dodgers will "ruin the country" apparently. I assume he refers to Monaco. The Daily Mail has the cheek to quote him as a 'businessman' when his only enterprise seems to be monkey-business with the tax system!

Derek McMillan

passed on savage cuts to working class people.

The media moguls are only too keen though to scaremonger about the 'radical plans' of Red Ed. Their propaganda conceals the fear of



Red Ed? photo Paul Mattsson

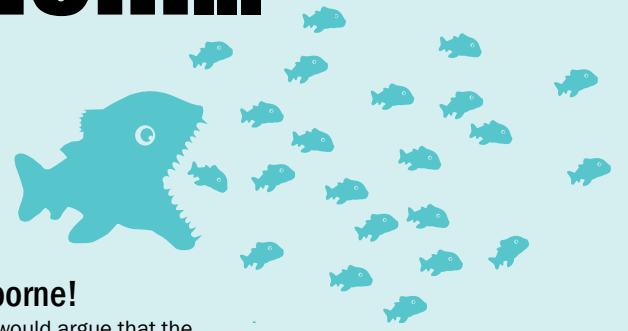
the rich that public anger is building over austerity and inequality. Even small concessions could lead to a new confidence and increasing demand for compensation for the miseries suffered under austerity. But Labour has ignored this potential mass movement and failed to mobilise it.

As Labour is less and less seen as a viable alternative to the Tories, it poses the building of a new mass party of the working class and poor. This situation has already opened up in Greece with the election of anti-austerity party Syriza and with the surge in popularity for Podemos in Spain.

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), in which the Socialist Party plays a prominent role, is hoping to stand 1,000 council candidates and 100 parliamentary candidates in May's elections, a real alternative to the austerity status-quo (see pages 4&5).

Opposing attacks on the working class and poor should be a principle, not a flimsy election promise. Labour convinces fewer people each day, people who are ready to be won to a socialist programme and fight for a genuine alternative to the dictatorship of big business.

Them...



Vote Osborne!

Only cynics would argue that the government's extension of its pensioner bond scheme is a blatant attempt to buy the votes of the over 65s!

The average investor will make a reported £600 profit but who is actually paying for the above market rate of 4% interest payment for savers? This largesse will be funded by further cuts to public services and to low income households receiving benefits.

economic recovery by giving them a pay rise. Aside from the fact that the economy remains in the sick ward, big hearted Dave has been accused of being a tad hypocritical by wanting to extend public sector workers' pay freezes until 2020.

Paying the piper

Several hundred super-rich people gathered at a posh Mayfair hotel last week to wine and dine with government ministers at the annual Tory fundraising bash. The assembled coterie of hedge fund managers and assorted billionaires paid up to £15,000 each to sit alongside a cabinet minister.

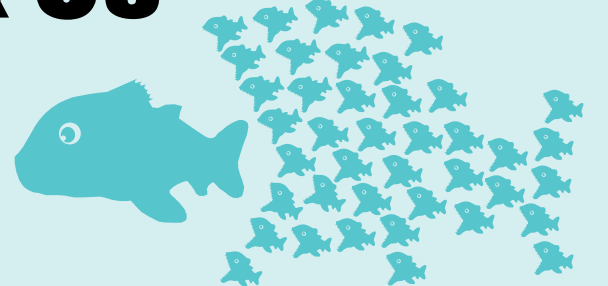
Readers may ask if this dinner and dance was all about cementing the relationship between finance capital and the Tory party. Of the 59 wealthiest hedge fund managers in the UK, 27 have made a combined £19 million in donations to Tory funds - £10 million alone since the 2010 election. In 2013 the government abolished stamp duty tax on investment funds amounting to a £145 million 'hedge fund tax cut'.

£26.7 billion a year that private landlords have gained from the taxpayer, equal to £1,011 each for the country's 26.4 million households

Caring, sharing Dave

PM David Cameron implored business leaders this week to allow their staff to benefit from the UK's

...& Us



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Welfare cuts kill!

Simon Carter

Last summer a retired gardener from Newham, east London, killed himself. 66 year old Malcolm Burge had been driven to this desperate act because the government had slashed his housing benefit in January 2013, leaving him in his own words: "Depressed, stressed and suicidal".

To compound his difficulties Newham council were relentlessly pursuing an £800 overpayment caused by its bureaucratic bungling.

Mr Burge wrote letters to the Labour council pleading for help but these were ignored. Instead they insisted on the repayment even though he couldn't afford it.

In a final plea to the council Mr Burge wrote: "I cannot remember

the last time I had £800. I am not trying to live, I am trying to survive."

According to the coroner, the council "didn't fully address Mr Burge's queries and their tone was not appropriate. It seems clear that he was a man who needed help and was in distress. Unfortunately, Newham borough council were unable to give it to him."

In response the council blithely replied: "We are sorry if this contributed to his death in any way."

● In December 2014 the Department for Work and Pensions admitted, after anti-cuts campaigners submitted a freedom of information request, that it had carried out internal reviews into 60 suicides resulting from benefit cuts since February 2012. Campaigners believe this figure is just the tip of a large iceberg of such cases.



photo Becky Davis

What we saw & heard

Political vendetta against water charges activists... 'We will not be moved'

Paul Murphy, the socialist TD (MP) for Dublin South West, was subjected to a dawn arrest by Gardai (police) last Monday, 9 February. It was a blatant political vendetta by the Fine Gael/Labour government against anti-austerity activists.

This terror tactic against Paul was also meted out to fellow Anti Austerity Alliance councillors and Socialist Party members Kieran Mahon and Mick Murphy and to local anti-austerity campaigner Scott Masterson. The raids and arrests follow the peaceful sit-down protest in Tallaght, south west Dublin, last November, against the government's hated and iniquitous water charges, which has led to a mass non-payment, civil disobedience campaign.

