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## 'Save our A&E' - Defend the NHS

As the privatising, service-destroying and job and pay-cutting steamroller hits the NHS in more areas, the urgent need to fight to save our health service is clear. Across the country people are responding - in their communities and in their local trade union branches.

The impressive strength of the 25,000-strong demo in Lewisham, south London, is likely to be echoed elsewhere as people in other areas respond to the call to stand up for our health service. Saturday 16 February will see demonstrations in Wales, London and elsewhere.

The low-paid clerical and admin workers forced to take strike action against enormous pay cuts in the Mid-Yorkshire Hospital Trust have won a stay of execution. Other health workers must be supported where they take action to defend health jobs, services and pay.

This is a fight of health workers and communities for the future of the NHS. We all want the biggest campaigns possible, but beware career politicians in any of the main parties who defend their local hospital but are happy to support cuts and privatisation elsewhere!

This week's action will be further evidence that people would respond in their hundreds of thousands to the call for a national union-led Saturday demonstration.

This would lay the basis for building a mass national fightback that must, to be successful, utilise the important potential strength health workers have when they take industrial action.

**Lisa Jones, a health service activist, reports on the campaign in Caerphilly, Wales, a story others will identify with:**

We are calling on the local council to hold a referendum on a 24-hour doctor-led Accident and Emergency (A&E) for the new Ystrad Fawr hospital.

We are demanding our A&E back. This area just isn't safe without it. I live on the doorstep of the new hospital, but when my little boy was critically ill, he had to be taken by ambulance all the way to Merthyr. A few seconds longer and he might not be here now.

My own experiences have made me realise just how important the NHS is to all our lives. I'm not just fighting for myself and my own family. Like everyone in the campaign, I'm fighting to defend the NHS.

When Caerphilly Miners was open, we had an excellent district hospital. Time and again, the Health Board tried to close it, but people marched to stop them. To change our minds, the Health Board changed tack and ran services down over a period of 12 years. Then, they spent two years publicising plans to give us a brand new state-of-the-art hospital with everything we'd had before and more. People still weren't happy, but they went along with it, because they believed what we were told: that we'd be getting back services we'd lost.

When the new hospital opened in November 2011, we found they'd spent £172 million on a bright and shiny 'white elephant' - a cottage hospital, with no A&E, to be used mainly for scheduled clinic appointments and long stay geriatric care. Not a district hospital at all.

We've lost a whole part of the NHS from Caerphilly and we're not prepared to put up with it. We have a minor injuries unit, instead of an A&E - with no doctors. People are better off going to their GP during office hours.

We don't even have a resuscitation unit. Lives will be lost if we don't get these services back.

What people need to understand is that this is all about money - NHS cuts branded as a 'reorganisation'. The South Wales Programme for the NHS would leave us with only four or five A&Es from Llanelli to Chepstow.

There was an 'engagement period' before Christmas. It included no public meetings - despite all our requests - just poorly advertised drop-in sessions at awkward times.

The public consultation process was meant to start straight after Christmas, but because of the outcry, it's been put back to some indefinite time in the spring.

Now is our chance to make our voices heard. We're linking up to other areas to oppose the South Wales Programme. Come and march with us on Saturday 16 February. Come join the fight to defend the NHS."

## **The Socialist Party demands:**

- No cuts, closures, job losses or attacks on pay in the NHS
- End the postcode lottery. We call for a fully funded, high quality service in every area
- Kick big business out of the NHS. Scrap the dodgy PFI deals and cancel the debts
- Stop the destruction of the NHS. Scrap the Health and Social Care Act (England)
- For a national trade union-led weekend demonstration against attacks on our health service
- Build a mass campaign with trade union strike action at its heart

# Mid Staffs hospital scandal - Big business culture kills

**Jon Dale**

The Francis report into Mid-Staffordshire NHS hospital has exposed appalling neglect that many patients suffered between 2004 and 2008.

Ill, frail and elderly patients were left for hours in soiled beds, unable to drink or eat. Between 400 and 1,000 people are believed to have died prematurely.

There has been an inquiry because of the determination and campaigning of relatives, who organised themselves and fought to overcome official indifference and cover-up.

Francis called the Mid-Staffordshire scandal a failure of the NHS culture: "doing the system's business - not that of the patients."

This has been seized on by right-wing politicians and press who want to undermine the very idea of a publicly owned free national health service available to all.

The truth is that for 30 years governments have pushed big business 'culture' down the NHS's throat and this is the result.

## **Big business**

In 1983 Thatcher asked Roy Griffiths, from Sainsbury's, to produce a report that changed the way hospitals were managed and budgeted, paving the way for the internal market.

Labour chancellor Gordon Brown asked a banker, Derek Wanless, to report on NHS finance. Many other businessmen and women have seduced Tory, Labour and Con-Dem governments with the supposed efficiencies of the private sector that 'out-dated' public service supposedly needed.

One such change was the last Labour government's introduction of Foundation Trusts in 2003. These allowed NHS Trusts to break from direct government control and have more financial independence.

As the Socialist said at the time, this was a step towards the breakup and privatisation of the NHS. We warned: "All a three-star rating shows is that the managers are good at reaching, or

appearing to reach, the latest targets. The quality of healthcare provided is a different matter (Socialist 11.10.03).

Mid-Staffordshire NHS Trust decided to become a Foundation Trust in 2005. To do so it had to show its finances were sound and to be meeting targets set by New Labour.

The problem was it was already running a £10 million a year deficit. A PFI deal on redeveloping the hospital entrance could only increase this deficit.

Directors were determined to eliminate the deficit so they could convince the regulator, Monitor, the Trust should get Foundation status.

Their thinking may have been influenced by the high salaries Trust chief executives and directors were awarding themselves.

To get the deficit down meant cutting the wages bill. Despite being short of 100 nurses, 160 redundancies were announced in 2006.

Ward staff were already stretched to the limit. Managers proposed a shift from 60:40 trained to untrained staff - to 40:60.

Why did nursing and medical staff not blow the whistle as care standards on the wards dropped dangerously? Francis has lifted the lid on the bullying that senior executives passed down. In an atmosphere where workers feared redundancy it was not easy to speak out.

Another factor contributing to poor care continuing over such a long period is the loss of any accountability of health services to their local communities.

## **Democratic control**

There has never been genuine democratic control of the NHS, but elected councillors used to have seats on local health authorities.

Community Health Councils were introduced in 1973. They had no authority but could issue reports highlighting local problems, which managers were forced to respond to in the local press.

Labour abolished Community Health Councils in 2003, replacing them with completely toothless Patient and Public Involvement (PPI).

Prime Minister Cameron, Health Secretary Hunt and all pro-big business politicians will pin the

blame on a few individuals for this terrible breakdown of the NHS's most basic duty of care.

They will gleefully smear the reputation of the NHS to boost their privatisation agenda. But Tory, Labour and Lib Dems are all guilty, for it is their policies that resulted in such an awful situation.

Mid-Staffs will not be the last such scandal either. Big business interests mean it is more important to measure and try to increase a nurse's 'productivity', than whether patients are clean, comfortable, fed and spoken to kindly.

Instead of exhausted, frightened, demoralised staff, a socialist NHS would ensure well-trained, well-paid healthcare workers with the time to enjoy practising their skills and feel pride in a job well done.

Genuine democratic control by elected representatives from the community, health workers and a socialist government, together with the resources needed would provide decent care with dignity for all.

## **The need for good trade union organisation**

Bullying managers, fear of redundancy and staff shortages can lead to demoralisation if there seems to be no way to change the situation. Whistle-blowers have often ended up losing their jobs and even their careers.

Strong trade unions and fighting leaders are the key. They can give health workers the confidence to speak out, not as isolated individuals at risk of victimisation, but as a powerful collective voice.

Francis severely criticised the Royal College of Nursing, which many nurses see as their trade union.

At Stafford, the RCN's priority appeared to be representing the interests of the Director of Nursing and other senior nurse managers.

Unison has 800 members at Mid-Stafford and Unite has 180. Unison branch secretary, Kath Fox, told Francis that as early as 2005 concerns were being raised in the corridors about staff shortages but she didn't receive any formal complaints because nobody: "felt confident enough to raise their head above the parapet".

She also told the inquiry that it had become increasingly hard for reps to get time off for trade union activities. This is what the Con-Dem government now propose across the board.

A new chief executive was appointed in 2005. He had worked in the USA health system and wanted to maximise the income from private patients. Kath Fox told Francis that he took an aggressive attitude to the unions.

She reported that the branch leadership got very frustrated at the impending redundancies. A Unison branch meeting decided to go outside the Trust structures and send a delegation to the local Labour MP.

He listened to them and then went to see the chief executive, who reassured him. He wrote back to Kath Fox to tell her this.

She ripped up the letter and threw it in the bin. After that, she felt there: "was nowhere else to go."

National and regional Unison and Unite officials, while opposing the Foundation Trust policy, were tied to supporting the Labour government that pushed this through.

Local branch officials could not feel confident their leaders would back them to the hilt in a struggle, including industrial action, against the cuts and redundancies that resulted.

A fighting union leadership was needed that put forward a clear strategy for a battle to defend all jobs and stop all cuts.

This would have meant building support in the community, with public meetings and demonstrations. Health care workers would have gained confidence to take strike action.

This is never easy, but it could have won huge support from other trade unionists, their families and the community as a whole.

