

Bring Down the Rotten Con-Dems Lobby the TUC for a General Strike

Over two years in and the Con-Dem government is universally despised. There are many reasons for retail and distribution workers to detest the current government and want to see the back of them. Extending Sunday trading hours during the Olympics, cuts to the Civil Injury Compensation Scheme, cuts to Tax Credits, freezing the minimum wage for under 21s etc.

The government doesn't seem to miss any opportunity to make clear just how much a tool of the wealthy and big business interests it is. The Leveson inquiry has revealed just how much senior Tories have prostrated themselves in front of executives of the Murdoch press all the way up to David Cameron himself.

Yet despite this the government's austerity programme keeps rumbling on largely unhindered, and high profile casualties from the cabinet have been minimal despite the scandals and economic difficulties.

Is Labour An Alternative?

USDAW's strategy for kicking out the Con-Dems seems to solely rely around trying to build up Labour party membership in the meantime and then waiting until a General election in 2015.

Incidentally this is much the strategy of Ed Miliband and the rest of the Labour leadership who



would rather allow the Tories to implement their savage cuts so Miliband and co don't have to and then inherit a growing economy in 2015. Unfortunately, the double-dip recession that we are currently in means this is unlikely and as several economists have predicted the current austerity measures could continue until the end of the decade.

Moreover, whilst Labour has undoubtedly recovered some support as workers seek a shield against the governments attacks. Yet abstentionism continues to be the dominant trend in election results, and membership of the Labour Party within

USDAW remains a lowly 4% despite all the stops being pulled out by our union's leadership to recruit activists to Labour.

No doubt many low paid retail workers will remember the government scrapping the

10p tax rate and whilst billions could be found to bail out the banks, the same couldn't be done for retail stores such as Woolworths which saw many USDAW members lose their jobs

Moreover, many of the policies that the government are hated for were either introduced by the previous Labour government or were policies Labour were proposing to carry out themselves.

These include the trebling of university tuition fees, introduction of Academies, closures of Remploy factories etc.



Lobby of the TUC takes place on Sunday 9th September starting at 1pm at The Level park - Union Road, Brighton BN2
Speakers include:

Mark Serwotka, PCS General Secretary;
Steve Gillan, POA General Secretary;
Bob Crow, RMT General Secretary

See www.shopstewards.net for info

In several cases the Tories have taken these further than Labour had planned but that does not absolve them of opening the door to such attacks.

The likelihood is that an incoming Labour government would not be much different to the Tories and would be likely to renege on promises to reverse the Health and Social Care Bill for example. That's why supporters of the Activist have been actively trying to build support for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition.

Although TUSC's election results have so far been modest, you only have to look into Europe to see how rapidly new parties of the working class can gain support. In Ireland the United Left Alliance has 5 MPs in the most recent election and spectacularly Syriza (the Coalition of the Radical Left) jumped from 4% to 27% in the recent elections, coming very close to finishing first in the polls.

Industrial Strategy Needed

But a political alternative is only one part of the solution. As the recent electricians dispute, civil servants in the Home Office and transport workers in and around London have shown, a series strategy of industrial action can win concessions.

Yet within USDAW industrial action is like a forgotten weapon rusting up in a dusty cupboard under the stairs.

The biggest obstacle to this is a leadership which has a pathological avoidance of industrial action. In the last year action has been taken at Unilever where some minor concessions were won and has been threatened in Primark in Northern Ireland where

USDAW members won a wage increase.

With over 400,000 members USDAW is the fourth biggest union in the country and in several sectors, particularly distribution has significant industrial might. USDAW members have the potential to shut down the supply chain of big supermarkets, and undoubtedly it was the contradiction between this potential power and the continuing attacks on terms and conditions of drivers and other staff at distribution centres that led to the frustration of many distribution workers at ADM this year.

On the other hand, many reps will undoubtedly not feel confident of using industrial action as a tool in our struggle for better working conditions and a better society as a whole. Yet there has never been a better time, particularly in Tesco where management appears to be on an offensive making unilateral changes to both pensions and the staff bonus scheme so far this year.