As a result of the street sit-down Tanaiste (deputy prime minister) Joan Burton, who was at a local community centre in Jobstown, was delayed leaving (the protest can be viewed on youtube). Incredibly the authorities are considering prosecuting Paul and his comrades for 'aggravated kidnapping'!

Speaking on RTE radio a defiant Paul said: "Let them charge us, let them have a jury of our peers because we would be found not



Mick Murphy, Paul Murphy and Joe Higgins

guilty, unquestionably." Socialist Party TD Joe Higgins described the arrests as "political policing". Fellow Socialist party TD Ruth Coppinger said: "This will not deter the people of Tallaght, Dublin South West or around the country from continuing to protest but in particular to make sure that the bills coming out in April will be met with mass non-payment. The water charges will be defeated."

All four have now been released. Police have sent a file to the DPP. **Stop press:** On 10 February police arrested another four anti-water charge protesters from Tallaght, including a 16 year old.

● Paul Murphy interviewed on newstalk independent radio station - <http://bit.ly/1M8YKmd>

'TUSC has my values and principles'

Warrington rebel councillor Kevin Bennett speaks to the Socialist

Warrington anti-cuts councillor **Kevin Bennett** has left the Labour Party to become a Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) representative.

The local Warrington Guardian paper, under the headline 'Enough is enough', reported how Kevin reached the end of the road in trying to fight austerity as part of the Labour Party. Kevin was indefinitely suspended by the council Labour group in April 2013 after voting against the Labour-led council's cuts budget. A 70-strong lobby of trade unionists and community campaigners took place outside the suspension meeting in support of Kevin's courageous stand. Hugh Caffrey interviewed Kevin about his move to TUSC.

What made you to leave the Labour Party?

It was after five years of intimidation, bullying, humiliation in some respects, with two of those years suspended from the Labour group of councillors; basically because I wanted to put my point of view across within it.

On many occasions I was stopped from doing this, so ultimately I voted against the budget cuts. Obviously I didn't agree with the cuts but part of the reason was I couldn't have an input through the Labour group.

I was dragged into the whips' office on several occasions, saying I shouldn't be sending emails to them, so I had no alternative but to do what I did.

You'll now be sitting as a TUSC councillor through until May 2016, what drew you to TUSC?

I think it was a natural progression. When I got suspended, it opened

doors to go round the north-west speaking to anti-cuts groups, socialists, that kind of thing.

It made me think: 'Well, I feel more comfortable here than I do anywhere, they're speaking my language, they've got my values and principles.'

I met some good comrades along the way, and I've kept in touch with those throughout my suspension. I think it's always been at the back of my mind that that's where I wanted to go, but I wanted to be thrown out of the Labour group and party kicking and screaming.

I think I fought within Labour for as long as I could. I did as much as I could to stay but ultimately, because of my views, they were trying to push me out anyway.

It came to a head, and TUSC was the obvious way to go because of the policies which I agree with. I was welcomed with open arms. I wasn't asked to do or say things, or not to



Kevin Bennett speaking at the 2015 TUSC conference photo Senan

say things, they accepted me as I am. I feel like I've come home.

You're running on behalf of TUSC in the Warrington South parliamentary seat at the general election. Tell us a bit about what you've got in mind for the campaign.

I'm looking to raise the profile of TUSC within Warrington South. We've already got Warrington Against the Cuts and Warrington Trades Council here, so I'm hoping to build on that.

People have started contacting me, wishing me well, so hopefully we'll get more activists together to go out leafleting and give people an alternative to the old parties where

"I think I fought within Labour for as long as I could. I did as much as I could to stay but ultimately, because of my views, they were trying to push me out anyway"

people can't see a difference.

Democracy is about choice and that's what I want to give people. So hopefully the group will build, we're holding public meetings and inviting people along who've wished me good luck and expressed an interest.

I am who I am. My background is the union, I come from a council estate, I will never sell out. I'm not a careerist. I think people deserve that choice.

TUSC public meeting

Wednesday 18 February, 7pm
The King's Head pub, 40 Winwick Street, Warrington, Cheshire WA2 7TU, opposite Central Station

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is an electoral alliance that stands candidates against all cuts and privatisation. In May 2015 it aims to stand 100 parliamentary and 1,000 council candidates.

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



2015 election appeal: Back the real opposition to brutal austerity

Scott Jones

Llanelli TUSC prospective parliamentary candidate

In the face of brutal austerity from the Con-Dem government in Westminster, passed on by a Labour assembly government and Labour councils in Wales, a record-breaking eight Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidates are standing in Wales for the general election this year.

At the Socialist Party Wales annual conference in Cardiff, a total of £4,750 was pledged from just 35 attendees to launch its election appeal, as part of the Socialist Party's effort to raise £50,000 to fund election campaigning across England and Wales.

This fantastic achievement included £300 from a care worker and sums of £40 from two students. A massive £500 was pledged by an NHS worker despite years of pay freezes or below inflation rises. Another £500 was donated by someone who received the sum as a Christmas bonus.

Education

Swansea West TUSC candidate Ronnie Job works for a local college and donated £100: "Cuts in Wales have passed through the hands of every party in the Senedd (Wales Assembly). Lacking an outright majority, Labour has needed Plaid Cymru and the Welsh Liberal Democrats to pass their cuts budget.

"These cuts are devastating edu-

cation, the NHS and local authority services. That's why TUSC needs to give as many people in Wales as possible the chance to vote for a socialist, no cuts alternative."

Amy, a low-waged fast food worker, has pledged £40 "to scrap zero-hour contracts". Rob Owen, secretary of Llanelli Trades Council has pledged £50 "to fight for £10 an hour minimum wage".

As a TUSC candidate myself, I put my money where my mouth is and donated too.