National trade union leaders should have explained that Mid-Staffs was not alone in facing cuts to meet Foundation Trust requirements.

A national campaign could have built the mood for national action, including industrial action, with a clear call to the rest of the trade union movement to take action in support of healthcare workers and to defend their NHS.

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## Patients are not just numbers

## **Becky Johnson, student nurse**

My friend and colleague hit the nail on the head when she said: "It makes me sad and very angry that something so disgusting and tragic was allowed to happen..."

This is why NHS hospitals should not be run as business organisations by people who are managers but nothing else. Patients are not just numbers!"

Mid Staffs were so obsessed with being one of New Labour's Foundation Trusts, a step towards privatisation, that they ran it like a business.

Footfall, turnover and productivity became paramount. A culture of bullying started at the top and permeated down.

Far from alleviating the underlying factors that led to poor care at Mid Staffs 2005-2009, today's era of austerity cuts and privatisation compounds systemic problems, making further crises of care likely.

Francis recommends the implementation of Performance Related Pay for nurses. We will be paid on the basis of how "compassionate" we are, judged by individual patient feedback forms.

The practicalities of implementing and utilising such a system, especially when nursing patients with dementia, who are unconscious, experiencing confusion or under anaesthesia are complex. Compassion is subjective. It can't be measured by tick-list.

Sometimes, patients are reluctant to follow medical advice. The nurse that encourages a patient with breathing difficulties to get out of bed is not always popular, but she is compassionate! Fear of being marked down by patients could see many nurses feeling they have no choice but to compromise their professional integrity.

Also health care is delivered by a team, not individuals working alone, set up to be in competition with each other.

## **Unqualified staff**

The Francis report also advocates registration for unqualified healthcare assistants (HCAs).

HCAs provide the majority of hands-on personal care, under the supervision of a registered nurse.

They are underpaid for the work they do and are often unsupported in their jobs.

Because they are cheaper, the government wants a move towards more HCAs, managed by fewer qualified nurses.

This takes nurses further away from the caring side of nursing, with qualified staff focusing on more technical, high-status tasks. This division of labour has come about in order to reduce costs.

Funding needs to be made available to up-skill HCAs into registered nurses. Wards should grant secondment to HCAs who want to do their nursing training and guarantee them a job at the end of it.

There has been much criticism of university based nurse education. Some have suggested it is responsible for creating uncaring nurses.

But a university education equips nurses for the reality of the job. Skill and compassion are not mutually exclusive qualities, we just work under a system that restricts our ability to show either.

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## London demonstrations: Save the NHS

- Valentine Day card for Ealing hospital, to be handed to NHS NW London, Thursday 14 February
- Save Lewisham hospital rally, Friday 15 February, 1pm Lewisham hospital
- Defend the NHS singing flash mob, Friday 15 February, 5.45pm, a central London station
- Hammersmith and Charing Cross hospitals campaign protest march, Saturday 16 February, 12 noon, Lyric Square, King Street
- Kingston Save Our Hospitals demonstration, Saturday 16 February, 12 noon, Norbiton Station, march to Guildhall <http://www.facebook.com/events/478817202164014/?fref=ts>
- Defend Whittington hospital action, Saturday 16 February, Holloway Road, N19
- Ealing hospital action, Saturday 16 February, 12 noon, Ealing Broadway shopping centre

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## GCSE U-turn shows all Gove's 'reforms' can be stopped

## **Jim Thomson**

Teachers, parents and students will be happy about the Con-Dem education minister Michael Gove's climbdown over the English Baccalaureate Certificate (EBC).

Gove's retreat shows that the coalition can be forced to backtrack in the face of united pressure.

The EBC was designed to replace certain GCSEs, supposedly reversing the "dumbing down" of secondary education and making the testing of students "more rigorous".

In reality the EBC was part of the Tories' political ideology; testing knowledge rather than developing the skills of the students in a positive way.

This knowledge-based approach benefits students from wealthier backgrounds.

It ignores much of the excellent educational philosophy and child psychology of the last 20 years that shows that skills-based learning is far more beneficial for individual child development and, inevitably, social mobility.

## **Back to the future?**

The EBC was designed to move education back to the 1950s - where students rote learned kings and queens, 19th century poems and times-tables.

Gove's defeat was due to united opposition from the unions, educationalists, the media, the Welsh Assembly and the Education Select Committee.

However, the EBC was just one small facet of a wider dangerous education policy. Gove is determined to privatise education completely.

Aspects of this have included attacks on national pay and conditions, the academisation of comprehensive education, the expansion of the 'free school' programme and significant cuts to pensions.

These attacks need to be fought by teachers, parents, students and the community; otherwise we will see the end of comprehensive education as we know it.

However, on these battles we cannot expect to be supported by anti-working class MPs or the media.

Therefore we need a much stronger leadership from teaching unions, especially the NUT and NASUWT.

This should include a programme of action, starting with a 24-hour strike before Easter and escalating to a 48-hour strike early next term to coincide with May Day.

While we welcome the end of the EBC, the government's Dickensian policies will continue to plague education until united opposition, led by the unions, forces the Con-Dems to backtrack completely.

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## **Lobby the NUT executive: No more delays! Call national strike action now!**

**Wednesday 27 February, 5pm**

**NUT HQ - Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1H 9BD (Kings Cross/Euston tubes)**

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## **Fight performance-related pay**

The news on 10 February of a 'secret memo' revealing the "full extent of Michael Gove's plans to revolutionise education", allowing academies and free schools to make a profit, will come as no real surprise to teacher trade unionists.

Gove wants performance-related pay (PRP) for teachers to cut costs for his big business friends. Gove also hopes PRP will divide the workforce and undermine collective trade union action too. A strike against PRP is also a strike to help stop privatisation.

The Mid-Staffs hospital scandal is also a stark reminder of what can happen to public services when they are dominated by targets.

But time is running short to stop Gove's pay proposals becoming implemented. Agreement across London Region NUT for a demonstration against Gove on Wednesday 13 March is a good way of mobilising for national strike action - but when will that action be called?

Wednesday 13 March could have been the first strike day, but the NUT executive narrowly voted against this.

Warwickshire NUT and Liverpool NUT have added their names to the list of London Associations that are lobbying the NUT executive on 27 February. The executive needs to call strike action this term.

**Martin Powell-Davies, NUT executive member**

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## **Smash the blacklist - not the unions!**

### **Defend and extend workers' rights to organise**

**Neil Cafferky, London Socialist Party**

The recent scandal around blacklisting in the construction industry once again highlights the ruthless steps employers are willing to take in order to undermine hard-won terms and conditions at work, and attack union organisation.

Tireless work by union activists, including the Blacklist Support Group, has exposed the Consulting Association, a firm of private investigators that compiled a list of over 3,000 workers in the industry.

Evidence presented at parliamentary hearings shows that workers were on these lists for trade union or left-wing political activity, but also for raising concerns about health and safety.

The results for many workers and their families have been devastating. As Unite general secretary Len McCluskey put it: "Lives have been ruined and families have been torn apart just because workers have raised safety concerns in Britain's most dangerous industry, or just because they exercised their human rights to belong to a trade union."

Blacklisting of trade union and political activists has been a tool of the employers in the UK for many years.

In the 1970s and 1980s the Economic League played a similar role to that of the Consulting Association today.

Evidence presented to Parliament shows at least 20 major construction firms using the Consulting Association. This indicates a very sophisticated and widespread web of spying on workers.

A senior Information Commissioners Office officer, himself a former police officer, alleges that some of the information found on Consulting Association files had come from the security services.

The revelations about blacklisting have caused outrage. There have been calls for a full public inquiry along the lines of the Leveson Inquiry.

John McDonnell, Labour MP for Hayes and Harlington, said: "This goes on today, just because you're a trade unionist, you stand up for health and safety or simply because you want to ensure justice and fairness at work.

"I want the inquiry to examine all those things in the past but I want an inquiry that opens up the doors and invites people to come forward with evidence."

## **Blacklist the blacklisters**

There is no doubt an inquiry is necessary to expose the shadowy world of blacklisting and to punish those who ruined the lives of thousands of workers.

However an inquiry by itself can only expose wrongs in the past. Many workers will ask themselves, what is to prevent a different company following the example of the Consulting Association?

Even if a criminal investigation and convictions were to follow from an inquiry, there would always be an economic incentive for firms to blacklist.

Trade unions have called for firms found to have been involved in blacklisting to be refused further public sector contracts.

This demand needs to be taken up as a coordinated political campaign by the unions, with particular demands placed on Labour-controlled local councils.

Unions that are contributing members' money to Labour politicians need to make it clear that rewarding blacklisting firms with lucrative council contracts will not be tolerated, and if it continues unions will withdraw their support.

In the long run a return of a directly employed council construction workforce can help combat private sector blacklisting.

There is greater public scrutiny and democratic accountability of the employer, the local council.

The root cause of blacklisting is the monopoly the employer exercises in deciding who is hired and fired.

In the absence of a properly organised union presence it is easy for the employer to dictate who works in the industry and who does not.

The best weapon to fight blacklisting is strong, democratic and accountable union organisation on the sites.

The task for the labour movement is firstly to launch a massive recruitment drive in the industry. Alongside this unions need to begin to set up registered lists of unemployed members in the industry and fight to ensure that, when employers are hiring, those lists are the first port of call.