This stems from a lack of tradition of using this within the retail sector. Yet generalised strike action, perhaps linking up the various grievances different sets of workers have with their employers, would give an immense boost to workers preparedness to take on the dictat of the bosses.

NSSN

The Activist encourages all USDAW members to take part in the 9th September lobby of the TUC called by the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN). The lobby is calling for the TUC's national demo on

October 20th not to be the end of large scale action called by the TUC this year, but the beginning of a mass movement to fight the attacks of this rotten government and sweep them from power.

It was the pressure exerted on the TUC by the NSSN and the leadership of militant unions like the PCS which forced the TUC to call the March 26th 2011 demo in London and the November 30th Public Sector one-day General Strike. In between this the NSSN has called for unions to co-ordinate industrial action against the governments attacks as was successfully done on March 28th (London education workers in NUT and UCU) and May 10th (PCS, UNITE members in health sector and UCU) this year.

Unfortunately the backtracking of the TUC and major unions, particularly UNISON and GMB, led to a disintegration of the unity built throughout 2011, as well as a missed opportunity to link up the fight of public sector workers with those such as Unilever and the electricians.

We cannot afford to let this happen again. As well as supporting the lobby, readers of the Activist are encouraged to get involved in the local activities of the NSSN to co-ordinate our struggles.



Many readers of the Activist will have been scandalised to see that in the July-August 2012 issue of Network, John Hannett announced that USDAW had signed up to Better Together - a campaign opposed to Scottish Independence that includes both Labour and Tories.

The Socialist Party supports the democratic right of nations such as Scotland to become independent if they so wish. It is one thing to concretely oppose independence at a given point in time on economic or other grounds. It is entirely another thing to sign up to support a campaign alongside a Tory Party in Scotland that is viciously hated by working class people.

To give readers of the Activist more background explanation of the issues at stake we reprint below an edited version of an article by Philip Stott of the Socialist Party Scotland

The launch of the "Better Together" anti-independence campaign this week saw Labour politicians unite with the Con-Dem's to extol the virtues of the union. Better Together's birth coincided with UK Prime Minister David "nasty" Cameron's brutal speech announcing his support for the dismantling of the welfare state with savage attacks on the benefits of the poorest. If anything was designed to undermine the Better Together message this was it.

It allowed SNP leader Alex Salmond to comment that campaign frontman, former Labour chancellor Alistair Darling, had "claimed that the Union was a 'celebration' of Scottish values, on the very day that the Prime Minister of that political union is proposing to eliminate housing benefit for young Scots."



This was followed a few days later by Mervyn King, governor of the Bank of England admitting that the UK was not even "halfway through" the economic crisis that began in 2007 and he has become increasingly "pessimistic" for the future. Or as political columnist Iain MacWhirter put it, "This is not a recession any longer but a full-blown economic depression." The Herald 28th June 2012

The run-up to the 2014 referendum will take place against the backdrop of an unrelenting economic catastrophe and a planned austerity programme that is barely 10% completed. Certainly, the pro-union campaign which is uniting Labour with the Con-Dem parties can offer nothing in terms of an alternative to savage cuts. Their message is simply, you think it's bad now, you should see how bad it will be if Scotland were independent

But neither has the SNP-led YesScotland campaign any intentions of putting up an alternative to big business, austerity and cuts. The SNP are wedded to the failing market and an independent Scotland as a low tax haven for multinational capitalism. YesScotland is backed by millionaires like Brian Souter of Stagecoach and former RBS charman, George Matheson. Responding to the Euro crisis the SNP have now abandoned their previous policy of joining the single

currency. Instead they now support an independent Scotland joining a Sterling Zone with the rest of the UK with interest rates set by the Bank of England. The SNP want to end the "political union" but maintain a "social and economic union" with the rest of the UK.