I work for a major supermarket that is attacking its workers left, right and centre and without a political party that represents working people we are fighting with one hand tied behind our back. TUSC unashamedly supports trade unions and workers in struggle.



Campaigning against cuts in Cardiff photo Becky Davis

Thanks also to Roger Bradley and Anne McAreavey who have to donated £250, Mark Evans £30, Roxanna Whitemoor £100, Pete McNally £250, Linda Thraves £250, Alec Thraves £100, Dave Salt £20, and John Vasey £200.

You can donate at 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 mark your donation "election appeal 2015".

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“I’ve taken off the shackles” of the Labour Party

Ex-Labour councillor applies to stand for TUSC

Kingsley Abrams is a former Labour councillor who was suspended from Lambeth Labour group for opposing cuts. He has now applied to stand for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) in Bermondsey and Old Southwark in May’s general election. Kingsley spoke to the Socialist.

Why have you resigned from the Labour Party?

Across the country, ordinary hard-working people are struggling in this period of austerity. Nurses, firefighters, council workers, office workers - they did not cause the banking crisis. They did not make huge profits from the cheap money that was flowing around ten years ago. Yet ordinary people have borne the brunt of the cuts that government - both national and local - has inflicted upon them.

It has become increasingly clear that Labour has no narrative that will differentiate it from the Tories - the same local government settlement, the same spending caps and limits, the same rhetoric on ‘unwelcome immigrants’. This is not a party that countenances an alternative to austerity even though voters in other European countries are keen to give it a try.

Labour also appears indifferent to

the unfairness of many of the current anti-union laws and the Tories’ proposals for several more.

Only 0.6% of Labour’s parliamentary candidates are from the African-Caribbean communities. The fact is that the NEC has not put a single African-Caribbean candidate with any previous elected experience on a single NEC shortlist for the past 15 years.

I am fervently anti-austerity. But it has become increasingly clear that these policies cannot be articulated in the current Labour Party

I am fervently anti-austerity. But it has become increasingly clear that these policies cannot be articulated in the current Labour Party. I haven’t given up. I intend to continue fighting austerity. I have just taken off the shackles.

Why did you decide to stand for TUSC?

Of all of the groups to the left of the Labour Party, TUSC, which is a coalition of trade unionists, community



Kingsley has applied to stand in Bermondsey and Old Southwark

campaigners and socialists, offers the best opportunity to articulate my anti-austerity politics. We have a responsibility to inspire the next generation into a lifetime of anti-austerity, left-wing politics.

Until recently you were on Unite the Union’s National Executive and hoped to be able to change the Labour Party through Unite’s political strategy of recruiting

trade unionists to the party and campaigning for trade union-backed candidates. What happened to that plan?

The strategy is not working because Unite members cannot see any difference between Labour and the Tories on austerity. Until Labour shifts to the left and opposes the cuts, Unite members will refuse to join the Labour Party in any significant numbers.

What can we do to help your campaign in Bermondsey and Old Southwark?

We will be setting up a campaign headquarters in the constituency, building on the community work already started by Southwark TUSC. We will need help with getting the leaflets out. Also with telephone and door to door canvassing. I can be contacted on: 07932 447 763; email: kingsleyabrams@gmail.com; twitter: @kingsleyabrams

A working class party needed

Paula Mitchell
Socialist Party Executive Committee

The RMT’s national council of executives recently gave the union’s official backing to a first tranche of TUSC candidates standing in May’s general election. The decision to endorse Tony Mulhearn, Dave Walsh, Ted Woodley, Paul Reilly and Glen Hart means that these candidates can now receive financial support from RMT branches.

At the same time, in a further sign of the fracturing of British politics, RMT president Peter Pinkney has announced that he is standing for the Green Party in Redcar in the general election.

The pattern of two-party politics in Britain is breaking up. Anger at austerity and declining living standards is increasing the distrust of all capitalist politicians. The betrayals of Labour in particular, carrying out Tory cuts in councils and pledging further austerity in government, mean that while many working class people will not vote at all, others are looking at alternatives.

The Scottish referendum and the Greek elections show that when people see a way of expressing their anger they grasp it. But the route to creating a viable working class-based alternative will not be straightforward. Working class people, including trade unionists, will test out different ideas and options.

It was a big step forward when the



Late RMT general secretary Bob Crow was a founding member of TUSC photo Paul Mattsson

late Bob Crow, RMT general secretary, co-founded TUSC in 2010. But even Bob spoke at the Green Party conference in 2003 and voted Green in 2004.

However, he then drew the conclusion that it was necessary to create an explicitly working class, trade union orientated banner under which elections could be contested. TUSC has been officially supported by the RMT since 2012 and this was unanimously confirmed at the union’s AGM last year.

Aware of the potential for a mass anti-austerity force to develop, the millionaire press has deliberately built up ‘safe’ alternatives. In the last couple of years the channel of choice has been UkIP - increasingly the

Green Party is also being promoted.

It is no accident that when the previous RMT president Alex Gordon stood for TUSC in 2012, or when the assistant general secretary of the union and 53 other members of the RMT stood 2014, it was met with a wall of media silence.

Unlike the Green Party, in which the RMT has no formal role, the union is officially represented on the TUSC committee with a veto over policies and candidates. The Socialist Party looks forward to continuing to work with the RMT on the TUSC committee and with the many RMT members who are standing as TUSC candidates this May.

For more on the Greens see the Socialist issue 841

Socialism TODAY

The Socialist Party’s magazine
The February issue includes:

- **Is the Green Party a real alternative?**

The Green Party is picking up support consistently in opinion polls. This has been reflected in an increase in the party’s membership. Do the Greens really represent an alternative to the establishment parties?
Claire Laker-Mansfield investigates.

