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Fight royal mail sell-off!

Strike against privatisation

A Royal Mail worker

It is no surprise that the Con-Dems are rushing the privatisation of Royal Mail through as quickly as they can. They face overwhelming opposition. 70% of people don't want to see the postal service in private hands. Price hikes to line the pockets of the super-rich - that's been the bitter lesson from the sell-off of rail, energy and water.

Privatisation would only mean job losses and a worsening of working conditions for postal workers. The 125,000 postal workers in the Communication Workers Union (CWU) are expected to vote strongly in favour of strike action over pay and pensions in the ballot, whose result is due early in October.

Not everyone's opposed though. Big bankers, lawyers, accountants and PR firms will collect up to £20 million in fees from advising on the sale. But the public will pay higher prices and eventually lose services. Royal Mail will be at the beck and call of institutional investors wanting a return for their investment.

The £200 million Royal Mail said it could have paid out in dividends if it had been listed for a whole year, would be better spent on providing jobs and improving services.

Our union, the CWU will be supporting the NHS demo at the Tories' conference on 29 September in Manchester - this is very welcome. But the union leaders should also announce a national demo against Royal Mail privatisation. This would give postal workers, other trade unionists and members of the public an opportunity to channel their deep anger over cuts and privatisation.

The CWU could link up with other unions considering action, such as PCS, NUT, FBU and the RMT to take strike action on the same day. The TUC must name the day for a 24-hour general strike. The collective strength of workers withholding their labour could bring this weak coalition to its knees.

CWU general secretary Billy Hayes recently said: "We want Labour to commit the next Labour government to renationalise Royal Mail if it is privatised." That would scotch the sell-off plans.

But this was wishful thinking - when in government Labour failed to renationalise the rail network or repeal the anti-union laws. In fact they tried to flog off Royal Mail. This is just further evidence of the need for a new mass party of the working class.

Royal Mail workers are confident we can win this battle. We need to fight to convince every CWU member of the strike's importance and involve them in the strike.

Regular mass meetings at local, regional and national level should make the decisions about the campaign.

Victory to the Royal Mail workers!

The Socialist calls for:

- No privatisation of Royal Mail
- If CWU members vote to strike, this must have the support of the entire trade union movement
- No to the use of the anti-trade union laws; scrap them!
- Defend all jobs and no to increased workloads
- Defend the union, defend the reps
- For a fully nationalised and democratically run communications industry
- Build a new mass workers' party to provide a fighting, political alternative to the pro-big business parties
- For a 24-hour general strike to oppose all privatisation and austerity measures

Britain: a seething cauldron of class anger

From 22 to 25 September the Labour Party will be holding its annual conference in Brighton. Despite the hatred of the government, its defeat over Syria and continuing punishing austerity, Labour is failing spectacularly to forge ahead in the polls. At the recent National Committee Hannah Sell, Socialist Party deputy general secretary, introduced a session on the situation in Britain. The following is based on her speech and the discussion that followed.

The historic defeat of Prime Minister David Cameron's plans to bomb Syria was only the latest in a long list of crises. No British government had been defeated on the question of war since the American war of independence. Then, in 1782, it led to the government's collapse. For now Cameron has suffered a body blow - but the government remains in place.

However, from the referendum on Europe, to gay marriage, to Lords reform, to corruption

scandals, to universal credit, to HS2, to the lobbying bill, it appears that crises are the new normal.

Labour leader Ed Miliband was momentarily able to take some credit for Cameron's humiliation. But in reality it was the 2003 anti-Iraq war movement scoring its first victory. Most people, like the Socialist Party, oppose the bombing of Syria: seven out of ten Americans and four out of five people in Britain are against an attack. This fed through to (in particular slim-margined) Labour backbenchers and forced Miliband, initially prepared to support Cameron, into opposition.

The Daily Mail's Max Hastings correctly described it as: "characteristically feeble of Labour's leader: he has seized on a tactical issue rather than a principled one." People understood what occurred and Miliband remains even more unpopular than Cameron, with a net satisfaction rating of -36! The incredible rottenness of New Labour was revealed when the Blairite wing insisted Miliband should have supported the warmongers, as Labour MPs did in 2003.

So, for now, the government is still standing. But it has been profoundly weakened. With 30 Tories opposing and 30 staying away from the recall of parliament, the scale of opposition to Cameron on his own back benches was exposed.

Cameron was forced to say that he "gets it" and he won't take part in a US intervention. This can change further down the road, but at this stage cross-party fear of the electoral consequences means another vote is unlikely. The task now is to force the government to 'get it' on austerity.

Anger intensifies

Cameron and Co may believe that they are getting away with making the biggest cuts to living standards since Queen Victoria's day. Seeing the lowest level of strike action since 2005 they may conclude that the working class has given up the fight. But they would be wrong.

Below the surface a volcano of anger is bubbling up, fuelled by many issues. Despite promises to mend their ways the latest expenses scandal reveals that MPs' snouts have remained firmly within the trough. According to the recent British Social Attitudes survey (BSA) just 18% have faith in the government to put the 'nation's needs' first.

But it isn't just MPs that are seen as corrupt. Trust in all the institutions of capitalism has been undermined. This includes the capitalist media after Murdochgate and the Leveson revelations; governments and GCHQ following the spying scandals; and the infiltration of Stephen Lawrence's family and the socialist-led Youth Against Racism in Europe (YRE), as well as their utterly despicable behaviour at Hillsborough, has added to suspicion of the police.

What is missing, given this huge, elemental, working class anger and distrust of the bloated elite is a clear signal from the leadership of the unions, the main working class organisations, of how it is possible to fight back.

The Socialist Party has been campaigning for a 24-hour general strike, supporting the National Shop Stewards Network call for the TUC to 'name the day'. It's obvious to workers, especially those involved in struggles of their own, that it makes sense to come out together.

Mood for action

If the trade union leaders gave a lead workers would respond. When Unite general secretary Len McCluskey took a show of hands in support of a 24-hour general strike at the 20 October TUC demo against austerity last year the response was overwhelming. In the demo's wake a Guardian poll revealed 82% support for a general strike.

Calls for action are answered with enthusiasm - on 30 November 2011 an estimated two million public sector workers joined the pension strike to register their opposition to austerity.

Despite serious hesitation at the union tops that pressure has not dissipated, and even the most right-wing trade union leaders can be forced to respond. At this year's TUC Unison general secretary Dave Prentis, key to the pension strike betrayal, was forced to put on a left face and to move a motion that called for coordinated action over the public sector pay freeze. The RMT's motion, which called for the general strike to 'remain on the table', was passed.

This autumn serious action is looming. This can make it harder for the right-wing trade union leadership to continue to hold generalised action back.

Postal workers in the CWU appear ready to fight the privatisation of Royal Mail. A CWU indicative ballot found that 96% were against privatisation. They are now balloting for strike action.

Of course Labour could prevent the sell-off at a stroke by promising to renationalise the service if elected in 2015. That would scare off any potential investors. But, given a Labour government tried to sell it off in 2009, this is unlikely.

Teachers in the NUT and NASUWT have called two days of cross-regional action with a plan to have national action in November. There is also a mood in the PCS civil service union to continue action and, following a 78% vote for action, firefighters in the FBU are likely to follow suit.

All these strikes must be supported to the maximum. But no opportunity must be lost to also argue the case for coordinated action, as a step towards a 24-hour general strike with

pressure put on the TUC to 'name the day'.

Potential triggers

But these disputes will not necessarily be the only way the seething anger below finds expression, especially while the block at the top remains and generalised action is delayed. Explosions from below can take unexpected forms as they did in Brazil where the initial spark for a mass movement was a few pence increase in the Sao Paulo bus fares.

The whole-scale attack on the NHS could similarly be a trigger to mass action exploding. The TUC demo on 29 September is very important but so too are the many local campaigns. The role of health workers must be to the fore. Cuts and privatisation are also continuing apace at the universities and could spark localised student movements.

Over half of the 150,000 people receiving emergency food aid from Trussell food banks between April and June were referred because of benefit delays, sanctions, and financial difficulties relating to the bedroom tax and abolition of council tax relief.

The government partially succeeded in dividing working class people on the question of benefits, thanks to the complete lack of opposition from Labour. However public opinion is beginning to change. The number of people who think benefits are too high has dropped from 67% to 51% according to the BSA. 93% of those born after 1979 oppose cuts to benefits, health and education.