In this way unions can monitor employers' hiring practices and ensure blacklisting becomes much more difficult in the future.

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## **Victory over 'workfare' sanctions**

### **Step up the fight for real jobs**

### **Campaigners demand all 'workfare' schemes are shut down immediately**

The victory in the Court of Appeal on 12 February for Cait Reilly and Jamie Wilson has dealt a massive blow to the government's work-for-your-benefit schemes. It turns out the government can't even follow its own rules!

Cait Reilly, a university graduate, originally lost her High Court case against being forced to give up career-relevant volunteering to work at Poundland.

But the three Appeal judges overturned this decision as the scheme was not compulsory.

Jamie Wilson, an unemployed HGV driver, was told that he would stop getting Jobseeker's Allowance for six months after he refused to work unpaid - for 30 hours a week - in the Community Action Programme. The judges ruled in favour of Jamie as the maximum benefit sanction was two weeks.

The ruling alone will not make the government scrap workfare. However, it does mean that all people who, like Cait and Jamie, have wrongly had their benefits stopped because of workfare may be able to claim money back. The government is appealing to the Supreme Court to get the decision reversed.

Claire Laker-Mansfield, from Youth Fight for Jobs, a key campaign in the fight against workfare, said: "A day's pay for a day's work is a basic right in any supposedly democratic society.

"The government must now respond to this ruling by immediately shutting down all unpaid workfare schemes.

"These schemes have amounted to a massive bailout to big business. The likes of Poundland have been allowed thousands of hours of free labour courtesy of the taxpayer."

The fight for decent jobs continues. 2.5 million people are unemployed, including one million young workers.

There are less than 500,000 job vacancies - many are not even real jobs. Millions more are under-employed or in the growing 'precariat' - low-paid workers in insecure jobs with bosses that don't allow even basic rights such as guaranteed hours.

But it doesn't have to be like this. Big businesses are sitting on £800 billion as they see no 'profitable outlet' for it.

An immediate 50% levy on this, combined with full nationalisation of the banking industry under democratic control, would be a good start to freeing up resources.

This money could then be invested in needed jobs, infrastructure, public services and green energy. Instead services are being destroyed in order to pay for the banksters' bailouts.

More job cuts in the private sector get announced every week - like those at HMV, Barclays, and Rolls-Royce.

Even in prime minister David Cameron's own back yard, 130 jobs are going as a Chipping Norton school for disabled children faces closure.

As Claire said: "It's high time the government started investing in creating secure, socially useful jobs paid a living wage - not punitive, ineffective slave labour schemes.

"But the Con-Dems' track record shows this is unlikely to happen without a struggle. That is

what Youth Fight for Jobs is here for."

For more info about Youth Fight for Jobs see [www.youthfightforjobs.com](http://www.youthfightforjobs.com), email [youthfightforjobs@gmail.com](mailto:youthfightforjobs@gmail.com) or call 020 8558 7947 or 07757 207289

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**BBC video of announcement of victory**

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**Horsemeat scandal: good for profit, bad for**

# health

**Dave Ingham**

The scandal of 29% horsemeat found in Tesco value burgers four weeks ago has paled into insignificance compared to the revelation in the last week that Findus' beef lasagne is 100% equine.

By means of an attempt at reassurance the company has since produced a statement saying that its product was only 'supposed' to be 15% beef. Horsemeat has now been found in the food chain in 16 EU countries, demonstrating that this is not just accidental but a systematic failing.

For an industry that supposedly prides itself on identifying its product's origins, the supply network is mind boggling.

The initial investigation by French authorities found that the meat had come from two Romanian abattoirs, sold to a Dutch trader, then a Cypriot trader, then to French firm Poujol who supplied it to Comigel's meat processing plant in Luxemburg who provided Swedish-based Findus with the lasagne - a path more convoluted than the plot of a badly written whodunit!

As well as supplying Findus, the plant supplies ready meals for Tesco and other supermarkets and frozen food firms, as well as supplying ready meals to schools, hospitals and retirement homes.

Although horsemeat itself is not dangerous to eat, carcasses from horses not bred for food production could have contained phenylbutazone, a veterinary drug which is banned from food as it can cause bone marrow failure. There are even rumours that some of the 'horsemeat' may also be donkey.

The Polish supply company at the centre of the Tesco value burger scandal is still supplying 'beef' to six UK companies. At the same time, it's been revealed that supplies of Halal beef from McColgan Quality Foods to prisons contained pork DNA.

In the race to make the biggest profits possible, the cheapest supplier wins, regardless of the quality of the product. We can't trust capitalism with our health and safety.

Part of the cuts that Merkel and Cameron pushed through in the EU budget is to food inspection, and the UK government is also cutting back in this area. All these cuts must be immediately reversed and investment in employment and training of inspectors prioritised.

Only with the nationalisation of the food industry under democratic workers' control, with regular inspection of food quality by committees accountable to workers and consumers would we be able to make sure that what we want to eat, is what we actually eat.

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## **"Fully funded" social care plan - still needed**

**Louise Campbell**

Tory health secretary Jeremy Hunt would like to have us believe that he's a hero of the elderly. He has announced plans that will supposedly tackle the scandal of people having to sell their houses to pay for elderly care. Shockingly 40,000 people are forced to do this every year under the current system.

The "fully funded" plan includes capping the cost of social care to individuals at £75,000 over their lifetime and increasing from £23,250 to £123,000 the assets you have to own before having to contribute.

### **Drop in the ocean**

Any measures which relieve the burden of the cost of elderly care on the poorest people should be welcomed.

But £75,000 is still a devastatingly high cap. The National Pensioners Convention has pointed out that the proposed cap would "help only 10% of those needing care, while the majority will be left to struggle on with a third-rate service." The cap does not include board and lodging if needed.

And of course the gesture is pretty meaningless when social care budgets have been cut by an average of 10% across the country and privatisation has run the service into the ground, as was shown by the collapse of Southern Cross care homes in 2011.

One reason behind Hunt's sudden apparent burst of sympathy for the elderly was shown when he said: "it makes it possible for insurance companies to offer policies, for people to have options on their pensions, so that anything you have to pay under the cap is covered". Yet another effort to find new ways for the Tories' big business friends to make a profit. But so far they have not shown much interest in stepping in here.

Why should we have to pay for this care from our own pockets at all? £120 billion is avoided or evaded in tax by big business every year and they have £850 billion sitting idle in their

banks. The money exists in society to have a genuinely fully publicly funded and democratically run, high quality system of social care for all those who need it.

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## **Them & Us**

### **Making a mint from mince**

British government officials are desperately trying to get a derogation (exemption) from new EU laws which limit the amount of fat and collagen (used in cosmetic surgery) which can be present in minced meat.

The new regulations state that lean minced meat should have a maximum of 19% fat and collagen, pure minced beef no more than 35%, and minced meat made using pork no more than 48%.

A Defra report last year pointed out that: "A significant proportion of mincemeat currently sold in the UK contains a greater proportion of collagen than would be permitted."

The report goes on to say the total savings for UK businesses from avoiding this regulation would be £829,799. This is a pittance compared to profits made in the meat processing industry - for example, when profits crashed last year food giant Vion still made £12 million profit! Yet again, profits come before our health and nutrition.

### **Housing crisis**

The Con-Dems are commissioning just 37,000 new 'affordable' homes - less than a fifth of what was promised. And 'affordable' now means 80% of market rates - so not very affordable anyway!

In 2011-12, new affordable housing starts fell by 68%.

Average rents in England are rising by £300 a year, and by over £600 in one-tenth of the country. So much for Prime Minister David Cameron's claim that housing benefit cuts were making rents fall.

For real affordable housing there should be rent caps - not benefit caps, and an emergency plan to build and renovate publicly owned housing.

## By the rules?

Zambia Sugar, part of Associated British Foods (ABF), paid only 0.5% of its \$123 million pre-tax profit in Zambian corporation tax between 2007 and 2012.

ABF says it is 'playing by the rules'. In which case the rules need to change!

Multinational tax avoidance in the developing world is estimated to total £70 billion a year.

ABF, which also owns Primark, has a holding company in the tax-haven of Luxembourg to help it pay less tax in Britain and Ireland too.

## Cash piles

The Socialist regularly reminds readers of the fact that £850 billion is sitting idle in the banks of big business in Britain. But internationally, just one company - Apple - has its very own hoarded cash pile of (\$137 billion) £87 billion! The company is being sued by one of its investors to share out the money to shareholders.

## Wealth inequality

In the mid-1990s the top 1% of earners received 7% of all income paid, today it's 10%. The bottom 50% of earners, on the other hand, have seen our slice of the pie reduced from 19% to 18%.

## TUSC in Eastleigh

### Dave Nellist

Pleased to announce #RMT Council of Executives member Darren Procter to stand in #Eastleigh by-election #TUSC

If food prices had risen like house prices, a chicken would cost £51.18. Cut rents, not benefits #TUSC #Eastleigh

### Dazprocter

Looking forward to standing as the #TUSC candidate 4 #Eastleigh. We want jobs, public services, protection of the vulnerable not the greedy!

Do MPs deserve the money they receive?? If a party truly represents the workers, they would take a worker's wage, wouldn't they?? I would!!

Before the people of #Eastleigh vote, ask yourself this - who caused us to be in this situation? Bankers? Why is no party saying this?? #TUSC

#Eastleigh will candidates be looking to represent the area or looking to further a personal political career? #TUSC standing 2represent u!!