Better Together have countered by pointing to the Eurozone debacle and that a Sterling zone without a political union would be end up with the same instability as the Euro – a recipe for disaster. This is likely to be a major theme of the pro-union campaign who will seek to exploit the fears as to whether an independent Scotland would survive against the backdrop of an unprecedented economic crisis.

Both these campaigns, offering as they do different capitalist routes to the same quagmire of stagnation, falling living standards and years of austerity are in reality a dead end. Neither YesScotland nor Better Together, led by pro-capitalist politicians, are prepared to advocate a fundamental break with failed cuts policies, never mind the decisive measures needed to break with a sick capitalism and rebuild the economy on a socialist basis.

It is significant that thus far both campaigns have failed to attract support from any section of the trade union movement in Scotland with the exception of USDAW.

That's not to argue that socialists or the trade union movement should be neutral on the referendum. The overwhelming majority of people in Scotland support a decisive transfer of powers to Holyrood from Westminster. A recent poll in June 2012 found 68% supporting a change from the status quo with

41% opting for devo plus (involving income tax and corporation tax going to Scotland) and 27% for independence. At the moment there is only one question, for or against independence, on the table with the pro-union parties furiously opposed to a second question on the ballot paper.

Conflict looming ?

It is still most likely that the SNP government, come September when the outcome of their consultation is made public, will support a second question for the proposed referendum. A devo max or devo plus option would likely be the most popular alternative among the Scottish people. It would also provide a convenient safety net for the SNP leadership should independence be defeated.

However, this may well lead the SNP into a conflict with the Tory-led Westminster government who may refuse to transfer the powers to Scotland to legally run a multi-option referendum. The strategy of the pro-union parties is to try to restrict the referendum to one question and hope to inflict a defeat on the SNP over independence. This could result in a constitutional crisis and would further boost support for

independence if the hated Con-Dem coalition if they were seen to be a block on the democratic rights of the Scottish people.

As it is the Con-Dem's have reached the status of pariah's in Scotland. David Cameron's satisfaction rating is at an all-time low of - 46%. Between them the Tories and Lib Dems have a combined support of only 18% in Scotland. The Scottish Social Attitudes Survey found that by 2011 trust in the Scottish Government had increased 10 points to stand at 71% in 2011. At the same time, the number of people who said they trusted the UK Government to act in Scotland's best interests was 18% - compared to 35% in 2007.

However, even the SNP and Alex Salmond have also seen their support falling recently. While still the leading party, the SNP leader's love affair with Rupert Murdoch has undoubtedly damaged Salmond. As has the SNP governments slavish carrying through of the cuts, including implementing attacks on pensions in the public sector. Nicola Sturgeon claimed there was no need for the doctors to be taking industrial action recently and they have opposed all strikes while

imposing pay freezes on hundreds of thousands of workers across Scotland. Further conflict between the SNP government and workers in Scotland may well erupt in the Autumn following the teachers union EIS decision to return to strike action over pensions.

Socialist Party Scotland has consistently campaigned for a multi-option referendum which would offer both independence and a form of devolution max on the ballot paper. A simple yes or no to independence would not give a fully democratic reflection of the views of the Scottish people.

The overwhelming majority of the working class and young people will support either independence or devo max in such a referendum.

Both options are a legitimate expression of the desire for finding a way out of the current desert of unending attacks and austerity. While giving support to this we will campaign for a parliament with full powers and an independent socialist Scotland that would link up with England, Wales and Ireland as part of a democratic socialist confederation as a step to a socialist Europe.

Bitesize News

Hard times for Clarke at Tesco

It appears that Tesco chief executive Philip Clarke is having a hard time. It seems he will have to tighten his belt after foregoing his bonus of £372,000 this year. Times are hard but he still collects his pay package of £1.16 million. The type of hard times our members would like to face.

Happy Birthday Walmart - for some

Walmart is 50 this month. The *Activist* wonders who will be celebrating. Walmart dominates the world retailers. It is the largest public corporation went ranked by revenue and the third largest employer in the world with 2.2 million workers - US Dept of Defense 3.2 million and Chinese Army 2.3 million.