Tory Chancellor George Osborne has trumpeted glimmers of good news on the economic front. But his claims are overstated - in a world of ailing economies Britain's remains among the sickest. The UK 'recovery' is the slowest in 100 years, slower than any other G7 economy with the exception of Italy. The UK economy is still 3.3% smaller than it was in 2007.

Even the boss of Next admitted that: "In real terms, people are still getting poorer." Wages have fallen for six consecutive years. Average wages in Britain have fallen further than almost any other country in Europe - a massive 5.5% since 2010.

Zero-hours

Unemployment remains high, officially at 7.8%. The number of people out of work for more than a year has reached a 17-year high of 915,000 and youth unemployment has risen to over one in five young people out of work.

Underemployment is the main factor keeping this figure down. It is now estimated that 5.5 million workers are on zero-hour contracts plus more in other forms of temporary, casual, part-

time work. Two years ago the Socialist correctly described this precariat as "a modern manifestation of the 'reserve army of the unemployed', as written about by Karl Marx, who analysed capitalism."

Many of these workers are not currently organised in the unions - but nonetheless they can be a tinderbox. In the US fast food workers are organising to demand decent pay and the right to be in a union.

Struggles like that will erupt here and a few victories, such as that of the Hovis workers in the bakers' BFAWU union against zero-hour contracts could open the floodgates. Like the 'new unionism' of the late 19th and early 20th centuries we could see organised struggles of the currently unorganised take centre-stage.

Any formal stuttering into economic growth has been largely fuelled by Osborne's attempts to engineer a house-price boom. This is a short-sighted attempt that is driven primarily by the Tories' own electoral needs. But even among elements of the capitalist class there is concern that they risk reflating the massive housing bubble. There is no possibility of this triggering significant and sustained real growth. It could potentially lead instead to a new stage of the crisis.

The after effects of the previous bubble still remain - a huge millstone of debt hangs around the necks of the working and middle classes. Six years into the great recession household debt remains a massive 140% of gross domestic product (GDP), compared with 100% in 2000.

So it is hardly surprising that workers hope, even against hope, that there is someone on their side to trounce the Con-Demons in the Coalition who have meted out this misery. And it is into this situation that Miliband has opened up the question of the link between the Labour Party and the trade unions.

Labour

Dancing to the tune not only of the Tories and big business, but also of the Blairites, Miliband has sought to use the Falkirk affair as an excuse to carry out the final smashing of the remnants of the working class's collective voice in Labour. Despite the police and internal inquiry exonerating Unite he says he is pressing ahead with 'reform'.

Certain myths have taken flight. Dave Prentis, for example, argued that the problem is one of bad timing and that opening up division between Labour and the unions risks the 2015 election. But a Labour victory is threatened by one thing: the Labour leadership's wholehearted commitment to maintaining Tory spending plans in the next parliament. It begs the question - what is the point of voting Labour?

But Prentis did at least criticise Miliband. Unfortunately Len McCluskey, general secretary of Unite, has not led the way on the question of political representation. While the GMB's general secretary, Paul Kenny, has threatened to slash his union's funding to Labour by over a million pounds if the link with Labour is broken, Len McCluskey has not clearly opposed Miliband's proposals. At one stage he even described the status quo (that is the unions having a collective political voice) as 'indefensible'.

Despite Miliband's woeful speech to the TUC congress, clearly the union leaders hope that Miliband may partially retreat; delaying a reduction of the union's voting rights within the Labour Party until after the spring conference. Even if Miliband was to do this, it is clear that he intends to go ahead with abolishing the trade union link, and will take clear steps towards it at the special spring conference.

However, at even the faintest whiff of Miliband retreating on this issue, the tabloid press, Cameron, and no doubt the Blairite wing of his own party, screamed 'chicken'. Under this pressure, Miliband may well completely break the link, despite the financial consequences for the Labour Party.

But the genie is out of the bottle - even if the process becomes more protracted. The question of how the organised working class can have a political voice is being discussed across the trade union movement. The Socialist Party argues that Labour has long since ceased to be such a voice, and that the trade union movement should break the link with Labour and found a new mass workers' party. Alongside the RMT and others, we take part in the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) which is doing important preparatory work for the creation of such a party.

Nonetheless, those trade unionists who are arguing to fight against the breaking of the link have a far better approach than the few who argue to accept it, but to continue to support Labour. If the trade unions were to go to the special conference and vote en masse against these proposals it would be the first significant rebellion against the Labour leadership's destruction of working class political representation. This could create a political earthquake. The possibility would be posed of the Labour Party being riven in two, with the pro-capitalist elements on the one hand and the trade unions on the other.

For Labour to be reclaimed by the working class would require far more; the trade unions would have to struggle for the adoption of a fighting programme - including ending austerity and public sector cuts, of a mass council house building programme, a living wage, and repeal of the anti-trade union laws; the expulsion of the pro-capitalist elements, and the recreation of the party's democratic structures.

Genie's out!

Given the grip of the pro-capitalist elements in the party we do not judge such a campaign would be likely to succeed. Even if it did not, however, the result of fighting to defend the collective political voice of the working class could be the emergence of a powerful new mass workers' party from within the shell of pro-capitalist New Labour.

Even now the current debate is leading more and more trade unionists - including those who previously thought Labour could be reclaimed - to conclude that the time has come to found a new party of the working class. Correctly, they see it as essential that such a party be based on the collective representation of the working class via the trade unions.

The approach of TUSC, based on the trade unions and a democratic federal structure while also giving individual participants a democratic voice, has been confirmed by events.

These discussions on political representation are taking place while an elemental class rage is developing under the surface of society in Britain. Despite the obstacles at the top of the trade union movement this anger will find an outlet and erupt at a certain stage. The result will be struggles on a scale not seen for generations. The fight for a mass political voice for the working class - armed with a socialist programme - will be a vital part of those struggles.

Stop NHS cutbacks

Dave Carr

David Cameron's 2010 election slogan was: "I'll cut the deficit not the NHS". Unfortunately for us, since he became prime minister of the Tory-led coalition, the National Health Service (NHS) has been savaged.

But as the NHS disintegrates under the impact of the gov-ernment's market policies, the Tories are determined to offload the blame of a faltering service onto hard-pressed health workers.

This buck-passing is from a government which refuses to agree legally binding minimum staffing levels on hospital wards; while a recent BBC survey of Accident and Emergency (A&E) staffing levels at hospitals in England reveals an overall 10% shortfall, causing a "significant impact" on the safety and care of patients.

Barking, Havering and Redbridge University Hospital NHS Trust reported a staggering 43% shortfall of permanent staff at its A&E departments. But it seems that health bosses and the health secretary have found a solution - close the A&E department at one of its two hospitals!

But it is not only government spending cuts that are undermining the NHS. Many NHS trusts, including the aforementioned, are saddled with exorbitant and unsustainable Private Finance Initiative (PFI) debts.

PFI schemes, introduced by the Tory John Major government in the early 1990s and widely expanded by Labour's Gordon Brown, are a licence to print money for the private consortium that runs them, at the expense of NHS budgets.

One of the NHS Trusts to face PFI financial meltdown is Barts, in east London, which is burdened with a 42-year, £1 billion PFI contract on its new Royal London Hospital. The Trust has to shell out an eye-watering £115 million a year in repayments, resulting in £78 million of cuts this year.

To most people the sensible solution would be to scrap PFI and reintegrate health services back into a publicly owned and democratically run NHS. But that is a dead letter to Tory chancellor George Osborne who instead has signed off a new version of PFI, whereby the public purse acts as a financial guarantor to the 'risk taking' private sector.

And in the meantime, to reduce PFI debts, expensive private sector 'turnaround teams' are sent into hospitals, such as Whipps Cross (part of Barts Trust), to identify millions of pounds of cuts in hospitals' day-to-day spending.

But if Cameron and Osborne and their private healthcare supporting friends believe that their wrecking ball policies in the NHS are going unopposed then they might want to wear ear plugs at the Save Our NHS trade union demo at the forthcoming Tory party conference in Manchester.

And in the week before, angry health workers, socialists, trade unionists and the wider community will be marching in east London as part of the campaign - along with possible industrial action - to demand a halt to the cuts.

If you want to save the NHS then join us on these protests (see demo details below).

The crippling cost of PFI schemes

NHS PFI repayments

- 2001-02 £196 million
- 2005-06 £542 million
- 2012-13 £1.76 billion
- 2029-30 £2.71 billion

Source: HMT

South London Healthcare Trust, which collapsed under PFI debt, was spending 14% of its income on a PFI repayments contract, agreed under Labour. This is equivalent to the salaries of 1,200 nurses or 200 hip replacements a week.