How much would #Eastleigh benefit if we chased the £120bn worth of tax money evaded, avoided or uncollected.....only #TUSC asking??

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## **10th anniversary of 15 February 2003: A million on the streets to stop the war**

### **But are there lessons for today?**

**Ken Smith, Socialist Party representative on the Stop the War steering committee 2003-2007**

It was the day that shook the world. From cold, grey, sub-zero London to sunny Sydney, a vast tide of humanity marched in every continent in the most momentous display of mass solidarity ever seen, hoping to stop the impending US-led invasion of Iraq.

The New York Times talked of the day showing two superpowers on the planet - the USA and world public opinion. The global hurricane provoked political turmoil worldwide and Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair's biggest political crisis.

In an estimated 600 cities across the world, people marched - possibly more than 30 million in total - against a threatened war which they rightly feared would lead to greater global instability.

Ten years on from 15 February 2003, all the fears of the marchers have come to pass and then some. The invasion led to the slaughter of more than half a million Iraqis. Millions more Iraqis have been displaced from their homes. Thousands of service personnel - including 4,486 in the US and 179 in the UK - have died.

Around the world lives continue to be lost and damaged in the name of the 'war on terror'. For

example through drone strikes in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the latest onslaught on Mali; through genocidal slaughter and repression, as in Sri Lanka; and through increasing denial of democratic rights. These are, in reality, wars conducted in the interests of big business.

## **Mass opposition**

The war for oil has left Iraq and the world in a state of permanent instability to this day and hasn't done anything to reduce the risk of terrorism.

The scale of opposition to Bush and Blair's drive for regime change in Iraq could not be doubted after that momentous day. Up to two million marched in London. Demonstrations took place in most major cities across the USA and there were huge demonstrations in every country where their "leaders" backed Bush's war drive.

However, the protests of the biggest anti-war opposition humankind had ever experienced did not succeed. The war went ahead with all its ultimate consequences. So does that mean that the tens of millions of us who marched failed or that demonstrations change nothing?

Undoubtedly, the demonstrations made the ruling classes of the world pause, seeking further justification in the form of a second UN resolution for their imperialist aggression.

Socialists explained that the UN process was "merely a diplomatic ploy to legitimise a predetermined decision to launch a war against Iraq" and that the UN was unlikely to act against the interests of its most powerful constituent, US imperialism.

Moreover, the scale of opposition in Britain saw Blair, previously known as 'Teflon Tony' because apparently no scandal or complaint could stick to him, teetering on the brink of defeat. The impact of the anti-war movement was something from which he never recovered.

## **WMDs**

The millions marching on that day were not marching to defend Saddam - as some, such as Observer columnist Nick Cohen, claimed. Most who marched were fully aware that Saddam was a vicious dictator who had ruled through the most brutal repression. The Socialist Party also gave no support to Saddam's rule and argued that his overthrow was the task of the Iraqi people.

No one doubted that Saddam had used chemical weapons in the past and could use them again - though there was enormous scepticism even then about the claims of stockpiles of so-called weapons of mass destruction, which were later proved bogus.

The main reason millions marched, and hundreds of millions more backed the marchers, was because they didn't believe foreign intervention was justified. They feared the consequences; and they suspected that, behind the propaganda fig leaves of George W Bush and Blair, this was a naked imperialist war for regime change to get their hands on Iraq's oil. It was also concerned with US imperialism's strategic interests and Bush's prestige after the 9/11 attack.

The millions came from all sections of society. There were those from socialist organisations and trade unions, and those who had been involved in the anti-globalisation movement in the decade previously, who knew what the likely consequences of war would be.

Yet, overwhelmingly the millions were people who had not previously been involved in political activity and who were not persuaded of the need for war in Iraq and were motivated to take action themselves.

The demonstrations - particularly in Britain - represented a unique chance for those leading the movement to clearly call on those newly mobilised masses to come behind a new political movement: a movement that could offer an alternative to the neoliberalism and war offered by establishment politicians.

The demonstration speakers represented a kaleidoscope of British society - reflecting the Stop the War Coalition's (STWC) 'popular front' approach.

This meant that, despite objections from the Socialist Party, the leadership of the STWC, strongly influenced by the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), bulldozed the decision through the STWC steering committee to allow a platform to then Lib Dem leader Charles Kennedy - without any public criticisms of the fact the Lib Dems only opposed the war without a UN mandate.

The leadership also refused to allow any speaker directly on behalf of a socialist organisation, denying the millions who marched a chance to hear a real alternative to war and capitalism. This undoubtedly helped to build up the Lib Dems' 'radical' image particularly among young people, helping to pave the way for the Con-Dem coalition.

Former Labour cabinet member Mo Mowlam, who was also to speak, was being promoted by STWC leaders as a Labour rebel, but six weeks later she called in the Daily Mirror for more bombing to win the war.

The Socialist Party explained in leaflets and articles that, "unless Blair's rule, and the interests of the capitalist ruling class that he represents, are put at greater risk from a movement at home than they would be by not going to war, Blair will not be deflected from his path".

We explained that this meant action before the invasion took place, as well as after; building

on the magnificent turnout on 15 February with mass civil disobedience, especially strike action, and seizing the time to build a mass political alternative, preferably in the form of a new mass workers' party.

## **Strike action**

Among the platform speakers at the demo were some trade union leaders who made the call for industrial action to stop the war, who were also uneasy about giving a platform to Liberals and Labour. In its material and speeches elsewhere, the Socialist Party supported this but argued that decisive industrial action to stop the war would require serious preparation.

Former Labour MP George Galloway had said in private discussions before the big day that he was going to use his speech to call for a new anti-war political alternative to be established. On the day he pulled back and spoke more obliquely, denouncing Blair and Bush, but only warning in general of splits in the Labour Party if Blair went ahead in supporting the war, saying that he and others would "refound the Labour Party" on socialist principles.

In the event George Galloway was expelled from the Labour Party in October 2003, at the time of Blair's choosing, and that opportunity to launch a mass party was lost.

However, even though some punches may have been pulled in speeches, why did the demo not then translate into mass civil disobedience and general strikes which could have halted Britain's involvement in the war?

The steering committee of the STWC met three days after the massive demonstration. The SWP and Communist Party of Britain leadership of the STWC acknowledged that "there is a massive responsibility on this committee to come out with a clear plan of action in the next few days."

At the time, the Socialist Party had three members on the 50-plus steering committee but did not have any members in the inner core of officers who made the day-to-day decisions and who were responsible for the political direction of the STWC.

However, it was forcefully put by Socialist Party members at the meeting that it required something more than abstract talk of a "political crisis" to make "mass civil disobedience" and effective industrial action a reality.

## **Recall TUC**

Under pressure from us, backed up by former NUM leader Arthur Scargill and George Galloway MP, it was agreed that "after getting two million on the streets we need to take up the call made by some trade union leaders for a reconvened TUC and to popularise the idea of all

forms of industrial action."

It was understood at that meeting that it would be wrong to put all our faith in a reconvened TUC calling industrial action, as was proved a few weeks later.

After 15 February, a serious attempt was needed to involve the majority of those who had marched into representative, democratic and effective coalitions at every level of society.

Socialist Party members were also particularly vocal on the need to draw on the experience of a mass civil disobedience movement that had brought down Thatcher - the anti-poll tax movement where mass demonstrations were combined with 18 million people refusing to pay the hated tax.

Of course, a campaign to stop a global war was on a bigger scale than the anti-poll tax movement, but the scale of opposition and potential anger that could be mobilised was even greater as well.

But, we argued, the most crucial aspect of building a movement out of the mass turnout on 15 February had to be organising effective and sustained action in the workplaces. Strikes, then as now, show that it is working class people who have the real power in society to bring everything to a halt.

## **Day X**

To bring to reality the slogan of "stop work to stop the war" serious preparations had to be made. Socialist Party member Bernard Roome, who was a member of the Communication Workers Union national executive at the time, had successfully moved a resolution at the union's executive "to campaign for all members to take protest action on the day that war is officially declared."

Socialist Party councillor and former Labour MP Dave Nellist also had successfully moved at a STWC steering committee that a planning meeting calling together all the executive and leading activist members of trade unions should be convened to coordinate action on Day X - the first day of the war.

Even before Day X, if a mass day of civil disobedience had been called on the day that Parliament voted to support an invasion, then it was possible this could have had the impact to force MPs to vote against war and defeat Blair.

If Britain's participation in the invasion of Iraq had been stopped, even at that late stage, this would not have stopped Bush and the US regime. It was a life or death matter for the regime

in the US.

In fact, veteran journalist Bob Woodward, in his book *Plan of Attack*, revealed that in March 2003 Bush had offered Blair the chance to keep British troops out of the war. But Blair was determined to assert Britain's prestige.

However, the growing anti-war movement in the US would have been given an enormous push from the defeat of Blair and an impetus could have developed for a new political party in Britain.

Blair and much of the Labour leadership faced growing anger over their war policies, as well as pursuance of privatisation, university fees and their anti-working class agenda. This even spread to the party itself with a parliamentary 'revolt' and a handful of resignations.

## **Labour**

Could Labour have been reclaimed for the anti-war masses, starting to take action and thinking about how to effect change? Following years of erosion of Labour's democratic structures it was impossible for working class people to have an impact on the party's policies, as was shown by various failed attempts to pass anti-war resolutions.