Certainly the six Walmart heirs who have a net worth equal to the

bottom 30% of Americans will be celebrating. With profits on the rise, there was a net income of \$15.4 billion on \$422 billion of revenue with a 24.7% gross profit margins. Each of the heirs earn \$450 million per year while the average starting wage of an US Walmart sales worker is \$21,000. Every two jobs created by Walmart costs 2.8 last jobs elsewhere.

The US taxpayer should chip in some cash for Walmart's party and they do! It costs the US taxpayer \$1.5 billion every year because

workers are paid too little to afford basic needs.

We demand ASDA, Walmart in the UK, along with Tesco, Sainsbury and Morrison are taken into public ownership and controlled democratically. These four companies control 77% of all retail sales. We will save our celebration until the profits of these companies are used for the interests of all the people and not a few heirs.

A Golden Hello

It appears that M&S have started paying 'Golden hellos'. An internet guru moved from Tesco to join the M&S team and she was paid £4 million just to change jobs.

Good times at M&S for some

Not so hard times at M&S. Their chief executive earns a basic salary of £975,000 but he received

£2.5 million in the last financial year and could still cash in some shares worth another £1.7 million.

You have to pay for the best

The bankers have always said if we want the best then we have to pay the going rate. It seems that the lot are money grabbing crooks.

Poverty Pay in Sainsbury - United Trade Union Action Needed

Below we reprint a press release from Unite the Union, which also organises workers in Sainsbury's. The press release highlights the poverty of many retail workers and the urgent need for a united campaign to organise the many workers in Sainsbury who aren't a member of either union.

Sainsbury's workers 'struggle to live' on low pay - 'Live well for less' must not mean 'Pay your staff less' says Unite

23 July 2012

Sainsbury's workers are using payday loans, struggling to pay for their children's school uniforms, and haven't had a holiday in years, Unite, the largest union in the country, has revealed.

In the first salvo of a campaign to obtain a 'substantial' pay increase for its 16,000 members working at the supermarket giant, Unite has conducted a snapshot survey of its members.

It reveals that low pay has a significant impact on the life of Sainsbury's workers; staff widely reported they have debt problems, rely on tax credits and pay day loans, with many saying they have been unable to afford to take a holiday for many years. Pressures

on family life were commonly reported, and one member claimed the pressures trying to survive on low pay led to the break up of his marriage.

In stark contrast, Unite points to the massive earnings enjoyed by chief executive Justin King - in excess of £3 million in 2010/2011 - while many of Unite members, many of them women working part-time, take home pay not much above the national minimum wage.

The Sainsbury's board is due to meet soon to discuss the pay increase for 2012, but before it makes its decision, Unite wants the directors to understand the plight of its workforce which makes a mockery of the firm's website claim that it is 'a great place to work'.

The Sainsbury's website states: "Our vision is to make Sainsbury's a place where people love to work and shop. This means we have to find the best people and treat them in the right way."

Unite's national officer for food and drink, Jennie Formby, said: "There is a yawning chasm between the ideals that Sainsbury's espouses and the reality that many of our members face as they struggle in their daily lives.

"We want to drive home the message to the company that prides itself on being a good corporate citizen that it should practice what it preaches and award its workforce a fair, decent and living wage.

"Our members have seen a significant reduction in their living standards following year on year below inflation pay increases yet senior executives have lottery-winning earnings every year and Sainsbury's profits continue to improve, with latest results showing profits up 7.1 per cent and sales up 6.8 per cent.

"Our members have helped create this highly profitable company and deserve a fair share of the wealth they have helped generate on a daily basis.

"While our survey is a snapshot, we believe that it is the tip of the iceberg caused by years of low pay and it should be addressed as a matter of priority by the company; 'Live well for less' must not mean 'Pay your staff less'."

The union is calling on the company to listen to the concerns of its workforce and respond positively to their claim for a living wage.