Defend all Barts health services and staff

Demonstrate: Saturday 21 September, 12noon,

The Green by Whipps Cross Hospital (near roundabout bus stops), marching to Walthamstow town square

Protest at the Tory Conference

- Save our NHS
- Defend Jobs and Services
- No to Austerity

March and Rally - Sunday 29 September

Assemble at Liverpool Road, Manchester M3 4FP, 11am

Marching to a rally in Whitworth Park

A UN attack we agree with

A UN investigator on housing, Raquel Rolnik, slammed the Con-Dems' bedroom tax after speaking to people hit by the tax.

Tory chairman and former housing minister Grant Schapps has attacked Rolnik and ranted about her using the term "bedroom tax" - instead of the government newspeak of "ending the spare room subsidy". But everyone she heard from called it the bedroom tax.

This included Karen from Barnsley, who spoke to the Socialist.

We went to an anti-bedroom tax meeting in Manchester. The UN officer was there to see how the bedroom tax is affecting people. She could have chosen any meeting in the country really,

she just happened to choose that one.

It was very informal - like giving a testimony - very emotional for everybody there.

Both my husband and I are disabled. We're in a three bedroom house. We sleep separately because of medical conditions.

We've had some adaptations done to the property - ramps put in, a full walk-in shower, that kind of thing.

So we've been charged for two bedrooms. Both bedrooms we've been charged for are around nine foot by six foot. The only reason I can sleep in one of the spare bedrooms is because at four foot eleven I can get away with a kid-size bed. It's only five foot six, otherwise it wouldn't fit in.

I don't have any 'spare rooms' - all my rooms have a use. I really, really hate that phrase.

One woman said how she'd been told not to worry about the bedroom tax as when her husband dies she'll be able to go back to work and sort it out then!

It makes life difficult - let's put it that way. Nobody mentioned a 'spare room subsidy' or under-occupation - or whatever it is this week. It's a tax."

Search for 'United Nations Bedroom Tax Hearings 14' on YouTube to see Karen and other victims of the tax describe their situation

Hillsborough: even more cover-ups revealed

Matt Gordon

Twenty four years on from the Hillsborough Disaster there have been yet more revelations about the apparently limitless mendacity of the South Yorkshire Police.

Not only were the statements of police officers systematically altered, but the statements of ordinary witnesses may have been altered as well.

The inquiry that reported its findings last year had trawled through 450,000 documents relating to the disaster and finally revealed without doubt what has long been known by the people of Liverpool - that the police orchestrated a massive 'black propaganda' campaign to

blame the tragedy of the 96 deaths on the fans themselves. They had done this with the tacit support of the tabloid media and the government.

Not only did the report point to the falsifying of statements, but it also found examples of the police requesting to use money donated to the families for themselves - on holiday homes and gym equipment! These accusations went right to the top of the South Yorkshire Police.

Following this report, in December 2012, the High Court quashed the original verdict of accidental death and Theresa May was forced to announce a new criminal investigation. Senior figures fell over themselves to apologise.

Altered statements

The latest developments reveal that 238 police statements have been altered, an increase from 164 in the original report, as well as an unknown number of witness statements.

There have also been 90 pocket books uncovered, written by officers on duty during the disaster, which have never before been looked at and may include vital evidence about what happened.

These findings will give campaigners further impetus to keep fighting, but one year on it represents slow progress and is still a long way from justice.

It is hard to have any trust in either the Independent Police Complaints Commission or in the criminal investigation which is led by former senior officers.

These institutions have been severely undermined, not just by revelations about Hillsborough, but by the parallel revelations about Stephen Lawrence, the scandals about Jimmy Savile and other public figures, and the role of the police in the miners' strike of 1984-85.

It is more and more apparent that for the powers-that-be 'black propaganda' is less a job on the side and more a full-time occupation.

Delaying tactics are still being used by the police, with reports that officers will refuse to give evidence and that this current round of investigation may go on for years.

Only a genuinely independent public inquiry, involving the families, campaigners and trade union representatives, with the power to prosecute those responsible, will finally get justice for the 96.

MPs still have their snouts in the trough

James Ivens

The results are in! MPs' expenses for last year have been published, and it's time for the Socialist to dish out the honours.

The Bisto Award for Gravy Guzzling goes to Ian Paisley Jr, scrounger for North Antrim, who pocketed over a hundred grand.

No stranger to success, 2008 saw the Democratic Unionist draw three state salaries at once. Clearly underworked as an assembly member and junior minister, Paisley did "research" on his dad's parliamentary payroll too.

Congratulations also to another Ian, who takes home the Lunn Poly Jet-Set Shield for spending nearly £12k getting into work.

Conservative Ian Halfon, black hole for Harlow, is leagues behind top travel claimant, Lib Dem Alistair Carmichael.

But with Westminster only 20 miles away, a standard-class season ticket comes in at £4,800. That's less than half, Halfon.

Gravy train

One MP made no claim at all. We should hope so too given his net worth of £200 million. Tory Zac Goldsmith is keen to trumpet the fraction of his dad's stock market swag he throws at green charities. Very charitably, he keeps his capital in an offshore tax haven.

For many of his colleagues, charity begins at home.

Figures released by the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA) reveal that around a quarter of MPs employ their own family as 'office staff'.

An eye-watering £9 million expenses increase is mostly down to crafty capitalist politicians hiding behind staff.

All the main parties have members' slathering spouses and kids with £25 to £50 grand. Many are already super-rich. And the lot of them seem set on voting the rest of us into penury.

It's all approved by IPSA, of course. Set up in response to the 2009 expenses scandal, the authority has proven nothing more than a gravy-stained rubber stamp.

Political alternative

What we need are workers' representatives on a worker's wage.

And we know it can be done, because we've done it before. Terry Fields, Dave Nellist and Pat Wall were Marxist Labour MPs and supporters of the Militant, forerunner of the Socialist.

Each took no more than the salary of a skilled worker in his constituency. The rest went towards funding the fightback. And they never once voted for cuts, war or privatisation.

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) stands in this tradition. Our candidates make the same pledge.

If ordinary people can't trust the main parties, Labour included, we need to do it for ourselves.

So will you stand for TUSC and help us spoil their party?

Ban this trade in death

Recently, Defence and Security Equipment International (DSEI) held its biennial arms fair event at the Excel arena in Newham, east London.

Two trade stands were found to be offering torture equipment for sale until embarrassed event organisers eventually booted them out.

While the Labour-run Newham council is only too happy to allow this trade in death to take place in the borough, it has effectively banned socialists and other peaceful campaign groups from using non-obstructive public stalls in pedestrian areas of the borough.

The arms trade is very big business around the world. In Britain the arms and defence industry employs 400,000 and produces £11.5 billion of exports each year.

Cameron and the Con-Dems may weep crocodile tears over civilian deaths in Syria, but they are only too happy to allow the representatives of dictatorships, such as in Uzbekistan and Bahrain, to buy more deadly equipment to brutally suppress their own populations.

These fairs, touting lethal weapons, should be banned. Moreover, the arms companies should be nationalised, with their factories and the skilled workforce turned over to the production of goods that would benefit society as a whole, and democratically run.

In the 1970s workers at the Lucas Aerospace combine produced a detailed report explaining how arms production in their factories could be converted to the manufacture of socially useful products, such as dialysis machines, and calling for workers' control.

Chris Newby

Lock up the tax evaders

The director of public prosecutions, Kier Starmer QC, has announced that you could now be locked up for ten years for benefit fraud.

This vicious threat is part of the anti-welfare propaganda barrage that has led to people thinking, on average, that 27% of benefit is claimed fraudulently. The real figure is 0.7%.

In fact, money lost to benefit fraud is tiny compared to the benefit money that goes unclaimed, leaving many in increased poverty. Yet Starmer says such fraud should be at the 'forefront of lawyers' minds'.

Putting the £120 billion annual tax evasion and avoidance, largely by the rich, to the fore would certainly be a greater source of money. But then the biggest tax avoiders can afford the best lawyers.

Labour faces both ways - again!

Labour has refused to pledge to scrap the bedroom tax - and told off anyone that says it will.

After their Scottish welfare representative said that a Labour UK government would abolish it, a Westminster Labour spokesperson replied: "It goes against what we are saying - we haven't made that pledge to date."

What they really think

When they let their guard down, politicians can reveal their true colours.