Even those who argued reclamation was possible put forward no clear strategy beyond asking people to join, an invitation that most anti-war activists declined and membership and support fell.

The Socialist Party argued that the anti-war movement did need a political voice and welcomed all positive steps towards working class political representation. However, in the belated formation of Respect, George Galloway, the SWP and others made fundamental programmatic and organisational mistakes, which prevented Respect from providing an effective political channel to the masses moving into action against the war and over other issues.

After 15 February, there were inspiring displays of trade union action, civil disobedience and the heroic organised and determined action of school students who walked out en masse on Day X - the day the war started.

International Socialist Resistance, a youth campaign initiated by young Socialist Party members, had distributed 60,000 leaflets on 15 February making a call for school students to organise themselves and prepare for school strikes. ISR members helped coordinate the strikes in many areas.

## **Opportunity wasted**

However, the leadership of the anti-war movement did not seriously address how to build and sustain a mass campaign of civil disobedience against the war.

Instead, they organised cross-party People's Assemblies and further demonstrations. Feeling the hot breath of the anti-war movement on their backs a number of politicians from the pro-war parties found their 'consciences' and participated. But the STWC leadership did everything they could to accommodate these right-wing establishment representatives - rather than make demands on them.

The scale of the anti-war movement in Britain, the US and elsewhere did lead to on-going crises for Bush and Blair, but not enough to topple either regime and stop the war.

Ten years on, the consequences of this blood for oil reverberate everywhere still. Nowhere is this more the case than in Iraq - billions of dollars were poured in to try and rebuild the country's infrastructure but whole swathes of the population have very limited access to electricity and drinking water.

Meanwhile the profits of the subcontracting and arms companies have skyrocketed. Deadly and near-daily attacks on security forces and civilians continue to claim lives.

15 February 2003 was an inspiring day to be alive, you saw the potential for the war to be stopped. Nevertheless, it also showed that mass demonstrations are not enough in themselves to stop political leaders whose power, prestige and ultimately political survival are at stake.

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## Campaigning against cuts

### Rotherham NHS - 'scams' and cuts

"Hospital goes into intensive care" claimed the Rotherham Advertiser. Before Christmas Rotherham NHS Foundation Trust announced it has to make £50 million cuts. Now it admits that in 2011 it 'lost' £684,000 in an email scam!

They've also paid private financial consultants nearly £3 million over the last three years. An IT system for patient records, costing £50 million to install, still doesn't work. The chief executive who proposed the cuts including downsizing the hospital and 750 job losses, then retired on a £250,000 a year pensions package.

Now the interim chief executive has been replaced by an American Healthcare company boss who has been hired by a management consultant who is allegedly being paid £2,500 a day!

The new Trust board took a £68,000 full page advert in the local paper to reassure the public and staff that the Trust can "meet all payroll and creditor obligations". The Trust chairman can only say that Rotherham hospital is like a "distressed child in need of a hug"! You couldn't make it up.

Rotherham Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), took a petition with 3,000 signatures against the cuts to the Trust governors last month, having made links with the hospital Unison branch. They are organising a public meeting with a speaker from the Mid Yorkshire NHS admin and clerical strike, to help give staff the confidence that they can fight back against the cuts.

**Alistair Tice**

## **South London - hidden costs of NHS butchery**

After Con-Dem health secretary Hunt agreed to butcher services at Lewisham hospital and others within the neighbouring South London Healthcare Trust (SLHT) two surgeons at QE11 hospital in Woolwich have already been declared 'surplus to requirements'.

Lewisham hospital is due to have its A&E and maternity services removed over three years. But figures released by Private Eye suggest that the cost of preparing the hospital for Trust boss Matthew Kershaw's plans could be £56 million.

On top of that £21 million is the estimated cost of plans to expand capacity at surrounding hospitals that are already under attack or overstretched. £47 million is earmarked for 'transitional costs'. £207 million to write off SLHT's immediate debts. That's £331 million already.

Longer-term spending plans include clearing up SLHT's 'excess' PFI costs at Bromley and Woolwich, starting with £23 million and rising every year until 2031. So the total costs would be nearly £750 million.

Most of the financial problems stem from PFI. If the cost-slashing Tory government decides that PFI companies cannot be allowed to lose out, promised replacements could well give way to further attacks on services, jobs, pay and conditions.

Cuts threaten the health service, its staff and users. We should step up the opposition with mass action to save our NHS - with trade union strike action at its heart.

**Roger Shrives**

## **Trusts hit staff pay**

Around 1,000 staff at Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, including nurses, stand to lose £600 a year through removal of the recruitment and retention premia agreed by the National Pay Review Body and implemented as part of the Agenda for Change agreement in 2005.

The Trust justified the cut by saying they no longer have to incentivise staff to recruit them, so the payment is no longer needed. They claim loss of pay will protect patients and jobs.

Trust Chief Executive, Lisa Rodrigues, says costs must be managed with 'forensic precision'. Ms Rodrigues did not apply the same rigour when the premium was introduced. Many nurses were told their posts did not attract the payment, when in fact it was a contractual right.

As for protection of patients, the Trust's own information show staff motivation at one of the lowest levels in the country. It's time for a democratic NHS that protects both service users and staff, and rejects cuts to jobs and services fuelled by a privatisation agenda.

**Sharon Mitchell**

## **Homeless protest cuts**

On 2 February, homeless people protested in Leicester as the Labour council plans £2.2 million worth of cuts to the homeless service. This could lead to 200 hostel beds being lost and other vital services to the homeless being cut. Homeless people sat on cardboard with placards to show what the city centre will see much more of - if these cuts go through.

The 'Streetlife' action group was formed by homeless people to campaign against the proposals. Leicester council's own homelessness review predicts that by the end of 2012/13 the council will have dealt with over 2,350 households facing homelessness, almost 20% up on the previous year.

It makes no sense to cut these services. If enough council accommodation existed to rehouse the homeless permanently then maybe the number of hostel beds could be cut - as that isn't the case, these cuts are crazy. There will be protests as long as Labour keeps passing on government cuts.

**Steve Score**

## Who's defrauding who?

A young single mother claimed income support while working but after the court case she will be better off, because she hadn't claimed everything she was entitled to.

Joanne Gibbons made a legitimate claim in 2010 for income support. She later got a job with the NHS trust, and then a clothes shop, without informing the DWP. Someone tipped off the DWP and she was brought to court.

If her wages were taken into account she was being overpaid £66 a week. But officials examining her claim realised she should have been claiming child benefit and tax credits totalling £130, ie £64 more than she got in benefits.

Her defence solicitor told magistrates: 'she would have saved the government money if she had continued the fraud'. Magistrates accepted this argument and although Ms Gibbons got a 12 month community order she does not have to pay back the £3,140 she was originally charged with obtaining illegally.

£2 billion a year in income support alone goes unclaimed, with billions more in other benefits, because people don't know their entitlement, Through lack of information this young mother fell foul of the system and was criminalised.

**Paul Gerrard**

## Fight or stand aside!

At a Salford against Cuts meeting, 60 people heard staff and service users put the case against cuts to vital frontline services. Calls for councillors to refuse to implement cuts, or stand aside for those who will fight them, were vigorously applauded.

Two years ago people gave Labour councillors, with their promise to 'protect the vulnerable', the benefit of the doubt. No longer. A resolution was passed unanimously, calling for a mass campaign by Labour councils to defeat the cuts, but saying that if they fail to do so Salford against Cuts will encourage and support council candidates who will.

**Matt Kilsby**

## Birmingham

About 200 people from council unions, students, service users and socialist campaigners lobbied Birmingham council Labour group on 4 February against the massive cuts they are

proposing. The main call was to oppose all cuts and for Labour to set a 'needs budget'.

Earlier some protesters had occupied the Council House balcony and unfurled anti-cuts banners. They were allowed to stay there and even had police protection! Councillors used a side entrance to avoid having to meet protesters. The budget setting meeting on 26 February will also be lobbied.

**Clive Walder**

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## **TUSC: 'No cuts' candidate in Eastleigh**

The resignation of Lib Dem minister and MP for Eastleigh Chris Huhne is just one of the latest crises to hit the coalition government.

It is further evidence to reinforce people's sense that politicians cannot be trusted and that they are completely out of touch with ordinary people.

Barely a household in the Eastleigh constituency will have been unaffected by the vicious cuts that have been carried out by the coalition as jobs have gone at Fords, B&Q and elsewhere.

Huhne was an enthusiastic supporter of a government which has pursued massive cuts as well as the privatisation of public services on behalf of big business.

Indicating how much more is to come, the Financial Times recently reported that there are "1,789 outsourcing opportunities worth £84 billion in the government pipeline." This spells more disaster for jobs and services.

Who will speak out on behalf of all those facing redundancy, losing vital public services, having their benefits slashed or being priced out of education? Some people will argue that the only alternative is to vote for a Labour candidate.

But in parliament Labour has failed to fight on behalf of all those hit by austerity. In fact, they were the originators of many of these policies, particularly cuts to benefits, privatisation of health and education as well as cuts in local government.

As workers increasingly engage in battles to defend their living conditions, the question of how to challenge those carrying out the cuts is posed sharply.

A new mass workers' party, democratically controlled and opposed to all cuts, must be built.

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is a key step in this direction and is standing a candidate in the Eastleigh byelection on 28 February.