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Campaign saves Bury Sure Start centres

Labour established Sure Start centres to provide education and health services for pre-school children. Now Labour councils are using government cuts as an excuse to close them down! Campaigners in Bury have won a victory in saving two centres. But another six are still slated for closure. **Paul Gerrard** is a member of the local National Union of Teachers branch, which backs the campaign. He spoke to **Liz Wheatley**, an NHS nurse and Sure Start parent involved in organising it.

How does it feel to have saved your centre?

Fabulous to have achieved a partial victory - by retaining the buildings previously destined for tendering to private childcare providers. However, we are concerned the two centres saved have been allocated

too little funds, staff and attention for them to continue to provide services to a high standard.

How has the council handled campaigners?

We've had a constant battle with them to make their 'consultation'

more transparent and accessible to parents, and this has created an 'us-and-them' attitude in elected members and senior officers. To present a petition of some 3,000-plus signatures, and have not one Labour councillor support it, was quite frankly shocking.

As an NHS worker, do you feel confident in any of the major parties to defend the NHS?

No. The NHS requires a true commitment to not only retain its ethos - free healthcare for all - but to ensure it delivers a service that is of high quality, safe, effective and world leading. Not one party has given me any confidence that our NHS, something we should all be proud of, will even be prioritised.

What do you think of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC - see page 5)?

It's great to see TUSC support-

ers taking action against evidently poor parliamentary representation and standing for their own areas in the next general election. A voice for local campaigners and real representation of the community is needed - we cannot continue fighting central government on our own.

Bringing together activists and providing a platform to represent local people with real commitment to change is desperately needed. I look forward to seeing local TUSC candidates increase in Greater Manchester over the coming months.

Farage humiliated by protesters

Alistair Tice

Socialist Party Yorkshire region

Nigel Farage was smuggled to safety by minders after TUSC supporters and others picketed Ukip's Rotherham office.

We heard Farage was coming to launch Ukip's Rotherham election campaign. It seemed very cynical to do so literally a day after the child sexual exploitation scandal had blown up in the media again.

So TUSC supporters joined the quickly called demonstration to

protest against the 'more Tory than the Tories' party. Ukip promotes anti-immigrant feeling and division while planning to carry out even more cuts in public spending.

Disgusted

People in Rotherham are disgusted by the cover-up and inaction of the council and police over child sex abuse. But they are also fed up with far-right groups trying to exploit it for their own racist ends.

TUSC will be standing candidates in Rotherham in the local and



general elections in May. We have long campaigned against the rotten Labour council, which has made severe cuts to children's and other support services. We're glad to see the back of their cabinet, but are opposed to Eric Pickles sending in unelected Tory commissioners to run

the town.

TUSC stands for justice and support for victims, and a united struggle against austerity cuts that are impoverishing towns like Rotherham.

There were maybe 30 protesters on the demo, and it seemed at least as many press and media people.

Farage was conducting interviews inside the office. After over two hours waiting for him to appear, he was snuck into a 4x4 which sped off.

Only later did we hear he had cancelled a planned public appearance. Obviously not so much the 'man of the people' he likes to make out.

Give tax avoidance the Boots!

Michael Barker

Leicester Socialist Party

Over £6 million has been stolen from the people of Leicester by Boots since 2007. This shocking sum was calculated from national figures showing the chemist failed to pay £1.2 billion of tax.

Campaigners working with TUSC protested outside Boots' main store in Leicester on 7 February. The city's TUSC councillors recently had the council sign up to the national campaign "Towns Against Tax Dodging".

Cllr Wayne Naylor, a member of TUSC-affiliated Leicester Independent Councillors Against Cuts, said: "There is no reason why the super-rich should refuse to pay their tax.



"As Boots gets more than 40% of its UK revenue from the taxpayer, through NHS prescription dispensing and wholesale services, it is particularly troubling that the government continues to tell us there is no money left to fund the NHS."

TUSC supporters also sent solidarity to thousands of Boots employees fighting to have their union,

the Pharmacists' Defence Association, recognised by bullying management. Bosses are using outdated employment law to block the move and drain the union's resources.

TUSC is the only group standing in May's elections that stands for all workers' right to collective bargaining, and for making the bosses pay all their tax!

Pensioner 'bundled off' by Unison bureaucrats

Elaine Brunskill

Socialist Party Northern region

Within seconds of criticising the Labour council at an anti-cuts rally, one Gateshead pensioner was bundled off stage by Unison bureaucrats!

Around 200 marched against Labour proposals to axe services in Gateshead on 7 February. Sidney, a pensioner who is fighting the closure of his local library, spoke at the rally afterwards.

He got the best round of applause

when he commented that a "Labour-controlled council shouldn't be entertaining any of these cuts." He was escorted off so as not to spoil a rally more akin to a Labour love-in.

Not funny

Three Labour MPs spoke, including Dave Anderson. The Blyth MP started by quipping: "There's more people out here than work in there now." Not funny when you consider 1,600 jobs have already been cut by Gateshead's councillors.

One campaigner said: "If they

think they can run our library with volunteers they are mistaken. People from Felling aren't going to stand by and watch Beryl (the librarian) being put on the dole!"

Gateshead TUSC chants went down well. "Labour council get off your knees: set a budget for our needs! Save our libraries, save our books: we don't want Labour cuts!"

Because TUSC was refused a speaker at the rally we held a fringe meeting afterwards. At the meeting an extra two people agreed to stand as TUSC candidates in the forthcoming local elections - result!

Campaigns news in brief

East Mids conference

Socialist Party members held their annual regional conference on 31 January. We discussed events in Greece and Britain's coming election, as well as women's, young people's and workplace campaign work. New, young members were elected to our regional committee. We added pledges of £280 to the £2,700 already paid towards the national election appeal (see page 5).