Education secretary Michael Gove on Socialist Party member Martin Powell-Davies:

"Martin Powell-Davies of the National Union of Teachers National Executive has claimed that our education reform plans will make teaching 'a totally unbearable profession'. It has come to something when the General-Secretary of the NUT ranks almost as a voice of moderation. But even though Christine Blower doesn't indulge in the hyperbole of others she still presents teaching as a profession in the grip of some terrible malaise."

See electmartin1.blogspot.co.uk for Martin's response

Ian Liddell-Grainger, MP for Bridgewater and West Somerset and descendent of Queen Victoria, on anti-badger cull campaigners after finding a dead badger on his doorstep:

"I thought most of them were in the habit of lying in bed until the pubs open, or until the postman arrives with the benefit cheque (or do such things get paid straight into their accounts these days?)."

"Either way, since they are all malingerers and scroungers there is no real incentive to leap out of bed as soon as the dawn chorus strikes up."

Ukip MEP Godfrey Bloom, on foreign aid:

"How we can possibly be giving a billion pounds a month when we're in this sort of debt to bongo bongo land is completely beyond me."

"To buy Ray-Ban sunglasses, apartments in Paris, Ferraris and all the rest of it that goes with most of the foreign aid."

"F18s for Pakistan. We need a new squadron of F18s. Who's got the squadrons? Pakistan, where we send the money."

A second entry for Michael Gove, showing awareness and sensitivity on the reasons people are forced to turn to foodbanks:

"I had the opportunity to visit a foodbank in my constituency only on Friday and I appreciate that there are families who do face considerable pressures."

"It's often as a result of some decisions that have been taken by those families which mean that they are not best able to manage their finances."

Caerphilly Labour council seems to have taken Gove's comments on board and is considering compulsory money management courses for anyone in rent arrears because of the bedroom tax.

Universities minister David Willetts explains why it's feminism, not neoliberalism, that's responsible for the lack of 'social mobility':

The feminist revolution in its first-round effects was probably the key factor. Feminism trumped egalitarianism.

It is not that I am against feminism, it's just that is probably the single biggest factor. One of the things that happened over that period was that the entirely admirable transformation of opportunities for women meant that with a lot of the expansion of education in the 1960s, 70s and 80s, the first beneficiaries were the daughters of middle-class families who had previously been excluded from educational opportunities."

Tory MP for Scarborough, Robert Goodwill, showed what he thinks of young unemployed people when attacking the Youth Fight for Jobs Jarrow March in 2011 after false press reports about the march:

"They are not fit to walk in the memory of the Jarrow marchers. If this is their level of commitment no wonder they can't find a job.

"It must have been a big shock to have to get up in the morning and march rather than watch Jeremy Kyle."

The Jarrow Marchers responded with this song, to the tune of Clementine:

Robert Goodwill

Robert Goodwill

Do you even know our names?

Just a Tory on a high horse

Are you that scared of our gains?

Goodwill's hunting

Goodwill's hunting

For the rights that we have won

For the youth clubs, for the healthcare

Just another Thatcher son

Where's the goodwill

Robert Goodwill?

Where's your human decency?

One in five youth on the Dole now

And you still refuse to see

Rob the public

Rob the public

Strip away the welfare state

Haunted by the 1930s

And you think we'll sit and wait

What we saw

Andy McSmith for the Independent on 11 September:

The newspapers today all reported that Ed Miliband's most uncomfortable moment during his visit to Bournemouth for the TUC conference was when Janice Godrich, President of the PCS civil service union, demanded a 'yes or no' answer to whether he was for or against austerity.

Ms Godrich is a member of the Trotskyite Socialist Party, successor to what used to be known as the Militant Tendency.

It was in that same hall in Bournemouth that Neil Kinnock launched his campaign to drive Militant members out of the Labour Party. You can say this was Militant's revenge.

Anger at zero-hour contracts in universities

Rent-a-prof?

Sam Morecroft, Part-time tutor

Sports Direct, McDonalds, Wetherspoons, Cineworld and... Britain's universities. Many people were no doubt shocked to hear that the use of zero-hour contracts is endemic not just among employers in retail or fast food, but also in some of the country's richest universities.

Research published by the UCU trade union shows that over half of universities and around 75% of further education colleges use the contracts to cut costs - denying staff sick pay, regular hours or any kind of job security.

For most university and college lecturers however, it will come as no surprise. Casualisation has become rife in universities and colleges, with postgraduate students and junior staff routinely used as cheap or even free labour.

While students are paying £9,000 a year tuition fees, the staff teaching them are being paid a pittance and having to take a second job to get by.

It's yet another indictment of Austerity Britain - while bankers are still raking in bonuses, educators are underpaid and exploited.

It doesn't have to be like this. Simply by releasing the report, UCU has forced the spotlight on zero hours.

The University of Edinburgh, the biggest zero hours university in Britain, has been shamed into pledging to scrap zero-hour contracts.

Of course it will require more than just drawing attention to really fight these contracts. Where casualised staff get organised and demand contracts with decent terms and conditions, they can win.

At the University of Sheffield this year, we've secured proper contracts for postgraduate tutors, guaranteeing sick pay and full employment rights.

That has been possible because postgraduates and casualised staff have got organised, joined

UCU and fought for something better.

At Sheffield we still have a long way to go - much of the lesson preparation and marking that staff are expected to do remains unpaid.

But the conscious effort by postgraduate students to organise across as many departments as possible means that we can force university management to listen to us.

Whether you work for McDonalds or an Oxbridge University, the way to beat zero-hour contracts is the same - unionise, fight back, and demand proper contracts, full employment rights, and decent pay!

Internships: on-the-job training or just exploitation?

Alastair Hewet

In London banking circles it's called the 'magic roundabout', every intern's worst nightmare. Having worked all night an intern is provided with a taxi ride home, which will then wait outside while they shower and change, before shuttling them back to the office for another long day.

The tragic death of Moritz Erhardt in August has raised serious concerns about exploitation of interns, not just in the banking sector, but across many business sectors in the UK.

Moritz was a 21 year old intern who was found dead at his home after allegedly working for 72 hours without sleep at Bank of America Merrill Lynch.

Never say no

The labour market has become a hostile place for young people since the financial crisis. Youth unemployment is close to 20%.

The incomes of many young people in their 20s are at 1999 levels. These difficulties can mean that determination to find a foothold in employment has never been higher.

As an ambitious young intern you will, of course, never say no to the colleagues and managers you are so desperately trying to impress.

You are well aware that this opportunity is in fact a 'trial run', an audition for you to showcase your talents.

You have already come so far, beaten the slimmest of odds to secure an internship. But it is not enough unless you convert this opportunity to a full-time position, something which is rarely guaranteed.

While some banking and law interns may face horrors such as the 'magic roundabout' and 24-hour working days, they are at least compensated with wages of around £40,000 pro-rata.

Interns in many other industries, such as fashion or media, often find themselves working for free, seeing internships as their only option to gain the experience necessary to find employment.

In some cases young people are so desperate to gain experience that they actually pay to do the internships, sometimes at a cost of thousands of pounds.

The employer will often have no intention of providing a job at the end of an internship.

Youth Fight for Jobs demands:

- A living wage - decent wages that are enough to live on for all workers, including interns and apprentices
- Proper contracts - guaranteed hours and full employment rights. No to zero-hour contracts and insecure employment. No more uncertainty and insecurity dressed up as 'flexibility'!
- Proper training - work experience, internships and apprenticeships with proper pay, based on preparing for a guaranteed job at the end of the training
- Real jobs - massive government investment into a programme of public works to create millions of decent, socially useful jobs
- We won't pay for the crisis! - build a mass movement of working class and young people to stop the cuts and fight for jobs, homes and services for the 99%

The Spark

Newsletter of Youth Fight for Jobs - Sick Of Your Boss? underemployment initiative special

£1 To order email youthfightforjobs@gmail.com

Megaphone

Magazine of Socialist Students

2013 edition includes articles on NUS, fighting the EDL and zero-hour contracts. £1

To order phone 020 8558 7947

Second seven-day strike at Hovis

Hugh Caffrey and Ian Plumbley

Hundreds of bakers in Wigan, Lancashire, are mounting a second seven-day strike against casualisation. Members of the BFAWU union have been fighting against Hovis management's attempts to enforce huge pay cuts and make the workforce easy to sack.

On 14 September the strikers and supporters marched through Wigan town centre, bringing the community together in the fight against the employer's use of the zero-hour contract.

Strikers explained how management had tried to operate the plant on strike days, only to fail as they had no idea how to operate the equipment.

They described how management spy through windows and look down on those on the picket line. And the Dickensian bonus at Christmas is a packet of crumpets and a ticket for a free loaf of bread!