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**The candidate for TUSC will be Daz Proctor, from the RMT council of executives. He explains why he is standing for TUSC in this extract from the election communication.**

I currently represent this region on the national leadership of Britain's largest transport union, the Rail, Maritime and Transport workers union (RMT) and am secretary of Southampton shipping branch.

I have been actively campaigning against shipping companies who pay 75p per hour on the cruise ships out of Southampton and £2.35 per hour on Condor ferries in Portsmouth.

My trade union was also instrumental in the formation of the "Stand Up For the South Coast" campaign, highlighting how incompetent politicians are looking to line the pockets of the greedy elite, rather than protect the normal working people of this country.

Career politicians privatise our services, attack education and the development of our youth, attack workers' rights and making it easier to hire and fire, and send our unemployed into poverty with welfare reforms.

For this they think they have earned a huge pay rise, while the working man and woman struggle to make ends meet.

We must stand up for our public services which we have built up over generations. Now we are seeing them attacked, fragmented and sold off in front of our very eyes.

And public sector workers are blamed and told if they want their pensions, they must pay more, work for longer and get less while suffering pay freezes!

Billionaire business is rewarded for failure, through taxpayer funded bonuses, yet the residents of Eastleigh are victimised through job losses.

If you want to oppose the attacks, want an alternative representative from a working class background who understands the struggles of everyday life, the importance of our public services remaining public, and who knows that blame lies with the billionaires and not the workers, I am your only choice!

## **Campaign demands:**

- Unite against all cuts
- Defend jobs & services
- Save the NHS
- Renationalise the railways
- Build a 24 hour general strike

## **Rally for TUSC**

**Tuesday 26 February, 7.30pm**

**Locomotive Engineers Club, 18 Southampton Rd, Town Centre, Eastleigh SO50 9FJ**

Speakers: Daz Procter, RMT Executive, Tim Cutter, Hampshire Unison branch secretary (personal capacity), Dave Nellist, former Labour MP now backing TUSC

**Support our campaign! Contact Nick Chaffey 07833 681 910; [eastleightusc@gmail.com](mailto:eastleightusc@gmail.com)**

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**The Eastleigh byelection will also see the first electoral outing of the recently-formed National Health Action Party (NHA).**

The NHA was established by health professionals after the final passage of the Con-Dems' health and social care 'reforms'.

Its co-leaders are Dr Clive Peedell, chair of the NHS Consultants' Association, and Dr Richard Taylor, who was the Independent Health Concern MP for Kidderminster from 2001-2010.

In January the TUSC national steering committee wrote to the NHA to open a dialogue with them, "including how we might be able to avoid future electoral clashes".

This was when Chris Huhne was trying to have his case dismissed which, if he had succeeded, would have left him still as Eastleigh's MP.

Unfortunately there was no response; while the NHA website, in its FAQs section, highlights that it has no "formal relations with any trade unions", bracketing unions with "the major parties".

The NHA is another important symptom of the disenchantment of millions with the

establishment parties, and it needs to be engaged with.

But without a trade union base, or a clear programme beyond saving the NHS, it is not necessarily the antidote.

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**Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, Hackney and Islington**

**Public meeting: Monday 18 February, 7.30pm**

**Halkevi Centre, 31-33 Dalston Lane, London E8 3DF**

Speakers include: Bob Crow, general secretary RMT and Nancy Taaffe, TUSC candidate in 2012 GLA elections

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## **Nottingham: Campaigning for comedy without misogyny**

**As part of the Rape is No Joke campaign set up by Socialist Students, a night of 'comedy without misogyny' was organised in Nottingham on Thursday 7 February.**

**Cathy Meadows spoke to Becci Heagney.**

### **Where did the idea for the comedy night come from?**

Jokes about rape are not the only issue, or even the most important issue, facing women in Britain today. However, it is one part of the sexism we face in our everyday lives.

We know women are facing the brunt of the cuts to jobs and services, still face sexual harassment and unequal pay in the workplace, and are objectified within the media and popular culture.

But a comedian telling a joke about rape could be the thing that a woman will get the most angry about when it's on top of everything else.

### **Was the comedy night a success?**

It was a big success! With a lot of help from people and groups around us, especially from the Nottinghamshire Trades Union Council which made a donation to help us fund the campaign, we had four comedians, various speakers and about 50 people at the event.

The comedians all showed that comedy could challenge reactionary ideas in a progressive and funny way - including one fantastic impression of the Canadian police officer whose comment had sparked off the Slutwalk movement, complete with a moustache and police hat!

Speakers from Rape Crisis and Nottingham Women's Centre outlined why they supported the campaign and also the challenges they are facing because of funding cuts.

Jackie Meht from Rape Crisis spoke passionately about how the minimal number of staff they have is being cut and how they rely mostly on volunteers.

But she summed up the mood of the night well when she said: "We're going to keep fighting it. We've been fighting for over 30 years and we're not going to stop now!"

**Rape Is No Joke week of action: 4-10 March**

See [www.rapeisnojoke.com](http://www.rapeisnojoke.com) for more

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## Support the fight for a socialist alternative

### Cameron's cuts aren't working

**Ken Douglas, Socialist Party national treasurer**

Socialist Party members from branches throughout England and Wales will be meeting at our national congress on 2-4 March to discuss the crisis in the world economy and the political situation in Europe and in Britain today.

We ask all readers to support our 2013 Congress finance appeal.

Despite all their talk of economic competence, the ruinous austerity policies of Cameron, Osborne and Clegg will have added an extra £700 billion to the national debt by 2015. The coalition is lurching from one crisis to another.

The Con-Dems are weak and divided and could be pushed back with a determined campaign

of coordinated strike action against the cuts, the attacks on the NHS and in the schools, culminating in a one-day general strike.

This fightback is growing and Socialist Party members are often playing leading and important roles - from the strike action by NHS clerical workers in Yorkshire to the campaign against the council cuts and closures in Southampton alongside the rebel ex-Labour councillors.

The Socialist Party is also playing a vital part in developing an electoral alternative based on the working class and the trade unions through the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition.

Our analysis shows a way out of this capitalist crisis - the amount of wealth in the world could ensure a decent life for everyone but only if the working class and poor can gain democratic control and ownership over it.

That's why building the Socialist Party and winning people to socialist ideas is so important - and why we need the finance to put our ideas into practice.

Every donation is welcome whether you are at school, unemployed or on a low wage and can't afford a lot.

It is the spirit in which it is given that is important. If you are working we would like you to consider making a bigger donation.

Help us to reach a bit further in the fight for international socialism with your donation.

Speak to your Socialist Party branch secretary, fighting fund organiser or treasurer about your donation, phone 020 8988 8777, use the form below or go to [www.socialistparty.org.uk/donate](http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/donate) (please label your donation 'congress appeal').

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## **Socialist Party 2013 national youth and student meeting**

### **Fighting for our future!**

**Mary Finch, Waltham Forest Socialist Party**

The Socialist Party held its 2013 national youth and students meeting on Saturday 9 and

Sunday 10 February, with around 80 people attending from across England and Wales.

The meeting opened with Socialist Party deputy general secretary Hannah Sell leading the discussion on the struggle for socialism around the world, including the most recent struggles in Greece and South Africa, and developing struggles in Britain.

The meeting split into separate political commissions, including: the need for a revolutionary party, how Marxist economics explain the current capitalist crisis, and what happened in Russia - could Stalinism rise again?

On Sunday, Claire Laker-Mansfield spoke about youth perspectives, and the work that young members in the party are supporting, particularly Youth Fight for Jobs and its 'Sick of Your Boss?' campaign, Socialist Students and Rape is No Joke.

Several people gave short reports of local successes with Socialist Students on campus, and in unionising their workplaces.

The meeting identified unemployment and underemployment, housing, sexism and education as some key issues currently surrounding and engaging youth.

The meeting ended with more commissions focussing on building the Socialist Party: writing for the Socialist, writing a leaflet, visiting a picket line, organising a demonstration, and attracting new members to the party.

## **We need fighting student unions**

The youth and student meeting compared the anger of students with the lack of a fightback by the officialdom of the National Union of Students (NUS) and local student unions.

Socialist Students, as well as building campaigns among students, also demands a democratically accountable, fighting student leadership.

Edmund Schluessel spoke about why he is standing for Socialist Students in this year's NUS executive elections, to be held at the NUS conference on 8-10 April.

## **Students occupy against job cuts**

Students from Sussex Against Privatisation have occupied the Bramber House conference centre at Sussex University.

They are protesting against plans from the university management to privatise services which

will affect 10% of staff.

Socialist Students also extended its full solidarity the recent occupation of the Finance and Human Resources department at Birmingham University over the sacking of lecturer Joseph Nafafe.

Socialist Students joins with Birmingham students in calling for his immediate reinstatement.

**See [socialiststudents.org.uk](http://socialiststudents.org.uk) for more**

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## **Unison South East region calls for general strike**

**By Paul Couchman, branch secretary, Surrey County Unison (in a personal capacity)**

Calls for a general strike of all workers came thick and fast at Saturday's AGM of the Unison south east region.

Resolutions calling for coordinated 24-hour general strike action came in from Surrey and Portsmouth local government branches and from Bucks Health branch.

Only one person spoke against the motions with speaker after speaker pushing for Unison's leadership to take the lead within the TUC.