Becci Heagney

Swansea TUSC

Swansea TUSC held a 'street ballot' of 188 people on 7 February. The poll returned a 0% result for "Labour councillors making Tory cuts", as compared to 100% for "representatives who will fight the cuts".

Ronnie Job

Nottingham eviction

Almost 300 people gathered on an estate near Nottingham to prevent the eviction of a local family on 23 January. Many travelled across the country to support their dispute with Bradford and Bingley over whether the mortgage had been paid. Protesters crowded the cul-

de-sac's corner to stop bailiffs getting in. But as bailiffs had parked further in, they actually got trapped by the crowd!

Geraint Thomas

Liverpool TUSC

The Church of England has named five Liverpool neighbourhoods as among the country's most deprived. Labour business spokesman Chuka Umunna has described Mayor Joe Anderson as "enterprising" and "creative". In what - bankrolling the rich while butchering the services of the needy? In any case Chuka is acting as a great recruiting sergeant for TUSC.

Tony Mulhearn

Socialist Students

Socialist Students is disgusted that Swansea University gave a platform to Tommy Robinson, ex-leader of the far-right English Defence League. We call on students and our student union to loudly condemn the decision to invite him onto campus. We call on the student union to organise an anti-racism protest on campus to show that far-right and racist ideas are not welcome here. If they won't, Swansea Socialist Students will.

Ben Golightly

SOCIALIST PARTY FIGHTING FUND

	£ received	£ target	January to March 2015				Deadline 6 April 2015
North West	743	1,200	█	█	█	█	62%
West Midlands	746	2,100	█	█	█	█	36%
Yorkshire	967	2,900	█	█	█	█	33%
Eastern	298	1,200	█	█	█	█	25%
Northern	143	600	█	█	█	█	24%
Wales	526	2,300	█	█	█	█	23%
East Midlands	349	1,600	█	█	█	█	22%
Southern	229	1,200	█	█	█	█	19%
South East	125	750	█	█	█	█	17%
South West	217	1,400	█	█	█	█	15%
London	516	6,100	█	█	█	█	8%
England and Wales	166	3,650	█	█	█	█	5%
TOTAL	5,023	25,000	█	█	█	█	20%

Is Podemos the Spanish Syriza?

Danny Byrne
Committee for a Workers' International

The election of a Syriza-led government in Greece has encouraged anti-austerity left forces throughout crisis-ravaged Europe and beyond. Nowhere is this more the case than in Spain, where a force widely seen as the 'Spanish Syriza', Podemos, is going from strength to strength.

Opinion polls repeatedly put Podemos in first or second place with over 20% support, threatening the survival of the Spanish two-party system. Over 100,000 people filled the streets of Madrid in Podemos' 'march for change' on 31 January. In what will be a year of many elections in the Spanish state, it will certainly be a force to be reckoned with.

In a similar way to Syriza, Podemos has been identified as a tool to end austerity

Podemos plans that these elections will see its vote inexorably rise, to the point of taking power. While the possibility of an overall majority, at least at this stage, seems very slim, Spain's two main capitalist parties - conservative PP and ex-social democrat PSOE - could be forced into a 'grand coalition' to put a brake on Podemos' advance. Such a move would only accelerate the death spiral of these two parties, especially PSOE.

In a similar way to Syriza, Podemos has been identified in the minds of millions as a potential tool to end Spain's austerity nightmare and reclaim a dignified life, following six years of degradation. But can it deliver?

Podemos featured heavily in the closing rally of Syriza's electoral

campaign, with its leader Pablo Iglesias joining Alexis Tsipras in giving the final keynote speech to chants of "Syriza, Podemos, Venceremos" ('We will win' in Spanish). However, while Syriza arose as an alliance of left groups, Podemos emerged as a new movement, separate from the traditional left parties.

In many ways Podemos' success is a product of the failure of the traditional organisations of the left and the workers' movement. The leaderships of these organisations - especially the United Left (IU) and the main trade unions - failed to recognise that the crisis had ushered in a new period of intense class struggle and radical change. They continued with the age-old failed policies of collaboration and deals with the system and the bosses' parties.

So to the millions struggling against austerity - especially those hailing from the Indignados occupations movement - the traditional left and the unions seemed more like a part of the system than a force leading the fight against it.

Podemos emerged as an alternative with an anti-austerity left agenda, and a programme to repudiate illegitimate debt and undo austerity. It employed much of the phraseology and demands of the Indignados' and other social movements, and had no 'baggage' of having managed the system in the past, which made it attractive to a new generation.

'The people'

Based around Pablo Iglesias and other left-wing academics, it emphasised the existence of 'la casta' - a corrupt political caste of capitalist politicians. This tapped into a mass mood of rejection of politicians, which was expressed by the Indignados in an anti-party mood. Podemos claimed to represent the entry of 'the people' into politics, over the heads of the discredited politicians.

Its leaders put it forward not as a party in the traditional sense, but a 'participative space' through which



Over 100,000 filled the centre of Madrid for Podemos' recent 'march for change'

the people of Spain can get their political voice heard as a whole. Its main organisational foundation is not a network of branches or rank-and-file committees, but the 'citizen's assembly' open to all Spanish citizens which elects the leadership of Podemos through open primaries on the internet. In the future it will vote in online consultations on some important policy questions. More than 300,000 people have signed up to participate.

This way of operating, though cloaked in democratic phraseology, assigns a passive role to the mass of people

This means that "Podemos is the people" according to its leaders. However, there are some contradictions. Are there not people who, instead of wanting to end austerity, support it? There are certainly people who benefit from it - the big bankers and shareholders to whom the odious public debt is paid, for example.