On 16 September there were 60-70 pickets out in the early hours of the morning. Stephen Hall, president of Greater Manchester Association of Trades Union Councils reported: "By 5am only seven of the company's fleet of over three dozen trucks, all driven by managers, and which have all usually left the bakery by 3am had been able to get out.

"The action of the pickets was only thwarted when police reinforcements, including police dogs were brought in to help break the blockade and three arrests were made.

"Shortly afterwards, however, it was reported that half of the company's United Road Transport Union member drivers had decided to take the day off in response to the action of the BFAWU pickets."

The first seven-day strike clearly had a big effect. Management have partially retreated. 24 workers employed on zero-hour contracts have now been given full-time permanent contracts.

This would not have happened without the strike, and shows how trade union action can defeat zero-hour contracts and create real jobs.

A BFAWU spokesperson explained: "The company plan to widen the use of agency labour on site... [and we are] concerned that this will lead to zero hour contracts merely being supplied by a third party."

Further BFAWU branch meetings are to be held to discuss more action if the management do not remove agency labour from the site.

The next strike runs from 25 September to 2 October.

- Send messages of support via the BFAWU website www.bfawu.org or to geoff.atkinson@bfawu.org
- Send donations to the strike fund payable to BFAWU, to BFAWU No.4 Regional Office, 348 Chester Rd, Cornbrook, Manchester, M16 9EZ
- Visit the picket line at Hovis (Premier Foods) Bakery, Cale Lane, Aspull, Wigan, WN2 1HD

Added on 18 September:

Strikers stop lorries

A mass protest at the Hovis bakery in Wigan on 18 September blocked the delivery trucks from leaving the plant for hours, for the second time in three days.

Despite a heavy police presence, the 2am protest delayed the first truck for well over an hour. By 4.30am, one picket explained: "Usually they'd all be out ages ago.

That truck there is at least an hour late, probably more". Over 30 trucks were due to go out within a few minutes of 3am. Three hours later, and less than a third had left the bakery!

While there was plenty of pushing and shoving by the police, there was no threat to use police dogs, unlike the protest two days earlier.

Another worker told me: "Monday's protest led to Tesco's turning away the delivery lorries. If they did that then, there's a good chance they'll do that this morning too."

Hovis is spending thousands of pounds on a small army of scab managers and scab lorry-drivers. Despite that, the workforce remains resolute and strike action is clearly biting.

The bakers will strike again from 6am on Wednesday 25 September for seven days. Further action is planned beyond that, because as a striker said: "the company isn't talking to us, and

doesn't seem interested in talking to us", and so the fight continues.

Further solidarity protests in Wigan and beyond may well be required to back up the bakers' battle.

Hugh Caffrey

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 18 September 2013 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Warrington town hall unions lobby councillors

About 100 members of GMB, Unison and Unite lobbied the full council meeting at Warrington town hall on Monday evening, 2nd September.

The workers are intensely angry that after years of pay freezes and a 1% pay rise, the council is increasing the pay of senior managers by up to £10,000 a year.

One GMB member said that while many workers have had their pay cut by job 'evaluation', these senior posts have been filled by 'slotting in', that is without advert and interview.

It is not even clear to the council unions whether these top posts have gone through the agreed job evaluation process at all.

"And we are feeling the cuts - the fortnightly bin collection has increased the weight we have to lift, and in summer the smell was terrible", commented a bin worker.

Another binman mentioned that workers were being recruited on agency contracts. "If they say a word out of place, they just don't get phoned back. And another lad came from Princes Trust, and he worked all day on the bins in the heat, for no money - it's wrong".

Unison members spoke about the loss of jobs as day centres were closed and others spoke of smaller teams dealing with bigger workloads.

Andy Ford

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 16 September 2013 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Strikes force One Housing Group into talks

Paul Kershaw, Unite housing workers' branch

Following a series of strikes by Unite members, management at One Housing Group (OHG) have agreed to refer the dispute to Acas (the conciliation service).

Unite has called for this since before the first strike and has argued that it may have been possible to avert strike action had a referral been made.

It is welcome that management appears to have backed down on this. Strangely the chair of OHG, Anthony Mayer, had expressed the view that the matter should be referred to Acas but management continued to dig its heels in while strikes continued.

It is very unusual for a board chair to be publicly at odds with his management in this way.

The strikes have been well supported with increasing numbers of staff participating and joining Unite, as well as wider support from the community.

It seems that this pressure has begun to tell on management. Members have been angered by the gratuitous attack on Unite issued by OHG management at the same time as accepting an Acas referral but I know Unite negotiators will approach all talks positively, I hope OHG do the same.

Frontline staff face severe hardship due to the pay cuts. The group continues to pay some workers below the London living wage.

The group continues to make some of the healthiest surpluses in the sector and the chief executive gets a pay increase which the group reported publicly as a pay cut.

None of this will enhance the reputation of OHG.

Frontline housing support staff have demonstrated that they will not be ignored, it is to be hoped that this fact has sunk home to management.

Please send all strike donations c/o Nicky Marcus, Unite, 128 Theobalds Road, WC1X 8TN. Cheques made payable to LE/1111 or bank transfers to Unite Housing Workers LE/1111 Branch, sort code 08-60-01 Account number: 20040639

Warrington bus strike against pay freeze

Andy Ford, Warrington Trades Council

Bus drivers at Network Warrington are staging a number of one-day strikes against a pay freeze and also a lack of investment which they fear is setting the company up to fail. Warrington is one of the few towns where the buses are still municipally owned.

I spoke to the striking Unite members outside the depot on Wilderspool Causeway.

"The pay 'offer' is 0% this year and the same next year!" I was told by one driver, and the shop steward also explained the attitude of the Labour councillors who exercise ultimate control over the company.

The issue of pay seems to be the straw that broke the camel's back, but many other issues are agitating the workforce too.

"This company works like a secret society, you can't find out what's going on. When we met the councillors they were quite hostile - Labour councillors! Only Kevin Bennett out of them all has offered us any support.

"We had a better relationship with the Liberal administration when they were in power, at least they answered our letters.

"We did eventually meet the Labour councillors but it seems they are not interested. We worry that the company is being run down to sell it."

I asked if the likes of Arriva and Stagecoach were in the picture.

"There's been bids in for Network Warrington, we're sure, although this lot deny it. They need to invest to save the company. They loaned £650,000 but a loan is not investment".

I mentioned the frequent sight in Warrington of empty buses.

"Exactly. They should set the routes so it's busier, less money lost, so they at least break

even".

We spoke about the modern plague of more and more senior managers, less and less shop floor workers.

"A lot of senior managers have been took on. One manager becomes three, that's how it has been going. The previous Managing Director has a lot of questions to answer".

The company employs about 230 drivers and the vast majority had obeyed the strike call with just a few non-union members and managers crossing the picket.

Strikes are planned over the next seven weeks.

Messages of solidarity can be sent to warringtontuc@live.co.uk

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Workplace news in brief

Glasgow Unison walkout

Council workers in Glasgow walked out on 13 September after a social worker was suspended in a row over workloads. The action continued by members of the Homeless Team on 17 September.

Glasgow City Unison is demanding that the worker is reinstated immediately and that staffing is increased to cope with the rising workload.

This underlines the need to build widespread action over workload, pay and working conditions.

- See socialistpartyscotland.org.uk

FBU strike and demo

The FBU has called a four-hour strike in England and Wales on 25 September. This is over pensions and follows an 80% majority for action in a ballot.

Talks are continuing in Scotland. The government is trying to force firefighters to work until they are 60, knowing that many will fail the fitness tests as they get older, putting their pensions in jeopardy.

But the battle is also against cuts to fire services all over the country. 3,600 firefighter jobs have been lost since 2010, almost 7% of firefighters across the UK.

The FBU calculate that 6,000 more jobs could be lost by 2015. The union has therefore called a national demonstration in London on 16 October.

Teaching unions

The campaign to build the strike action by the NUT and NASUWT teaching unions started on 14 September with rallies in London and Nottingham. This will be followed on 21 September by rallies in Cambridge and Exeter.

The strikes will start on 1 October in Eastern, East Midlands, West Midlands and Yorkshire and Humberside regions.

On 17 October there will be strikes in the North East, London, South East and South West regions.

Week of action at HMRC

PCS members in revenue and customs department HMRC have called a week of action against plans to close 281 enquiry centres across the UK.

This will run from 23-27 September. There will be protests on 25 September in central London at Euston Tower and Portsmouth and Brighton.