In moving the Surrey motion, I argued the need for our union to give a lead to the millions of working class people already struggling in Britain.

Food banks are appearing in Surrey County Council offices for the first time in living memory. I also said that the trade union movement needs a general strike to remind the government we exist and that workers hold the real power in society.

Delegates from social workers to admin workers to health workers all spoke of a growing mood of anger and determination amongst Unison members and the support that could be built across the whole union for a general strike.

James Morbin from Oxford Health explained how the tragedies and scandals now unfolding in the NHS are a direct result of the Con-Dem government's privatisation and austerity programme.

Jane Armitage from Surrey County reminded delegates how many new members joined Unison when we took coordinated strike action on pensions.

All three motions were passed overwhelmingly by the 100+ delegates present and the meeting agreed to send them as a combined motion to the Unison national conference in June.

Many delegates made it clear that we don't want to wait until June for our national leaders to step up to the mark but agreed that the motion should go to conference just in case we are still waiting.

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This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 11 February 2013 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

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## Care workers fight cuts in pay and conditions

Unison members in South Derbyshire healthcare branch are having an activity in Derby on Saturday afternoon, 16 February, to publicise how the Thera Trust treats its workforce.

Staff at Thera East Midlands (TEM), part of Thera Trust, support people who have learning difficulties and challenging behaviours.

### **A Thera employee spoke to Gary Freeman:**

Thera is proposing to bring in a draconian contract in the East Midlands and in some (possibly all) other Thera companies which will mean wage cuts for TUPEd [transferred] staff and an end to overtime at weekends, at night and on bank holidays. Staff will lose over £300 a month.

The company wants cuts in sick pay, and a workforce at the beck and call of the employer. The employer's proposed contract means that they can send staff to any site in TEM and if it is at the beginning of the shift, the employee will have to get there in their own time and expense.

Similarly, if staff are not at their usual base at the end of a shift, they are expected to get home in their own time and expense.

The employer wants to introduce annualised hours with no pay for extra hours worked and

due to staff shortages, we are concerned about not being paid and also that we will never get the hours back.

The employer wants to include a clause in the contract giving them the right to change the contract when they want. They have also threatened further wage cuts for all.

The company's contract will inevitably lead to a loss of its skilled workforce and will affect the quality of care that support workers are able to give.

Our union branch organises TEM workers in Derbyshire; other Unison branches organise members in other parts of the East Midlands.

We recently had a consultative ballot across the whole East Midlands with a 93% vote for strike action.

Unison members from Thera North in Lancashire (where the union is recognised) are attending the protest.

The union is now preparing for an official ballot in the East Midlands and we hope to win union recognition from this dispute.

- Scrap the proposed contract
- No reduction of TUPEd terms and conditions
- £8 per hour as a minimum for Thera contracted workers
- Trade union recognition

**Protest Saturday 16 February, Osnabruck Square, Derby, 12.30pm-2.15pm**

**Informal meeting immediately afterwards in the upstairs room at the Dolphin Inn, Queen Street DE1 3DL**

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## Workplace In Brief

### Mid Yorks Hospital strike

Hospital workers fighting massive pay cuts have forced Mid Yorks hospital Trust to extend the deadline for agreeing to new contracts by three weeks so that negotiations can proceed.

Plans to ballot all 3,000 Unison members at the Trust are on hold until the next meeting with the Trust on 24 February.

## **London firefighters fight cuts**

After lobbies by the FBU, the London Fire Authority has voted not to comply with mayor Boris Johnson's order to go ahead with public consultations over £45 million in cuts and the closure of 12 fire stations. The FBU has vowed to continue the campaign against the cuts.

## **PCS ballot**

Members of the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) are voting in a ballot for industrial action, including strike action.

This national ballot, covering a quarter of a million workers, is about cuts in pay, pensions and terms and conditions.

The government is refusing to negotiate so the union has called the ballot which runs from 8 February to 4 March.

## **Construction protest**

There is a mass picket at the Capenhurst construction site near Chester/Ellesmere Port planned for 6am Wednesday 20 February, organised by Unite and GMB.

Jacobs Engineering are refusing to sign up to full Blue Book terms (the national agreement covering this category of construction project).

Delegations of construction workers from sites in Cheshire, Merseyside and Wales are coming. Unite are providing transport from Liverpool Unite office, 5am at Jack Jones House.

Site address: Urenco, Capenhurst Lane, near Chester, CH1 6ER

## **An NSSN supporter in the construction industry**

## **Fight prison closures**

On 13 February members of the POA prison officers' union will be lobbying parliament in protest at the plans to close seven prisons and partially close two more.

This will cut 2,600 prison places from an already overcrowded system. Almost 5,000 places have been lost since the Con-Dems were elected.

Overcrowded prisons lead to greater levels of violence, drug use, and bullying behaviour. During 2011 there were already an average of 42 assaults a day in prisons.

These cuts have more to do with the drive to the privatisation of prisons rather than the 'rehabilitation revolution' the government boasts of.

The lobby starts at 12.30pm in Old Palace Yard.

## **Defend the Four**

Unison members campaigning against witch-hunts against socialists in the union and for democratic control over all Unison structures are urged to encourage their branch to support a model resolution.

This can be found on [www.stopthewitchhunt.org.uk](http://www.stopthewitchhunt.org.uk).

Unison members are also urged to support the Reclaim the Union candidates in the elections for the union's national executive.

## **BBC strike**

Members of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) working for the BBC are due to strike on 18 February unless the corporation agrees to end compulsory redundancies.

A work to rule will start on 15 February. The BBC is planning 2,000 job cuts across the organisation and is trying to force people out at the same time as advertising jobs to external candidates. Negotiations are continuing.

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## **Greece: Martial law ends ferry workers' strike**

On 5 February the Greek government deployed military-style conscription against striking maritime workers to force an end to their industrial action.

The ferry workers are fighting against wage cuts, job losses and months' long non-payment of salaries.

The industrial action badly effected ferry crossings to Greece's myriad islands. But on the evening of 5 February, the police were mobilised under emergency legislation to break up picket lines.

This draconian 2007 legislation allows the government to rule strikes illegal and to place the workers under 'civil mobilisation'.

Workers are threatened with being forced back to work and face sacking and possible imprisonment. The New Democracy-led government used the same anti-democratic legislation recently against striking Metro workers in Athens.

## **Austerity**

Successive Greek governments have deployed the legislation against workers in essential services since the country's economic crisis began.

It shows the lengths to which the Greek ruling class is prepared to go to force through the programme of the Troika (the International Monetary Fund, European Commission and European Central Bank) in return for financial bailouts - policies that save the big banks and financial institutions but which are impoverishing huge parts of the Greek population.

To stop these attacks on fundamental labour rights, an appeal for the mobilisation of the full might of the wider workers' movement across Greece needed to be made by the trade union leaderships and the Left parties.

Instead, the two main union federations, the GSEE and ADEY, only organised limited regional solidarity action with the maritime workers, on 6 February.

The setback for the ferry workers will only encourage the New Democracy-led government, with support from its coalition partners, the 'social democratic' Pasok and the Democratic Left, to resort again to martial law against the organised workers' movement.

The Greek government's actions should also act as a warning to the working class throughout Europe. To force through deeply unpopular cuts and to defend its profits and interests, the ruling class will use ever more coercive, repressive measures against democratic and union rights, particularly the right to strike.

But through their struggles, which are often difficult and painful, workers will draw conclusions about what to do next.

They will conclude that they need to act together and to coordinate mass action. But the current union leaders resist this.

Therefore workers need to take initiatives from below, to force the unions to take determined action to overturn the government's policies and to drive them out.

- Full version see: [www.socialistworld.net](http://www.socialistworld.net), website of the committee for a workers' international, CWI

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## Low pay + high prices = debt misery

**Carole Wood**

I volunteer for an advice agency and deal with some people's debt problems. Clients from all walks of life come in because they're worried and need the free help and advice we can offer.

Despite what the government and the media claim; most clients don't get into debt because of frivolous spending.

Anyway, what is 'essential' expenditure and what could be termed luxuries? People all have different needs, priorities and problems to deal with.

In the Tories' eyes the working class gets itself into debt by overspending, sitting around at home all day, or being "feckless". The reality is very different.

A lot of debt arises from sudden changes in circumstances such as job loss, relationship breakdown, death of a partner or the onset of illness.

Look how quickly 1,300 Jessops workers lost their jobs. An announcement on the news about administration was followed two days later by mass redundancy.

I have seen people working two or three jobs trying to stay afloat. This lifestyle isn't sustainable and sooner or later they fall prey to exhaustion or family practicalities.

I did it myself; I worked full time in an office, together with an early morning cleaning job and weekend factory work.

In the end I gave up the factory work as I had no life and was physically drained. I now have a young child, so even if I could sustain three jobs I would struggle with childcare.

I regularly see fuel debt. Utility firms keep increasing prices despite massive profits (in August 2012 Eon announced half year profits of £245 million), leading to fuel debt for both working and non-working people.

Fuel arrears are termed priority debt, ie these creditors must be paid first. So if someone has numerous debts, often including at least one payday lender, they need to concentrate on paying off their gas and electricity arrears.

Unfortunately what often happens is a payday lender such as Wonga exerts huge pressure on the client to clear their balance, and they end up paying them first.

It is worse when clients have rent or mortgage arrears. With payday lenders hassling them up to 15 times a day by phone, text or email, clients naturally want to get these companies off their backs.