It is a crucial necessity for the anti-austerity movement to understand that the people needing a political voice are working people, the unemployed, youth, pensioners, etc. In other words, the wider working class whose interests are up against those of another 'people' - the super-rich capitalist class.

Also, for socialists, involving working class people in politics means getting them active in democratic structures which discuss, debate and decide on the policy and strategy of the movement. This means more than simply an occasional click in an online election or referendum.

Podemos does have hundreds of 'circles', or branches, around the country but these have only a token role in its functioning. The absence of mass circles in neighbourhoods and workplaces which serve as building blocks of Podemos means that in practice it operates in a very top-down manner. It has a narrow leadership - based around general secretary Iglesias - which decides on everything.

Democracy?

This way of operating, though cloaked in democratic phraseology, assigns a passive role to the mass of people, and is an obstacle to the building of a really mass democratic political force for the Spanish working class.

Tens of thousands turned out on the streets for the 'march for change' only to be sent home afterwards and told to vote for Podemos when the time comes! Such a mobilisation should have served as a starting point for a sustained mass movement of protests and strikes to bring down the government and end austerity. A potential electoral victory would be one part of this.

This is not an academic question, given the clash with big business and the Troika that the necessary measures would provoke (as shown by Greece). Any left government can only apply the policies which it can also defend in the streets and workplaces. The mobilisation and self-organisation of working people is valuable preparation for such an eventuality.

Podemos' leaders, in a way mirroring those of Syriza, have also moved towards the right as their support has grown. Podemos' initial programme was a radical left-wing one, which promised a universal decent income for all, the right to

The Committee for a Workers' International

The Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) is the socialist international organisation to which the Socialist Party is affiliated.

The CWI is organised in 45 countries and works to unite the working class and oppressed peoples against global capitalism and to fight for a socialist world. For more details including CWI publications write to: CWI, PO Box 3688, London E11 1YE. email cwi@worldsoc.co.uk

www.socialistworld.net

housing and the nationalisation of the strategic sectors of the economy. However, in recent months its leaders have moderated their rhetoric, dropping key promises such as a retirement age of 60, and the non-payment of the debt, in the name of 'realism' and an international 'context' which makes such plans impossible.

It is true that there is a 'context' which acts against the measures necessary to end the misery of workers. This context is the continued domination of the multinational companies and bankers, whose markets and institutions (both national and European) will work against any government which tries to govern in favour of the people. However, instead of accepting this and adapting the programme to what is possible within it, the mass movements of the working class against austerity need to fight to transform this context!

Socialist policies

Only the organisation and mobilisation of the working class and a left government with a revolutionary socialist policy to replace the dictatorship of the markets with workers' democracy based on public democratic ownership of wealth can face up to this task. Such a government could link up with the working class of Greece, Ireland, Portugal and the whole of Europe and build a socialist federation from the ashes of the capitalist EU.

Socialismo Revolucionario, the Socialist Party's sister organisation in Spain, fights to organise a revolutionary pole of the left, workers' and social movements around the defence of such a strategy.



Pablo Iglesias (centre) and other leading Podemos figures

National Gallery workers march down Whitehall



photo Paul Mattsson

Ian Pattison

On Thursday 5 February, 100 staff at the National Gallery and their supporters marched down Whitehall in from their workplace to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, handing in a petition almost 50,000 strong.

The PCS union members were

on strike for five days at the central London gallery from 3 February because the majority of their jobs are threatened with privatisation.

Many of the workers on strike are paid below the London Living Wage of £9.15 an hour.

Immediately before the strike was set to begin, PCS union rep Candy Unwin was suspended from her job. In just a few short days, 6,000 peo-

ple signed a petition demanding her immediate reinstatement.

Before we set off to march, several strikers entered a National Gallery building where the Board of Trustees was meeting. A representative of billionaire Mark Getty, the board's chief executive, was forced to accept a copy of the petition.

Chris Baugh, PCS assistant general secretary, spoke at the strikers' rally outside, giving the union's full support to the striking workers and calling on the entire trade union movement to back them against victimisation. Angry staff were clear that they would strike again and again if privatisation is not stopped.

- Sign the online petition at you.38degrees.org.uk/petitions/no-privatisation-at-national-gallery
- Email messages of protest to mark.getty@ng-london.org.uk

Defend the PCS: Solidarity to defeat union-busting

The Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) is under sustained attack by the government, which wants to bankrupt the union and destroy its capacity to defend its members against cuts and privatisation. See www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/20080 for a new article by John McNally, PCS national vice-president (writing in a personal capacity), about this ongoing onslaught. John explains the serious nature of the battle the PCS has been forced into, and takes up those in the trade union movement – at leadership level and some left groups – who are failing to offer the necessary solidarity.

Info Commissioner staff walk out

Matt Kilsby

On Tuesday 3 February PCS union members at the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) in Wilmslow, Cheshire, began a two day strike over pay.

The dispute has been sparked by three senior executives awarding themselves an average 11% increase at the same time as denying the rest of the staff a decent pay rise.

Workers at the ICO monitor and enforce rights on information access, having been set up in 1984.

One striking worker told me: "It is grossly unfair that management can award themselves whacking great pay rises at the same time as our pay has stagnated over the last few years. Comparatively, we are some of the poorest paid workers in the civil service.

"Meanwhile, we're told that the economy is recovering and the richest in society are getting richer and richer. Well, we're on strike - in George Osborne's constituency - to demand our fair share!"

Should the two day strike fail to force management back to the negotiating table, the PCS branch will be looking to escalate the action.

- Messages of support should be sent to icobranchpcs@gmail.com



photo Matt Kilsby

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Lewisham: support anti-academy dispute

Lewisham NUT members

On 12 February National Union of Teachers members are due to strike at four Lewisham schools in south London, Prendergast Hilly Fields, Prendergast Vale, Ladywell Fields and Sedgell, to stop them becoming academies.