The closure of these offices will deny pensioners, vulnerable workers and tax credit claimants a vital face-to-face service.

Grangemouth ballot

Workers at the Grangemouth oil refinery in Scotland are balloting for strike action over attacks on their terms and conditions and pensions.

Cleaners strike

69 GMB members employed as cleaners in Kensington and Chelsea are striking over pay. Currently they are paid £7.18 an hour but they are fighting for the London living wage of £8.55 an hour.

OCS employ them to work in one of the richest boroughs in the country, while the workers can barely afford the fares even to get to work. The two-day strike ran from 16 September.

Train cleaners fight for living wage

On 16 September RMT members working as cleaners for contractors ISS on the East Coast mainline backed up their strike action by protesting at York and Kings Cross stations. They are campaigning for a living wage and improvements to their working conditions.

In London, after the protest, the workers marched to ITN headquarters nearby. They refused to leave until a reporter came down to meet them. RMT assistant general secretary Steve Hedley was then interviewed about the dispute.

Lively demo against cuts at Whipps Cross hospital

Picture gallery of demonstration on 16 September 2013 outside Whipps Cross hospital in East London:

A stream of nurses, domestics, porters, technicians, doctors, paraded back and forth over the zebra crossing on Whipps Cross road, chanting "Save Whipps Cross", displaying placards, and winning the support of the rush hour traffic.

This was the gate protest on 16 September called by Waltham Forest Health Unison branch. Speeches were interspersed with chanting and a huge amount of noise in support from passing traffic - especially the ambulances!

Unison branch secretary and Socialist Party member Len Hockey opened the speeches by applauding the Whipps Cross workers who had joined the 200-strong protest, emphasising the central role the workforce has to play in the fight to defend the hospitals across East London.

Len encouraged workers to get up on the platform and speak for themselves, as well as introducing union reps and anti-cuts activists in support.

Labour MP John Cryer pledged his support. Socialist Party member Nancy Taaffe spoke from the local anti-cuts union and called for the hospital's PFI contract to be cancelled.

She emphasised the central role of the trade unions in fighting the attacks, and appealed to hospital workers to stand for election to the council in 2014 as part of TUSC (Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition).

Ongoing campaign

This gate protest was the latest step in Unison's campaign. Four weeks ago 100 people from the community, trade unions in the borough and hospital workers attended a public meeting.

Last week a meeting of 90 staff - Unison, RCN and Unite members - met to pass a vote of no confidence in the NHS Trust management and to take strike action.

An indicative ballot of Unison members has now begun. Workers at the hospital hope the regional leadership of the union will show as much determination to fight as they have themselves.

Saturday will see a demonstration through the borough. Workers have been taking leaflets for the last few weeks to help build this demo, and went away yesterday armed with the last batch, determined to make it as successful as possible.

Paula Mitchell

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 17 September 2013 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

TUSC campaigners look to shake Fleetwood

Jane Hersey

Ray Smith is the prospective candidate for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) in the forthcoming Fleetwood town council byelection in Rossall Ward.

Ray is campaigning to save Fleetwood hospital from closure and oppose Tory-Liberal cuts, and is against the abhorrent bedroom tax.

Ray helped to set up Fleetwood Against the Cuts, which is supporting him in the election.

One of his supporters said: "There are many residents who are suffering greatly because of welfare cuts.

"I feel let down by the mainstream parties and feel it is time for a change. Ray is the only candidate that will give me and others in the area a voice." This was a sentiment echoed by many residents both young and old.

Many residents expressed their concerns at the savage attacks on people living in poverty and with disabilities, indeed all vulnerable people, by the Coalition government.

Many felt disillusioned by Ed Miliband's failure to challenge David Cameron on his so-called welfare 'reforms'.

GMB union member Ray is passionate about finding a voice for local democracy and if elected he intends to defend all services, lead a public campaign to keep the Lancashire town's hospital open and support local residents.

Ray used to be a Labour councillor but is standing for TUSC because Labour has changed. "It no longer represents vulnerable and ordinary working people."

Plymouth

Plymouth TUSC is seeking anti-cuts candidates to stand against Labour in next year's city council elections.

Ryan Aldred, secretary of the Socialist Party's Plymouth branch, said trade unionists fed up with the Labour Party need to "seize the time".

"In Plymouth we have a Labour administration which is implementing Tory austerity policies to the hilt, such as the bedroom tax, the abolition of council tax rebates and inviting businesses to set up schools.

"As we speak, it is seeking to make further cuts of £65 million while at the same time having

the bare-faced cheek to call itself a 'brilliant co-operative council'."

Plymouth TUSC public meeting: 8 October, 7pm, at the Plymouth Social Club, Tavistock Place, PL4 8AX. Contact 07731 919245 or rjaldred@hotmail.com

"Over 100 years ago, my union and most unions supported the Liberal Party, and they were told: 'You've got to stay in the Liberal party and turn it around.' They broke with that and formed the Independent Labour Party, because the Liberals weren't representing people that were working, unemployed, and in social deprivation.

"They set up the Labour Party. And I think, 100 years later, what trade unions are realising is that the three main parties all support privatisation, all support anti-trade union laws, and all support, from time to time, illegal wars around the world...

People are saying to themselves, they're not getting value for money from the Labour Party... I think, eventually, people will turn around and say, 'Well hang on a minute - no one's representing our class of people.' And they'll come together and say, there ought to be a new political party - a new party of working people, unemployed, pensioners.

All the people not being represented, but the majority of people in this country. That's the significance of it.

They'll come together and form a political party that fights on behalf of working class people."

RMT union leader Bob Crow on why he supports TUSC, as quoted in the Guardian

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is an electoral alliance that stands candidates against all cuts and privatisation.

It involves the RMT transport workers' union, leading members of other trade unions including the PCS, NUT and POA, and socialist groups including the Socialist Party.

Southampton 'rebel councillors' Keith Morrell and Don Thomas join TUSC steering committee: see tusc.org.uk

Scotland: Bedroom tax close to death

Let's finish it off!

Philip Stott, Socialist Party Scotland

Bedroom tax non-payment levels are soaring in Scotland with an estimated £25 million - half of the £50 million due - likely to be unpaid this year.

Hated and reviled by those it is impoverishing, trade unions, councils, housing associations, the Scottish government and now even a United Nations representative have all been pressed into calling on the Westminster government to scrap it.

Recent victories have emboldened the anti-bedroom tax campaign in Scotland:

In Dundee in April, the Bin the Bedroom Tax campaign forced the Scottish National Party-led council to agree to a 'no eviction for a year' policy - the first council to do so. This pledge has now spread to a majority of councils.

The Labour-led North Lanarkshire council, which had threatened eviction proceedings against a disabled woman, was overturned by a community revolt in August. North Lanarkshire council has agreed to no evictions until April 2014.

A Labour MSP has now drawn up a bill that would change the legislation to rule out evictions and provide £50 million to mitigate the bedroom tax.

Now the Scottish SNP government has announced an extra £20 million this year for DHP payments to help mitigate the impact of the Tory tax.

However - this is not enough. Only the full £50 million and a commitment to cover the loss in housing benefit for the 85,000 households affected until the bedroom tax is scrapped will do.

SNP and Labour politicians have been dragged into action by a mass campaign of opposition from the close-on 100 local campaigns that have been set up and the work of the Scottish Anti-Bedroom Tax Federation.

Huge public meetings, thousands on demonstrations, protests at council meetings and the Scottish parliament, as well as MSPs' and councillors' surgeries, have piled on the pressure. Anti-eviction armies are being assembled across Scotland.

The money is there. Last year's underspend by the Scottish government was £179 million. There is likely to be a similar underspend this year.

Combined with the reserves and borrowing powers that local councils have, no tenant in Scotland should have to worry about where they will find the money to pay this tax.

What is the use of SNP and Labour politicians if they won't act and use the powers they do have to protect the poor, disabled and the vulnerable? We are close to a victory over this shocking piece of class hatred, inflicted by a government of pampered millionaires on the poor. It would be a victory not only against the bedroom tax, but against all the cuts being inflicted by the Con-Dems and will give confidence to all fighting back against austerity.