Rent and mortgage arrears are also 'priority debts', and non-payment can have serious consequences.

Anyone falling behind with these payments should talk to their landlord or mortgage company urgently, or risk losing their home.

A repayment plan can be negotiated, and payday lenders have to wait until the client's priority debts are cleared.

The media never mention the physical and emotional effects of debt. I have seen clients suffering from malnutrition after living on diets of pasta, rice and little else, in an effort to clear their payday loans.

They want to pay their creditors but their income level does not let them pay the amounts demanded. And with payday lenders charging up to 4,000% interest, a small unpaid loan can quickly spiral out of control. One of our client's £200 payday loans soon turned into a £1,500 debt.

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## Film review

# 'No' - an exercise in rewriting Chile's history

## Tony Saunois

It is 1988, Santiago, Chile, and 15 years into the vicious Pinochet dictatorship. The military regime has been compelled to call a plebiscite on the continuation of Pinochet's presidency. The choice on the ballot is a simple yes or no.

This is the setting for Chilean director Pablo Larrain's latest film 'No'. Released in 2012 it is the story of advertising PR man, Rene, a single parent played by Mexican actor Gael Garcia Bernal, who also played Che Guevara in the film 'Che'.

No has been nominated for Oscar awards and reviewed as a "must" to see "an account of Chile in the 1980s". It is presented as a "radical" film which is not a "typical political drama".

Technically the film skilfully intertwines original news footage from the time with its story. It opens with an effective listing of the crimes of the regime.

Scenes of Pinochet's advisory council meetings and footage from the Yes campaign depict a regime wholly out of touch with Chilean society - sometimes with humorous irony.

There are undoubtedly witty moments - eg when a government minister is unclear if the No campaign flag - a rainbow - is a gay symbol, a Mapuche [a group of indigenous inhabitants of Latin America] symbol or a gay Mapuche symbol.

## Rewriting history

However, apart from some film footage of police repression, this film is an exercise in writing out of history the real heroes of the struggle against the regime.

It is part of a process in this period to try to rewrite history to denigrate or wipe out the role of mass struggle and especially the workers' movement from key historical events.

Sometimes, as in the case of No, this is then dressed in some form of radical dress to sell it to a new audience.

From the skewed perspective of a slick advertising TV campaign with its main slogan, "Happiness is coming to Chile", it appears the regime was defeated by the sole efforts of an advertising agent.

This was in truth the basis of the No campaign. It was an attempt by the leaders at the time to de-politicise the movement. The No vote won, in reality, despite its campaign not because of it.

Seeing the film tells nothing about the background to the plebiscite and the struggle against the regime.

Throughout the film there is not a single shot of life in the working class areas and the shanty towns which surrounded Santiago at the time and were the heartland of resistance to the military dictatorship.

The entire struggle is viewed through the distorted prism of the middle class advertising world.

## **Pressure from below**

The regime was compelled to call the plebiscite as a result of the mass protests which erupted during the 1980s.

Tens of thousands took to the streets, building barricades and doing battle with the riot police and the army month after month.

In 1984 a massive demonstration of at least 250,000 took place on May Day in the O'Higgins park in Santiago.

Here the first issue of the paper of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI, the world socialist organisation to which the Socialist Party is affiliated) 'Democracia Obrera' was sold by members of the CWI wearing masks to avoid detection by the hated secret police, the CNI.

A massive battle erupted at the end of the march as tens of thousands of heroic masked youth fought the army and police. There was overwhelming support among the youth for an armed uprising.

The Chilean Communist Party adopted a "double speak policy". It was compelled to reflect the mood of the youth and established its own armed wing - the PFMR.

Chile, by the end of the 1980s, was on the brink of an insurrection. Even El Mercurio, the right-wing daily which backed the coup in 1973, warned that Chile was heading for a "Nicaraguan road".

The Sandinista victory, which overthrew the brutal Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua in 1979, had rekindled the idea of insurrectionary struggle among the young fighters battling against the repressive regimes of Latin America.

## **Communist Party betrayal**

At the same time the Chilean Communist Party leadership conducted its real policy which was to join together with the 'democratic' capitalists and work for a controlled transition.

It was the mass movement and threat of an uprising which compelled the ruling class and then the regime to call the plebiscite.

The leaders of the Communist Party and the Socialist Party in alliance with the capitalist parties like the Christian Democracy supported the plebiscite as a means of channelling the mass opposition to the military into a 'safe', 'democratic' transition to avoid an uprising and what would have followed it.

None of this is even referred to in the film; It was all due to the efforts of Rene - a PR man.

The regime was convinced it would win the plebiscite but was preparing to fix the result in case it lost.

This is clearly portrayed in the film. As the results came in the power was cut - as it was in real life.

Yet suddenly the regime caved in and accepted the result. Why? The film does not attempt to answer this question beyond saying it was due to "international pressure". This had not bothered Pinochet for 15 years.

Archive material of air force chief of staff Matthei arriving at La Moneda presidential palace declaring he accepts the No campaign's victory is shown in the film.

The air force had supported a controlled transition for a period of time. Yet, why the change of heart by the army and navy?

As the power was cut, a struggle opened up within the regime. Pinochet wanted to fix the result. However, reflecting the mass pressure the army generals split and the game was up.

Outside the presidential palace were hundreds of thousands. Thousands of the best youth fighters had flooded to the city centre and were prepared to storm the presidential palace - among them members of the CWI Chilean section.

## **Struggle continues**

These youth were dispersed and sent home by leaders of the Communist Party speaking from the tops of riot police vehicles.

They said the situation was "under control" and they would call them back should it be necessary. In reality, behind the scenes, agreement was being reached with the military and the opposition. Not a hint of this is reflected in No.

The film ends with the poignant archive film of Pinochet handing over power with a smile and shaking hands with Pratricio Alwyn, the newly elected president and member of the capitalist Christian Democracy which had backed the coup in 1973.

A 'controlled' transition to a wholly undemocratic system followed, in which Pinochet remained head of the army and senator for life.

It was written into law that the military would be immune from prosecution for its crimes of murder and torture.

The legacy of the "Happiness is coming to Chile" promise of the No campaign has been greater inequality and vicious neoliberal policies today.

A new generation has now taken up the struggle against these policies reflected in the tremendous student movement which has taken place during the last two years.

In 2012 mass protests demanded renationalisation of the copper industry and the country's other resources to pay for decent education, all privatised under Pinochet and not touched by successive governments.

'No' may raise awareness that Pinochet was defeated in a plebiscite. Will it enlighten people about the reality of what happened or what lessons can be drawn today? No.

**For essential background reading see *The other '9/11'* - The 1973 bloody coup against Popular Unity government:**

[The other '9/11'](#)

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This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 11 February 2013 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

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**Film comment:**

# Spielberg's Lincoln by Tony Mulhearn

Patrick Ayers and Eljeer Hawkins gave a penetrating analysis of the Spielberg film 'Lincoln' (the Socialist 7-13 February). They underlined the class forces which triggered the dynamic of the struggle against slavery.

Abraham Lincoln was driven by the expanding capitalist class' imperative to destroy slavery, which was an obstacle to the development of capitalism on a national scale.

These pressures compelled him to change from an apologist for the slave-owners to an outright abolitionist. The film reveals Lincoln's qualities as a leader whose historic role at that juncture was critical.

A key focus of the film is on Lincoln's moral repugnancy of slavery which is highlighted in various speeches and anecdotes he makes to mobilise support for his objective - the adoption of the 13th Amendment to the constitution.

This declares that "neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction."

In one such anecdote he relates his revulsion at seeing a boatload of slaves being transported in appalling conditions to the southern plantations.

Spielberg reveals his sympathy for Lincoln by casting the anti-abolitionists as the most repulsive collection of political hacks - on a par with today's weekly spectacle of Prime Ministers Question Time - and his supporters as timid backsliders.

One anti-abolitionist venting his hatred of the 13th amendment hysterically screams: "What's next, votes for women?" The anti-abolitionist benches explode in fury at this prospect.

Daniel Day-Lewis's towering performance makes his Bafta award richly deserved. The film identifies the pressures on a leader brought to bear by hostile class forces. His superlative performance captures these hostile pressures which are refracted through various sources.

From his wife, played by a magnificent Sally Field, who lost a son in the civil war and is desperate for the war to end even if it means cutting a deal with the Confederates to avoid sending her second son to war; from his closest advisors who demand that he retreats saying the time is not right and, of course, from the anti-abolitionists whose hatred for Lincoln is displayed as all-consuming.

## Historic role

Lincoln, determined to preserve the Union as essential in developing the United States as a viable state with a prosperous future, withstands these pressures with single-minded determination to secure the vote in Congress. Lincoln uses three unscrupulous conmen who, today, would be dubbed spin doctors.

Without Lincoln the interests of developing American capitalism would probably have prevailed, but it may have stretched out over a longer period.

Lincoln's leadership at that crucial point in US history certainly sounded the death knell of slavery and hastened the development of America as a giant industrial and commercial power.

Inevitably, much is missing from the film. The movement of the masses and the 400,000-signature anti-slavery petition organised by the Women's National Loyal League, for instance. Still, this is a powerful film and a must for all those wishing to gain an insight into the role of leadership and the shenanigans surrounding the end of US slavery.

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<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/16123>