A fifth school, Bonus Pastor, has abandoned its academy plan. Now for the other four!

The government says academies are given extra 'freedoms'. That includes being 'free' to break from national pay and conditions.

Staff in many academies report that conditions and morale have got worse. That's bad for teachers - and bad for education too.

Instead of being part of one democratically accountable local au-

thority, schools and staff are divided into different employers.

There's no evidence that academies improve education. That's not an NUT claim - it's what a committee of MPs has just concluded!

Resist the spread

Up to now, Lewisham has largely resisted the spread of academies that has taken hold in some boroughs. Shouldn't it stay that way?

This government introduced new rules that allow schools to convert into academies very quickly and without having to properly listen to the views of staff and parents. Once converted, you can't change back.

If politicians and governors are so confident that academies are the answer, why not put the decision to a full ballot of parents?

Wales FE workers accept 1% offer

A Wales FE worker

In a consultative ballot, Unison members in Wales further education (FE) colleges have voted to accept a 1% annual pay award.

This is obviously not enough to halt the continued erosion of our wages, let alone begin to reverse the 18% drop in our real incomes that Unison estimates has taken place since 2008. But we wouldn't have received a penny if members in Unison and teaching unions hadn't overwhelmingly decided on action over the employers' proposal to offer no cost of living rise this year.

The advice from Unison over the

consultation was the ubiquitous: "this is the best that can be achieved through negotiation". But the offer came about in response to the threat of industrial action, not negotiation. 30% of our members rejected the 1% offer, showing that a growing number of members are unwilling to accept any further decline in incomes.

We are now facing a fight for jobs and the very future of further education in Wales, given the shocking funding settlement from the Welsh Government. Some colleges are reporting funding cuts of over 10% in this year alone. Labour ministers in Cardiff are presiding over the decimation of further education in Wales.

Unite: elect fighting socialist reps

Socialist Party member Suzanne Muna is standing to represent London and Eastern region on the Unite union executive.

Suzanne has been backed by the union's United Left (UL) for the byelection and is now appealing for branch nominations.

Suzanne is secretary of LE1111 housing workers' branch, which has been involved in several industrial disputes as housing organisations attempt to attack terms and conditions. This has included Suzanne's own employer the Homes and Communities Agency, One Housing Group and the significant victory for all workers at St Mungo's Broadway in the autumn.

Suzanne has been also involved

in drafting a set of workplace standards for the union to defend and fight for in the Not for Profit Sector.

The election of Suzanne would strengthen Unite in both current and future battles. UL is also backing Jasmin Suraya to represent the union's health section on the executive.

Branches must nominate at meetings up to 28 February, with nominations to be received by noon on 6 March.

Suzanne's details for London and Eastern branches are: Unite housing workers' branch LE1111, membership number 15692878, contact: suz.muna.unite@gmail.com Jasmin's details for health branches are membership number 20126331, branch LE0042M.

M25 strike date set

M25 maintenance, emergency and incident support workers working for Connect Plus Services are due to strike on 16 February over pay, sick pay and union recognition.

The Unite members plan to strike



on every Monday following the first walkout until the dispute is resolved.

More about the background to the dispute can be read in issue 828 of the Socialist or at www.socialistparty.org.uk/issue/828/19455

Remember the dead – fight for the living

The Tebay disaster in Cumbria on 15 February 2004 killed RMT members Gary Tindall, Colin Buckley, Darren Burgess and Chris Waters. Seven more were injured. RMT members are still having to campaign for secondary protection for workers on or about the rail lines.

Eleventh Tebay rally for workers' secondary on track protection
Sunday 15 February, 12noon, Tebay Memorial Stone, by the A685
A buffet will follow at Tebay Sports, Social and Railway Club, Church Street, Tebay, Penrith CA10 3SP

The Azure Card: isolation and stigmatisation of asylum seekers

Andrew Walton

The 'Azure Card' is given to asylum seekers who are under Section 4 - awaiting a result on their claim for asylum. Asylum seekers live on a measly £36.62 a week and the card limits where you can go to for food and other essentials.

They do not have access to other benefits and are not legally allowed to work. The voucher scheme was first used in England in 1999 and is currently frozen so that its value is being eroded by inflation.

Mark Gawthorpe is a volunteer with Refugee Action, a charity which offers support to asylum seekers. He reports that welfare minister Iain Duncan Smith was considering extending the use of the Azure Card to people with gambling, drug or alcohol problems, so that they can only spend money on 'essentials'. This further stigmatises vulnerable people and will exacerbate mental health issues.

Unite

Mark said: "People with dependency issues and drink or drug problems could unite with asylum seekers to stop this campaign of stigmatisation."

This could be the thin end of the wedge and the scheme could be extended to cover benefits in general

"There is a connection, sympathy and similarity between members of these communities, both are alienated and disenfranchised. If you have plenty of money, you are welcomed into the country on what is called an 'entrepreneurial visa', yet vulnerable people, who have gone through horrific experiences, are being targeted"

Mark thinks that this could be the thin end of the wedge, and the scheme could be extended to cover benefits in general, such is the extent of scapegoating of benefit claimants in the mass media.

At a support meeting in Leicester, I heard first-hand accounts from people struggling to live on the card: "Not having cash means that you cannot shop in charity shops or the market, which would be cheaper. I can only use Tesco, Asda, Morrisons or Sainsburys for food"

"I have been an asylum seeker for three years, living in a pub and destitute. Maybe your nearest supermarket is far away, or you may

be old, disabled or sick - you still have to walk to the supermarket and back."

"It makes you feel like a criminal, people in the queue stare at you"

"I can't save any money from week to week - if you do not use all the money up within a week, it disappears. It makes you a prisoner - you have no choice about where to shop or what to spend your money on. You cannot save up to give someone a gift, or to celebrate. You need to rely on other people to exchange the card for cash - this makes you vulnerable to exploitation"

"It makes you feel like a criminal. People in the queue stare at you."