Socialist Party Scotland members have been at the forefront of the campaign against the bedroom tax, in setting up local campaigns in areas across Scotland and in the establishment of the Scottish Anti-Bedroom Tax Federation. We say:

- Scottish government must act now to change the Housing Act and legislate for no evictions in Scotland for the bedroom tax
- Scottish government, councils and HAs must agree to fund 100% of the money lost to tenants as a result of the bedroom tax
- Westminster government must scrap the bedroom tax and return all money stolen through it

Tears from Wolverhampton councillors as they slash jobs

A Wolverhampton Unison member

Wolverhampton council has announced it is seeking 1,000 voluntary redundancies, and if they were not forthcoming it would be making them compulsory. This comes on top of 600 job losses over the last four years.

The leader of the Labour council said they had no alternative and told us that some councillors 'had cried when making the decision'.

To add insult to injury, after the announcement he suggested that the unions join forces with the Labour Party to launch a campaign against Tory cuts!

Wolverhampton Unison's response to them is: dry your eyes and fight to defend public services and for the working class of Wolverhampton who elected you!

A motion calling for the Labour council to defend services and to set a need budget, based on what is required by the people of Wolverhampton, not determined by Tory cuts, will be going to a special Unison branch meeting.

The motion will also call for a ballot on industrial action to defend jobs and services.

Our members have had enough, but it's not just Wolverhampton. The neighbouring authority Shropshire has announced its intention to sack 50% of its workforce!

These attacks will not stop until the Tories have achieved their goal of destroying public services. As Labour leader Ed Miliband's performance at TUC confirmed, the election of a Labour government will lead to no reversal of these attacks.

Rather than leave individual branches to defend local jobs and services Unison needs to organise nationally coordinated action to defend all public services.

This, linked to coordinated action by all trade unions, is the only way to defeat the attacks we face.

Taking the anti-cuts fight to the councils

Overwhelming opposition stuns Hull council

Mick Whale

Hull city council workers have stuck an enormous two fingers up to the cuts. They have rejected the worsening of terms and conditions which management was trying to force on them as part of the council's attempts to balance the budget - by making the workforce suffer.

Indicative ballots across the authority during the summer weeks, delivered votes of more than 80% rejection in all unions.

Unison, the largest union achieved a 90% rejection and their ballot included support for industrial action, up to and including strike action.

The size of the rejection vote surprised the Labour cabinet, the officers and some of the union leaders.

What it shows is that there is a preparedness of local authority workers to fight.

Significantly, the highest turnout in the vote against the proposals came from Unison, which had actively campaigned through workplace and mass meetings.

There is no doubt that this pushed up the turnout and the extent of the rejection.

The hated chief executive, Darryl Stephenson has ended up with egg on his face.

His advice to the Labour cabinet was to sack and re-engage on the worst possible terms and conditions irrespective of the vote.

Literally within minutes of the result being communicated, the Labour portfolio holder for human resources was on the phone seeking a meeting with the trade union representatives to try and find a different way forward.

Council workers are not out of the woods yet but the result will give the workers confidence.

It remains to be seen exactly what 'different way forward' the authority comes back with.

However, by knocking back the attempts to worsen terms and conditions, the workforce has made itself less attractive to would-be private contractors who are circling round the authority like vultures.

Leicester council feels the pressure

Steve Score

There's been a small victory for Leicestershire Anti-Bedroom Tax Federation and the Unite Community trade union.

At Leicester city council's housing scrutiny commission, councillors including the assistant mayor responsible for housing, said they would be prepared to consider a non-eviction policy for those hit by the bedroom tax.

This was a result of the questions and points put to them by us, and a packed public gallery

listening to their answers.

Leicester rent arrears increased by £100,000 in the first three months of the tax. It is also clear that there are not enough suitable homes for people to 'downsize' to.

There are 2,400 Leicester city council tenants and families affected. Yet in the first three months of the tax, only 73 were moved, all but four to one-bedroom properties.

Not a single affected family waiting to downsize to a two-bedroom house has been successful.

Many people hit by the bedroom tax do not have a 'spare bedroom', including people who are affected by illness and disability and those who care for their children for only part of the week.

The council are yet to evict as a direct result of the bedroom tax. However, 910 'notices of seeking possession' have been issued from April to June.

Some tenants already in arrears before the bedroom tax have now been given court dates.

A small number of tenants may get temporary help through Discretionary Housing Payments.

However, disabled tenants who get the Disability Living Allowance (or now PIP) have that money treated as income when their entitlement to DHP is assessed. This is wrong and we will demand the council changes that policy.

We now need to build up the pressure to make a 'no evictions' policy happen - without the caveats that some councillors have already suggested.

One week left to smash fighting fund target!

Ken Douglas, Socialist Party national treasurer

The news that MPs are claiming more expenses than they did in 2009 when they were last caught fiddling them will sicken ordinary people who are bearing the brunt of the Con-Dem cuts.

A quarter of MPs are employing family members in order to maximise how much they can claim, paying them as much as £50,000 a year.

Unlike these self-serving MPs, the Socialist Party relies solely on the support of ordinary working class people and the fund-raising efforts of our members.

It is vital that we have the funds to finance our campaigning to put forward a socialist alternative to the policies of rotten, corrupt politicians from all sides who are enriching themselves while selling off our public services and killing the NHS.

There is little more than a week to go until the end of the fighting fund quarter and Socialist Party members are going all out to ensure that we raise the £12,000 needed to reach the target of £25,000.

Members in Caerphilly raised £50 from supporters of their campaign against zero-hour contracts and to bring back the local A&E.

In Waltham Forest over £50 was donated on a lively protest outside Whipps Cross hospital to fund the fight against the cuts of £77.5 million that are currently being implemented.

Determined to make the most of the summer, members in Lewisham raised £67 with a branch barbecue and a local supporter has arranged a monthly donation of £20.

We can still reach our target but we need your help. Can you raise some fighting fund and send it in before the 4pm deadline on 27 September or can you make a donation to help fund the fight for a socialist alternative? You can pay in fighting fund or donate via our website at www.socialistparty.org.uk/donate or telephone 020 898 8877.

Selling the Socialist: Swansea achieves subscription goal

As part of the 'year of the paper', Swansea Socialist Party was determined to meet its target for subscriptions.

Achieving the target has not involved anything extraordinary, just some attention to detail.

A significant part of the increase in subscriptions has come from new members.

Whenever somebody joins, the question of subscribing to the paper and the value of the paper is discussed as part of joining, not something to be added later.

The branch puts the Socialist on the meeting agenda each week - what articles have we got in the current issue, who's writing something for the next issues, is there an article that should be discussed in a future branch meeting?

This is part of bringing home to everyone the importance of the paper, for the part it plays in our work and its analysis of events.

In this way all members, from the newest to the most experienced, are encouraged to take a pride in the branch's contribution to the Socialist and to discussing how best to utilise it.

The branch committee monitors who is on subscription and makes sure that where possible, those not on subscriptions are asked to take one out.

The layout and quality and range of the content of the paper is continuously improving and Swansea SP is happy that by subscribing, selling and writing for the paper we play some role in contributing to that

The Socialist is at 46% of its quarterly sales target - help get towards 100% by paying in your sales by 4pm on 27 September

Commonwealth governments' meeting: Protest against despot Rajapaksa

Keerthikan Thennavan, Tamil Solidarity joint national secretary

Tamil Solidarity is at the forefront of protests against this year's Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Sri Lanka, in November.

The meeting will give a world stage and international legitimacy to the brutal, authoritarian rule of President Mahinda Rajapaksa.

His regime stands accused of war crimes and human rights abuses during and following the all-out military offensive against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, which ended in May 2009.

In the final months of the conflict, hundreds of thousands of Tamil civilians were forced into so-called 'no-fire zones' where food lines and field hospitals were repeatedly shelled by the Sri Lankan armed forces. Many tens of thousands were killed.

Numerous reports, including by Channel 4 and human rights organisations, have verified this horrific slaughter.

Yet, the British government has granted 49 export licences to the Sri Lankan regime for weapons and military equipment worth £8 million.

After the 2009 carnage, hundreds of thousands of Tamils were rounded up into concentration camps. Thousands are still being detained, thousands more remain unaccounted for.

The predominantly Tamil areas of the north and east of Sri Lanka have been effectively put under military occupation.

A land-grab is underway, similar to the takeover of Palestinian land in the West Bank.

Any assertion of Tamil rights is violently put down. Last November 30 students were arrested under the misnamed Prevention of Terrorism Act, with leading student organisers taken to so-called 'rehabilitation camps'. These camps are used to hold without charge anyone the regime wants to silence.

The Prevention of Terrorism Act and other oppressive laws are used routinely against anyone seen to be in opposition to the regime, including trade unionists, journalists, political and human rights activists, including from the Sinhala majority population.

Tamil Solidarity stands with all those in Sri Lanka campaigning for workers' and full democratic rights, regardless of their ethnic or religious background.

The best way to fight against the divide-and-rule policies of Rajapaksa's regime is to build the unity of working class and oppressed people.

- Join us on the protest against the Commonwealth meeting - outside Downing Street on Wednesday 9 October, 5pm-7pm.

www.tamilsolidarity.org

Kazakhstan

Jailed activist awarded human rights prize

Below is a short report from the Campaign Kazakhstan website on the news of Vadim Kuramshim's award.

Imprisoned human rights lawyer, Vadim Kuramshim, has been awarded the 2013 Ludovic-Trarieux Human Rights Prize, the "oldest and most prestigious award given to a lawyer in the world".

The first prize was awarded in 1985 to Nelson Mandela, then in a jail in apartheid South Africa.

It is awarded to "a lawyer, regardless of nationality or Bar [national bar associations - professional bodies of lawyers] who throughout his career has illustrated, by his activity or his suffering, the defence of human rights, the promotion of defence rights, the supremacy of law, and the struggle against racism and intolerance in any form".

Vadim Kuramshim is a well-known lawyer and human rights defender, who has spent years in prison and been persecuted, including being tortured, for exposing the atrocious conditions in Kazakhstan's prisons.

His latest 'crime' in the eyes of the Nazarbayev regime was exposing the endemic corruption in the regime's administrative apparatus.

He was arrested in September 2012 after returning from a conference in Warsaw where he gave a speech denouncing human rights abuses in Kazakhstan.

He was however found innocent by a jury of all the serious charges against him and released.

Vadim was again arrested in October 2012 and eventually taken to a court with no jury. In breach of many of the court's own procedures, Vadim was pronounced guilty and sent to prison for 12 years on the same charges on which he had first been acquitted. This outrageous verdict was upheld by the Court of Taraz on 14 February 2013.

During March 2013, Vadim Kuramshim was transferred to a prison colony that is infamous for violations of prisoners' human rights.

Campaign Kazakhstan warmly welcomes the Ludovic-Trarieux award to Vadim and appeals to supporters to step up the campaign for his immediate release.

A new target can be set of getting Vadim out of prison in time to attend, in person, the formal awarding of the prize in Paris on 5 December 2013.

www.campaignkazakhstan.org

- Demand Vadim's release. Write to Kazakh embassy in Britain: Ambassador Kairat Abusseitov, 33 Thurloe Square, London, SW7 2SD. Email: london@kazembassy.org.uk
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Oppositionists condemn murderous Iran regime

In the 25 years since the revolution against the Shah thousands of political prisoners have been massacred by the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Since 1989 many men, women and children, whose only crime was to say no to the Islamic state, have been killed.

In trials lasting only a few minutes prisoners, without legal representation, were sentenced to death on charges of 'waging war against God'.

After being executed they were buried in mass graves. Their bodies were not handed over to their relatives - only a few pieces of clothing were delivered to them.

Eventually, some of the families of those executed discovered the location of the mass graves near Tehran.

One of these graves is at Khavaran. Families of those executed keep their memory alive by taking flowers to the grave each year.

As Islamic Republic Day (1 April) was being celebrated there were threats of violence, beatings and arrests, to prevent families coming to the grave.

The regime believed this behaviour would hide their crimes but the government did not succeed. Iranian activists, including families of those executed, and human rights lawyers organised an Iran Tribunal in London in 2012, and again in 2013.

The Tribunal condemned the Islamic government, including Ayatollah Khomeini and others who were implicated in these crimes against humanity.

The families of those executed demanded the opening of the files but the government denied the murders had taken place.

Others, who were imprisoned instead of being executed, were secretly executed at the end of their prison term. The killings continue, including public executions in the streets.

Socialists in Europe need to show solidarity with the gathering movement of opposition in Iran.

Iranian socialists in Manchester

TV review: Vietnam's 'children of Agent Orange'

Linda Taaffe

On Monday, after days and weeks of wailing capitalist politicians on both sides of the Atlantic being given bagful of airtime to strut high and mighty about the abhorrent use of chemical weapons in Syria, a small 'human interest' item, so beloved of TV journalists, came tumbling into our living rooms.

A small group of very praiseworthy doctors from the Kensington and Chelsea hospital in London, working for Facing the World charity, were in Da Nang Vietnam.

They were helping facially disfigured children, from toddlers to teenagers, to regain their faces that were horribly deformed.

The presenter warned viewers that the images may be too distressing to watch. Working with Vietnamese doctors, operations were being systematically carried out one by one.

After two weeks 20 operations had been performed bringing overwhelming joy to the children, and their parents.

Eyes, cheeks, ears, lips were being put back in the right place. Families could now regain their place in their villages, many having been cast out because of their "monster" child.

Agent Orange

And how did so many children get to be like this? According to the Vietnamese authorities there are still around 150,000 children in this predicament - and all due to Agent Orange.

This was the chemical weapon dioxin - one of the most deadly chemicals known to science - dropped from airplanes by US troops 40 years ago over the countryside of Vietnam.

With the difficulties of fighting a guerrilla army the US military came up with the grotesque strategy of dropping chemicals that would defoliate all the vegetation, making it more difficult for the Vietcong to hide and at the same time ruining crops that were feeding the population.

Somewhere in the Pentagon conclaves of US generals, in cahoots with president Nixon, coldly discussed plans to use chemical weapons, and then ordered those plans to be carried out.

In these same rooms today similar generals and a president are parading their morals about chemical weapons as lily white. What absolute hypocrites!

Even worse, they are compensating US soldiers whose children have been born with the same deformities but refuse to likewise compensate the Vietnamese - citing lack of evidence.

These are the same type of representatives of the ruling class who fudge-over the evidence about the culprits for the recent chemical attack in Syria, but nevertheless have their finger on the trigger. Even greater hypocrites!

And the tragedy according to the doctors is that once Agent Orange is in the gene pool there is no knowing how long it will take to subside.

As the presenter on the programme deftly put it, the story was about the "toxic legacy" of war.

Socialist reporters would have used this story to also highlight the hypocrisy of warmongers Cameron and Obama.

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

Labour backs austerity...

Ronnie Job

A Trade Union Congress (TUC) press release after Miliband's speech to Labour conference shows how ties with the Labour Party hold back trade union struggle.

It says: "Ed Miliband's warm reception reflected his understanding of the concerns of the modern workplace - the squeeze in living standards and the growth of exploitation through zero-hour contracts."

He should understand zero-hour contracts - his party's councillors are implementing them! Three Labour councils in South Wales, Rhondda Cynon Taff, Cardiff and Swansea between them have thousands of workers on zero-hour contracts.

As for the "squeeze in living standards", Labour-led Swansea council leads the way, with its 'sign or be sacked' policy towards council workers and union members who face losing thousands of pounds or up to 10% of their take-home pay on new contracts.

That squeeze will continue as Miliband confirmed that austerity will continue under Labour. Instead of praising Miliband, the TUC should be organising the fightback against whichever party is implementing cuts.

The press release should have named the date for a 24-hour general strike rather than boosting the credibility of a leader whose party will carry on with Con-Dem cuts.

If the TUC wants political representatives to act in their members' interests then they should stop flogging the dead horse of Labour and instead back candidates that support the repeal of all anti-trade union laws and will vote against all cuts, like the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC).

...unions must stop backing Labour

I am currently reading the union history 'GMB@Work' by John Callow. It is inspiring to read of the efforts of pioneers like Will Thorne in unionising gas workers and others in Victorian times, against steep odds.

We need something like that again - a new 'New Unionism'. Many of those pioneers, including Thorne himself, were members of Marxist organisations.

They also drew political conclusions, that workers needed independent political representation and should break from the Liberals, then supported by many workers and union leaders.

Again, I think that is something we need now. The Labour Party is clearly now just another bosses' party (a bit like the Democrats in the US).

More and more members, and workers in general, do not understand why union funds still go

to funding a party of privatisation and war.

So I welcome the decision by the GMB union's Central Executive Council on 3 September to drastically slash its funding of the Labour Party by 90%.

It is especially significant as the GMB and its leadership has been viewed as one of the most Labour loyalist unions, and it does not have a broad left type grouping such as are organised in Unite or Unison. This development will have a knock-on effect in other unions.

I think the 'Labour link' should be completely severed. We must argue against those arguing for the union to be "non-political", which in itself is a political standpoint.

We must argue for GMB to support efforts to forge new and proper independent working class political representation (such as what the RMT union has been doing).

A GMB union member

<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/17442>