At the meeting it was felt that a successful campaign to abolish the Azure Card might be like fixing a small cog in a big wheel - but it would be an important start and give people confidence that they can win victories.

The private company Sodexo profits from the Azure Card system. The Mirror ran a story showing the money made from asylum seekers by the 'big four' supermarkets - Tesco £20.6 million, Asda £11.3 million, Sainsbury £5.9 million, Morrisons £2.4 million. "Shops are inconsistent - they may take a card one week and not the next"

Alternative

This stigmatisation of marginalised groups is part of capitalism. It is a deliberate strategy, to isolate and atomise working-class and poor people. Mainstream politicians, of all parties, argue that cuts are inevitable and we have no choice but to accept austerity.

Yet the people of Greece and Ireland have shown that there is an alternative to division and scapegoating, by rising up en masse against debt and water charges.

We need to build a political voice for those who have no party to speak for them

We need to do the same here, and also build a political voice for those who have no party to speak for them. The Socialist Party campaigns as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, which is in the process of building a new political voice for the oppressed.



The Azure Card can only be used in certain shops

"Years of uncertainty and worry" Heartbreak of Con-Dems' immigration laws

Becky and Jamie Davis

We are an American/British couple who married in 2012, applying for our spousal visa weeks before Home Secretary Theresa May imposed strict new financial requirements in July that year. I have fortunately just had my Indefinite Leave to Remain in the UK approved after two years of uncertainty and worry.

It is a common misapprehension that marriage guarantees permission from the state to live in the UK. While citizens of EU states can enter freely with their spouses and families and settle in the UK, for non-EU migrants the process is far more lengthy, expensive and uncertain - in many cases heartbreakingly so.

First I had to apply from the US to enter the UK to marry with a fiancé visa. Cost - £601. There is no guarantee that it will be approved and you can be denied virtually arbitrarily, no refunds. This is true at every stage of the settlement process.

We had to extensively prove our relationship, prove that my fiancé could support me and that he had space for me to live with him. You can neither work nor have access to public funds while you are under this visa.

Once married we then had to apply for my spousal Further Leave to Remain (FLR) visa which took nine months to arrive. I was still not allowed to work or volunteer this entire time. Cost - another £601.

Then, after two years of marriage (five, under the new Home Office rules) and a pass qualification in the "Life in the UK" test, we had to apply for my Indefinite Leave to Remain, which allows some access to public funds. Cost - £1,093. By post the wait can be five to eight



The process can be quicker...only if you have the money

months. If you pay an extra £400 you can have an appointment at a 'Premium Service Centre' and receive a same-day decision. If you pay £6,000 a mobile case worker will come to your home - you get the picture!

Under the tough new immigration rules British citizens must now make at least £18,600 a year if they want their non-EU spouse to live with them. If you have a child born outside Europe and want them to settle with you the threshold is £22,400 and an additional £2,400 for each additional child. Or you must have £62,500 in savings. The migrant's income is not taken into consideration.

By the government's own estimate, around 18,000 UK families a year will be prevented

from living together by these harsh new rules. Many cases have hit the headlines of the national press. A petition for one such case can be signed at <https://you.38degrees.org.uk/petitions/theresa-may-don-t-force-me-to-give-birth-without-my-husband>

A Home Office spokesperson said: "Our family changes were brought in to make sure that spouses coming to live in the UK would not become reliant on the taxpayer for financial support and would be able to integrate effectively." Apparently it would seem you "integrate" more "effectively" the higher your bank balance!

The poor have had to fight attacks on jobs, attacks on pay, and attacks on welfare. Now it seems we even face attacks on love.

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London bus strikes: It's the same job We want the same pay

London bus workers are engaged in an historic battle to get one rate for the job - the best - across all London garages, with the third and fourth strike days planned for 13 and 16 February.

The aim of the campaign is to improve wages and conditions for all London bus workers. The workers' determination to win the current strike is there for all to see.

They are angry that drivers are getting different wages for driving down the same stretch of road. Not only are there different rates between companies but also in the same companies.

In the face of attempted management intimidation and driving sleet, picket lines of 40-50 were still common across London on the second strike day on 5 February. Over two thirds of buses were not running.

Despite the bus companies' and Transport for London (TfL) propaganda saying the strike is waning, several garages reported more drivers taking strike action.

If management are so confident that the strike is waning, why did they get police down to the picket lines and have photographers taking pictures of pickets? It has also been rumoured that drivers on probation were threatened with the sack if they went on strike.

Despite this intimidation the vast majority of drivers are standing firm. Pickets reported that, at Putney, a good number of buses parked

outside the garage could not be used as there were not enough drivers to drive them.

Response

As management are increasing their response to this strike the opportunity is there for bus workers to do the same.

There is at least one example of where pickets stopped buses leaving a garage for a while and also blocked off the main street outside the garage. This could be repeated across other garages.

Unite, the bus workers' union, could also call protests at TfL, even linking up with other transport unions. They could also organise protests at the different bus companies. It is clear that public opinion is behind the bus drivers, with two-thirds of bus passengers backing the strikes.

Unite has given £1.5 million to Labour's election campaign. Yet we've seen little support for bus workers in return. But where are Labour MPs and councillors on the picket lines?

Socialist Party members and Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) supporters have been prominent on many of the picket lines and have received a good response from bus workers. As well as backing the strikes, we argue that we need to go a lot further by renationalising London's buses to put public transport under democratic public control.

same pay



photo Paul Mattsson

Bus drivers at the Clapton garage picket on 5 February. See picket line reports at www.socialistparty.org.uk

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!